The Unfeathered Storeys
Of Academic Lives

Architectural Flirtations
A Love Storey
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About the Authors

Beda Ring

is a PhD researcher in Critical Studies in architecture, at KTH in Stockholm, Sweden. An activist at heart, Beda doesn’t shy away from acts of provocation and is always ready to stand up against injustice. With an undergraduate architecture degree from a North American state university on the east coast and additional coursework in Gender Studies at Stockholm University, Beda’s work combines a passion for undermining power with an assertive hands-on approach. Beda speaks English, Swedish and (enough) Italian, aspiring one day to add Greek to the list, as all things Greek make Beda’s heart beat a little faster. An avid bather, Beda frequents the outdoor sauna at the Fredhäll bathing club in central Stockholm during the winter, and finds a temporary summer home in Skala Eressos, Lesvos, on the Aegean Sea. In a true queer outlook on life, Beda credits her poor sense of direction and tendency to get geographically lost on “the need for relentless resistance to the hegemonic authority and inflated valuing of straight lines.”

Brady Burroughs

is a teacher in architectural design at KTH in Stockholm, Sweden, with 12+ years of experience within first and second year, as well as masters level design studios. Also one of the founding members of the feminist teaching and research collaborative FATALE (Feminist Architecture Theory- Analysis, Laboratory, Education), Brady works in Critical Studies, offering elective courses, workshops and seminars in gender and architecture, and a masters studio with a foundation in queer, feminist and critical theory. An empathic animal friend and flawed vegetarian, Brady lives in the million programme suburb Tensta, with three mischievous Cornish Rex felines. Carrying over the analytic mind from an earlier (failed) academic endeavor in aerospace engineering, where the favorite idiom “C’mon, it’s not rocket science.” comes from a place of empirical knowledge, Brady meets challenges with creativity, enthusiasm and a pedagogic disposition, able to encourage students, or colleagues, in doubt and to resolve conflicts diplomatically.

Henri T. Beall

is an architect and writer, with 6-7 years experience practicing in architectural offices in the U.S., Switzerland and Sweden. Harkening back to the days of poché drawings in the shady sections of a tenuous life of “the architect” who was constantly baroque, Henri teaches part-time in a masters level design studio at KTH in Stockholm. A dandy with a sensitive side, prone to the entangling intrigues and occasional outbursts of a true drama queen, Henri ioneically has the determination and pragmatism to see projects to completion. Like an old piece of chewing gum on an Italian façade, Henri is stucco on Camp culture. To avoid getting bogged down in cementsics, poetry, puns and linguistic wordplay often make their way into Henri’s literary columns. Henri’s writing raises stone cold ethical and political concerns about architectural practice and the formation of architects that should not be taken for granite, Aldo there is also a gene-Rossi portion dedicated to interests in design, literature and photography.
INTRODUCTION

HENRI T. BEALL
This book is the result of a collaboration between three authors whose ambition it is to produce a shift in the culture of architecture, especially in the domain of architectural education. Each author has one foot in education and the other in one of the main areas of the architectural discipline: 1. Research; 2. Pedagogy; 3. Professional practice. Although our paths had crossed long ago, as colleagues at the KTH School of Architecture in Stockholm, Sweden, the idea for this collaboration surfaced for the first time on March 21st, 2013, at an Open House event. The event took place in a residential area called Mozzo, just outside of Bergamo, Italy, at Case Unifamiliari, a collaborative project by Aldo Rossi and Attilio Pizzigoni, where Beda Ring has renovated one of the four row houses as part of the design work for a PhD within Critical Studies in Architecture at KTH, Stockholm. With a special invitation from Beda, Brady Burroughs brought a group of students from the KTH architecture program, attending an Architecture and Gender course, on a study trip to see an example of queer feminist design research firsthand. Meanwhile, I was also staying in the house, to work on the documentation for what would eventually become the chapter in this thesis dedicated to the new acoustic architectural details upstairs. This coincidental meeting around a common interest marked the beginning of a two-year conversation about how we think, make and position ourselves as architects, teachers, researchers, even humans, in relation to our power and privileges.

Through a “method of opportunities” and “intentional post-justification,” terms borrowed from our colleagues Katja Grillner and Katarina Bonnevier, Architectural Flirtations is something between an anthology and a pulp fiction, where we tell stories while formulating critical arguments. With the help of feminist and queer theory, we use fictional provocation, humor and imagination in order to reveal habits, shift perceptions and raise ethical concerns in situations where we encounter the conflict, dreams and drama of quotidian life. However, rather than a deconstruction, we would call it a re-construction. One of our guiding questions has been: “If we begin with the most vulnerable, passionate or empowering moments in life, what kind of architecture will we make then?”

There is also a concern to produce work that is accessible for different readers beyond internal academic circles, by using a more familiar literary language and form to invite the reader in, rather than an exclusionary architectural or academic one. Although the work is directed first and foremost toward architects, whether studying, teaching or practicing, and remains academic, we have made a very conscious effort when it comes to the tone and language used throughout the book, as well as the graphic style. As the voice and style of writing shifts according to the mode of narrative and which collaborating author is writing, our hope is that the work is accessible to a broader, albeit academic, audience. Likewise, we follow a principle of generosity toward images and drawings, coupled with excerpts of the most important ideas throughout the text, to provide an abbreviated version for readers who are more “visually inclined.” As one of our favorite feminist theorists bell hooks writes about pedagogy: “One of the ways we become a learning community is by sharing and receiving one another’s stories; it is a ritual of communion that opens our minds and hearts.”

Throughout the development of this project, we’ve come across many ideas and misconceptions about what flirtation’s role might be in relation to architecture. Some of our colleagues of a more “historical persuasion” have interpreted flirtation as a form of Ciceronian rhetoric, others as some kind of “architectural sales pitch,” in order to woo a critic. We suggest that both of these interpretations deal more with the act of persuasion than flirtation, and perhaps lie closer to a form of seduction, as they are much more focused on gaining an advantage or an intended goal, rather than the suspense
and uncertainty of a flirt. Although a flirtation may be persuasive, we don’t feel it’s about persuasion. In a true exchange, one is open and curious about what might be discovered, while persuasion is about convincing someone of what one already knows. In the same vein, we would like to distinguish between flirtation and teasing, in that flirtation, at least our Campy approach to it, works by making fun with not of something or someone, while teasing can function more as a mechanism to put another person at a disadvantage. Although architectural flirtations can and do function as another critical mode in relation to conventional critique, their intentions are not mean-spirited or manipulative.

Another question we’ve encountered is how we define “the serious” in architecture, and whether the aim of architectural flirtations is merely to make light of established architectural design practices and discourse. Here, it is important to ground our work within feminist and queer theory, specifically the work of Gavin Butt and his concept scholarly flirtations, which has been the basis for developing architectural flirtations. Based in a queer Camp mindset, Butt raises the idea of revitalizing (and queering) critical scholarly work by taking what is usually deemed “superficial” seriously, or in turn, by not taking that which is usually considered serious, so seriously. In keeping with the ideas of Camp, which we will explore in more detail in the coming chapters, it’s not about being superficial, but rather about playfully pointing out that what tends to be considered “serious,” has achieved this position because of certain norms or habits that are always tied to intersecting systems of power. When we refer to “the serious,” or our desire to undermine “the serious,” we are talking about power! The power to decide what is correct, good, worthy, or valued. The power to take for granted, to assume, to uphold a system of values. Architectural flirtations aim to constantly question and shift those values through critical Campy practices.

Perhaps the best way to clarify our use of flirtation is through an example. While working on the final edit of this introduction, I read of an incident that I believe clearly exemplifies a flirtatious practice in spatial politics. According to Göteborgs Posten, on July 16, 2016, a neo-Nazi organization assembled for an illegal demonstration in the square of the small Swedish town Strömstad, just north of Gothenburg. As they prepared to hold speeches to a tense group of (unwilling) onlookers, a Colombian man, named Johan Gongora, made a spontaneous (and courageous) decision to throw off all of his clothes and do a naked dance around the square. The account relates that he didn’t know what else to do but was compelled to act, and that for him, the naked body represented his humanity. So, in a literal flirtation with danger, not knowing how things would go, he put his body in harm’s way. The action was not directly oppositional (although the nudity could be considered an improper act, even punishable by law), but it was critical and sprang out of a desire to thwart the fear and hate being manifested in a public space. Ultimately, through vulnerability and empowerment, the naked dance disarmed the tense situation and dissolved the demonstration, as onlookers began to laugh and their attention shifted toward the naked dancer. Gongora is quoted saying that he believes his act, in turn, gave the other onlookers courage to take back the square. To me, this epitomizes what an architectural flirtation could be. Flirtations are risky! They demand that we invest a part of ourselves (or in this case, all of our parts), without any guarantee of a return, and even in the face of a possible failure or disappointment.

Flirt with a title

We debated for quite some time over the title. Early on, Beda Ring (who tends to be the more provocative of the group) suggested that we use I hate architecture ♥, referring
to the manifesto with this same title that was used as a programmatic tool at the beginning of the renovation project in Mozzo. Beda argued that it was necessary to aim straight for architects’ most vulnerable spot (whether it be the heart or a bit lower), in order to be sure to get their attention. Beda, inspired by feminist, queer, race and cultural studies theorist, Sara Ahmed’s discussion of the willful subject, feared that projects associated with “feminisms” in architecture were often too easily discounted or marginalized, and risked simply “preaching to the choir,” i.e. other feminists. In what Ahmed calls the politics of dismissal, feminists (or any other positions of resistance to authority), understood as being willful or oppositional, are dismissed simply for being “willing to be willful” by those who maintain a position of power. As a consequence, they then become the cause of the problem they reveal, overshadowing the actual oppression or discrimination and allowing it to go unnoticed. So, Beda’s thought was to actively provoke a reaction that demanded attention.

Although Beda’s argument was compelling, as the part of the trio most closely associated to the profession, I was adamantly opposed, giving rise to some rather heated discussions that the other two jokingly referred to as the battle between “the ram” and “the bull,” in reference to our zodiac signs. Of course, that’s all nonsense! As a teacher (and compassionate “fish,” by the way), Brady also had some reservations about using the term “hate” in a pedagogical context, especially at a time when politically, socially, economically, and ecologically there is already so much hate manifested in the world on a daily basis, not to mention that it could be easily misinterpreted. Although we believe it is an ethical obligation to address the gravity of injustices head-on, and not to shy away from what we perceive as “the architect’s” role, whether active or complicit, where the very fostering of the culture of architects begins, we felt that this provocation was perhaps best left to the manifesto. There were several other iterations, such as Architectural flirtations: Camping with Aldo and Architectural Flirtations: Conversations with Rossi, but these missed the performative aspect of the first proposal. In other words, the part that makes you do a double take. In the end, we are happy to report that things took a decided turn from hate to love, landing in the current title Architectural Flirtations: A Love Storey. After all, love is political, and the subsequent insistence of our spell check to “correct” our misspelling of storey was evidence that we had succeeded in the double take.

Precedents and inspirations

I feel obliged to mention a selection of previous feminist architectural theory anthologies, all from U.S. and European contexts (primarily UK), that have guided and inspired us, both in form and content. Although not much more than a list, we feel it is necessary for our readers to understand the important work we stand on and are indebted to. We have arranged them into two groups, where we see a correlation between the periods of publication to the types of feminisms and concerns expressed. The first group is the most recent and perhaps reflects the influence of third-wave feminism, where there are traces (although in some cases very slight ones) of a more intersectional feminism that is post-structural and post-colonial, destabilizing notions of body, gender, race and sexuality. Gender Space Architecture (2000) by Jane Rendell et al., with its impressive collection of interdisciplinary texts from the three areas demarcated in its title has been a key reference, as well as a primary source for the courses in architecture and gender, taught by Brady Burroughs and her colleagues in Critical Studies at KTH. For a very recent account of the state of feminist work today, particularly related to our pedagogical interests, we turned
to the compilation by Lori Brown Feminist Practices (2011), with its focus on the contribution of women designers in practice and pedagogy. Altering Practices (2007) edited by Doina Petrescu is another central work that explicitly deals with the politics and poetics of space within contemporary feminist practices. Both Beda Ring and I found this work especially helpful in instigating a reimagining of the role of the practicing architect with geopolitical and ethical concerns.

Three more anthologies, all published in 1996 and sharing many of the same authors, The Sex of Architecture by Diana Agrest et al., Desiring Practices by Katerina Rüedi et al. and The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice by Francesca Hughes, with sources and theoretical references from the late 80s and early 90s, coincide with prevailing feminist attitudes during the time of our object of architectural affection Aldo Rossi’s formative years.7 These anthologies can be understood as riding on the tail end of second-wave feminism, focusing on “women” and “sexual difference,” more specifically issues of sexuality, reproduction rights and legal inequalities between two opposite sexes. In relation to architectural theory, these issues found their expression in enquiries on gendered public/private space, “diversity” in the profession and/or academia (i.e. representation of women – usually Western, white and middle-class), an interest in representations of the feminine, or ideas around the (male) architect “giving birth” to a work or building. And finally, Beatriz Colomina’s Sexuality & Space (1992) that both Beda and Brady remember as a seminal book during their days as undergraduate students in architecture school, explores a sexual politics of space and the “kinds of close relationships between sexuality and space hidden within everyday practices.”8 Although the earliest of the publications, this book does a remarkable job of including a broad representation of many perspectives.

Aaron Betsky’s Queer Space: Architecture and Same-
9. Early façade sketch of Case Unifamiliari in Mozzo
ATTILIO PIZZIGONI ARCHIVE

10. Early sketch depicting roof of Case Unifamiliari in Mozzo
ATTILIO PIZZIGONI ARCHIVE
Besides positioning this book alongside previous anthologies of feminist architectural theory or queer architectural theory, we feel another relevant relationship exists with two collections of critical writing from disciplines other than architecture, _After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance_ (2005) edited by Gavin Butt and Mona Livholts’ _Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies_ (2012). Both of these books, one from art and performance and the other from feminist studies, question the practice of criticism, repositioning critical inquiry through performative modes and experimental writerly responses, including several pieces from a queer and/or feminist position. These have served as both a source of inspiration and a challenge.

_Objects of architectural affection_

All of the “love storeys” take place on March 21st, the spring equinox, in and around a row house project in Mozzo, known as _Case Unifamiliari_, smack-dab in the middle of what we call “the center” of architecture. That is, in and around a project co-designed by an iconic (male) architect, whose practice and authorship has made a recognized contribution to the discipline and discourse of architecture, especially during the shift from the modernist to postmodernist period. We engage with the work of Aldo Rossi, more specifically with two of his projects—_Case Unifamiliari_ (1977, co-designed w/Attilio Pizzigoni) and _A Scientific Autobiography_ (1981) that seem to occur during a defining period in his career as an architect and educator, ten years prior to winning the Pritzker Prize (1990) and before the first major international commissions when most of the large scale projects were built.

During the ten-year period leading up to work on the row houses in Mozzo and culminating in _A Scientific Autobiography_, Aldo Rossi, who was known for his commitment to radical pedagogies, had been banned from teaching (along with other faculty) at Politecnico di Milano, in a time of political turbulence and upheaval within the Italian university system. Shortly thereafter, he began his journeys over the Atlantic to teach at several universities in the U.S., such as Cornell, Cooper Union, The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) and Yale, as well as La Escuelita – a dissident school started by a group of architects banned from teaching in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Rossi challenged the traditional architectural pedagogy at the time, with the idea that “the architect should be part of a broader cultural, intellectual, and political milieu.” He promoted the studio as a place of collaborative research and interdisciplinarity, bringing theory into practice. His intense involvement in education, as well as the thoughtful account of his own work in _A Scientific Autobiography_, had a tangible influence on pedagogical models of studio-driven education and makes this period of this particular architect interesting for us, as a possible place of experimentation and resistance to traditional forms of design education and research today. In a sense, we are taking to heart Aldo Rossi’s idea that “architecture itself should reclaim the city as a site,” by making the _Case Unifamiliari_ our place of exploration.

As for the row houses themselves as some kind of demarcation of “the center,” although not one of Aldo Rossi’s well-known architectural projects, its place in numerous publications, including one of the twelve drawings represented in _A Scientific Autobiography_, leads us to believe that it may be one of his so-called “projects of affection.” In fact, the prominent green tint of the verdigris roof that stands out, to put it mildly, in the sea of terracotta roofs that otherwise make up the residential area of Mozzo, is another telltale sign. According to his collaborator on the project, Attilio Pizzigoni, Rossi was adamant about this exact color.
of the roof, which wasn’t easy to achieve with the available materials at the time. Rossi speaks of the significance of this color, and it’s affective value for him personally, several times in a Scientific Autobiography. In a passage about the green stucco façade of The Hotel Sirena, likened to that of his own grandparents’ villa, mixed with the memories of a young love, he writes “the sense of paint and contrasting colors was never disentangled in me: specifically the oppositions between the acid green and this rose rosanna, between the color of flesh and a slightly unusual flower, all of which were enclosed in the image of the Sirena.”

What better way to get at the heart of this architect than a small project that orchestrates what Rossi called “the fixed scene of human events” in a clear manifestation of this color contrast, so deeply influential to his work?

This “affection” for the row houses in Mozzo is something Beda Ring shares. Beda Ring has origins on the east coast in the U.S. and was educated in the North American university system, a little more than a decade after the completion of this project. Aldo Rossi’s work was frequently referenced in the architecture school and influential for Beda personally, as evident in the photo depicting a group of “Rossi-inspired” models from Beda’s diploma work. Beda suggests that the influence of Rossi’s (North) “American experience” is evident in the row houses in Mozzo. Both the extruded barn-like exterior form and the flow of the interior spaces are uncharacteristic for this Italian residential area. However, the volume and plan resemble the American farmhouse Beda grew up in, based on The Lexington seven-room colonial catalog house from Sears, Roebuck and Co. and built by Beda’s grandfather in 1936. And yes, this grandparental villa also had a green roof!

Both the admiration for Aldo Rossi’s early work and writings, and the tacit familiarity with this project in particular, led Beda to choose this as a site for renovation and critical reflection. How exactly Beda managed to pull it off is another story, one that isn’t willingly broadcast, but will become clear in the Third Storey of the second half of this book. Beda describes the subsequent meeting through her PhD work with Rossi’s collaborator for this particular project, Attilio Pizzigoni, as a generous and exciting glimpse into the intimate sphere of the working process between Aldo Rossi and one of his former students, another with “affection” for these row houses. We will hear more about this meeting in Chapter Two.

During the work on this book, we have noted that while the private ownership of houses is not uncommon in the area of Mozzo (most residences are gated with a “no trespassing” sign), the vertical division and independence in the way the Rossi/Pizzigoni row houses function is unusual, whether due to an “American influence” or simply the row house typology. Each of the row houses in Case Unifamiliari has its own garage beneath the house on one side, and a private garden on the other. In contrast, a majority of the surrounding multiple-family houses share a common garden, with community parking along the street. However, we learned that the material structures that separate each independent household do not deter gossip from flowing rampanty between them, which has also been fun to work with. Beda, in particular, has used this factor to an advantage on a number of occasions, while it was key in the development of my chapter on the acoustic details.

Despite its oddities, we all agree that what gives this architectural work its luminous presence and singularity within the residential blocks of Mozzo, is undoubtedly, first and foremost, the acid green color of the roof. And if we return to the Case Unifamiliari as “the center,” with its most striking characteristic simultaneously rooted in a memory from the past (Rossi’s) and breaking with its context in the present (Mozzo), we find a “center” which is perhaps not
11. Architectural diploma work and childhood home in Mechanicsville, MD, USA
   Photo: Beda Ring

12. Sears, Roebuck and Co. catalogue house - The Lexington
   Source: Sears Archives
necessarily fixed. Likewise, (one of) its architects Aldo Rossi, an “enigma” among his contemporaries, taunting with the phrase “How can I be postmodern when I was never modern?” is a “center” with contradictions. This playful, indeterminate quality lends itself to our queer Campy approach, explained by Brady Burroughs in Chapter One.

_Situating the flirt_

To begin framing this project, we suggest that it is situated within what we would describe as four main areas of interest: 1) Two specific works of Aldo Rossi and his involvement in architectural pedagogy serve as a location within architectural design and discourse. 2) We place this book in relation to critical theory and other anthologies of feminist architectural theory, more specifically a “Camp-inspired” intersectional queer feminist theory, with theorists such as Sara Ahmed, bell hooks and Gavin Butt leading the way. 3) The recurring focus, as well as intention, lies within critical (or radical) architectural pedagogies. 4) The writing itself explores experimental writing practices, borrowing largely from literature and fiction, as well as drawing on conventions used within typical architectural documents. Through this performative critical writing, the project as a whole works within and develops the relatively new research area designated as _design practice research_.

Overall, the book is divided into two parts; the first half raises the questions _what, why_ and _how_, featuring chapters on the intention of the project and how it came about, with basic architectural drawings and images to orientate the reader in relation to the existing row houses. We have also provided a character map as an overview and reference to the many characters that appear throughout the “love storeys.” The characters are related to one another and may appear in more than one storey, which means that, the main character in one storey may appear as a periphery figure in the next.

The second half consists of three different “love storeys;” _Unrequited Love_ from the researcher on the outside by Beda Ring, _Lessons in Love_ from the pedagogue on the inside by Brady Burroughs, and _A Love to Die For_ from the practitioner upstairs, yours truly. It is our hope that this structure will enable many possible readings, for those who wish to read from beginning to end, those who find a particular section of interest, or those who sample chapters freely. Although the chapters do refer to one another in a certain sequence, it is possible to read in any order, as all storeys occur in the same place, on the same day, only from different locations and perspectives.

**PART ONE**

In Chapter One, _Architectural Flirtations, formerly known as critique_, Brady Burroughs discusses the intention of the project as a whole, important theoretical concepts and references, and begins a contextualization in relation to other current work in performative, queer feminist, and pedagogical architectural research. Brady also uses images from several of Beda Ring’s PhD seminar events, as an example of _architectural flirtation_.

In transition to the next chapter, we have chosen to include a reprint of Beda’s framed manifesto _I hate architecture ♥ from the entrance hall of the renovated row house_, as it succinctly summarizes many of our own frustrations with architecture and why we see a need for this project in the first place. Originally, Beda intended to print the manifesto in the stencil typeface known as “Charette,” often associated with the lettering used on architects’ drawings from the past, especially those of Le Corbusier, who is also wrongly attributed as the designer of the font. As a poke at another iconic male architect, Beda thought it would be
humorous to use “the architect’s font” to list everything she hated about architecture. However, it seems the last laugh was on Beda, as the typeface proved to be too difficult to read and ironically unable to fulfill its own function.

Chapter Two, *Dear Aldo, A (flirt’s) Scientific Autobiography*, written by Beda Ring, is a series of eight personal letters to the late architect, Aldo Rossi. It not only explains the renovations of *Case Unifamiliari* and how they came about, but positions and contextualizes some of Beda’s own memories and inspirations from architectural education and practice in dialogue with Rossi’s reflections on his own work in *A Scientific Autobiography*. This chapter also functions as a shift to the storytelling in the second half, as many of the characters and key events in the renovation project are briefly introduced.

Providing an *Interlude* between the first and second half is Beda’s experimental text *Meditations*, a story of desire and vulnerability that follows the temptress Aphrodite on a journey of architectural storytelling about love, in relation to the self, friendship, and community. This early “site-writing” piece, to borrow a term from art and architectural theorist Jane Rendell, inspired Beda in the initial phases of the renovation work, especially in the design of the baths on the first floor. Rendell uses the concept of “site-writing” to describe critical architectural texts that combine differing genres, voices, and levels of subjectivity and intimacy, in order to develop “alternative understandings of subjectivity and positionality” in relation to spaces directly, from memory, or even as imagined projections or desirable dreams. Site-writing aims to take into account the (critic’s) researcher’s own position and to challenge the idea of knowledge production in (criticism) critical research with one fixed and objective point of view. The *Meditations* text has not only set the tone, but also inspired many themes of our subsequent “love storeys.”

The First Storey begins the narrative surrounding Beda Ring’s Open House event for the renovation of the Mozzo row house with *Renovating Rossi*, as it tells the tale of Beda’s colleague Jo, also a PhD researcher, caught in a constant state of anticipation and miscommunication. Beda takes us outside, around the grounds of the *Case Unifamiliari*, as the effects of the renovation begin to spill out into the environs of the neighborhood. Through minor architectural provocations, it addresses social and political differences, habits of academia, and the strong desire for belonging, coupled with the “backside” of a small community.

Before moving inside the *Case Unifamiliari* with the Second Storey, we get a peek at the renovations on the first floor through Beda Ring’s architectural room specifications. The specifications are complemented with a documentation of student questions about the renovation, formulated by the Architecture and Gender students from KTH. In the style of a true pedagogue, Brady provides no answers, as the questions are meant to stimulate the imagination and encourage readers to ask their own questions.

Brady Burroughs invites us inside with *Open House*, a narrative recounting five dream sequels on the performative seminar series, arranged and enacted collectively around the renovation work of colleague Beda Ring, together with these same students. The chapter chronicles the experience of the architectural teacher, during a “live” experiment in the act of pedagogical stewardship, simulating a walk-through of the rooms on the first floor. It is coupled with an analytical discussion of the course and architectural pedagogy.

In the Third Storey, I complete the visit to the renovated row house in Mozzo, Italy in *Flirting with Death*, the mythic musings of a professional on the newly constructed acoustic details upstairs and their entanglements with the
neighbors to either side, as well as our companion species. As part of the practical application of architectural flirtations with the existing building, I use drawings, models and (re)storytelling to tease out the assumptions, discriminations and conformity of the architectural profession. Likewise, the piece itself also explores how more traditional methods of design work can be combined with writing, in a parallel development of both design and research projects.

And finally, the Postlude follows a round table conversation between the three authors, as we all meet at Beda Ring’s favorite beachfront hang out, Zorba the Buddha Café, in Skala Eressos, Lesvos, Greece, to summarize and share some reflections on the finished project. When faced with the impossible task of composing some “objective” concluding comments on this eclectic body of work, we chose to instead describe some of our own “learning moments” from the project as a whole, in relation to the four areas of interest listed above. The summarized “learning moments” then make up the Afterword.

Our contribution to critical architectural theories and pedagogies lies within the act of clearing ground through what we call architectural flirtations, where what is usually understood as “the center” is continually displaced, by shifting it to places where it is not usually to be found. The intention cares not so much in achieving an eventual outcome, although there is always an underlying interest in a more ethical direction and empowering shift, but rather in the constant (or willful) redefining of what “the center” might include, a recentring. Although the inherent vulnerability in these particular tactics – a misperformativity, allows for unintended (and undesired) failures, the uncertainty also opens up for the displacement of assumptions and habits lurking in the serious practices of long-standing institutions and conformist cultures.

Henri T. Beall, 27 August 2016, Stockholm

Endnotes

FOR FULL REFERENCES WITH ACCESS DATES, SEE BIBLIOGRAPHY.

5 Intersectional feminism recognizes the intersections of different systems of oppression or discrimination including race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, ability, etc. The term is first credited to Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989), a black American scholar in the field of Critical race theory and law. See Muñoz, José Esteban. 1999. Disidentifications: Queens of Color and the Performance of Politics. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 8.
10 (Thank you to Jan Hietala for letting me borrow his copy!) Betsky, 4.
14 For an explanation of what we mean by "the center," see the round table discussion in the Postlude.

ENDNOTES

PRELUDE
CHAPTER ONE
In this chapter, I aim to briefly describe and position the key concepts that form the central ideas of our pulp fiction anthology Architectural Flirtations: A Love Story. I explore key words, also featured in the title of this introductory chapter, architectural flirtations and critique, in relation to ideas about architects and their formation staked out by architect and theorist, Dana Cuff in her chapter “The Making of an Architect” from 1991. Cuff writes: “The ethos of a profession is born in schools.” For me, it’s obvious that the effects are lasting! Although written almost 25 years ago, around the time of my own design education, I am struck by the degree to which my masters architecture students still recognize elements of their own education in Cuff’s text, when reading it together in March 2014. In revisiting the central aspects that contribute to making a culture of architects, what Cuff describes as enculturation, “a process that transforms layperson into architect through the knowledge, experience, and authority gained over the course of a career,” with a specific focus on education, my co-authors and I propose an intentional and continuous displacing of the center. By the center, we are referring to a norm, a value that is not fixed and is dependent on its context. It is meant to indicate that we aim to work from the heart of things, rather than assuming (or being relegated to) an outside position. This strategy, what we call architectural flirtations, involves clearing
ground for more ethical, socially conscious, and generous architectural conversations.

Before we begin, a note on the various layers of this chapter, in order to assist you, the reader, in the navigation of these concepts and ideas and to allow for different modes and levels of reading. The first layer consists of an introductory text of general ideas and main theoretical references, giving a brief overview of the connection between key themes. Referenced as details to this general overview, a second layer containing three conversations dives deep into theoretical threads and more intricate meanderings, providing a depth and contextualizing important concepts. And finally, to exemplify how architectural flirtations and our queer Campy practices of misperformativity might undermine architectural academic seriousness, a series of plates with pull–quotes runs parallel to these layers, featuring images from several of Beda Ring’s PhD seminar events: The first, staged as an Open House tour through the renovated Rossi/Pizzigoni row house project in Mozzo, Italy, in a borrowed office space in Stockholm and featuring homemade cherry muffins; The second, staged as an Architectural Flirt Aid Course with a chocolate fountain centerpiece, in a local architecture office in Stockholm; The third, an Architectural Taste Test with a variation of Dunkin’ Donuts, in the main conference room at the new KTH school of architecture in Stockholm. And finally, the final seminar, also held in the new architecture school at KTH, replete with color coordinated princess cakes to match the green roof of the Rossi/Pizzigoni row houses.

Architectural

Why do we insist on using the word architectural in reference to practices that primarily involve writing and teaching? Situated within what feminist, art and architectural theorist Jane Rendell describes, in “Critical Spatial Practices: Setting Out a Feminist Approach to some Modes and what Matters in Architecture,” as one of the five theamics of current feminist critical spatial practices – performativity, our work is most often a joining of (queer) feminist, literary and architectural disciplines within a theatrical guise, “to explore the ‘position’ of the writer through the spatial and material qualities of the text.”

We write stories as architects, about architects, within and around architecture, inspired by architectural encounters and phenomena. At times, I would even claim that we write architecturally, but it is absolutely a creative and interdisciplinary endeavor. Beyond crossing traditional boundaries of academic and professional disciplines, we understand interdisciplinary work in the sense that Rendell explains that interdisciplinary research seeks to produce political critique. She writes: “The aim of such work is to question dominant processes that seek to control intellectual and creative production, and instead generate new resistant forms and modes of knowledge and understanding.”

According to Cuff: “Becoming an architect is about becoming an artist, but a peculiar kind of artist who stays within certain boundaries... The process of becoming an architect is one of learning socially appropriate avenues for creativity.” I understand Cuff’s intention of evoking the figure of the artist as an example of an autonomous individual, in order to emphasize the incongruity of architecture’s strong identification with- and lingering myth of the lone creative (male) genius, in relation to the collective teams necessary to do the actual work. She points to an unresolved conflict between a perceived freedom in the process of design and the more constraining practical aspects of business associated with professional practice. Cuff admits that most art practices must resolve these very same conflicting roles she is referring to, but states that she uses a stereotypical artist in order to get at the way most architects are fostered to see themselves primarily as the architect-artist, rather than identifying with their managerial or collaborative roles. Jane Rendell, on the other hand, describes a more complex understanding of artistic practice and collaboration, and focuses specifically on interdisciplinary work that offers “a critical feminist alternative to conventional architectural practice.” Nonetheless, could it be these certain boundaries and socially appropriate avenues, mentioned by Cuff, necessary in becoming an architect and designating limitations of the discipline that Rendell finds constricting in her desire to expand the field through the use of the term critical spatial practice, leaving the term architectural behind?

In the introductory chapter to Art and Architecture: A Place Between, Rendell explains critical spatial practice as a term that “allows us to describe work that transgresses the limits of art and architecture and engages with both the social and the aesthetic, the public and the private.” And in yet another text “Tendencies and Trajectories: Feminist Approaches in Architecture,” Rendell again defines the term critical spatial practice as “a term which serves to describe both everyday activities and creative practices which seek to resist the dominant social order of global corporate capitalism.”

In both of these cases, the term is effective in bridging a gap between architecture and other disciplines. My question is how does it function specifically in relation to the discipline of architecture? While I empathize and agree with Rendell’s call for a more interdisciplinary perspective and expansion of the field of architecture, I wonder if there might be another way to approach the disciplinary limits of architecture, or its certain boundaries and socially appropriate avenues? My concern is that in giving up the term architectural, work done under the epithet spatial may be relegated to the margins, leaving the bastion of architecture located firmly at the center, unchanged.

Since the word ‘architectural’ is directly associated to the discipline we intend to affect, Architecture – with a capital A (to signify a self-perpetuating patriarchal discipline and canonical culture that is in need of change), and because my co-authors and I recognize this inherent association with power, we choose strategically to call any and everything we do architectural. In the conclusion of her text on critical spatial practices, Rendell stresses the continued importance in making explicit references to feminism in order not to “partake in the act of obscuring feminism’s political imperative” in an attempt to find “less oppositional ways of being feminist.” In a similar manner, I would suggest that “contemporary feminist practitioners interested in architecture” cannot afford to give up the term architectural, if the intention is to change it.
14. Architectural Flirt Aid Kits

Since the word ‘architectural’ is directly associated to the discipline we intend to affect, Architecture – with a capital A (to signify a self-perpetuating patriarchal discipline and canonical culture that is in need of change), and because my co-authors and I recognize this inherent association with power, we choose strategically to call any and everything we do architectural.

If I linger, for a moment, on the subject of “contemporary feminist practitioners” before continuing with the term flirtations, it is necessary to briefly clarify an important distinction between queer feminism and a so-called mainstream feminism, and why this work belongs to the first. To begin with, I can say that our work rests on the premise that gender and sexuality are necessary categories in relation to any research that aspires to be relevant. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts it: “Gendering is our first, and most persistent, instrument of abstraction. That’s the most primitive theoretical tool. Both capitalist and worker are within it, coloniser and colonised are within it. Those kinds of distinctions disappear. Any kind of academic work is incorrect if not gendered. There are people who think that only women and queers ought to be talking about this kind of thing. For me that is wrong. I say to my students: just remember that whatever you are researching will be incorrect if you don’t take this into consideration: gender it.”

I would also venture to say that a majority of feminist architectural theory and/or practice works under this premise. However, the choice to align ourselves with a queer feminism and an intersectional one at that (more on intersectionality below), indicates an intentional move away from mainstream feminism, sometimes used interchangeably with the term white feminism, closely related to neoliberal feminism, or what popular author and self-proclaimed bad feminist Roxane Gay calls “Capital-F Feminism.”

To clear-up any misconceptions, these feminisms I am referring to, whether mainstream, white, or neoliberal, indicate a general blindness (or unwillingness) to acknowledge all of the privileges of being white, cis, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class, educated, Western, etc. and a belief that resisting the system of gender oppression is the most important, and in some cases, the only “real” job of feminism. In other words, it usually implies a concern for the equality of white, heterosexual, middle-class women (who sit highest up on the feminist food chain) with white, heterosexual, middle-class men; end of story. However, it is important to keep in mind that these feminisms work on a structural level and are referring to a system, not an individual. That is, white feminism doesn’t refer to all “white” women who are feminists, nor does mainstream feminism implicate all heterosexual women, or can neoliberal feminism lay claim to all feminists with a middle-class background. Rather, these are approaches to feminism that fail to see that all of these systems of oppression are interconnected and that not taking them into consideration excludes the experiences of many women. So, gendering your research will only get you so far. Then there’s the “pesky” business of understanding your own privileges and how they play out in the work you do, the opportunities you have, and the possibilities to make your voice heard.

When I use the term queer feminism, I am referring to a feminism concerned with gender and desire complexity, as described by post-structural theorist Judith Butler, rather than that of a more liberal feminism concerned primarily with gender equality in a binary, complimentary system. That is, a system that automatically links femininity to the female body, masculinity to the male body, and assumes that “opposites attract” in a heterosexual system of desire. But it doesn’t end there! As feminist/queer/race and...
cultural studies theorist Sara Ahmed points out in her book *Willful Subjects*, “The very assumption of willfulness can protect some from realizing how their goals are already accomplished by the general will.” In other words, assuming the identity of feminist or even queer feminist does not automatically mean that one cannot oppress or discriminate and that one’s actions are (even if well-meaning) in everyone’s best interest. Ahmed writes: “What is assumed as a willful queerness can be a willing whiteness.”

Attention to only one system of oppression can lead to unintended oppressions in another system. This is where the idea of intersectionality comes in. Intersectionality recognizes the intersections of different systems of oppression or discrimination including race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, ability, etc. The term is first credited to Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1959), a black American scholar in the field of Critical race theory and law. For this reason, I would like to paraphrase Gayatri Spivak’s quote above and suggest to feminist architecture students and colleagues, “just remember that whatever you are researching will be incorrect if you don’t take THIS into consideration: intersectionalize it.” This advice, in my opinion, is something that feminist architectural theory and/or practice is still struggling with, and I hope that our work takes a step in that direction.

**Flirtations**

Beyond the matter of terminology, we address serious issues, specific but perhaps not exclusive, to the architectural discipline and culture through architectural flirtations. Our work focuses primarily on the education and formation of young architects through pedagogical practices that touch upon different areas within the architectural discipline, such as research, pedagogy and professional practice. The term architectural flirtations is an adaptation of historian and performance/queer theorist Gavin Butt’s notion scholarly flirtations. Both architectural- and scholarly flirtations seek ways to challenge the seriousness of traditional forms of critical writing through playful experimentation, without worrying so much about possible failure or outcomes; however, architectural flirtations extend the scope to include not only critical writing in architectural research, but also architectural design, and pedagogical practices in design education. In the development of queer Campy practices or a mode of working, our aim is to question and find new ways of approaching the habits of an architectural culture, specifically those of criticism and critique within that culture.

Architectural- and Scholarly flirtations are similar in their intent to undermine the reproduction of power within serious or traditional subjects, and/or approaches to these subjects, through an act of queer scholarship that is purposefully improper and contingent. However, while Butt’s scholarly flirtations remain concentrated on the study of contemporary art and performance, we see possibilities in the flirtatious performative act itself, as a mode of doing, applicable to the field of architectural design and pedagogy and pertinent to the self-critique of critical research within the field. More specifically, Butt is interested in the possible knowledge production of these flirtatious experiences and the (other) ways this knowledge may be recounted, while we are per-
haps more concerned with what the actual space of contingency can offer, in the very moment this knowledge is being produced. In the performative mode, the difference is between talking about something, and actually doing it. It is our attempt to take seriously and develop the line of questioning Gavin Butt initiates.

Citing psychotherapist and essayist Adam Phillips’ book On Flirtation: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Uncommitted Life, Butt reminds us: “The fact that people tend to flirt only with serious things—madness, disaster, other people—and the fact that flirting is a pleasure, makes it a relationship, a way of doing things, worth considering.” We are interested in this way of doing things that contributes to the formation of an architectural discipline in general, but more specifically, in the practices that aim to produce specific architectural cultures. In her chapter, Cuff writes of this process, “the metamorphosis from layperson to architect tells us much about how the architectural profession sees itself. As a group teaches its prospective members how to belong, the observer grasps the important traits of the culture.” The status of culture implies that the “correct” way of doing things has become established, hence deemed professional or serious, and therefore rarely questioned or even noticed, as a habit from a certain time and place. It occupies the center, and its influence extends to all aspects of the culture it represents. These aspects, in turn, assume the habits or norms of a larger culture, according to prevailing social systems and hierarchies of power. Cuff argues: “It is my contention that the social context of a work of architecture is at least as influential as the properties of building materials or the building site.”

How might architectural flirtations provide a re-orientation or displacement of this center, and suggest other ways of doing things? In her experimental essay “Notes on ‘Camp’” in note form, with the intention of exploring the Camp sensibility, cultural-political critic and author Susan Sontag writes: “The whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious. More precisely, Camp involves a new, more complex relation to ‘the serious.’ One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious.” Gavin Butt suggests that Sontag’s text can be seen as a “staging of a provisionality,” as if she will at a later stage write a more serious scholarly article. Sontag performs the indeterminable quality of Camp—its reluctance to be pinned down or defined in its tension between the serious and the frivolous, by making a list. By refusing the temptation to put forth a full-fledged idea, she retains the tentativeness in a list of points, giving the sense of incompleteness, as if they may be revised, deleted or even added to.

As literary scholar Terry Castle argues in her reading of Sontag, this tentativeness engages or flirts with the reader in a more direct way, provoking a desire to answer with one’s own list of examples. In this way, “Notes on ‘Camp’” performs an act of flirtatious writing. I am interested in both the performative flirtatious act, as well as the flirtatious intention to shift or re-orientate the habits of a culture, in order to find “a more complex relation to ‘the serious’.” For instance, if I turn to the words Beda uses in the title of her manifesto I hate architecture ♥, written in the early stages of her PhD work and programmatic for the subsequent renovation of Aldo Rossi and Attilio

Susan Sontag writes: The whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious. More precisely, Camp involves a new, more complex relation to “the serious.” One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious.
Pizzigoni’s row house project in Mozzo, Italy, it is performative in that it does the actual flirting. I hate architecture makes a direct, demonstrative statement, while the heart at the end “♥” performs a textual wink. It indicates that the statement may perhaps not be taken at face value. There’s something else going on here! Immediately, as Butt suggests, “rendering indeterminate the serious judgemental attitude” the question arises: Should I take this seriously, or not?23

The strength of other local queer-feminist performative work, such as that of our colleagues Katarina Bonnevier, Thérèse Kristiansson, and Mariana Alves, of the Stockholm-based art and architecture collective MYCKET initiated in 2012, most directly inspires and influences us as a clear example of shifting the rules of engagement and challenging the serious within architectural practice, as well as in architectural scholarship.24 They make rooms of love (and sex), safe spaces, or what Katarina Bonnevier sometimes refers to as the kindly disposed room, most often for and with groups located outside of what is usually considered the center. In her account of current feminist spatial practices, Jane Rendell notes the rise of interdisciplinary and practice-led research, where the tendency of contemporary feminist practitioners “highlights an interest not only in the end product, but in the process of designing itself, pointing to the importance of the dialogue between theory and practice in architecture.”25 This interest, in the performative act of research and the desire to combine practice and theory, is something my co-authors and I share with MYCKET; however, I also see important distinctions between our work, in both the intention and the way change is brought about.

MYCKET’s work is direct, it’s in-your-face, and it aims (and usually manages) to create temporary utopias or places that allow and encourage other ways of being in the world. One specific example is their Club Scene events, where they reconstruct and reenact historical queer clubs from around the world, experimenting with performance through spaces, scenography, costumes, and bodies. The recurring usage of slogans like “Every Time We Fuck We Win” or “An Army of Lovers Cannot Lose,” phrases borrowed from The Queer Nation Manifesto and used by MYCKET as both posters and “guerrilla” flyers in several of these events, is one detail that speaks of the very clear urgency in their work.26 It’s voracious, there’s an appetite for victory and there are no apologies! MYCKET’s work makes space, and although there may be some flirtation involved, I’m not certain that it is ultimately about the flirt.

There seems to be a level of commitment in MYCKET’s work that pushes it beyond the realm of flirtation, as there is a clear desire for resolve or a “consummation” of the original intention, in order to achieve these utopian places, even if the result is fleeting. To put it in a historical perspective, this work resembles the directness of the post-Stonewall tactics of many queer activist groups, rather than a more subtle, coded, (closeted) pre-Stonewall campiness that lends itself to flirtation.27 (The Stonewall uprisings were a series of three nights of violent clashes between the LGBT community and the New York City police, during raids of the Stonewall Inn, after the funeral of gay icon, Judy Garland. This is often credited as the event that sparked the fight for gay liberation and LGBT rights in the U.S. More on this difference in Conversation One.)

Architectural flirtations, on the other hand, make space within acts of anticipation and contingency, regardless of the outcome. In contrast to a more confrontational, in-your-face approach that aims to dismantle or disrupt the center, the campy flirt engages in a playful displacement of the center, pulling and pushing it around like the lead in an enticing dance. This displacement not only dissolves the defining edges of the center to expand what the center might include, but also pushes them to the side to make room for new centers.28 In this way, the space it makes is less defined and more like clearing ground. Sara Ahmed describes a similar act of clearing ground in her proposal that “orientation is a matter of how we reside or how we clear space that is familiar.”29 “Orientations are about the directions we take that put some things and not others in our reach.”30 She borrows a term from queer-feminist, literary theorist Teresa de Lauretis, habit-change, to describe the queer act of re-orientation in order to bring things (and people) that were previously unavailable in a conventional genealogy within reach.31 It is this act of re-orientating, or recentring, brought about by the flirt that we pose as a possibility for instigating change in the habits of an architectural discipline and culture. Although architectural flirtations may take many forms, in this particular work we offer several examples, including pedagogical practices engaging in performative seminars, academic texts exploring experimental writing methods, research seminars staging fictitious events, and developing architectural documents and details through fictional writing, just to name a few.

While there are strengths and weaknesses in both of these approaches, depending on the situation, I would suggest that architectural flirtations are perhaps particularly applicable to pedagogical situations. One of the clear advantages is that, although they do make demands, they don’t exclude what is already in the center. In other words, these practices are not only useful for the “queer kid” (or any position(s) that understands itself as being outside of the center) who is perhaps searching for a role model and a place to belong, but also seeks out the future architectural critic, already schooled in the culture of the architectural profession, who may have a direct affect on that very same “queer kid” in a pin-up or review. However, it is important to remember that the three previously mentioned spheres within an architectural culture or discipline; research, pedagogy, and the profession, each have their own centers or habits that are different and that at times may overlap or even displace each other, so flirtations must always be situated. Likewise, the position of the flirt is subject to the prevailing hierarchies at work within specific situations, so the possibility for- and effectiveness of a flirtation is also dependent on the intersections of gender, race, sexuality, class, and any combination thereof. Therefore, flirtatious practices are always uncertain and must be adjusted accordingly.

In her trilogy on teaching, black feminist writer, theorist and activist bell hooks describes engaged pedagogical settings, not as so-called “safe spaces” where everyone agrees, but rather as spaces that “know how to cope in situations of risk.”32 And yes, flirt-
Flirtation is risky, in its inherent vulnerability in not knowing how things might turn out, as the center is always slippery and reluctant to give up its privileges. Butt notes: “Flirtation may be deemed ‘weak’ by dint of its pleasurable embrace of uncertainty and doubt.”

However, in these particular instances, I would argue that the in-your-face approach is perhaps likely to trigger a complete shutting down - shutting out effect, creating even further distances between what is in the center and what is not. Ahmed makes a similar observation regarding feminist killjoys, “when you are filled with the content of disagreement, others do not hear the content of your disagreement.” In other words, a direct confrontational approach may be perceived as an “attack” and result in immediate dismissal, by those who most need to hear the message. To be clear, situations of architectural flirtation are not (only) about everyone having fun and getting along. They are about creating the situations where risk is possible. As Phillips reminds us: “Flirtation is the game of taking chances, of plotting illicit possibilities.”

There is no lack of precision. Rather, it is precisely improper.

Besides the risks of weakness or failure, there is another type of risk with flirtation, mentioned by Gavin Butt, in relation to gender. In reference to a quotation by sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel he writes: “[Note: in the context of Simmel’s patriarchal heterosexism, all flirts are women].” Cuff discusses questions of gender in terms of what she calls “the competitive arena,” established in the three elements shared by most architectural programs; the studio, the ‘crit’ and the charrette. She describes the “macho” qualities built into the charrette forms of working as “endurance tests” where students are expected to “temporarily sacrifice everything for the sake of their projects” and likens the architectural school to a “designer boot camp.” Not to mention “the assumed and seemingly generic six-foot tall, able-bodied male” architecture students are taught to design for. Although students of all genders may (and do) participate in this competitive arena, there remain assumptions connected to gender marked situations, such as the masculinity of boot camp, that potentially place the flirt into a stereotypical gender role of the feminine, where the “weak” or uncertain practices are perceived as inferior or second-rate. In other words, they can be easily dismissed as not being up to par for the demands of a tough and competitive environment. It is therefore important to stress the queer position of the flirt, where gender and desire are not linked in a simplistic binary structure and have a more complex relation to the serious. By complicating the gender-desire chain, while retaining the “weak” or uncertain character of the flirt, the reproduction of power is undermined and assumptions or habits around situations deemed serious acquire a campy-ness, shifting the grunts and elbowing of a boot camp into the songs and choreography of a Broadway musical.

When the American business magazine Forbes asked one of our own flirtatious role models, former Star Trek actor, Broadway musical director, and current LGBTQ activist/social media phenomenon, George Takei, about his approach, which combines very serious struggles with what can be seen as frivolous Campy tactics, his answer
struck a chord with me. "I think the serenity at the heart of the Buddhist philosophy has allowed me to combat injustice and inequality with a certain level of patient perspective. It’s so necessary to engage those who would seek to oppress you, and to extend to them a hand in our common humanity. That’s the philosophy I try to maintain on the Facebook page–with a few adorable and irresistible cat pictures, of course." He extends his hand and invites the center up for a “dance,” but maintains the lead by adding the flirtatious uncertainty of never really knowing what can be taken seriously (through his relentless use of bad puns and cute animal posts online). I would suggest that this particular “dance” doesn’t resemble a sexy salsa or a sophisticated tango, rather it’s a full-on parodic disco! As architectural critic and author Aaron Betsky writes in his book *Queer Space*: “The space of the disco was one of the most radical environments Western society has created in the last fifty years.”

In her “Notes on ‘Camp’” Sontag writes: “Camp taste is a kind of love, love for human nature. It relishes, rather than judges, the little triumphs and awkward intensities of ‘character’.” It is this shift of ethos from judging to relishing that we are interested in. In her call for an *ethics of love*, bell hooks writes: “Cultures of domination rely on the cultivation of fear as a way to ensure obedience... When we choose to love we choose to move against fear- against alienation and separation. The choice to love is a choice to connect- to find ourselves in the other.” *Architectural flirtations* operate in a mode of generosity and connection, rather than the judgement and alienation of conventional critique. To clarify, we are not categorically against making judgements and are fully aware that judgements are a necessary and inevitable part of almost any action we take. What we are questioning here, with *architectural flirtations*, is the act of critique as an intentional mode of judgement, and more often than not, an unreflected one. Flirtations offer an alternative mode where the criteria and values of judgement are both contextualized and contested, while the position of the judge or the critic and the position of the one being judged are placed in a relation of mutual exchange, rather than one of mastery.

Critique

Pedagogy and professional practice meet most directly in situations of critique and evaluation. It is one of the central activities of architectural education where students learn how to be critical through the discussion of their work, with teachers, peers and sometimes practicing architects as guests. These performative practices foster, promote and perpetuate an architectural culture and discipline, as students are educated and sent into practice, continue into academic positions, or even return as teaching faculty. In her chapter on the formation of architects, Cuff writes: “As the terminology indicates, crits are not two-way discussions: for the most part, students are the passive recipients of jurors’ opinions. As a ritual, the crit teaches students that their work should be able to stand the test of harsh professional criticism, doled out by those with greater experience. It offers a model of professional behavior, implying that full-fledged architects hold positions that can be challenged only by other full-fledged
architects (other jurors) and not by the public, other professionals or clients.”

In her work on architectural education, with a specific focus on the design jury, architectural academic Helena Webster provides an accurate and current account of this ritual of critique, mentioned by Cuff above. Webster agrees about the crit’s centrality in the acculturation of students into architects and finds that the design jury’s intention “to support student learning through a reflective dialogue” is for the most part rhetorical, while what it generally does is exact judgement over student work.

Through a Foucault-inspired ethnographic study of power in design juries from one British school of architecture, Webster suggests that the asymmetrical construction of power in design juries encourages students to adopt “surface tactics” to appeal to critics’ tastes, deterring them from a deeper understanding and reflection over their work. She also notes that the critics perform critique differently according to the students’ varying degrees of ability, where those that already possess “architectural identities” are met in more mutual terms, as colleagues, while those that are perceived as “weaker students” are often interrupted and/or dismissed.

Webster’s work points to many of the same issues and situations that we aim to address with architectural flirtations; however, as a leading Bourdieusian scholar within architectural theory, her critique centers on a class-based analysis of cultural and social capital as the primary factor in relations of power, leaving oppressive systems of gender, race and sexuality unexplored.

This is the point where architectural flirtations grab the baton and keep running!

In proposing a shift from critique to conversation, brought about by architectural flirtations, our intentions are two-fold: First, to encourage situations of evaluation where the focus is on reciprocal learning, i.e. everyone involved can potentially learn something. We use the term “conversation,” rather than discussion, which often implies an underlying attempt to persuade through argumentation, as conversation evokes a less certain, more informal interaction, allowing flirtations to occur. These flirtatious interactions are a combination of discourse and practice between those involved, as both a discursive act and a way to be in dialogue through doing. The crucial part for us is the exchange, which requires a mutual acceptance of vulnerability, hence the preposition with.

For instance, in writing or making, if I am in conversation with a reference, whether contemporary or historical, neither of us is left unchanged; whereas, a critique of this same reference, doesn’t necessarily require any revision on my part. It simply proves a point! The former inhabits a “weak” or vulnerable position, allowing the conversation with to re-orientate previous assumptions, while the latter tends to maintain a “strong” position to secure an intended outcome. The same applies to a crit situation, between critic and student. In an architectural flirtation, both must be willing to temporarily occupy a “weak” or vulnerable position, where the destination of the conversation is unknown. It is a risky opportunity for generosity, rather than a power struggle. So, the “dance” of architectural flirtation is to be in conversation with.

And second, to problematize the concepts of critique or criticism and flirt out assumptions perhaps overlooked in the critical architectural project, where we locate

The same applies to a crit situation, between critic and student. In an architectural flirtation, both must be willing to temporarily occupy a “weak” or vulnerable position, where the destination of the conversation is unknown. It is a risky opportunity for generosity, rather than a power struggle.
Exhibition of early diagrams

Flirtations do not seek to replace “critical architecture” with “flirtatious architecture,” to become institutionalized as the next in line, as they are short-lived and committed to being uncommitted. Flirtations are difficult to pin down. Flirtations recognize their unavoidable imbrications, revel in their contradictions, and laugh (and cry) at their inevitable failures.

Flirtations are also a way of knowing, where knowledge is not a fixed or certain entity, but rather something that is in continual transformation through situating, positioning, questioning, proposing, or… flirting.

Like a conversation, a flirt is dependent on the interaction of more than one part. It isn’t a one-way relationship; otherwise the flirt begins to resemble a stalker, and the conversation an interrogation. In his argument for scholarly flirtations as “an ethical imperative... to respond to the challenge to serious forms of attention... by transforming, or disrupting, the habitually sober performativity of critical writing,” Gavin Butt refers to the work of queer literary theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and her claim that paranoia has become the standard mode of operation for critical theorists. Sedgwick describes this paranoia as a strong theory, concerned with certainty and knowledge in the form of exposure, as it operates within a negative affective register (e.g. seriousness). You might call it a kind of critical autopilot. She explains, “paranoia knows some things well and others poorly,” and risks “blotting out any sense of the possibility of alternative ways of understanding or things to understand.”

Consider, for a moment, the architectural critic or even the critical researcher, fostered within the culture of criticism described by Dana Cuff. What is the likelihood that the critical tends toward a similar mode of operation, where paranoia guards the center of a privileged position? If architectural flirtations are to offer another way of doing things where alternative ways of understanding are not lost, it is important to point out that the proposed re-orientation or recentring of the serious does not preclude the presence of the critical. As Sedgwick notes: “to practice other than paranoid forms of knowing does not, in itself, entail a denial of the reality or gravity of enmity or oppression.”

So, what ARE architectural flirtations? Are they simply another name for what Jane Rendell calls in her introduction to Critical Architecture (2007) “new ways of writing architectural criticism”? Not quite, although the flirtations in this particular work do share many aspects with those that Rendell describes, such as the performative, interdisciplinary, and experimental writing practices. The mode of judgement associated with criticism (even if, as Rendell notes, criticism can also be closer to a type of commentary), is where we start to diverge. However, there are perhaps close similarities to the position of the flirt and that of the critic that Rendell describes in “site-writing,” where judgement is suspended in a (simultaneous) two-way movement between “critic, work and artist” and “critic, text and reader.” In this particular case, between “flirts, Case Unifamiliari, Rossi/Pizzigoni” and “flirts, text and reader,” with the added dimension of the exchange between multiple flirts (or authors). But our own work. In other words, the fact that a project is critical does not preclude it from falling into habits, such as the practices of critique or criticism, habits that may undermine the very intentions of being critical in the first place. Butt suggests: “Flirtation might therefore be seen as a model for practices of criticism – where it seems necessary and germane – to decenter the paranoid structures of serious analysis, or indeed to re-inflect them with a flirtatious, and playful, form of knowing.” The “dance” of architectural flirtations is also a way of knowing, where knowledge is not a fixed or certain entity, but rather something that is in continual transformation through situating, positioning, questioning, proposing, or... flirting.

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I wonder, is this moment of suspended judgement still criticism? We would suggest that in this suspension, or a different mode of judgement, it becomes something else. Architectural flirtations are re-orientated instigators that, in this moment of suspended judgement, turn in a different direction, towards generosity and a willful Campy-ness, while still retaining criticality. Flirts can take a very clear position, but don’t take themselves so seriously, so that this position cannot change. Flirtations do not seek to replace “critical architecture” with “flirtatious architecture,” to become institutionalized as the next in line, as they are short-lived and committed to being uncommitted. Flirtations are difficult to pin down. Flirtations recognize their unavoidable imbrications, revel in their contradictions, and laugh (and cry) at their inevitable failures. Flirtations complicate things for the critical that has fallen into habit, whether in an act of securing its own position, or in routinely following practices that it has come to rely on. Flirtations take away certainty and open up for vulnerabilities. Flirtations get in the way, functioning almost like critical killjoys, and likely for some, an irritation, as not everyone likes to “dance.” What would a generous architectural conversation look like, if we were to extend a hand to the serious culture of architecture and invite it up to a Campy dance in disco form? With one steel point placed precisely on the hip of curiosity, the other arm draws a sweeping arc towards imagination. The weight shifts, as the steel point now moves to rest on the other swaying hip of vulnerability, and the second arm swoops around in a deep curve toward empowerment and stretches upward into an exaggerated power pose.

In a (queer) feminist future, there is an(other) flirtatious architectural culture of conversations.

An architectural scholarship that values playfulness, impropriety, and uncertainty.
An architectural education that encourages generosity, collaboration, and exchange.
An architectural profession that understands privilege, uses power ethically, and doesn’t take itself so damn seriously!

Should YOU take this seriously, or not?

Following are a series of three details referenced in the introductory text, which operate as conversations between me – the author, and you – the reader, as well as some important theoretical voices behind the construction of the proposed ideas.
Our interest in Camp lies in its ability to disarm, to thwart expectations and undermine assumptions. The aesthetics, theatricality and humor of Camp can surprise, provoke and sometimes shock the otherwise seriousness of academic culture.
Have you ever heard of Camp? Perhaps the most common understanding of the word camp is “a place usually away from urban areas where tents or simple buildings (as cabins) are erected for shelter or for temporary residence (as for laborers, prisoners, or vacationers).” Or in a more recreational/educational sense, “a place usually in the country for recreation or instruction often during the summer; also: a program offering access to recreational or educational facilities for a limited period of time.” Or in a more political sense, “a group of persons; especially: a group engaged in promoting or defending a theory, doctrine, position, or person.” It can even indicate an intellectual struggle, “an ideological position.” Although these definitions have a tangential relationship to Camp or “camp” in the sense it is used in this project, it may be a new term if you are unfamiliar with the LGBT or queer community. But, chances are (at least in a Western context) that you have seen or come into contact with some form of queer Camp culture, even though you may not have recognized it as Camp.

Maybe you’ve seen an American musical from the 1950s on TV? Or a popular John Waters film like Hairspray? Or even a drag show? Ok, so then what is Camp? Is Camp political? And how might it relate to architectural flirtations? If I borrow a line from Fabio Cleto, who in turn borrowed it from Gregory Bredbeck, both scholars who have written on the subject, “[T]he only definitive answer to such nevertheless urgent questions is a camp one: only her hairdresser knows for sure.” There are many different understandings of its meanings, contexts and practices, but most recognize the strong connection between Camp and culture, through activities such as art, performance, and literature, making it interesting for us in an architectural application.

If we look to one of the earliest descriptions of Camp (1954), and perhaps one of Sontag’s inspirations for “dethroning the serious,” Christopher Isherwood writes: “You can’t camp about something you don’t take seriously. You’re not making fun of it; you’re making fun out of it. You’re expressing what’s basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance.” Meanwhile, in the introduction to the earliest anthology on Camp, Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality (1993), English professor David Bergman explains the difficulty in defining Camp and its contradictory nature, but he attempts to list four areas where most scholars are in agreement: 1) Camp is a style characterized by the exaggerated, artificial and over-the-top. 2) Camp finds itself in tension with popular, commercial and consumerist culture. 3) Only those located outside of mainstream culture can recognize or use camp. 4) Camp has to do with homosexual culture or a “self-conscious eroticism” that questions naturalized notions of gender/desire. He cautions that each of these areas, are in turn, highly contested, giving rise to widely opposed arguments. Camp as a critical concept seems to pose trouble for any desire of consensus, a quality (along with my co-authors) find promising for the intentional troubling of institutional architectural consensus cultures.

But what are some of these arguments and opposing positions? In his article “Strategic Camp” (1999), Bergman retraces historic origins, as well as contemporary uses, attributing Camp with a subversive political quality, although one that has its limitations. He describes it as an expressive but secret code, found in the literature, performance and practices of gay artists, “as a means of giving gay people a larger space in which to move, loosened from the restraints of the dominant society.” For English and cultural studies scholar Andrew Ross, on the other hand, Camp is an “operation of taste” where “‘taste’ is only possible through exclusion and depreciation.” In “Uses of Camp” (1989), Ross argues that while Camp may have challenged “legitimate definitions of taste and sexuality” (i.e. those deemed appropriate by the dominant society Bergman speaks of), it also functioned as a “cultural economy” co-opted by bourgeois values and purposefully maintained within a marginal position of elitism, ultimately rendering Camp a failed political strategy. In response to what Bergman calls “Ross’s utterly humorless analysis,” he writes: “Ross does not, it seems to me, appreciate fully that a style can be destabilizing without being overtly oppositional… The aggressive passivity of camp has been among its most potent tools… Camp does not do away with the dominant society, but rather finds a way to live within it.” This aspect of Camp also interests us, in terms of relating to the center of a serious architectural culture through a kind of “doubleness,” in a demanding, but non-oppositional way. “Camp” is about being artificial, theatrical, and over-the-top, but with a straight face. It’s not just a copy; it’s a clever copy. And it’s not just kitschy; there’s always an intention behind it. Like a secret code that’s really bad at keeping a secret.

**Feminist – queer – intersectional Camp**

One common denominator for all of these analyses is the connection of Camp to (white) gay male culture, which raises the question of its relation to feminist and queer positions, as well as its suitability for a more intersectional approach. Radio, television and film scholar Chuck Kleinhans writes: “Camp, like any particular subcultural attitude in our society, operates within the larger boundaries of a racist, patriarchal, bourgeois culture. That it defines itself in difference from the dominant culture does not automatically construct Camp as radically oppositional.” For instance, drag culture in particular has been accused of both promoting transphobia by “mak[ing] gender ‘into a joke,’” understood as offensive to transgender individuals, and of appropriating “the mannerisms, language (particularly AAVE- African American Vernacular English) and phrases that can be attributed to black women.”

In “What Makes The Feminist Camp?” (1996), Pamela Robertson, cultural and gender studies scholar, cites feminist critiques of Camp through the drag or imper-
sonation of female stars, for “preferring images of female excess that are blatantly misogynist,” making women the object of camp but never camp subjects. However, Robertson also points to claims that camp is in fact a useful feminist political tool, even in its outrageous representations, as it makes an obvious critique of naturalized sex/ gender roles, a similar sentiment expressed by Sontag in an interview several years after the publication of “Notes on ‘Camp’,” when she stated that it helped “undermine the credibility of certain stereotyped femininities—by exaggerating them, by putting them between quotation marks.”

In her call for a feminist camp, Robertson then argues for camp as a place of intersection between feminist and gay theory. She proposes that the “complexity and contradiction of camp’s guilty pleasures,” that is, its two-sidedness of simultaneously enacting both affirmation and critique, co-optation and resistance, alienation and absorption, gives rise to a form of parodic play in which one (in Robertson’s case, a female) takes pleasure in distancing oneself from one’s own image, allowing for a criticality necessary for resistance to patriarchal norms. Although Robertson does claim a queer position and an explicit “working class sensibility,” I would argue that her analysis remains largely (white) female and feminine orientated, providing rather a reverse of the gay male version. While Robertson’s feminist camp does address a female subject, it tends toward a heterosexual female subject, lumping all queer women into the category of “lesbians” and remaining out of reach to queer masculine women or queers of color.

You may be asking yourself, how do we get to a more queer understanding of Camp? In his introduction “Queering The Camp” (1999), Professor of Literature and Communication Studies at the University of Bergamo, close to the row houses in Mozzo, Fabio Cleto writes that Camp has “constantly eluded critical definitions… tentatively approached as” Fabio Cleto writes that Camp has “constantly eluded critical definitions… tentatively approached as”. Communication Studies at the University of Bergamo, close to the row houses in Mozzo, Fabio Cleto writes that Camp has “constantly eluded critical definitions… tentatively approached as”. Professor of Literature and Communication Studies at the University of Bergamo, close to the row houses in Mozzo, Fabio Cleto writes that Camp has “constantly eluded critical definitions… tentatively approached as”. In his introduction “Queering The Camp” (1999), Professor of Literature and Communication Studies at the University of Bergamo, close to the row houses in Mozzo, Fabio Cleto writes that Camp has “constantly eluded critical definitions… tentatively approached as”. Although Robertson does claim a queer position and an explicit “working class sensibility,” I would argue that her analysis remains largely (white) female and feminine orientated, providing rather a reverse of the gay male version. While Robertson’s feminist camp does address a female subject, it tends toward a heterosexual female subject, lumping all queer women into the category of “lesbians” and remaining out of reach to queer masculine women or queers of color.

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This twisted or bent building is built upon sand, devoid of foundations, with two ephemeral wings that are interconnected in incessant contradictory rearticulations of the perception and performance (or as Sontag calls it the naïve and deliberate) of the nomadic/permanent, improper/conventional, complicit/subversive, and gay/straight. It is constantly undermining and betraying itself, giving authenticity and theatricality a place to co-exist. Cleto writes: “I would in fact suggest that camp thus exists only insofar as there is a doxastic space in which to surreptitiously improvise the theatricalisation, the mise en scène, of a dressing-up party space— and by describing it as a party, we activate indeed its complex system of inclusion/exclusion, its grouping into a camp (in the very metaphor of both its vagrant movement, political alliance, and martial display, that the queer origins of the term promotes).”

Cleto argues that accusations of Camp elitism can instead be seen as evidence of “a politics of radical disidence,” as the formation of a community around a taste that is dissensual and paradoxical, where “those who are otherwise dominant are, for once, excluded… evacuating the knowledge/power order at its very roots.” However, he warns that this disidence is dependent on a framing within “queer performativity,” in order not to fall into a vacuous camp-likeness in the hands of the dominant culture. Cleto concludes that Camp’s “failure” as a stable critical construction relies on a constant (re)framing, (re)negotiating, (re)articulating, (re)presentation of the sum of its queer performances and discourses. In other words, the queer architecture of Camp must constantly be (re)constructed, as provisional ‘wings’ and ‘chambers’ of a queer building whose walls are erected, dismantled and moved elsewhere, as soon as their performing ends are accomplished.” So the unsettling question that the architectural flirtation raises: Should I take this seriously, or not? is very much a Camp one.

In order to propose Camp as a strategy available to a queer subject with a more intersectional approach, I turn to the work of queer/performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz, in his book Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (1999). Muñoz proposes the concept disidentification for what he calls “minoritarian subjects” (i.e. those subjects who do not occupy the position of a privileged norm with an assumed “other” – more specifically, people of color/queers of color) as a possible strategy to reclaim what can be seen as Camp practices, in order to “offer the minoritarian subject a space to situate itself in history and thus seize social agency.” Disidentification is a process where an artist transforms and reconfigures, through a campy over-the-top performance, the performativity of previously abject, exoticized and/or race-representations, whether of mainstream straight or (white) gay camp culture, or even that of homophobic/misogynist cultures of people of color, in order to remake it into something desirable, identifiable, and queer. In Muñoz’ words, it stands in resistance to “the cultural logics of heteronormativity, white supremacy, and misogyny.” In doing so, the subject disidentifies with the previously pejorative stereotypes of the dominant culture through the act of expressing desire for- and reveling in these “once toxic representations.” In other words, it adopts the camp technique of assimilation and resistance, of representation and parody, in one singular gesture.

In a less theatrical example, Muñoz suggests that disidentification could also offer a young queer revolutionary woman from Antilles a post-colonial theory of Frantz Fanon that was “as queer and feminist as it is anti-colonial.” According to Muñoz, in the act of disidentification, Fanon’s “homophobia and misogyny would be interrogated while his anticolonial discourse was engaged as a still valuable yet mediated identification.” Much like Camp, disidentification renegotiates and rearticulates from within and against, rather than posing a strict oppositional resistance. Muñoz also notes: “disidentification is not always an adequate strategy of resistance or survival for all minority subjects. At times, resistance needs to be pronounced and direct; on other occasions, queers of color and other minority subjects need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public sphere. But for some, disidentification is a survival strategy that
works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously.”

Muñoz explains his understanding of identity as “a site of struggle,” at the point where essentialized and constructivist notions meet. Through style and humor, this “Camp-in-difference,” recycles old dominant narratives, not only to decode but to recode, in the inclusion and empowerment of minority identities and desires. Here, I use the term “Camp-in-difference,” both as a reference to Muñoz’s use of the term “identities-in-difference” to describe positions that emerge from a failure to perform according to a dominant public sphere, but also in the tragicomic, even Campy, associations to the word “indifference” and the very real experiences of indifference that identities-in-difference sometimes face from the (white) feminist and queer communities, historically and today. It is an attempt to reclaim a Camp agency by turning this indifference back onto these communities and their implicit control over Camp performativity. I would suggest that architectural flirtations’ reliance on queer Campy tactics; therefore, should not be seen as a hindrance to minority identities and desires, but rather as enabled through the possibility of this variation, or Camp-in-difference.

Camp and Sontag

If you recall from the introductory text, I introduced the notion of Camp in relation to a literary work by Susan Sontag. Most scholars refer to “Notes on ‘Camp’” as a seminal text within Camp discourse and agree that Camp becomes something else, once separated from the experience of the queer subject. Sontag’s well-known essay is often credited with a central role in facilitating this type of appropriation, making “camp” available to mass consumption. One theorist in particular who is neither convinced (nor forgiving) of Sontag’s intentions and inconsistencies in her “Notes on ‘Camp’” is Moe Meyer, in his introduction to The Politics and Poetics of Camp (1994). Meyer sees Sontag’s literary work from the 1960s as a non-queer appropriation of Camp that allowed its subsequent bourgeois pop-culture manifestation, and in turn drained the original concept of its political potential. I must admit that in undertaking this work on Camp and in my eagerness to get right to the point, I read Meyer’s introduction first, with its promise of divulging all of the political secrets of Camp that I was looking for. However, I was soon so surprised and provoked by its claims that I began to wonder what I had gotten myself into and whether in proposing “Camp-inspired” flirtations, I wasn’t also a bourgeois traitor like Sontag? Or, I thought, maybe Meyer is performing some kind of campy critique and I am just missing the humor? In short, it pulled me out of the mode of conversation and plunged me right into the mode of a defensive and disproving critique.

I then read everything else I could get my hands on about Camp, only to find others who were also critical of Meyer’s views. Cleto performs a thorough analysis of Meyer’s critique, characterizing it as a double failure, in “its double betrayal – of both queer and camp.” He argues that in attempting to definitively define camp, a concept whose transgressiveness lies in its unstable and transitory nature, and reclaiming it as gay property, Meyer reinstates the gay male subject as sole owner of “original” Camp (rather than a queer one) and reproduces the problematic bourgeois binary “original (queer camp)/copy (pop camp)” in reverse. This in turn makes queer an exclusionary tactic and takes the “camp” out of Camp. While I’m not ready to follow Meyer on his crusade against Sontag (which, in all fairness, was written over 20 years ago), charging her with the single-handed demise of Camp as we know it, his analysis does raise some important concepts and concerns in its “strong” performativity of critique, making it worth inviting him into this conversation.

Queer premises

Meyer’s book is published at the height of queer theory (and in the aftermath of the devastating AIDS crisis of the 1980s), just four years after Judith Butler’s ground-breaking work Gender Trouble (1990), on which he bases his understanding of the concept queer and its location in a mode of performativity. According to Meyer, queer is an unstable identity that challenges the hetero/homo binary, making room for both people and practices that don’t fit comfortably into one or the other. More importantly, constitution of the queer identity is not solely based on sexual practices, but also on queer practices involving “enactments, embodiments and speech acts” in “a series of improvised performances.” The way we dress, the gestures we make, the things we say all go into the performance of constructing our identity and making that identity visible to others. Judith Butler points to drag, a typically Camp performance, as an example of a queer enactment: “In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency.” In other words, showing the “original” to also be a copy.

Meyer argues that these queer practices threaten a bourgeois notion of the self, based on sexuality and subscribed to by some middle-class “conventional gays and lesbians,” therefore providing not only a critique of an essentialist view of sex/gender/desire, but also a critique of class. In his attempt to reclaim the political and critical potential of Camp, from what he considers as un-queer, bourgeois, partial interpretations, Meyer makes the connection between queer and Camp by defining Camp as “strategies and tactics of queer parody,” with the function of producing queer “social visibility.” As inspiration and evidence of this definition, he cites two queer activist organizations as examples, ACT UP and Queer Nation, in their political and confrontational use of Camp tactics. Meyer argues: “the same performative gestures executed independently of queer self-reflexivity are unavoidably transformed and no longer qualify as Camp...there are not different kinds of Camp. There is only one. And it is queer.” So, according to Meyer, you can’t take the queer out of Camp AND you can’t take the Camp out of queer.

Appropriation

Does this mean then that only queer scholars may use Camp tactics, and in extension architectural flirtations, without the risk of committing an act of appropriation? Although this is clearly the case for Meyer, or at least he makes the distinction between the “real” Camp that is available to queers and what he calls the camp trace, available to non-
queers, my answer is not necessarily. It doesn’t need to resemble a call for essentialism or queer territorialism, but the discussion of appropriation is an important one nonetheless. It is an aspect that deserves attention and consideration, and one of the reasons behind the contextualizing nature of the Conversations in this text. I do share Meyer’s general understanding of the concept queer and agree that Camp is always queer in some regard, but where we differ is in our approach to making queer practices useful in other contexts, some of these being non-queer. Or as Ahmed calls it, “what is ‘oblique’ or ‘off line,’” referring to the social rather than sexual definitions of queer. In these situations, we could think of Ahmed’s statement: “To make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things.”

While I am not discounting some of the valid points Meyer makes about the co-optation of queer Camp culture, I don’t agree that one necessarily has to be queer in order to use the queer criticality of Camp, even if it ultimately ends up transforming into something else in the process. Rather, as mentioned earlier, I believe it is important to frame Camp practices and discourses within queer performativity, keeping the concept open to new political (and pedagogical) possibilities.

Regardless, this provocation serves as a reminder that in using any concept or practice, we must respect the position and context from where it came, so as not to dilute or distort it in order to fit our own purposes. In other words, one need not occupy the same position (e.g. queer or black feminist) when borrowing concepts or practices (e.g. queer theory or black feminist theory), but one must be vigilant and respectful of intrinsic differences in positions and struggles. For example, (white) feminist architects and scholars (including yours truly) love to quote bell hooks and Audre Lorde, prominent black feminist writers and theoreticians, whose work poses a resistance to what bell hooks calls “dominator culture” or “the system of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.” With bell hooks publishing books like belonging: a culture of place (2009) and Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (1984) that include discussions about struggle and opposition in the politics of space and location, and Audre Lorde’s famous piece “The Master’s Tools will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” (1979), architects are sometimes quick to assume that these theories were written for them!

However, if in citing or using a version of these ideas, the same (white) feminist architects and scholars pull out the “most useful” parts (e.g. those concerning gender), and conveniently leave out “other” parts (e.g. those concerning race), without mentioning the existence of white privilege or raising any of the concerns that the original ideas address, this would be appropriation. belonging: a culture of place begins with a chapter on bell hooks’ personal experiences growing up in the oppression and racism of segregation in Kentucky, U.S.A. and sets the foundations for an exploration of place and belonging from the position of a black woman. The first chapter of Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center is titled “Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory,” and Audre Lorde’s text is a discussion focused on the marginalization of black and lesbian women by white feminist academics. It’s not possible that the importance of the aspect of race can be mistakenly overlooked or difficult to grasp. Failing to acknowledge the very specific position
these writings originate from and the oppressions they respond to, even in the excitement over discovering words that move us, or ring true to our own struggles, is both a misuse of the work and blindness to our own privileges.  

I can imagine that by this point some of you (the more inaugurated readers in gender and critical race theory) may be wondering, what about the use of intersectionality? Isn’t this an analytic tool created by black feminists for the specific oppressions experienced by subjectivities where the oppressions of race and gender intersect? And hasn’t it been appropriated and co-opted by white queer/feminist academics, like myself, as a means to justify an anti-racist position within their/my scholarly work, while maintaining their/my white privileges and furthering their/my own careers? In other words, rather than putting theory into practice by giving up those privileges and clearing ground for those directly affected by these intersections, white queer/feminist academics can instead write about the injustices that affect “others,” while still maintaining their power and privileges. I take this charge seriously and acknowledge the inherent contradiction. Where does that leave us? Much in the same way I have argued for the possibility of a non-queer use of Camp, and as I mentioned in the introductory text, I would suggest that it is not only possible, but urgent that white queer/feminist academics adopt an intersectional approach. However, I do see the danger in a discrepancy between claimed identities and subsequent practices.

For instance, a white queer/feminist academic could claim an anti-racist stance and promise an intersectional analysis in the introduction to a body of work, but then perform an analysis that only takes gender (or sexuality) into consideration, never mentioning race or ethnicity again. In these cases, intersectionality is appropriated, becoming merely a label – like false advertising, and making empty claims that are never followed through. None of this is anything that activists and scholars of color haven’t said already. Well-known, scholarly or literary voices like bell hooks, Angela Davis or Toni Morrison have said it. Contemporary activist voices like the queer women of color who initiated the Black Lives Matter movement, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors, have said it. And even popular online (women of color) bloggers, many of which explicitly prohibit citation of their work in scholarly texts for this very reason have said it, but it bears repeating.

To be clear, we do not make any in-depth analyses or expand theoretically on issues of race in this project, and it would be disingenuous of me to claim otherwise. Rather, our project focuses primarily on issues that have to do with gender and sexuality, hence the location within queer feminism, with an intersectional approach to these issues, as they intersect with race. However, it is not to be confused with a liberal “diversity” project or merely a matter of expanded inclusivity, adding to what already exists in the center and benefitting those already in power. Architectural flirtations aim to both displace and reconstruct current centers, making room for new centers and questioning what we usually take for granted as the center. I, of course, cannot guarantee that we don’t fall into some of the pitfalls and misstep along the way, but there is a concerted effort to do more than present a disclaimer and then to avoid difficult issues, either out of self-preservation or laziness.

**Sontag’s queer premises**

This is the charge Meyer makes toward Sontag’s “Notes on Camp,” accusing it of appropriation, enabling the subsequent kitschy “heterosexual/Pop colonization of Camp.” Meyer’s own critique is solely concerned with the queer/non-queer aspect of Camp, while it presents no analysis in terms of gender or race. Before going any further, I have a confession to make: I like (some) kitsch and have a real soft spot for Susan Sontag. But rather than “come to the rescue” in defense of Sontag and try to prove otherwise, it is perhaps more interesting to situate Sontag and this particular work, and then to look at some of Meyer’s claims in relation to other ways of approaching it.

Sontag, the critical (and privileged) figure that is said to have often performed a Campy version of herself, wrote this piece in the early sixties– one of the first critical approaches to Camp, before the AIDS crisis, long before queer theory and during a time that was in the midst of social upheaval, with legal battles and violent physical clashes over gay rights, as well as women’s and civil rights. The March on Washington for civil rights, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech occurred on August 28, 1963. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is signed a year later, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, religion or national origin. And, the report issued by The Commission on The Status of Women in 1963 documents widespread discrimination of women in the workplace, followed by the passing of The Equal Pay Act. The Stonewall uprisings didn’t occur until 1969. Many scholars mark Stonewall as a defining moment and shift in both the practices and interpretations of Camp, as the LGBT community went from a closeted existence toward a firm political statement of openness. To help put things into perspective, Sontag – a mostly closeted, recently hetero-divorced, Jewish American, queer woman writes in her personal journal entry on 12/24/59: “My desire to write is connected with my homosexuality. I need the identity as a weapon, to match the weapon that society has against me. …I am just becoming aware of how guilty I feel being queer.” Susan Sontag divorced her husband (whom she married at age 17) and father of her son, Phillip Rieff in 1958.

The recent documentary film Regarding Susan Sontag (2014), focuses on Sontag’s personal life in relation to her work, in a very humane portrayal of the intense contradictions that made up this intellectual celebrity, including her critical strengths, amorous weaknesses, the relentless drive behind her work, and her commitment to political and social change. According to poet and cultural critic Wayne Kostenbaum, interviewed in the film, “She couldn’t have written “Notes on 'Camp'” if she hadn’t done decades of homework. Honestly!” In other words, 58 extensive points about a sensibility, requires a serious engagement and a whole lot of research. Similarly, the editors of The Scandal of Susan Sontag (2009) propose that Sontag’s critical work was a form of admiration, a constant “undoing and redoing, complete with missteps and misstatements” that
maintained the utopian status of a “work in progress.” However, Sontag’s tendency throughout most of her life to avoid any discussion of private matters or what the editors call “her peculiar and contradictory impulses toward private reticence and public provocation,” has earned her critique from many queer scholars who, like Meyer, see this as a betrayal toward the LGBTQ community. Notes on ‘Camp’ is performative in nature, with subtle cues and queer inflections, which are in turn immediately contradicted. In response to critiques aimed at Sontag for not being queer enough, Kostenbaum replies “Does the author of ‘Notes on Camp’ have to ‘come out’?”

What happens if rather than, as in Meyer’s case, charging this work and in extension Sontag, for producing a version of Camp “sanitized, and made safe for public consumption,” we read the essay in a critically flirtatious way? One with the advantage of new information about Sontag’s life that takes into consideration both the work AND the author and asks, in addition to queer culture, what else could this be about? As noted earlier, the queer position doesn’t automatically make you a feminist and yes, the personal is still political. In one such reading “Some Notes on ‘Notes on Camp’” (2009), literary scholar Terry Castle understands “Notes on ‘Camp’” as a personal confession in disguise, while it seduces the reader into a similar autobiographical self-revelation. She calls it “an urge so intense and charged as to become a form of greeting and provocation, a complex hello to an absent yet much-desired unknown.” The essay’s mock didacticism I would offer, is only a screening device. Though it may lend the essay a superficial air of intellectual rigour and self-restraint, it also allows its author to gesture-toward a tumultuous world of feeling.

In what Castle calls “a very speculative and subjective” theory (one that she would never dare to propose if Sontag were alive today), she contends that Sontag’s own “childhood disappointment- to the feeling of being misplaced, misunderstood… unappreciated.” Castle reads between the lines, with some psychoanalytic help, to find pain and indig- nation towards “the intellectual, aesthetic and emotional impoverishment of her family situation,” during Sontag’s early years in suburban Southern California with absent parents. Castle relates that Sontag expressed these same sentiments in a piece for The New Yorker, and wrote of her constant yearning as a child “to be somewhere else.” According to Castle, Sontag’s love of Camp “mediates… between childhood outrage and a more sophisticated ‘adult’ self.” While campy objects, reminiscent of “trashy” objects from the past, elicit contradictory feelings of both disgust and tenderness in their connection to notions of “home,” Sontag’s explicit yet understated connection of Camp to homosexuality, serves as a “coming out” for the author. Castle goes on to posit that Sontag’s distaste for both camp and her own essay later in life might have been due to the fact that it hit too close to home in two senses: First, with the campy coded language of the 60s’ essay easily decoded by the 70s/80s, “she might as well be semaphoring her sap-phic tastes.” And second, that it triggered strong emotions linked with suffering, both from the pain and abandonment experienced in childhood, and in the shame and fear of rejection associated with being queer.

(Mis)performativity of critique

How then might we approach Sontag’s work otherwise? Gavin Butt suggests that “Notes on ‘Camp’” can be seen as “flirtatious performativity” or as a performative literary enactment, calling into question more serious forms of critical scholarship. In contrast, Meyer expresses frustration over Sontag’s distinction of Camp as a sensibility rather than an idea: “As long as thinkers, whether gay or nongay, cling to this definition of Camp-as-sensibility, they are invulnerable to critique, forever protected by invoking Sontag’s own critical exemption.” Although flirtation risks the consequences of mixed-signals and/or failure, this does not mean that flirtatious acts cannot be held accountable, or are somehow exempt from critique. On the contrary, I would suggest that maybe we need new ways of evaluating and valuing other ways of being critical. In my opinion, Meyer seems to read Sontag’s work as criticism, as if the content can be taken at face value, separate from its style. In this sense, it is not only the content, but also the Camp style of “Notes,” which is under scrutiny here.

Pointing to Sontag’s own definition of Camp as a sensibility-like taste, that has no rigid system or method of proof, unlike the systematic stability of an idea, Meyer interprets Sontag’s seeming reluctance to make a serious commitment and be held to it as an “evasive strategy” or what he calls “Sontag’s defense system,” as if her intentions behind denoting Camp as a sensibility were akin to military tactics. It is almost as if Meyer wishes to say, “See, look here, she’s not playing by the rules! If she refuses to put forth an idea, then how can I critique her?” But could she be flirting with us? As an alternative, Butt proposes flirtation “not as an absolute Other to serious commitment, but as a way of relating to it. It is a way of entertaining seriousness, but without being committed to it.” In other words, Meyer is so set on reclaiming “Camp-as-critique” and positioning it as part of a serious oppositional theory that the challenge to the serious that the flirt offers, passes him by.

What are some of the underlying values as a critic Meyer discloses when he underestimates the transgressive possibilities inherent in the so-called “frivolous” interpretations of Camp? What else is he saying when he implies that Camp, under Sontag’s influence, is a “merely aestheticized sensibility characterized by triviality and lack of content, or simply an operation of taste”? In the context of architecture (as well as, I would suggest, a much wider application), aesthetic sensibilities are anything but trivial. Ask any architect in drag, where its cross-cladding combines “the theatrical performance of gender and sexuality with the masking and dressing of architecture,” as my colleague Katarina Bonnevier’s queer enactments reveal in her study of historical architectural cross-dressers. Likewise, style and content are inseparable. Ask any artistic researcher,
as (inconclusively) evidenced in my colleague Jan Hietala’s work on spatial gender politics at Horace Walpole’s villa Strawberry Hill, where his list of considerations builds not only a new (queer) archival history, but also a style of presentation that engages the content itself in the performativity of inconclusiveness. And taste can be a powerful tool of control. Ask any Syriac immigrant resident in Södertälje, Sweden who has met the standard of “Swedish taste” at the planning office, in the application for building permits on custom-designed single family houses, as my colleague Jennifer Mack documents in her historical-ethnographic work on architecture and urban planning.

Related to Meyer’s assumptions about the “frivolous” side of Camp, are the implications of its association with popular consumerist culture and mass consumption. While I agree that sheer capitalist co-optation is undesirable, I would argue that there is a danger in automatically conflating popular culture with the superficial, in that it risks becoming a form of classism. In an interview about his ongoing project that is a queer approach to cultural seriousness, Gavin Butt comments on the relationship to his own formative culture growing up in a working class family. He cites what he calls a “paradigm-establishing text,” The Uses of Literacy (1957) by Richard Hoggart, “that explored the ways in which popular fiction, pulp novels etc., came to be important within working class cultures.”

Butt’s work tries to move away from “judgemental moralizing” with “serious being the only barometer by which we assess value and importance,” as he thinks “about popular pleasures and mass pleasures and the ways in which they are dismissed as being facile.”

Butt also notes that it is nearly futile (and even undesirable) to use any “easy application of binary distinctions of serious/trivial, heavy/light, and the like, through which we customarily judge the importance of something.” I would argue that Camp destabilizes, not by disrupting, but by embracing contradiction, in its simultaneous affirmation and critique of the popular culture it is part of. In conversation with Irit Rogoff, on the possibilities of “the popular’s” transgressive criticality in relation to seriousness in neoliberal culture, Butt also makes the point that “popular culture,” usually deemed unserious, can never be seen as either “top-down” (i.e. capitalist market forces or governmentality serving a general public) or “bottom-up” (i.e. general desires of the people), completely one thing or another. It rather lies in a messy contested space between the two.

As for Sontag’s culpability in the matter, despite the “soft spot” mentioned earlier, I don’t agree with everything Sontag writes in her 58 points on Camp, but the point is that I don’t know if Sontag does either. And the fact that Camp was hijacked and commercialized is hardly unique for concepts with critical value, as architect and academic Ole W. Fischer notes: “Even the most severe critics of ‘the system’ have had to realize that criticism, revolt and subversion are part of the stabilizing repertoire of ‘late capitalism’: critical gestures have quickly been internalized, commodified and recycled for niche products or marketing strategies.”

As a matter of fact, as early as 1973, the architectural theorist and critic Charles Jencks wrote about Camp in relation to architecture, using Sontag’s popular essay as a main source. And yes, Jencks did, in my opinion, appropriate part of the meaning of Camp for his own architectural purposes and leave out (or ignore) its connection to queer culture, concerning himself only with the aesthetic aspects. He wrote of something he called the “Camp attitude,” which he defined as “a mental set towards all sorts of objects which fail from a serious point of view.” His application uses a more mainstream, apolitical variation of the concept, equating it with a fatalistic “anything goes” attitude and a matter of eclectic and exotic individual taste. However, is Sontag to blame for Jencks’ face value interpretation of her essay?

In any case, the question is not the validity of Meyer’s critique of Sontag, but rather how Meyer’s performativity of critique exemplifies the mode of operation for much of queer and critical theory (and architectural education), in order to call attention to its habits, as well as its weaknesses. Gavin Butt links what he calls “Frankfurt School-type critiques of the culture industry” to “morally serious Marxism,” claiming that this type of critique may miss “the generative possibilities in popular forms of cultural consumption and engagement.” In a queer alignment with campy or “trashy” sensibilities, Butt writes: “It’s interesting now, I think, to see where trashy sensibilities pop up in contemporary culture, ...and to think about the differing ways in which not taking something seriously - enjoying the bad, worthless, or tasteless - might forge communities out of a sense of exclusion from, or rejection of, professional elite cultures and their institutional protocols and discriminating norms.”

It makes me wonder what could have become of a misperformative flirtatious conversation between Meyer and Sontag?

**Camp-inspired flirtations**

If we bring the (white) feminist architects and scholars from earlier back into the conversation, how might non-queer positions employ queer performative practices, such as Camp-inspired architectural flirtations? Our interest in Camp lies in its ability to disarm, to thwart expectations and undermine assumptions. The aesthetics, theatricality and humor of Camp can surprise, provoke and sometimes shock the otherwise serious-ness of academic culture. Likewise, its ability to hold both the frivolous and the serious at once, farce and tragedy, give Camp a depth, as well as a surface. As Bergman notes: “the humor of camp, while it may be full-throated, can also leave a lump.” In other words, this kind of provocation can leave you not only wondering: Should I take this seriously, or not? but also Should I laugh or should I cry? Just as Camp embraces contradiction, the flirt embraces contingency. By connecting Camp with the position of the flirt, queer political “doubleness” is joined with the allure of uncertainty, giving the flirtation a performativity that isn’t necessarily oppositional and becoming a “politically motivated flirt.”

**Architectural flirtations** offer queer performative practices to anyone willing to flirt with academic seriousness, keeping in mind the risks of appropriation, of course. And how does Camp help in proposing another critical mode of learning and valuing within an architectural discipline, the discourse of critical architectural theory and architectural education? Imagine a critique coming at you; it looks like an angry guard dog, one that is trained to guard a certain territory and to attack if necessary. From another direction comes seduction; a persuasive cat lying on its back and presenting its tummy,
but one touch and the claws are inevitable. Meanwhile, Campy flirtations come prancing by, in the form of a fluffy poodle with pink highlights. Regardless of your relationship to dogs and cats, which one would you allow close enough to pet, or even to lick your face? The poodle’s exaggerated curls, artificial coloring and theatrical demeanor may allow it intimate access that the attack dog or capricious cat aren’t granted. But be warned: the poodle can still bite, if it needs to get your attention! So, are architectural flirtations merely a critique in disguise? I would say that it depends on how you orientate yourself, toward generosity or judgement, but more on that in Conversation Two.

As mentioned in the previous conversation, Camp engages the flirt with a queer political performativity; however, that performativity has the possibility to operate in different directions and modes. These differing directionals help configure the space of exchange where the mode of valuing takes place. While the conventional orientation of the architectural critic, I would argue, is toward judgement where value is generated through criticism, the flirt re-orientates its criticality toward generosity, reconfiguring the space of evaluation to become more contingent and vulnerable. To begin this conversation on the re-orientation of criticality, I turn to two works by Sara Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others (2006) and Willful Subjects (2014), to briefly describe how Ahmed’s concepts disorientation and willfulness could relate to the critical architectural project, as well as how the two might be connected in practices of architectural flirtation.

Orientation

Have you ever thought about your own orientation? Ahmed’s questioning begins with the idea of the direction of desire – as that which moves us toward what we value, and the relationship between sexual orientation and inhabited space. She asks what it means to be orientated toward certain people or things, in order to think about the spatiality of intersecting notions such as sexuality, gender and race. “If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as “who” or “what” we inhabit spaces with.” Ahmed points out that this movement toward what we value also has a reciprocal effect in that bodies take shape in the act of tending toward “who” or “what” is within reach, and that those things are within reach in the first place, because of the direction we’ve already taken. She proposes that this “who” or “what” we inhabit spaces with might also tell us something about “who” or “what” we tend to value, by shaping the spaces we share with others and creating a relation of proximity between us.

For instance, if an architectural discipline or culture tends toward critique, I would argue that its orientation is toward judgement, where the certainty of established practices and serious commitment to criticism are in its reach. Likewise, tending toward these practices of criticism and the seriousness of academia or a profession, in turn, helps form the figure of the architect or architectural critic, while also...
determining a relation of proximity between the critic and “who” or “what” is valued as good, normal, appropriate or serious. This question of orientation and shared space becomes crucial in situations where the critic and “who” or “what” is being judged aren’t orientated in the same direction, in any or all of the possible intersecting lines of orientation and, as a result, don’t necessarily occupy a space within proximity of one another. In other words, situations where the “who” or “what” is being judged is understood as causing disorientation. How might (temporarily) queering the orientation of the architectural critic through Campy practices clear ground to put new things and people within reach? And in this act of re-orientation, how might one shift to another direction from judgement, toward generosity?

**Habit-change**

As a reconfiguration of phenomenology’s concept of orientation, through the re-examination of work by philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger, Ahmed offers “queer phenomenology” as a disorientation device (reminiscent of Muñoz’s disidentification in order to reconfigure Camp practices for minoritarian subjects). Queer phenomenology “redirect[s] our attention toward different objects, those that are ‘less proximate’ or even those that deviate or are deviant.”154 Disorientation arises from a place of disorder and contingency, what Ahmed describes as “queer moments,” already found within phenomenology, where disorientation and, as Merleau-Ponty describes, “the horror with which it fills us” are then overcome in an act of re-orientation.155 (Apparently, philosophers are just as uncomfortable with the feeling of uncertainty as are critics.) Ahmed suggests that we remain in these moments of uncertainty in order to find a new orientation toward them, which in turn could also lead to a renewed vitality. In relation to the architectural critic, another way to put it might be that if we remain in the uncertainty of the architectural flirtation, turning toward playful generosity and away from serious judgement, perhaps we will find new relations to the serious or other ways of doing things.

According to Ahmed, as we orientate ourselves, we align our bodies with space, so that we not only get our bearings, but we also begin to “feel at home.”156 So, orientation also engenders a sense of belonging. She gives the example of the difference between being blindfolded in a strange room as opposed to a familiar one, where orientation’s relation to the familiar becomes visible, as reaching out to find objects that we have previous experience or knowledge of helps us to align ourselves with the space we’re in.157 Imagine the center of an architectural culture, whether in research, pedagogy or professional practice, where serious practices of critique or criticism are the standard form of evaluation, forming the contours of that familiar room where the architectural critic “feels at home.” Every critic has their own personal orientation as well, which is situated according to the intersecting systems (e.g. gender, sexuality, race) that position us. These bodies begin to “feel at home” over

**In other words, architectural flirtations ask the critic to put on the blindfold (and maybe a funny costume) and venture into that previously familiar room of critique where the furniture has been rearranged, or the room itself has perhaps undergone some minor renovations, in order to re-inhabit the space from a different (queer) angle.**
time and through the repetition of re-orientation, where the unsettling experience of disorientation is overcome by aligning with the contours of a space that is familiar. Or, as Ahmed writes, “If spaces extend bodies, then we could say that spaces also extend the shape of the bodies that “tend” to inhabit them.” She notes that this is how spaces can become gendered or racialized, if for example “the [practice of architecture] is associated with a masculine (white) body, then it is this body that tends to inhabit the space for [architecture].”

If we think of the spaces for architecture in an educational institution or the spaces that support an architectural education, there are bodies that teach in these spaces, bodies that are referred to in these spaces, bodies that learn in these spaces, bodies that administrate or service (IT) in these spaces, and even bodies that clean or facilitate in these spaces. Each of these bodies extend into the space differently, some more “in place” or in line with an architectural orientation than others. In an example of how racism inhibits black bodies from extending into spaces of whiteness, Ahmed points out that the extending into space might also be understood as the bodily experience of privilege.

And what about the extension of the body into that familiar space of critique, through the objects and costumes we wear to enable this extension, in order to inhabit or “feel at home” as critics or researchers? I know that I am guilty of donning the familiar sport coat on occasion, what I would call a (masculine) “accessory of power,” not only in order to play the part of the critic or the researcher (i.e. be taken more seriously), but also to signal to the other critics or researchers that I am one of them, or one that is also orientated toward critique. Come on, you know you’ve done it too! Disorientation calls attention to the ways we are already orientated, by calling into question not only “where” we are, but “who” we are, helping to make the tendencies of an orientation visible. Through the experience of disorientation the architectural critic might discover habits in their orientation toward practices of criticism or judgement they didn’t realize they had and that the “who” or “what,” previously out of reach or overlooked, suddenly appears right in front of them.

To become aware of habits in an architectural culture of criticism, or how we extend into the spaces where we “feel at home,” means not only to become aware of a repetition of tendencies, but that these tendencies are also incorporated into that culture and naturalized, becoming routine and going unnoticed, as they already feel like a part of that culture. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, Ahmed writes: “I turn to the concept of habits to theorize not so much how bodies acquire their shape, but how spaces acquire the shape of the bodies that ‘inhabit’ them. We could think about the ‘habit’ in the ‘inhabit’.” She borrows the term “habit-change” from de Lauretis to describe the process of re-orientation, where one does the work necessary to gather tendencies outside of a given orientation, in order to bring other objects and bodies (or practices) within reach. Ahmed makes it clear that “it can take a lot of work to shift one’s orientation, whether sexual or otherwise. Such work
is necessary precisely given how some orientations become socially given by being repeated over time, as a repetition that is often hidden from view.” We could think of this work of re-orientation as the constant shifting of the center of an architectural discipline or culture, or a recentring.

In Conversation One, Cleto points to the destabilizing nature of Camp as its “dimension of possibility” in that it works through processes of “failures, excess and betrayal.” Similarly, Ahmed writes: “If orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that extension fails.” I would suggest that flirtatious Camp practices could incite a purposeful failure in the extension of architectural bodies into familiar spaces of critique, so that “once unsettled it might be impossible to return, which of course means that we turn somewhere else, as a turning that might open up different horizons.” In other words, architectural flirtations ask the critic to put on the blindfold (and maybe a funny costume) and venture into that previously familiar room of critique where the furniture has been rearranged, or the room itself has perhaps undergone some minor renovations, in order to re-inhabit the space from a different (queer) angle.

**Clearing ground**

You may be wondering how individual orientations can bring forth any kind of structural changes? Ahmed cites the importance of tables throughout her work on orientations, whether the family dining table, the philosopher’s writing table, or the institutional conference table, as they support the gathering of bodies and the work that go into forming orientations, such as heterosexuality, patriarchy, or whiteness. This gathering around tables also serves as a concrete example of how orientations can be organizing and community building, by aligning with others that have similar orientations. In extension, these gatherings may come to have political implications, as Ahmed points out that orientation is not a neutral concept. She notes that typical concepts of orientation, such as left/right or East/West, have asymmetrical distinctions, where left and East often represent the “weak,” deviant, women and racial others, or sexuality and the exotic, while the right and West are taken as truth, strength, normality, whiteness or simply used as an origin of reference. According to Ahmed, a politics of disorientation would then promote queer gatherings around queer tables, transforming the space into the familiar “to allow that which has been overlooked – which has been treated as furniture - to dance with renewed life.”

And what of the gathering around established architectural values and an alignment with the orientation toward judgement? Could the architectural critic’s practices of critique and criticism be seen as supporting a tradition where “the system of imperialist white supremacist [heterosexist] capitalist patriarchy” is taken as a given or hidden in its background, in its desire for certainty and the security of its habitual privilege? In other words, could this perhaps help explain the tendencies of an architectural discipline, where the occurrence of theoretical anthologies with all (white) male authors, or lectures with all (white) male historical references, or lecture series with all (white) male speakers, or almost all (white) male Pritzker Prize winners, or a majority of (white) male professorships, or an opening panel at a politically themed architectural biennale with eight out of eight male panelists ARE EVEN STILL POSSIBLE?!! Likewise, the tendency of (white) feminist architectural theorists to write about “women” and “feminism” without first problematizing these categories still remains, again raising the question of “who” or “what” might STILL be out of sight? A politics of disorientation would help bring these backgrounds and privileges to the foreground, because as Ahmed writes: “When bodies take up spaces that they were not intended to inhabit, something other than the reproduction of the facts of the matter happens.”

Why is the work of disorientation so difficult? As Ahmed points out, being “in line” with others, following a certain path and not deviating, is “a form of commitment as well as a social investment.” In other words, commitment to an orientation promises certain returns; for the architectural critic – recognition, status, promotion, or perhaps academic power. Following a certain line will lead me to this thing or take me to that place, while deviation can arouse fear for the loss of this imagined reward or destination, resulting in self-perpetuation. Ahmed writes: “Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition.” Architecture students learn the rituals of critique through the participation of design crits (or in reading criticism) throughout their education, they learn to imitate or “follow” the critics’ performance of critique, which in turn is a repetition of those practices learned through the critics’ own education and professional experience, clearing a familiar ground where everyone should be orientated more or less in the same direction.

The “inheritance” of lines to follow, whether familial, social, or disciplinary, also comes with the expectation or assumption that we will reproduce these same lines. For instance, the tradition of the crit as a central part of architectural education, or the concept of praxis or professionalism in architectural practice, or the canon of architectural theory, all rely on the inheritance of what has come before it, as well as the expectations of our (white, paternal) “architectural ancestors” to keep it going. The gathering of these intersecting lines then clears ground that is familiar and in which we operate, while it demarcates a social (or disciplinary) space with a particular personal and political orientation. As Ahmed notes, this clearing ground or background is “about the making of worlds.”

When we fail (or refuse) to align ourselves, we risk being understood as what Ahmed calls a willful subject. Campy misperformativity and the politics of disorientation purposefully call this line into crisis, so that it begins to resemble what Ahmed likens to a “fork in the road,” where we are forced to choose (or flirt with) an uncertain
A recent trend involves, not only a shifting of the center, but also identifying, understanding, and sometimes changing our own orientations and alignments.

Architectural phenomenology

Before we move on to Ahmed’s notion of willful subjects, a brief note on what I perceive as the misappropriation of phenomenology in architecture. Since Ahmed’s theories rest heavily on a revised phenomenology, I find it necessary to distinguish between the two. In the introduction to an article by Alberto Pérez-Gómez, a current architectural phenomenologist and teacher, architectural theorist K. Michael Hays describes how some architects, out of a reaction to advances in modern science and technology, where value was placed on mathematical certainty and reason rather than sensorial feeling, turned toward a phenomenology, loosely based on Husserl’s notion of the “return to things” and Merleau-Ponty’s idea of “the primacy of perception,” in a desire to return to a more metaphysical, bodily experience of the world. Hays argues that phenomenological architects’ preconceived notions of science as “rational objectivity, technology, and functionalism” and their tendency to pose it as an opposition to experience as “mystery, poetry and Being,” ended up creating the very polarizations they aimed to resist.

Similarly, another architectural theorist, critical of phenomenological architecture, Jorge Otero-Pailos, argues that a young post-war generation of architects from North America and Europe became disillusioned with the aesthetic and intellectual constraints of modernist ideology, its faith in technology, and its accompanying processes of industrialization. He claims that they turned toward phenomenology in the search for a “premodern” experience of architecture, which eventually (and paradoxically) led to the beginnings of the postmodern period. This period is known to be hostile toward architectural phenomenology’s tendency to treat the ambiguous notion of “authentic” human sensorial experience as an all-encompassing theoretical model, claiming it becomes essentialist, ahistorical, apolitical and anti-theoretical. Otero-Pailos lists several architect-historians, such as Mark Wigley, Mark Jarzombek, Hilde Heynen and K. Michael Hays, who made notable contributions toward a post-structural revision/opposition of phenomenology in architecture.

Through his historiography of theory in American Schools of Architecture, Otero-Pailos claims that phenomenology was used as an instrument of power, as some of the most influential architectural academics, such as Jean Labatut (Princeton University, teacher to “postmodern” architects Charles Moore and Robert Venturi), Charles Moore (Yale University), Christian Norberg-Schulz (MIT), and Kenneth Frampton (Columbia University), turned toward phenomenology in their teaching and writing, in order to legitimate themselves as theorists, usurping academic power previously held by architectural historians and laying claim to intellectual authority over architectural discourse. This in turn, he argues, “led the transformation of Western architectural culture during the so-called postmodern period, changing how architects learned and understood the relationship of modern architecture to its history.” Beyond its educational implications, but not unrelated to the idea of prevailing orientations and values, Otero-Pailos points to a spiritual dimension found in phenomenology, noting that all four academic figures were also Catholic, suggesting “religion thus played a central role in the architectural reception of phenomenology, although it remained muted under the more secular language of philosophy.”

Otero-Pailos even locates Aldo Rossi, our central object of architectural flirtation, “among the circle of young architects and phenomenologists that formed around [the Italian architectural journal] *Casabella*” under the leadership of Ernesto Rogers, a key figure in the development of architectural phenomenology in Europe, but notes that Rossi eventually turned in another direction toward the Marxist teachings of the Frankfurt School. He also suggests that even today (as it did in my own design education), phenomenology tends to have a polarizing effect between the design faculty and the history and theory faculty within the academy, re-producing the division between theory and design, and in extension research and practice. Students get caught up in the middle having to choose sides, making this divide still relevant and necessary to discuss.

In terms of Ahmed’s work above on orientations and with an analysis of gender, race and sexuality, we might even say that the fact that well respected (white) male philosophers, such as Merleau-Ponty, Bachelard, Heidegger, and Husserl write poetically about the relationship with objects and things in their philosophical meanderings, later connected to architecture through work by theorists like Norberg-Schulz or Frampton, makes many (white) male architects feel the pull of “the familiar” or (and familial) line, like phenomenology was written for them! I would argue that many architects, in fact, tend to selectively (mis)use only the parts of phenomenology that are “useful” to their own practices and orientations, while neglecting to mention or problematize some of the suspect “backgrounds” associated with this branch of thinking. This produces a disciplinary lineage with problematic foundations, or as Ahmed might suggest, the “inheritance” of a cleared ground where the specific lines gathered behind it become naturalized and disappear.

With ideas based in patriarchy, colonialism and racism to construct “the Other,” no mention of the labor, production, or history behind objects, and the continued belief in a universal subject (which translates into a white, educated male), an architectural orientation toward phenomenology comes with a slew of questionable conclusions, or as Ahmed might suggest, the “inheritance” of a cleared ground where the specific lines gathered behind it become naturalized and disappear.

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whether architect phenomenologists would be as appreciative of their practices being likened to feminist witchcraft.

In the spirit of Campy contradictions and disorientations, I do believe that phenomenology can still be useful for architects, as long as it is first re-examined and revised not only in post-structural terms, but also specifically feminist and critical race ones. I see resistance to this revision as a matter of holding onto power and reinforcing unnecessary divisions. Ahmed has shown the possibilities of queering orientations, as well as the reconfiguring of “bracketing” into a form of wonder to rediscover the familiar along with its histories, rather than a device to “put aside” or discount an object’s familiarity. In a similar manner, disorientation might be useful in re-orientating the “critical project” in architecture from critique to conversation, as I discuss later in Conversation Three. Architectural flirtations lie somewhere in-between (revised) phenomenological and post-structural orientations, bridging the gap and embracing their inherent contradictions in the negotiations between the poetic and the political.

**Willful subjects**

As we’ve already established, flirtation is built on the premise of uncertainty and contingency, while the Camp influence allows for a queer performativity that embraces contradictory positions in a theatrical, exaggerated and humorous way, or a type of *misperformativity*. *Misperformativity* then is the result of an explicit Campy flirtation with Judith Butler’s “theory of performativity,” which can be described in simple terms as the idea that gender is something one *becomes* not *is*, and an attempt to connect these concepts with the improper performance of an architectural criticality. If gender, and in extension the direction of our desire, are dependent on the way we dress, the gestures we make, the things we say, then a purposefully improper performance would intentionally misbehave and ultimately risk failure, calling the expected or habitual performativity into crisis. This is one of the aims of drag in relation to gender, also used by Butler as an example of the performative nature of gender. Most of us are caught in the negotiation of a double performative gesture on a daily basis. That is, we take into account both our personal positions in relation to gender, race and sexuality in terms of societal norms, along with another set of values, expected costumes, gestures and language of the architectural (or other) discipline we sometimes inhabit. Just as Butler suggests that there is no “real” man or woman, but rather that these are always only performances of an idea of a set of appropriate masculine or feminine qualities to achieve an unattainable ideal, I would suggest that there are also no “real” architects, but rather an accepted set of notions or ideals of the performance of “the architect,” and that these notions can be more or less limiting, depending on the first set of positions (gender, race and sexuality) you occupy.

Architectural *misperformativity* could be thought of as *doing* “the architect” (or “the academic” or “the studio teacher” or “the student”) so wrong, it’s right.
In other words, misperformativity is an intentional performance of these expected notions and habits, including architectural critique, in an improper and unserious way, to thwart the seriousness of academic architectural culture and queer it into a critically playful one. Misperformativity helps in the act of recentring through dis-orientation. If we summon the image of the Campy poodle from Conversation One, dis-orientation might arise from the effect (or misperformativity) of the fun pink streak in the thick curls of the poodle that cause a double take, or in other words, require a recentring from the expected performance of “poodleness.” An interesting aside, the Swedish expression “ätt göra en pudel” or direct translation “to do a poodle” means to completely reverse one’s story, or to enact a 180º turn around from firm denial to repentant admission. So, even this expression about poodles has to do with a type of re-orientation, and the relentlessness in pointing these moments out is part of reclaiming the charge of willfulness. Ahmed reminds us that “[mere] persistence can be an act of disobedience.” Willfulness then is the part of the poodle that can still bite, when it’s necessary to get your attention.

Similar to the cleared ground associated with orientations, Ahmed describes what she calls the will sphere as “how we inhabit the world willingly with others” where subjects, objects and companion species (to include the poodles) make a mutual or reciprocal impression on each other, creating a type of intimacy in the sharing of a project or task, or a shared direction toward something that is willed. Willing then, also involves the act of valuing, as “[one] cannot will, without also positing and valuing the willed.” In other words, in order to move together towards the completion of a project or task, the project or task must be deemed worthy of taking on to begin with. If they allow each other to complete what is willed, then this becomes an expression of “willing helpfulness.” Willfulness, then, is “what resists being helpful” in that it gets in the way of the common project or task being completed.

Although perhaps commonly considered an act of intentional opposition or stubbornness on the part of the willful, Ahmed makes it clear that willfulness is a charge, or judgement, made by those whose will is in authority against those whose will is not. “To be identified as willful is to become a problem.” For this reason, Ahmed describes willful subjects as being closely related to “feminist killjoys: willful women, unwilling to get along, unwilling to preserve an idea of happiness,” as they get in the way of others’ happiness, often by bringing attention to injustices or inequalities that make that happiness possible. She also points out that the distribution of this charge of willfulness often follows the system of structural hierarchies within gender, race, and sexuality, where some subjects may be assigned willfulness simply for not being what those doing the judging are (white, male, straight, able-bodied, etc.), as their very existence may make what is usually in the background (an assumed shared will) suddenly appear in the foreground as the power of privilege.

Have you ever been the one that raises the concern that all of the lecturers in a lecture series, as well as a majority of the architectural examples in the lectures by those lecturers are white, Western, male architects? Have you ever been the one to suggest that a design jury should be varied in gender? Have you ever been the one who points out that all of the assigned readings for your doctoral research course are written by male authors who consistently refer to humans as “man”? Have you ever been the one who suggests that our own backgrounds may affect how student portfolios from non-Western countries are judged for acceptance into a European architectural program? Have you ever been the one who points out that design entrance exams are as much a test of cultural capital as they are “talent”? Have you ever been the one who challenges the charismatic guest critic who makes sexist/heterosexist comments during a design critique? Have you ever been the one to point out that everyone (students and teachers) has left the review space or seminar room in shambles for the custodial staff, after the critique is over? Have you ever been the one to suggest that gender or ethnicity may have an affect on the assessment of student design projects? Have you ever been the one who points out the preferential treatment of male architecture professors in relation to their female counterparts on an email thread to the entire staff? Have you ever been the one to call out a popular male professor who “accidentally” schedules a design studio activity during the one day allotted for the examination of your elective course? Have you ever been the one to respond in a sassy manner to the male ventilation contractor on site, who begins a building meeting by referring to you and your colleague as “girls,” rather than as architects? In this case, you may know the feeling of being charged with willfulness and “ruining the atmosphere” of the shared project that is architecture.

### Will as (a) discipline

How do we locate this concept of willfulness within education, and eventually a discipline? Just as re-orientations involve work, Ahmed suggests that “will work” involves adjusting one’s will (and desires) until it no longer requires any effort. In other words, the feeling of effortlessness paradoxically comes from the effort of “will work,” as the will disappears into the background. “When will work ‘works’ we are in harmony or agreement. ...When will work does not work, we have a disagreement.” It is in this moment of disagreement that the charge of willfulness may be attributed as the cause. In a historical account of “will work” as a form of education, Ahmed describes the educational tradition, originating in the Enlightenment period with Protestant influences, where the goal was the breaking of the willful child’s will, usually by paternal authority, “for the preservation of the familial as well as social order.” In this scenario, obedience is seen as a virtue or as good will, while having “a will of one’s own” is understood as disobedient and morally corrupt, as it conflicts with the will of the authority figure, who also represents God’s will. Likewise, the will of the authority figure, whether a godly or a parental one, must be followed will-
What would happen if we didn’t always align? If we got in the way? If critics turned to face another direction (what’s “behind them”), and were generous with their co-critics, without falling into consensus?

If unexpected tastes, flamboyant styles, political and ethical intentions, unorthodox practices, unserious precedents, and unconventional representations were regarded with the same academic rigor and a little bit of humor?
ingly under penalty of punishment, where “punishment” or violence against the will is presented as being for the child’s own good, as it intends to bring the child into good (moral) will and on the “right” (God’s) path.201

Ahmed explains how this violent “breaking of will” developed into a “making of will” in a milder liberal educational philosophy, where the goal was rather to attain an alignment of wills (or renunciation of will, if you were female) as the willful figure aligned with the authority figure.202 Likewise, one (male subject) was encouraged in “will work” to build a “strong” will as opposed to a “weak” or capricious (female) one. The happiness or “effortlessness,” a feeling of less resistance or trouble, brought about by the subsequent alignment, would in turn give rise to self-compliance, making willing habitual as one learned to will in the “right” direction. Ahmed describes these processes as “pedagogic mechanisms” that continue to leave traces in “will work” today.203 “Will work” then, becomes a form of training, or a discipline through discipline.

What kind of traces still haunt the “will work” of an architectural discipline in the training of young architects? In her illustrated step-by-step account of the ritual of the design jury, Helena Webster describes the socializing role of the crit through what she calls its periodicity, constituency, spatiality, choreography and language, as a staging of power and authority.204 Imagine the will sphere of an architectural design critique, where critics and/or teachers, students and student work gather in the common project of architectural education, all facing (literally and metaphorically) in the same direction as usual. The organization of these bodies and objects for an evaluation through criticism tend toward a familiar formation, and an implicit agreement, more or less, over the values used in the judgement of the work.

The image of a mass of student bodies (social order) behind a few key critic/figure teachers (parental authority), all facing a wall of drawings, images and models (potential will) and a lone figure (willing or willful subject) receiving praise or critique (reward/punishment), as architectural heroes and very rarely heroines (“God-like” figures) are referred to as an example worthy of emulation (moral good will), is a familiar and recurring one. However, although there can be an unfortunate example now and then of reviews that tend toward the “breaking of will” or as architectural critic/academic Naomi Stead phrases it “sadistic overtones” and “clashing of egos,” I would posit that the educational model today is closer to a “making of will,” or an attempt to align the architectural wills of students with a generally accepted will of the discipline.205

Webster claims that the staging of power in the ritual of the crit allows critics “to judge student performance against, and steer students’ development toward, the critics’ personal paradigms of disciplinary identity.”206 Perhaps this is part of the task of any education, to offer up models previously accepted by a discipline for emulation, but what would happen if we didn’t always align? If we got in the way? If critics turned to face another direction (what’s “behind them”), and were generous with their co-critics, without falling into consensus? If unexpected tastes, flamboyant styles, political and ethical intentions, unorthodox practices, unserious precedents, and unconventional representations were regarded with the same academic rigor and a little bit of humor? If concerns that aren’t typically considered “architectural” or about buildings being built were met with open ears and interested hearts? If the assumption wasn’t that the learning was necessarily dependent on what “the experts” have to say or on the reproduction of expected values? If generosity made room for the occasional misperformativé poodle, along with the seductive cats, and guard dogs alike?

**Institutional will**

Ahmed extends this idea in the relation of capital to institutional will, where power is the currency, and willful “disobedience” is understood as going against the general will of a social body, or that which is for the common good, where the common good disproportionately benefits those whose wills are already in agreement with the general will. She gives examples, such as the laborer who’s body has been injured on the job and is unable to return to work, or the woman who refuses her “duty” of reproduction to maintain the family line, or the queer body that desires sexual pleasure (without reproduction) to maintain the institution of heterosexuality, or the migrant who is “unwilling to integrate,” or the colonised who does not support or even questions the demands of the coloniser, or even “the figure of the wanderer” in its refusal to settle down and become a willing part of the social body.207 As Ahmed points out, the will economy is gendered, sexualized, classed, and racialized.208

Architecturally, we can think of material conditions that reinforce this idea of the will economy, such as “hostile architecture” with spikes in front of commercial properties and slanted benches in public spaces to discourage the “wandering” homeless, or regulations against temporary settlements and evictions of nomadic cultures, or the continued gentrification of lower cost areas with new production of housing marketed toward the nuclear family and young professionals, or gendered public bathrooms disqualifying transgendered bodies, or the walls of a public transit station providing a space for anti-immigration and racist rhetoric in political advertisements, or the building of walls and closing of bridges to police national borders.209

For this reason, it is important to re-examine and reconsider the general will, or norms and ethics, of the institutions where architectural educations are formed, in order to question what it is we are willing to align with. Have you ever considered what the jobs that architects say “yes” to might say about their alignments?

If we move back to the institutions of architectural education, the labor of will work sometimes takes a questionable form in the interest of the general will of the institution, and out of an interest of remaining in the employment of that institution. Although not always the case, competitive practices, like those mentioned earlier by Cuff, are so prevalent within all levels of architectural academic culture that it is worthy of a brief reflection on what is perhaps a familiar scenario. Let’s speculate for a moment. In a neoliberal educational model, the profiling and marketing of different studio approaches, from foundation studies to masters level, initiates the atmosphere
of competition between studios, as teachers depend on student enrollment (like customers) in order to be able to offer the studio (the product), while students get the impression that their choice (of product) may somehow make them more or less desirable (marketable) later in an architectural career. Once the choice of studio is made, the competitive arena shifts to the design studios themselves, where students, under the pressure to perform and in the interest of preserving the idea that the original choice of their particular studio is the “right” one, act out in varying degrees of antagonism toward their fellow students, in order to ensure their own personal ranking and to secure the hierarchy of the studio.

Myths about the toughest schools abound, with reportedly worst-case scenarios of students sabotaging each other’s models prior to critiques. Likewise, studio teachers, under the same pressure to prove that their students made the “right” choice and that their studio (product) remains in high demand, may engage in non-collegial practices. This may involve verbally belittling other studios’ work or practices, harshly critiquing the work of students from “competing” studios, using design juries to critique other studios’ approach rather than the student work, or by dominating or disrespecting their co-critics and colleagues from other studios during a critique. All of these practices could be seen as marketing schemes to legitimize and keep the studio (the product) in popular demand.

Let’s continue to speculate on how a will economy might work within academic research. The building up of symbolic power and legitimacy to align with the general will, in the competition for funding and research grants, is something architectural academics know well and clearly falls into the gendered, sexualized, classed, and racialized will economy. However, less explicitly economic-related practices, similar to those of the competitive design critic or studio teacher, all work toward the inflation of the will economy. These practices might include asking questions in a research seminar or conference, not out of curiosity or an interest in mutual dialogue, but with the sole purpose to publicly delegitimize the presenter and deflate the value of his/her research (i.e. put them in their place), positioning oneself as the more competent scholar; or the senior researchers who are sticklers for keeping time during paper presentations, but then use double the allotted time for their own presentations, leaving the junior researchers with no discussion time at all; not to mention the researchers who verbally belittle the design faculty for their practical, rather than academic experience, in order to increase the value of their own academic merits (simultaneously reinforcing the divide between practice and theory). Perhaps the worst, is an academic system that keeps senior researchers so busy ticking off boxes toward tenure or a professorship that they aren’t available for the “less glamorous” work of supervision that makes little to no impact on their curricula vitae. The prevailing attitude becomes “every person for themselves” and produces a socially unsustainable will economy.

Even working practices help to perpetuate an unhealthy and inequitable institutional will economy, by serving as an example for how an architect or academic should perform. How many architects do you know who at some point in their careers have either worked for free or have been expected to work for free, either by clients or employers? How many academics do you know who work frequently on evenings or weekends? Similar to the way Webster describes the socialization of young architects, in the “twenty-four-seven” preparations for the design crit and the demands of a culture with “total” commitment to the profession, one of my co-authors Beda Ring describes her final phase of PhD work as one, long, never-ending stressful day that lasted for about a year. If researchers or teachers relinquish (or are forced to) the ability to say no to free intellectual labor and consistently sacrifice their health or personal life, in an attempt to align with the general will of the institution and the pursuit of academic merits or tenure track positions, they convey to junior researchers (and architecture students) that a state of constant stress and over-work is a legitimate institutional expectation and strengthen the power of an exploitative institutional will economy. How can students be expected to resist or change a culture with an unhealthy will economy, if the teachers and practitioners serving as their role models enforce or perpetuate it?

Politics of willfulness

As I mentioned earlier, disorientation helps to re-direct or recenter architectural flirtations, while willfulness designates a mode. Similarly, Ahmed suggests that we can reclaim the charge of willfulness as a mode or style of politics. “To claim to be willful or to describe oneself or one’s stance as willful is to claim the very word that has historically been used as a technique for dismissal.” Ahmed explains that the charge of willfulness is at once a judgement and an act of dismissal, to discount those who fail to comply with the demand of unconditional obedience to the will of an authority. Willfulness then, involves persistence in the face of authority. However, Ahmed warns that an authority of power can use this persistence as proof of their charge against you. “You have to become insistent to go against the flow and you are judged to be going against the flow because you are insistent... you have to become what you are judged as being.” She points out that in order to more easily discount those who challenge the will of authority, power tends to reduce willfulness to an impression of individualism, as just someone with a “will of their own,” making the collective aspect of a politics of willfulness an imperative. Ahmed makes it clear that in reclaiming the charge of willfulness, she is not proposing a set of behaviors that could be designated as willful. Rather, describing oneself as willful is “to be willing to announce your disagreement, and to put yourself behind it.” How might we begin to resist or change an academic architectural culture with an unhealthy will economy? Ahmed relates the story of “two queer-of-color academics” that reacted to the conditions of their participation in a conference where the list of invited speakers were all white through what she calls a politics of willfulness; they “refused to take part; they refused to become part.”

Similar to the Campy misperformativity of the poodle, Ahmed discusses how
the disobedience of willfulness is not always a matter of opposition, but could instead take the form of an “unwilling obedience.” In other words, “[we] can pass as willing in order to be willful,” just as the poodle’s appearance can get it close enough to bite. So it’s not only about saying no, but how we say yes. Ahmed gives some examples of practices of unwilling obedience like reluctance, hesitation, plotting, inaction, even laughter (also reminiscent of the doubleness of the Camp laugh), where willfulness works through obeying in a way that does not support the commands of authority.

“Willfulness can be understood as the labor required to reach that no, which might even require saying yes along the way. The effort to acquire a will to disobey is the effort not only to say no but to say it publicly, to say it loudly, or to perform it through one’s own bodily action or inaction.” There are, however, some risks of assuming willfulness. Not only can willfulness become a habit, in that we begin to assume a resistant stance preemptively, regardless of the situation, but we may also become blind to our own agreements or privileges.

In the intersections of will in willful politics, certain struggles or “lines” may be charged with willfulness by other willful subjects, as if their will “gets in the way” of more important struggles. Ahmed writes: “the self-perception of freedom from norms can quickly translate into a freedom to exploit others.” For instance, lets pretend that an architect academic, who claims a feminist or some other critical identity, conducts a participatory research project, or leads a group of students in this type of project, within a local segregated or underprivileged area. From the beginning, this project rests on the assumption of the participation of residents from that area, who may or may not be willing to participate, even though it is intended for their own good. Sound familiar? As someone who has lived in one such area in the suburbs of Stockholm for the last 18 years, I’ve seen countless groups of inner city artists, architects, planners, and academics use this area as their own personal testing grounds, with seemingly little change or lasting effects. In other words, assuming willfulness can potentially obscure the intentions and conditions of our work, as we pat ourselves on the back and clear our privileged consciences, before returning to our institutions and tenant-owned apartments in the city.

We can think of how willful disobedience toward the general will of an architectural institution or discipline might be enabled by architectural flirtations. Phillips reminds us “[the] generosity of flirtation is in its implicit wish to sustain the life of desire.” Desire, playfulness and the refusal of serious commitment are all characteristics that the flirt shares with the figure of “the willful child.” Transforming this willfulness into a mode of politics might give “a sense of being in charge of what you are charged with. And the charge itself can be a connection: a way of relating to others similarly charged.” In other words, the will of the re-orientated willful subject engaged in a Campy misperformative flirt, and the collective will of other willful subjects to the point where the center has no choice but to give way, like an “ethical peer pressure.”

Rather than direct opposition, architectural flirtations make the structures and habits of power visible through disorientation and empower a collective struggle of willful subjects to the point where the center has no choice but to give way, like an “ethical peer pressure.”
Although architectural flirtations engage directly with the center, right where the power lies, they don’t necessarily aim to re-orientate those who hold the power. As Ahmed suggests: “Power involves the capacity to carry out an action despite the will of others. Resistance, in other words, is not strong enough to stop those with power doing what they will do.” Rather than direct opposition, architectural flirtations make the structures and habits of power visible through disorientation and empower a collective struggle of willful subjects to the point where the center has no choice but to give way, like an “ethical peer pressure.” It makes it impossible to take the cleared ground of the center for granted any longer or to dismiss, marginalize, or trivialize the validity of other voices and experiences. In a politics of willfulness, architectural flirtations deflect critique with generosity, set conditions for willingness in order to invoke empowerment (rather than obedience), and disarm techniques of power through persistent vulnerability.

Conversation Three: CRITICISM, CRITIQUE, CRITICALITY

Flirting with the kiss
To begin a conversation around criticism and as a matter of clarification, I first turn to a small luscious pink book in its soft canvas cover that I have mistaken for my red iPad mini more than once. This sensuous object, praised by the architectural community, with its silver highlights, abundant illustrations, and provocative language, make it accessible and easily digestible for a student audience. For this reason, it seems like a good place to start. Despite seeming similarities in terminology like the performative, flirtation, generosity, reciprocity, and even architectural objects of affection, and the fact that we both “flirt” with modern architecture in a playful, non-oppositional approach, my co-authors and I feel it is important to be clear that our work should not be confused with, or is in any way meant to relate to the type of argumentation found in architectural critic and academic Sylvia Lavin’s extended essay, Kissing Architecture (2011).

In declaring the work “postfeminist” by page four, I can admit that for us, Lavin had already “stirred the pot” so to say.

Beda’s initial response was:

“brush up against his still volume”? “apply moist pressure”? “get filled up by sensuous bodies pouring in and out”? “slip itself [ON] and [OVER]”? “the [PULSATING PINK SWERVE]”? I can’t get the image of a giant architectural vagina out of my head! It is a nice change from all of the usual giant architectural d*** heads! I mean phalluses!

Ha, and she called Gordon Matta-Clark’s work pornographic? This reads like lesbian pulp (only straighter)!

At first, Henri, our sensitive literary writer, refused to read past page nineteen due to the “unbearable over-use of adverbs.” Henri marched into the bathing area where Beda and I were relaxing in the tiny indoor pool and exclaimed:

It’s painfully obvious that Lavin’s editor, Sarah Whiting, certainly should have been immediately and inevitably fired, as she seemingly refrained from softly suggesting that Lavin ultimately resist the typically seductive temptation for writers to intentionally and consistently use each and every adverb utterly possible! First rule of writing: Lose the adverbs!
Then Henri stormed out of the room. (Probably to check her own adverbs, tricky little buggers that they are! Speaking of grammar infractions, Henri, in fact, is known to be a bit of a “comma queen,” but it gets uncomfortable every time Beda or I try to bring it up.)

Beda and I assured Henri that this was only the case for what Beda referred to as “the visual orgy scenes,” where Lavin describes the metaphor she proposes—the intimate gesture of an architectural kiss with visual culture, to revitalize old paradigms of architecture and transform it into what she calls “superarchitecture.” This, in order to bring forth an affectual aspect otherwise lacking in, as Lavin put it, boring modernist buildings. So, Beda read the rest.

Once we were all on the same page, Beda began thinking out loud:

So what would happen if I kissed Lavin back?

I mean, imagine the friction of Architectural Flirtations rubbing up against Kissing Architecture.

A big ol’ wet queer kiss! Hell, let’s make it a foursome!

Although not a proper analysis of Lavin’s text, I did like Beda’s idea in order to avoid slipping back into habitual modes of criticism, which is a constant struggle! In performing Lavin’s own statement: “Kissing requires not only that architecture receive the kiss but that it participate in return: that it kiss back,” we could try to make sense of some of her claims and point to where we feel the work reproduces, and in turn, perpetuates some of the disciplinary architectural blind spots our own work tries to address. And besides, kissing is definitely fair game in a flirtation! From now on though, we’ll refer to Sylvia Lavin as SL, since we’re about to get intimate and it would feel strange to continue using her last name.

Misperforming the kiss

Before we start puckering up, maybe we should begin with the architectural objects of our affection? In both kissing and flirting, finding the right “attraction” is important. The “figure of the architect” that SL seems to be into is distinctively male, unless of course, you are Elizabeth Diller and in a partnership with two other male architects (which could also be interesting). Most of these figures are the usual suspects, starchitects like Gehry, Koolhaas, Herzog & de Meuron, FOA, UNStudio, Greg Lynn (makes sense—SL’s own “real life” partner), who promote the idea of architecture as “proper buildings,” the kind of high-profile projects that get published in glossy magazines, which is fine.

You can’t control who you are attracted to, right? (Except, by chance, if you are only attracted to the money and power, but that almost never happens!) SL even manages to get Mies, LeCorbusier, Alberti and Palladio in the roll call for kissable candidates, just in case we were unsure of her architectural orientation! Although, there was a brief same-sex dalliance there in the transition from the “visual orgies” to the contemporary practices of “superarchitecture,” between Paul Rudolph and Andy Warhol, which made Beda hopeful.

Our architectural object of affection, Aldo Rossi, is also an internationally renowned male architect. What to do? On the other hand, our attraction is not for his large high-profile commissions, but rather, one of his more modest collaborative projects for quotidian life, his personal autobiographical reflections around his work, his theatrical and playful drawings, his dedication to political intentions and radical pedagogies, and his “queer” position—somewhere in-between modernism and postmodernism, phenomenology and criticality. He is our stand-in for the center of architecture, which we want to change, not promote.

As we lean in, SL whispers: “Even if alienating and deforming, kissing cannot be critical. A critical kiss is a bite, not a kiss.”

This reference to biting makes Henri think of the poodle (Conversations One and Two), ruins the moment, and again Henri storms out.

I wonder if SL is nervous?

I whisper back: A kiss can be sweet, intense, or friendly, but it can also be strategic, vindictive, even political. A bite can be critical, but it can also be erotic. It all depends on who is kissing (or biting) whom and for what purpose.

Re-orientating the kiss

In other words, the positioning of the kissers, as well as those witnessing the kiss, matters. In reference to the ideas on the institutional will economy from Conversation Two, we could think of it as a “transaction,” where the parties involved in an economic exchange each have different stakes. If SL’s proposed mingling involves powerful institutions (or high-end private residences) by renowned architects, entangled with video art works by internationally successful artists, without any consideration of systemic hierarchies of gender, race or sexuality, then the kissing risks remaining within an accepted “imperialist white supremacist [heterosexist] capitalist patriarchal” architecture paradigm. Likewise, SL’s promise of a “regime change …with neither confrontation or violence prescribed by the avant-garde nor the endless accommodations of new practice” becomes a superficial form of lascivious amusement for the architecturally frustrated and already privileged few (i.e. white, upper-middle class, academics/professionals in the architecture and art world). Kind of spoils the mood, at least for those of us who don’t identify as postfeminist or anti-critical.

SL looks at me, as if to say what are you waiting for? The scent of her hair reaches me. I move a strand that has fallen into her eyes, across her cheek and tuck it behind her ear and continue.

If you remember from Conversation Two, Ahmed suggests that extending into space might also be understood as the bodily experience of privilege, as “spaces also extend the shape of the bodies that ‘tend’ to inhabit them.” The experience of these institutional art and architecture spaces, for someone like SL, or those bodies that feel entitled to inhabit and extend into these spaces through their experience of bodily privilege, may elicit feelings of boredom and even a desire for the sensual. Meanwhile, those...
Without situating the kissing, it becomes unclear for both the reader, and perhaps even the writer, in whose interest are these changes brought about? ...If the answer is white, upper-middle class, academics/professionals in the architecture and art world, then the kissing ends up serving architecture for architecture’s sake, leaving any other social, political, or ethical ethos of the project behind.

In addition, SL’s intention behind outdoor kissing with video installations projected onto exterior facades as “a corrective to the institution’s closure and urban inaccessibility,” allowing those outside of MOMA (stand-in for all architecture, according to SL) and without a ticket, a view of the artwork for free, may be perceived as a positive expansion of “architectural effects” within the city. Or, it could be alienating, by extending the area of “dominator culture” experienced by those on the outside of that institution. While both cases are only speculations, the ethical responsibilities of the kissers (or the biters) and the institutions that commission them, as well as the academics who write about them, remain.

SL imagines the “viewer,” “museumgoer,” “spectator,” and “urbanite,” as bystanders to the kiss, maintaining the same universal subject of modernism, even if they do for a moment also become Walter Benjamin’s flâneur. However, it seems unlikely that they are imagined as the homeless veteran seated on the curb outside of the museum with his dog and a sign, or the trans woman of color several blocks away, or even the political activist and graffiti artist protesting a real estate summit nearby at The Brooklyn Museum. Without situating the kissing, it becomes unclear for both the reader, and perhaps even the writer, in whose interest are these changes brought about? In other words, who benefits from this “transaction”? If the answer is white, upper-middle class, academics/professionals in the architecture and art world, then the kissing ends up serving architecture for architecture’s sake, leaving any other social, political, or ethical ethos of the project behind.

I encourage Beda to tell SL a little bit about the minor architectural provocations she’s built outside of the Rossi/Pizzigoni row houses in Mozzo, Italy (First Storey) that try to engage local residents and stir up the community.

Beda hovers just in front of SL’s theory of kissing, close enough to feel her breath, and her nose just grazes it as she pulls back again.

The willful kiss

For a moment, I can see by the look in SL’s eyes that she’s curious about how our Architectural Flirtations would feel next to her Kissing Architecture, so I wait to see if she’ll make a move, but at the last minute she looks away.

She pretends not to notice that I noticed what she was thinking, and begins to say something, anything, out of context, just to break the awkward silence: “Because architecture has served long and well as a model of failure, disaster, and complicity, it now really deserves a kiss, needs to kiss, needs a theory of kissing.”

Beda looks at me in confusion. SL’s words remind her of her own enthusiasm.
over staging an “Architectural Flirt Aid course” as a PhD seminar, in order to “save architecture from its critical condition.” She begins to warm up to SL again.

In the middle somewhere, around page sixty-six, I also start to believe that SL’s theory of kissing and our architectural flirtations will finally meet. SL makes an interesting point about how a theory of kissing, specifically how writing about kissing, enables a change in architecture’s perception of itself and its collaborations with other mediums, to become what she calls “semiautonomous.” I start to think, ok, we have something in common here, an interest in writing practices as a possible means to affect architectural practices.

She continues to hold my interest by proposing that another way to have an effect is “to call something that is not architecture by a new name, like superarchitecture, and then to try to put it back together with architecture as a proper name.”237 She explains that in this way, “building ends up with more than it started with.”238 Another thing in common! Architectural flirtations also use techniques of naming and renaming, connecting interdisciplinary practices with architecture through intentional post-justification. Perhaps there’s a chance of saving this “transaction” after all?

I must admit that, at first, I flinched a bit when SL used the term “not-architecture” for anything that wasn’t a building. But then it occurred to me that Aldo Rossi wrote something similar in his A Scientific Autobiography, what he refers to as “forgetting architecture” or the “dissolution of the discipline.”239 The general idea is that one must temporarily free oneself from a discipline and “forget” the disciplinary constraints, in order to be able to experiment within that discipline. I guess you could say that the theater was Rossi’s “not-architecture.” So, I decide that this is something we can work with and move in very, very close.

Just when things are starting to heat up, from out of nowhere, SL pushes me away. She says: “kissing architecture is not a private matter, but an urgent call to control, in order to “describe experience and produce experience,” the experience of a limited and redundant few.242

This type of “transaction” promotes a narrow idea of what architecture is and whom architecture is for, providing experiences and spectacles for those bodies that already fit in and can afford them. It is a “transaction” that reproduces the attitudes of a complicit architectural discipline with questionable values, where the institutional will economy wins out over critical thought, ethical intentions, and social responsibility.

Moving on from the failed attempt at “kissing back,” I (on behalf of my co-authors) must make a second clarification; our call to move from critique to conversation is not an alignment with “post-critical” voices. Nor does this work, although performative and projective, intend to leave criticality behind. Rather than go through an exhaustive analysis of an exhausted debate on critical vs. projective practices, I lean on previous accounts (and retorts) by authors such as Jane Rendell in her introduction to Critical Architecture (2007), Ole W. Fischer in “Architecture, Capitalism and Criticality” (2008), and John Macarthur and Naomi Stead in their article “The Judge is Not an Operator: historiography, criticality, and architectural criticism” (2006), to name just a few.243

Briefly, this debate grew out of the North American context a little over a decade ago, questioning the critical project’s (at the time) tendency toward disciplinary autonomy and oppositional methods of argumentation, raising doubts as to critical theory’s continued role and relevance in architecture. The two main figures representing the “critical” voice were architect Peter Eisenman and theorist K. Michael Hays, while the dominant voices on the “post-critical” side were that of Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting (Sylvia Lavin’s editor), in their paper “Notes Around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism” (2002).

Even today, questions remain about criticism’s role in architecture, as well as in the art and visual culture world – as addressed by Gavin Butt in After Criticism (2005) and Irit Rogoff in “What is a Theorist?” (2008); however, all of the theoretical voices we turn to, locate themselves within a position of criticality.244 Many encourage a move toward interdisciplinarity, performativity and experimental modes of critical practice, where I would situate our work with architectural flirtations. Are you curious as to how we intend to move away from criticism and yet remain critical? Perhaps it is necessary to more precisely clarify and position architectural flirtations in relation to criticism, critique and criticality?

**Criticism**

Let’s begin by engaging in conversation with Stead and Macarthur, who argue for the importance and centrality of architectural criticism as a necessary “interface” between theory and practice, as well as for its creative and productive role in taking a clear position that can then be confronted and debated, to further both the practice and discourse of architecture.245 In this case, architectural criticism seems to imply written criticism about a built work, or rather, a judgement made about a work by a person who is not the maker of that work. The critic, or judge, who enacts the criticism is thought
to have a needed distance or “necessary externality” to the work in order to occupy this between position that links culture/practice, academy/industry, or discipline/operation. Stead and Macarthur also suggest that architectural criticism “can be a valuable tool in architectural education – in the production of reflexive, informed, and discerning graduates.” In the case of written criticism, as a source of informed discussions with clear positions on built works, I am inclined to agree (with a healthy dose of criticality towards these criticisms, of course).

However, I would distinguish between the written criticism of a critic on professional design work (which I assume Stead and Macarthur are referring to) and the criticism of a critic in an academic design jury of student work, as two distinct positions that require performing criticism differently. Following the previous conversation about the staging of power in the ritual of the crit, questions arise for me about the power of authority of the critic, especially in pedagogical situations with the inherent hierarchies between critic – student, or even teacher – student. Helena Webster’s research echoes this concern, in her analysis of power in architectural design juries, where she finds that “the design jury’s ritualistic practices had the effect of objectifying a power differential between critic and student and that this asymmetry of power profoundly distorted the pedagogic outcomes.”

In contrast to architectural flirtations’ suspension of judgement in order to turn toward another mode of criticality, Stead and Macarthur argue for the necessity of judgement, in order to put criticism in an operative role in architectural practice. They write: “The judgement of the critic is not the problem, nor is it final in the sense of a final authority. The making of a judgement is crucial in opening architectural criticism to an operative role in architectural practice.” Again to distinguish, while this may be true of written criticism in a professional context, where both parts are meeting on equal terms as professionals, the critic in an academic design jury, whether teacher or external critic, has two operative roles to negotiate, the evaluator and the mentor. No matter how congenial the atmosphere of a critique situation may be, I would argue that in making a judgement, both of these roles maintain a “sense of final authority,” whether in the act of assessing or simply serving as a role model.

In further support of judgement and the role of criticism, Macarthur and Stead argue that “the critic as judge has recourse to a whole body of law and precedent in the form of the architectural canon, which itself is made up of a consensus of past critical judgement.” In other words, they argue that “the activity of aesthetic judgement is itself historiographic” and therefore validated by some historical consensus. The same could be said for the critic in an academic design jury; however, another question arises for me about the validity of that very same canon, when inflected with notions of gender, race, and sexuality. Could criticism and/or its critics be relying on old bad habits? If we think back to Conversation Two, isn’t it possible that certain “inherited” orientations and alignments, even for the astute critic, could be hidden and out of view? Architectural flirtations offer another (performative) mode of relating to each other and/or a body of work and its precedents, on different terms, and without necessarily the...
same serious aims of criticism. In Adam Phillips’ words: “Flirtation may not be a poor way of doing something better, but a different way of doing something else.”252

Let’s briefly return to the preposition with, and compare it to (written) architectural criticism’s between, in order to delineate an important difference in temporality between the modes of judgement and flirtation. The preposition between implies that something comes before – a project is designed and built, and then something happens after – the built work is judged and placed in relation to historical precedents, as well as its contemporaries, with the help of criticism. Obviously, between can also imply a reciprocal action, where the author of the built work responds to the criticism or even physical changes are made, but in both cases, there is a sequence of before and after. Traditionally, in pedagogical situations, the crit is set up in much the same way; critics deliver criticism about student work that is prepared beforehand, in order to grade and place students in relation to their peers, as well as what has academically come before them. (Of course, crits also occur intermittently during the development of a studio project, but I would argue that this element of judging and comparing is always present, regardless of when the crit occurs.) So, work is placed before a crit, and the judgement is delivered after. Whereas, with is a parallel position, rather than an in-between one.

If we invite several of the previously mentioned authors into the conversation, those who are considering the state of criticism or critical theory today and wish to revitalize it and/or reinvent it; Rendell, Butt, Rogoff, and Sedgwick all recognize and encourage this shift in position, in order to retain criticality. Sedgwick speaks of the beside position in order to resist dualistic thinking (that can in turn lead to the paranoid critic).253 Butt suggests that criticism situate itself para, which he defines as “against and/or beside,” to free itself from institutionalized forms of thought.254 Rendell writes that a shift from positions of “over” and “under” to those of “to” and “with” can allow for a different power dynamic of equivalence.255 And Rogoff subscribes to a practice that involves a “writing with” rather than “writing about” to achieve a dehierarchization.256

Much in the same way, architectural flirtations aim to destabilize the sequence of before and after, rendering the more oppositional temporality of architectural criticism between two sides, in a design jury situation, fleeting and contingent. Besides undermining power, this shift in positioning, in being with or beside, helps to achieve a necessary simultaneity that opens up for vulnerability on both parts, making a mutual “flirtatious” interaction possible and, I would suggest, a more conducive learning relationship. As Helena Webster writes, in reference to design jury critics: “Only when experts begin to see themselves as colearners engaged in a collective project to continually question and reconstruct architectural discourse, rather than as prophets whose role is to convert students into disciples, will architectural education become truly student centered.”257

Critique

We can continue our conversation with Naomi Stead, but this time in relation to another more exploratory article “Producing critical thinkers, designing critical objects: re-examining the role of critique in architectural education” (2003), in order to move from criticism toward critique.258 At this point, it is perhaps important to note that I am speaking from the position of a teacher in design studio, who happens to use writing as part of my pedagogical practices (in addition to drawing and modeling), whereas Stead occupies a position closer to that of an architectural theorist and historian, in her discussion of pedagogical exercises, mainly in architectural writing.259 Rather than see this as a deterrent in our conversation, it merely makes the complexity of this question of critique in architectural pedagogy more evident.

In her article, Stead reflects on the importance of “thinking critically” in architectural education and gives an account of one example from her own teaching practices with exercises in (written) critique, in order to speculate on ways that critique might be used more effectively to produce “critical architectural thinkers, who are, furthermore, equipped to design critical architectural projects.”260 She notes that exercises in reading and writing architectural criticism, over the course of a student’s education, seem to help students develop what she calls a “critical sensibility.” Again, I am inclined to agree; however, I wonder whether we can necessarily draw the conclusion that students who have developed a “critical sensibility” have also become better “critical thinkers”? What’s the difference, you ask?

If I rephrase the question, couldn’t the students’ development of a “critical sensibility” alternately mean that they have learned the habits of how to be a “critic,” rather than to “think critically”? “Thinking critically” involves taking a risk and entering into uncharted territory, without knowing the results ahead of time, and I would argue, is closer to the uncertainty of a flirtation. While a “critical sensibility” could help with the task of “critical thinking,” it might also imply the imitation of a learned (and safe) performance of critique, one that is reinforced through the performances of critics in design crits. Webster presents a similar idea, what she calls “ritual mastery,” where students gain an understanding of the ritual norms and practices of the design crit and then develop “surface tactics” to guarantee the best outcome.261 Rather than risk harsh criticism with experimental ideas or presentations that may lead to “deep, transformative learning,” Webster found that students prepared their projects and presentations in accordance with these learned norms and practices.262 Recalling Conversation Two, we might say that following an accepted architectural orientation towards judgement, within a culture of critique, might obstruct taking the uncertain path to places of genuine interest and of risking the failure of misperformativity that may lead to “critical thinking.”

Let’s invite Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick into the conversation to help clarify what these norms or habits of critique might look like. As mentioned earlier, relying heavily on psychoanalytic theory, Sedgwick argues that paranoia has become the modus operandi of critical (scholarly) practice.263 She argues that if the practice of critique operates in a state of paranoia, “There must be no bad surprises,” so it is imperative to already know what will happen.264 Likewise, she notes that critique (paranoia) imitates what has come before it, while also becoming what it is imitating, so it is both a
way of knowing AND what is known. (Here, we can see the habits forming.)

Stead jumps back into the conversation with a comment on what she considers to be a “failed” pedagogical writing assignment, where first year students were to critique a local built work of their choice: “Ultimately, it is clear that these first year architecture students had not yet developed the knowledge, skills, or critical apparatus to engage in primary architectural critique.” Stead remarks, failure to do so (i.e. implicate themselves), was one of the main complaints that students had toward critics and critique situations throughout their education, especially in design juries. By dismantling the guise of “objectivity,” or as mentioned in Conversation Two, the hidden orientations and alignments of the architectural critic, judgement of student design work proves to be a highly subjective endeavor. (An aside: Earlier research on diversity and architectural education suggests that the subjectivity of traditional practices of critique can even be disadvantageous to students due to gender and racial bias.)

According to Stead, “[The students] had a definite sense, not only that one must be an expert to write criticism, but that the critic stands in judgement of the work, and that it is not appropriate for students to take this role—that this would, in other words, be hubris.” In my ears, Stead’s observation echoes the words of Dana Cuff on the lessons from the ritual of the crit, where students learn “that full-fledged architects hold positions that can be challenged only by other full-fledged architects.” While the students’ increased awareness of and respect for the complexity of architectural work, through the training within a culture of critique, is undeniably a positive development, I wonder what effect a shift from “serious and committed” critique to a more “frivolous and flexible” flirtation might have? Would the students then feel it was “appropriate” to fearlessly experiment with the role of the critic in a more playful and improperly informed way? In extension, how might the ritual of the crit benefit from a re-orientation from expert or “professional” criticism toward the imposed “amateur” position of the flirt?

Pertinent to the ritual of the crit or design jury, Sedgwick suggests that critique (paranoia) believes in “knowledge in the form of exposure.” It reveals or makes a pain of humiliation in an imagined and expected failure. It reveals or makes a reminder that is known about a project before formulating any critical opinion.” Fair enough. But if we speculate for a moment, wonder what might have happened if these inexperienced students had been asked to flirt with the built works, rather than critique them? In other words, to operate in a flirtatious mode that suspends judgment and turns uncertainty and ambiguity into pleasure and suspense.

Gavin Butt remarks: “flirtation stalls the moment of definitive judgement and commitment, and thereby makes space for the entertaining of lesser familiar possibilities, which, in turn, reduces the constricting hold of the paranoid impulse on the production of scholarly knowledge.”

Stead interjects: “it appeared that for many of the students, the inability to describe architecture was in fact merely the symptom of a larger inability even to observe it.” She explains that while the assignment encouraged students to adopt an approach with “an emphasis on individual, phenomenological experience [to] allow students an entry point to writing about architecture by de-emphasising the physical object... this was largely avoided by the students, who seemed to regard it as a ‘soft’, insufficiently rigorous, and above all ‘biased’ approach to architecture and the criticism thereof.” Stead notes a pre-existing cultural bias in the idea that critique should be “objective,” as well as the “prevalence of formalist approaches in the current journals.”

If we speculate further, what if the students had written from the position of a flirt rather than a critic? For instance, what if they positioned themselves as an intelligent alien life form or a mythical humanoid creature, who was observing these buildings for the first time and was unfamiliar with both architectural terminology and its values (much like the first year students), without the added pressure to be “critics”? Might this kind of critical distance to themselves, and their preconceived notions about architecture and architectural critique, enable imaginative, reflexive, if not surprising observations?

Stead reflects on another pedagogical situation, comparing the “success” of more advanced students in a similar writing assignment to those of the first year. She states: “the students were very shy of making absolute critical judgements about the work of their apparent ‘superiors’, both because of a feeling that they didn’t yet know enough to be authoritative, and because they saw the importance of being fully informed about a project before formulating any critical opinion.” This prompts Sedgwick’s reminder that critique’s (paranoia’s) only option is to prove the assumptions it begins with; therefore, it operates in a pre-emptive mode of fear, choosing to reject the more vulnerable position of pleasure seeking, in order to shield itself, at all costs, from the pain of humiliation in an imagined and expected failure. (And here, while this is only
Maybe it is high time for architecture to ask for a “divorce” from the committed relationship it has with critique, and its accompanying habits, in order to venture into the pleasure and excitement of a new flirtation!

31. OPPONENT: Katie Lloyd Thomas at Architectural Flirt Aid Course, PhD seminar, 28 May 2014, Stockholm, Sweden

320 So, for Stead, the problem is not necessarily with the culture of criticism or critique, but rather a question of the forum for critique and its inherent constraints. I, on the other hand, suggest that maybe it is high time for architecture to ask for a “divorce” from the committed relationship it has with critique, and its accompanying habits, in order to venture into the pleasure and excitement of a new flirtation!

Remaining “loyal” in her commitment to practices of criticism (perhaps in the hope of “working things out”), Stead states: “Examining the foundations of architectural thought and belief, the grounds upon which our understanding of the discipline and the practice are based, does not necessarily mean undermining or ‘deconstructing’ these beliefs. It may simply mean acknowledging that such received ideas do exist, and acknowledging that they have a history and values of their own.”

We end our conversation here, but I get the feeling that Stead is more interested in considering some sort of couples counseling with critique rather than a divorce, whereas I deem it necessary not only to acknowledge, but also to undermine those systems and values that are in place.

Re-orientating and/or destabilizing these foundations is part of the act of clearing ground in architectural flirtations and redefining the centers. It is also something that, according to Irit Rogoff, is crucial for criticality at a systemic level. In describing her own re-orientation, a performative shift that went from facing the academy to facing the art world, Rogoff writes: “Criticality, as I perceive it, is precisely in the operations of recognizing the limitations of one’s own thought, for one does not learn something new until one unlearns something old, otherwise one is simply adding information rather than rethinking a structure.”

Criticality

The question remains, how do we intend to move away from criticism and critique, yet remain critical? Irit Rogoff, speaking from a position within art history and visual culture, begins by describing a move from criticism to critique to criticality as a “dynamics of loss,” reminiscent of the processes of “failure” in Campy misperformativity, Ahmed’s disorientations, and even the “failure” to be willing in willfulness from Conversations One and Two. With this “dynamics of loss,” she argues, it has been necessary to give up certain institutionalized habits, such as: the security of a discipline and the clear position that comes with it, the certainty of an established methodology, and the convenience of a set subject of study. The practice of criticality, according to Rogoff, is both “connected... with risk” and “operating from uncertain ground.” So, with its improper behavior, inherent contingency, and skepticism toward commitment, I suggest that architectural flirtations might be one way of sustaining this mode of criticality, without returning to critique or criticism.

Akin to the idea of clearing ground through the performative practices of architectural flirtations, Rogoff continues to describe this move away from critique and criticism as the need for an “open and fluid space in which numerous forms of experimental conjunctions between ideas, politics, images, and effects might take place,” in a kind of mean.”
performatively (and interdisciplinary) criticality that erases the distinctions between practice and theory.294 Similar to the “fluid space... of experimental conjunctions” Rogoff describes, architectural flirtations are interested in enacting the willful space of persistent vulnerability.295 This space, we suggest, is conducive for spaces of learning and a way to be both generously and generatively critical.

And what of criticality in relation to architecture and academia? Or the fact that this work around architectural flirtations resides within the field of Critical Studies, which has its own history of alignments and commitments to critique, at a school of architecture that is part of a larger institution with its own institutional will? According to Fischer, criticality, with its origins in the work of Kant, Marx and Freud and embodied in The Frankfurt School (within European contexts), was institutionalized as an academic discipline in architecture over the course of the last three decades.296 Championed by the “critical theory” of K. Michael Hays and the “critical practice” of Peter Eisenman, “criticality became a synonym for the theory of architecture.”297 This project that became known as “critical architecture,” however, still had its old foundations firmly rooted within ideas of critique and criticalism, not to mention a very uncritical stance in terms of gender, race and sexuality.

Professor of architectural theory, Hilde Heynen joins the conversation, with some insights from her article on critical architecture and the Modern Movement. Heynen states: “It seems to me that there are two major concerns that are at stake if we question insights from her article on critical architecture and the Modern Movement. Heynen terms of gender, race and sexuality.

In terms of modernism being one of the many strong influences on the current values of architecture as a discipline and its history with the culture of critique, 1, along with my co-authors, would add racism and heterosexism to Heynen’s list of concerns.

Heynen makes the case that the aesthetically motivated (American) strand of “critical architecture,” represented by Hays and Eisenman and concerned with autonomy, differs from that of the socially motivated (European) modern architects who were “convinced that there existed a clear connection between architectural patterns and social reality, and... conceived of their own work as contributing to a more just, better society.”298 She proposes that (in the European strand) Modern architecture was, in fact, a social project and therefore embodies critical architecture.

Heynen’s claim is interesting for us, since Aldo Rossi – an active writer, teacher and practicing architect during this time period, and the main object of our architectural affection in the second half of this project, most likely fits somewhere in-between the two critical strands. With his practice in Italy and teaching abroad, he was a colleague to many of the leading figures in “critical architecture” on both sides of the Atlantic. Fischer also lists Aldo Rossi as one of the “representatives of critical architecture,” associated with the IAUS and following the writing of Tafuri.299 He goes on to describe Rossi as “exemplary for this complexity and ambiguity” of a position between modern, post-modern, structuralist and post-structuralist theories in architecture.300

So, while Hilde Heynen and I perhaps don’t share an interest in a renewed “long-term relationship” with modernism as a critical practice, we do both have a desire to flirt with it. As for our choice of object of architectural affection and the so-called “post-critical architectures,” all I can say is that you don’t bother to flirt with someone or something you aren’t interested in to begin with; hence, the choice of Aldo Rossi as opposed to, say, Rem Koolhaas. Not a judgement, more a matter of preference.

After a slight detour in the conversation, if we return to the idea of criticality and academia, that is, criticality in research and teaching practices, and ask what architectural flirtations might hope to accomplish in relation to a field like Critical Studies, or in relation to an architecture school that’s also part of an institution? In a local context, thinking about criticality stems partly from the fact that Critical Studies no longer has a design studio in the master’s program at KTH in Stockholm (since 2014), and is therefore unrepresented in the advanced level of architectural design education at the school. Except of course, in auxiliary courses and occasional workshops or lectures, although still important, in what sometimes feels like an institutional attempt to “check-off” gender and/or critical theory requirements, or to simply satisfy student complaints about a lack of both. (With that said, I must note that the various Architecture and Gender courses taught by myself and my colleagues, as well as the masters orientation courses organized by my colleague Hélène Frichot, have really come out full force to show what criticality goes for.)300

The “critical” question is why would a school, after an investment of five years in building up a new masters studio based in feminist and critical theory, which sparked international interest and recognition, choose to no longer offer this particular studio? Was it merely a change in leadership (perhaps inconsequential but not unimportant)? Another critical question for me, in terms of institutional “architectural orientations,” If not in the design studios, undeniably the center of design education, where does the critical now “reside” or gather within the institution? Its location within the school and the implicit hierarchy of courses within the curriculum, says a lot about its meaning and value for those responsible in determining the “architectural orientation” of this particular school’s education. In other words, does the critical already have a place reserved at the table, as Ahmed would say, or is it only invited on certain occasions, like the willful university daughter(s) home for the holidays, known for “causing” conflicts and “ruining the family atmosphere”?301

The other part that gives rise to reflection, is the fact that students tend to shy away from choosing the explicitly “critical” studio, resulting in lower numbers in enrolment and giving the school an economic motivation behind the cancelation (see the section about the choice of studio and the will economy in Conversation Two). Speculations as to why this occurs are just that, speculations. Could it be a fear of the explicit feminist position of the studio, understood by some as exclusionary, outdated, or even as detrimental to future job opportunities by association? Or is it perhaps the continued misconception that critical = theory, which translates into a (false) deduction that the studio is all reading and no design? Or does it have to do with recent political shifts
toward neoliberalism and the devaluing of the critical, with added pressure by market forces on education to produce employees, rather than “critical thinkers”? Or, are we just too serious with the critical in Critical Studies?

It could be all, a combination, or none of the above, but perhaps the most important part to consider is what might the critical (and in extension Critical Studies) need to do, in order to regain a reserved place at the table? And in sharing the responsibility, what might “critically inclined” students need to do? Student choices are not only individual, but also collective and political! That is to say, how does “critical architecture” and “critical theory” reinvent itself, in order to revitalize a “critical project” that is relevant to a more ethical and socially conscious architectural discipline and culture? Architectural flirtations ask that criticality or the critical begin by misperforming, re-orientating and persistently re-examining its “serious” relationships with critique and criticism, and not simply be complicit with the company it tends to keep.

Endnotes

FOR FULL REFERENCES WITH ACCESS DATES, SEE BIBLIOGRAPHY.

2 Cuff, 43.
4 Cuff, 153.
5 For non-architects, the graphic notation used to reference these conversations is a conventional drawing standard used in architectural drawings to refer to details.
8 Cuff, 154. (my italics for emphasis)
9 Cuff, 11.
10 Cuff, 40.
18 For an explanation on the relationship of privilege to mainstream or women feminism. Belle Jar. The 19. “ shit where Feminists need to stop doing.” The Belle Jar blog March 8.
19 I do not cover the idea of the “neoliberal feminist” in this work, however, my colleague Helen Runtting is currently doing some interesting work around this notion in her forthcoming dissertation images of Desire. Swedish Architect under Semicapitalism.
24 For a quick overview of previous work in feminist architectural theory, see the Prelude.
ARCHITECTURAL FLIRTATIONS

CHAPTER ONE

82 Robertson, 268-269. For Sonntag interview: see Ross, 72.
83 Robertson, 277-278.
84 Cleto, 2.
85 Cleto, 5.
86 Cleto, 9.
87 Cleto, 33.
88 Cleto, 31.
89 Muñoz, 5.
90 Muñoz, 9.
91 Muñoz, 6.
93 Muñoz, 7.
94 Muñoz, 10.
98 See Cleto 10; Bergman 1993a, 7-9 and Ross 62-64.
101 Meyer, 2-11.
102 Cleto, 16.
103 Cleto, 16-22.
104 Meyer 3-4.
106 Meyer, 2-4.
107 Meyer, 9.
108 ACT UP AID Coalition to Unleash Power was an international advocacy group, formed 1987 in NY, that worked for legislation, medical research and treatment for people with AIDS. queerization is an LGBTQ activist organization, founded 1990 by members of ACT UP in NY, to combat homophobia and increase visibility of the queer community through direct action, such as street and confrontational tactics.
109 Meyer, 5.
111 Ahmed 2006b, 161.
114 See Muñoz, 21-25 for a discussion on the important contribution of work by feminists of color to queer theory and the lack of white feminists' acknowledgement or advancement of this work.
115 Black Lives Matter: http://blacklivesmatter.com/
116 See the following selected articles as examples (Thank you to Yva Habel for posting these online and bringing them to my attention.)
118 Liberty's inherent racism." Model swel Culture. December 10. I have, however, chosen not to cite personal blogs of black activists, feminists, and writers, out of respect for their contributors and policies and in order to not risk exposing them to unwanted harassment online, but there are many doing important work.
119 Meyer 10.
120 Castle 22. Castle describes Sonntag as a 'camp' lady-thespian who was "as eccentric theatrically and mesmerizing as any of them."
121 Bergman 1993a, 13-14, Cleto, 1, Ross 55-56.
125 Ching and Wagner-Lawlor, 14.
126 See Kates, Nancy D. 2014. film, section 50:00-54:49.
127 See also Sonntag 1964-1968, 278 and 290.
128 Meyer 7.
129 Castle 22.
130 Castle, 22.
131 Castle 28.
132 Castle 28.
133 Castle, 20-29.
134 Castle, 30.
135 Butt 2006, 190.
136 Meyer 7.
137 Meyer, 8.
139 Meyer 10.
140 Meyer 10.
144 Danboit, 2009.
149 Thank you to Ulrika Karlsson for bringing this to my attention.
151 Butt and Rogof, 28-29.
152 Bergman 1993a, 105.
153 Ahmed 2006b. 1.
154 Ahmed 2006b. 4.
155 Ahmed 2006b. 7.
156 Ahmed 2006b. 7.
157 Ahmed 2006b. 8.
158 Ahmed 2006b. 58. I have substituted Ahmed's example of "writing" for "architecture" in this quote and added the dimension of race.
159 Ahmed 2006b. 110.
160 Ahmed 2006b. 111.
161 Ahmed 2006b. 112.
162 Photographic evidence of this phenomena, where three male critics are pictured in their black sport coats, see fig. 3 in Webst 2007, 25.
163 Ahmed 2006b. 129.
164 Ahmed 2006b. 100.
165 Ahmed 2006b. 101.
166 Ahmed 2006b. 102.
167 Ahmed 2006b. 11.
168 Ahmed 2006b. 155.
170 Ahmed 2006b. 177.
171 hooks 2008. 9.
175 Ahmed 2006b. 16.
176 Ahmed 2006b. 17.
177 Ahmed 2006b. 15.
178 Ahmed 2006b. 19.
182 Otero-Pailos 2012, 142.
183 Otero-Pailos 2012, 137.
184 Otero-Pailos 2012, 141.
185 Otero-Pailos 2012, 143.

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER ONE


Ahmed 2014, 48. Ahmed borrows the term 'com- panion' from Heidegger's Being and Time


Ahmed 2014, 61. For three consecutive years, Hélène Frichot orga- nized master's level orientation courses for approximately 150 architecture students, two weeks in length. Likewise, every term since 2008, Critical Studies offers its Gender and Architecture course both as a student elective and a continu- ing education course. The most recent, for two consecutive terms, is Helen Bunting's 'Images of Desire.' And each term a lecture on critical/feminist theory is held by one of the senior lecturers in Critical Studies for the 1st and 2nd year students.


Ahmed 2014, 141.


Phillips, xvii-xviii.


Ahmed 2014, 54.

Ahmed 2014, 111.

Thank you to my colleague and supervisor Hélène Frichot for sharing an early version of her keynote paper about Lavin's work for the 2015 AHRA conference, "This Thing Called Theory, at The School of Art, Architecture and Design at Leeds Beckett University.

Lavin 2011, 5.


Lavin 2011, 10.

Lavin 2011, 11.

Lavin 2011, 11.

Lavin 2011, 15.

A note on my use of the term "wild." While Ahmed goes into thorough discussion of the many philosophical, sociological, and political uses and definitions of "wild," from a metaphysical attribute to an explanation of human pathologies, I am most concerned with its entanglement with desire, as well as the conditions and effects of being deemed Wildly, or the feeling of wildliness in relation to pedagogy and institutions.


Ahmed 2014, 63.


Ahmed 2014, 75.

Ahmed 2014, 75.

Ahmed 2006b, 164. For other examples of femi-

Ahmed 2014, 159.

Ahmed 2014, 152.

Ahmed 2014, 133.

Ahmed 2014, 144.

Ahmed 2014, 134.

Ahmed 2014, 152.

Ahmed 2014, 141.


Phillips, xvii-xviii.

Lavin 2011, 14.

Lavin 2011, 46 & 43.

hooks 2009, 8.

hooks 2009, 8.

hooks 2009, 8.

Whitford, Emma. 2015. "Protesters Slam Real Estate Summit At Brooklyn Museum: 'It's Like Vultures Gath- ering around the Table as the Participants Eat'" - Gothamist, Nov. 17.

Lavin 2011, 15.

Lavin 2011, 66.

Lavin 2011, 66.


Lavin 2011, 113.

Lavin 2011, 19.

Lavin 2011, 59.

Lavin 2011, 59.


Macarthur and Stead, 118.

Macarthur and Stead, 118.

Webster 2007, 22.

Webster 2007, 16.

Webster 2007, 59.

Webster 2007, 59.

Webster 2007, 59.


I hate architecture

120101 Beda Ring

I hate architecture that is all fact, and no fiction.
I hate architecture that is all flash, but no substance.
I hate architecture that promotes itself.
I hate architecture that requires a signature.
I hate architecture that puts profit before learning.
I hate architecture that profits those who always profit.
I hate architecture that claims the law of supply and demand.
I hate architecture that is all profit, and no learning.
I hate architecture that puts profit before its own.
I hate architecture that profits those who always profit.
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CHAPTER TWO
Dear Aldo,

A (flirt’s) Scientific Autobiography

...
Dear Aldo,

Is it ok if I call you Aldo? I’ve spent my entire architectural education and career hearing you referred to simply as “Rossi,” so I thought I’d try your first name for a change. Since the two of us will be engaging in quite a long conversation during this project, I hope you don’t mind the imposed familiarity. I’m writing to let you know that I have “moved in” to one of the row houses in Mozzo, and have started some extensive renovations as part of my doctoral research. I’m in the second house from the end, the one farthest from the entrance gate. Technically, I guess you could call it an “occupation,” at least that’s what one of the neighbors is calling it. This neighbor, Adelina, who shares a common firewall with me in the middle of the building, has been trying to petition for my eviction ever since I got here. She’s had little support from the other neighbors and almost no interest from the local authorities, and (between you and me) it appears that she’s not so popular here among the Case Unfamiliari residents. She always seems so cross and eager to judge everyone else. I wonder what her story is?

Anyway, I figured that you might be curious as to what’s going on, so I thought I would write to you about the work in progress and some of my thoughts behind the changes. Your address is a bit tricky, but I figure that at the rate of the Italian Postal Service, they must be used to delivering mail to the deceased. I’m sure they’ll figure it out! I brought along my copy of A Scientific Autobiography, your personal account of your own education and career, and your experience of the everyday might be altered. By using elements of fiction and theory, telling stories while formulating critical arguments, this method borrows from many writing practices, in order to get at areas of resistance out of reach to traditional forms of academic writing. My Australian colleagues call it fictocriticism, and define it as “the constructive, creative and critical situatedness of the thinking-designer in the midst of their problematic field,” but I prefer critical fiction, as I understand “criticality” and “criticism” to be two different things.

This particular critical fiction borrowed its form from one of the contract documents used in architectural practice, the room specification. As you know, Aldo, architectural scholar Katie Lloyd Thomas defines the specification as “a practical document which sets out materials, construction methods and standards of work.” She explores how the language we use as architects to specify materials, whether descriptive, process-based or an indicator of performance, affects these materials, and ultimately the spaces we build. Although my specifications remained mainly within the realm she calls “naming,” I wanted to attempt to materialize the ideas in my writing, by proposing physical changes to an existing built space. I wondered if it was possible and was curious what might come out of it.

Inspired by Lloyd Thomas’ work on architectural specifications, I also wondered what would happen if I allowed the roles of different forms of practice to switch places. What if I allowed the room specifications to become primary and the drawings secondary, where the drawing supplemented the writing, in order to undermine what Lloyd Thomas calls the privileged position of the “conceptual realm of form” over matter? She presents her research on specifications in a similar manner: “I attempt to bring to the occurring question: What’s your research about? This is how I got to know Jo and Seh, my colleagues from Brussels and Umeå, as we had a lot of fun working together through humorous late-night emails, sent in-between our efforts to complete the task from each of our different locations.

To make a long story short, I decided to have some fun with the assignment in the search for a larger structure, by using a writing experiment as a way to think through the papers I had written so far. This writing experiment involved a critical fiction, one of the writing practices I have employed throughout my research and even used in my teaching for design studio. Many of my colleagues, Katja Grillner, Katarina Bonnevier, Hélène Frichot, and Brady Burroughs, are known for working with critical fictions in the field of Critical Studies in Architecture at KTH, Stockholm. I’ll have to tell you more about them sometime!

In case you’re not familiar with the term, I understand critical fictions as opening up to imaginary locations, allowing us to explore positions other than our own (and perhaps more importantly, our own positions from a “comfortable” distance), to discover other stories, and to propose ways in which our experience of the everyday might be altered. By using elements of fiction and theory, telling stories while formulating critical arguments, this method borrows from many writing practices, in order to get at areas of resistance out of reach to traditional forms of academic writing. My Australian colleagues call it fictocriticism, and define it as “the constructive, creative and critical situatedness of the thinking-designer in the midst of their problematic field,” but I prefer critical fiction, as I understand “criticality” and “criticism” to be two different things.

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fore what usually remains somewhat out of sight in architectural discourse.”

In Ahmed’s words, you might say that Lloyd Thomas is enacting a “habit-change” to bring within reach that which was previously hidden or overlooked, in an effort of re-orientation, or a queering of architectural discourse. And I wondered, of course, what would happen if I took this “mundane” specifications document less seriously? This is where the Mozzo row houses come in.

Pressed for time, I chose one of my favorite floor plans without hesitation, the entry floor of the Case Unfamiliarì (a project I had always been fond of for its simplicity), as the existing structure to “house” my ideas. At the time, I had one manifesto and two papers behind me to work with.

The manifesto, I hate architecture ♥, was programmatic for the project in general. It was written as a quick way to get down all of the things I was dissatisfied with in architecture and a productive way to deal with the frustration of not knowing where to start with the PhD. (My manifesto wasn’t nearly as extensive as yours - The Architecture of the City.)12 It’s funny, I heard from some of my masters of architecture students that a few “renegade” copies of the manifesto were floating around in the design studios at KTH. There were several versions, although I’m afraid that the students preferred the earliest (and angriest) one!

As for the papers, they included a discussion of water separatist bathing spaces in Leavos, and a discussion on architectural pedagogy, based on one of my best studio teaching experiences ever, where students worked with critical fictions and designed a sanctuary for mythical humanimal creatures.13

Before I go on about the renovation, I should mention that as part of a design practice research approach, where projective practices enable and advance critical positions, I had an underlying intention to avoid writing critically about a field of study, and instead to try to write in a performative way that actually did critique theory.14 The performative aspect comes both from relying on the speculative method of critical fictions, and my interest in making as a practicing architect and design studio teacher. I know, you’re probably wondering, what is this design practice research all about? Or are you? (If you’re not so interested, Aldo, you can just skip over the next few pages.)

I’ll admit that I had some preconceived notions about these various types of emerging and overlapping fields, where thinking (discursive-epistemological) and doing (performative-methodological) are intertwined. Where did I place my own research? Within artistic research, practice-based research, or design practice research (a.k.a. architectural design research)? Did it matter? I’ll also admit that I was reluctant to delve into this type of discussion and had avoided it like the plague. It was the exact opposite of what I wanted to spend my time doing, talking about the ways knowledge is produced, rather than just getting on with it and producing it. Besides, I had friends, like Neil, who were both interested in this discourse and had written extensively on the subject of projective research.15 What was I going to say that hasn’t already been said through the dutiful regurgitation of the same literature? And I can also admit to you, Aldo, that I have problems doing things I am supposed to do.

I wondered how I might approach this necessary part of the PhD in a less serious way, remaining true to my method. I came across the idea of “creative inquiry” by Alfonso Montuori, which sees the literature review as “a construction and a creation that emerges out of the dialogue between the reviewer and the field.”16 I wanted to avoid what Montuori calls “a simple enumeration of ‘who said what,’ a regurgitation of names and ideas,” which according to him are “generally as deadly to read as they are to write,” and I agree.17

I decided to look at three compilations, one on artistic research - The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia (2012) by Henk Borgdorff, a crossover on research in the arts - The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts (2011) by Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson, and one that specifically addresses design research in architecture - Design Research in Architecture: An Overview (2013) by Murray Fraser.18 Then, in order to make it more meaningful for myself, I also imagined that I was speaking to friends of mine who were not familiar with this type of research, in order to explain why they haven’t seen much of me lately and what it is I’ve been doing locked in this row house. I figured this might be a good way to make my work accessible to readers located in different disciplines, outside of architecture, and as a result, less academically rigorous in the writing. I was interested in rigorous writing, only in an unconventional way!

I associated practice-based research with a more direct connection to the profession, including certain commercial aspects that I perceived as risking complicity with existing norms in professional cultures. Specifically, a fear that economic stakes and/or stakeholders might influence the research that was undertaken. (Although, I am aware that research funding is also an economic factor.) Or worse, what Hélène Fricht and her co-authors (Julieanna Preston, Michael Spooner, Sean Pickersgill, Zuzana Kvar, Ceri Hann, Megg Evans) distance themselves from: “direct and unmediated reformulation of professional architectural project work into descriptive or anecdotal research.”19 In other words, architects doing what architects normally do and calling it research.

Design practice research; however, was in my mind closer to what happens within an educational institution, where I was...
located. I envisioned the research involving design practices, together with a rigorous academic approach, but still free to temporarily disengage with certain aspects (and influence) of the profession, namely economic ones. This distinction probably has something to do with my broad definition of what architectural design practice entails, including writing, teaching, un-built explorations, performances, even storytelling, as opposed to my experience of what professional practice usually entails, which is the development of built works in relation to a client.

Then Aldo, I tried to imagine what my friend Ulrika, a scholar in the history of science and ideas with a focus on gender theory and medicine, would be curious about (besides when we could plan the next beach vacation to Lesvos, of course). She would most likely find it surprising (and a bit conservative) that some common arguments against the idea of artistic research within academia have been that the potential institutionalization of artistic practices would have a restrictive, disciplining effect on the otherwise unregulated, autonomous work and speculative knowledge artistic practices produce. Or conversely, that the alternative, transgressive nature of artistic practices would somehow dilute or erode academic values and conventions for scientific (or scholarly) knowledge production. Henk Borgdorff, Professor of Research in the Arts could reassure her: “In the case of artistic research, it is important to stress that the object of research, the context of the research, the method of research, and the way the research results are presented and documented are inextricably bound up with the practice of making and playing.”

You’re an architect Aldo, so you are used to this way of working and thinking (and playing) to develop an idea, but for my doctor friend Aase, who recently defended her PhD in medicine, the mention of the word “play” in relation to my research might make her wonder about the question of academic rigor, synonymous with the criteria for so-called “scientific knowledge.” Borgdorff, along with others, suggests that the question of legitimacy is not about artists trying to prove the validity of their work as traditional research, but rather about the university recognizing work that comes from outside of established methodological practices and valuing a more speculative type of knowledge. Since Aase is still skeptical, Borgdorff makes a bold statement that the element of contingency present in artistic practices has the potential to “reconfigure academia,” in that it challenges the academic status quo as an “alternative culture of knowledge,” with what he calls “un-finished thinking.” This corresponds with my own intentions of shifting a serious architectural culture of critique through the uncertainty of Campy flirtatious practices, to displace the center(s) of the architectural discipline.

Speaking of the “hard sciences,” I still get a kick out of the fact that the renowned German Nobel prize winning physicist Max Planck, the epitome of scientific knowledge, who’s work Scientific Autobiography and Other Papers you cite as an inspiration for writing A Scientific Autobiography, ends his book with a musing on the reconciliation between what he calls “exact science” and religion, or measurement and faith (you might even say fact and fiction), where he defends the importance of the “unknowable.” I couldn’t resist putting him into one of my critical fictions for this reason!

When poet and writer Nina Burton, whose beautiful book I appreciated so much - on the similarities in the creative process of both the sciences and the arts, asked if people still believed in this divide and why I think this is? I would tell her about Helga Nowotny, who points to curiosity as the main catalyst in the production of new knowledge, and how she confirmed my feminist suspicion when she wrote: “Uncertainty is therefore inherent in scientific research and in the artistic production of new knowledge alike.”

I suspect that the question of legitimacy in research and research practices has a lot to do with power, or fear for the loss of an “exclusive position of judgement over and against all other realities,” as Isabelle Stengers, another physicist, suggests in her article “Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices.” The only similar situations of disciplinary gatekeeping I’ve experienced in the architectural institution have to do with design students presenting critical projects that challenge a critic’s preconceived notion of what architecture is, or what it means to practice architecture. In fact, on occasion it has been particularly tricky when a diploma student doesn’t include the design and production of an “original” built work as part of their practice.

While on the research side of things, at least in my brief experience of architectural research within the Swedish context, I’ve found both an interest and encouragement toward what is known as practice-based research, often involving some kind of artifact, which is the main part of the research, accompanied by a written documentation with varying academic requirements, in order to communicate and contextualize what has been discovered in relation to theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and previous research in the field. In my particular case, this involves the renovation of the row house in Mozzo, combined with the writing of the critical fictions, or as I like to call it, the architectural pulp fiction.

In browsing the literature on the evaluation of this type of research, one case caught my attention. It was a doctoral thesis at the University School of Art and Design in Helsinki that was rejected by the research council in 2000, for being “more autobiographical than critical” and regarded as “a parody of doctoral theses and an affront to the academic system.” The most offensive elements of the thesis were, according to the critics, the language and the style, for example [the PhD candidate’s] use of three fictitious alter egos (a hare, a ball and the figure Elise) as spokespersons explaining how her artworks originated.” Aldo, what if your point is to parody doctoral theses and to poke at the academic system? Perhaps it was an unorthodox move to use three fictitious alter egos (a hare, a ball and the figure Elise) as spokespersons explaining how her artworks originated.”
work, but I can only hope, for my sake, that we’ve come further in the
last 16 years!

Aldo, my Swedish architecture colleagues, Katja Grillner and
Lars-Henrik Ståhl, point out that architecture as a discipline is
neither exclusively artistic nor scientific, but a combination of
both.34 This makes me think of my friend Patrycja, a psychodynamic
therapist, and the looong Skype conversation we would have
about my “troubled” architectural identity, with my unexplainable
loyalty to architectural practices (that I hardly ever use), and
my surprising reluctance to call my work “artistic.” Although
the preferred term in the Swedish context seems to be “practice-
based research in architecture and design,” my extended period
of teaching in academia (12 years) prior to the PhD, made even
“practice” in the singular, with associations to professional
practice, feel distant and the emphasis uncomfortable.35 So in
the end, I chose design practice research, which for me felt like
it had equal parts of design pedagogy, professional practice and
academic research.

I thought about a few of my former architecture students
who have an interest in design and design research, now curators,
architects and/or studio teachers themselves, like Marie-Louise,
Malin, and Iro. They’ve stepped up and helped me in numerous ways
throughout this project, so if any of them wanted to pursue
their own PhD, I might recommend Fraser’s book. (I was surprised
to come across my colleague Brady Burroughs’ work, together with
the feminist architectural group FATAE, cited in Katja
Grillner’s chapter of this publication. I wasn’t expecting to see
a familiar face!)36

Fraser begins this book with the premise that design research
is not only valid, but important. He writes that there is “no real
argument any more that design research in architecture exists,
or that it possesses its own rigour and relevance.”37 He even
mentions you, Aldo, as one of the architects who begins to connect
analysis and design early on in 1969, in the history leading up
to a more established field of architectural design research.38

Who knows? Maybe the Case Unifamiliari was the site of an early
experimentation with architectural design research?

Back to the renovation! With the room specifications, I set
about the process of transforming the important themes, ideas, and
connections between them from my previous texts into a description
of built changes in the imagined existing rooms of one of these
row houses. As you know, the ground floor consists of three
rooms, with one auxiliary space along the back. The small cubic
room of the entry hall is the first indoor space upon entering,
and therefore offers the first impression of the renovation. The
changes I’ve proposed here are based on the manifesto, providing
visitors with the motivations behind the renovation work and a
space for transformation.

A staircase leading to the second floor sits directly
opposite the entrance, with doorways on either side leading to two
symmetrically mirrored rectangular rooms flanking the staircase.

The room to the left, as you face the stairs, has been transformed
into a wet space with a tiny indoor pool, drawing on the themes of
the Lesvos paper. To the right, is a room dedicated to pedagogy, a
versatile space with an air of magic that caters to our “companion
species,” inspired by the humanimal sanctuary. (This space took on
more of a radical disco theme, as the PhD developed.) Stretching
across the ends of these two rooms and connecting them along the
rear facade, is an outdoor space resembling a gallery. This space
has begun to spill out into the garden in a manifestation of the
critical fictions writing practices that link all three.

In order to describe the changes in each space, I used what
I knew from my experience practicing in Swedish architectural
offices and methodically followed the standard order used in
these specification documents for each room; general description,
demolition, structural changes, new partitions, surfaces: floor,
baseboard, wall, ceiling, and miscellaneous.39 I also remade the
rooms to coincide with their new functions and wrote a letter to my
colleagues, Jo and Seh, explaining what I had done. After receiving
their feedback and encouragement on the assignment, I thought to
myself: Why not do it for real?40 So here I am, the renovations
are under way, and I have even planned three new communal garden
features in the immediate surroundings of the house, as an
extension outward of the social and political aims of the project.41

Out of respect for my neighbors (well, at least one of
them), I’ve spent the evenings quietly re-reading A Scientific
Autobiography. You know, the combination of “scientific” and
“autobiography” alone is the perfect set-up for design research!
Anyway, it’s made me think about where the work we do comes from,
our motivations, inspirations, and predecessors. Throughout your
book, you talk about experiences and feelings, childhood places and
memories, objects, people and events - the things that contributed
to making you the person you are, doing the work that you do.

I love your description of the deep relationship you formed
as a child with the SanCarlone at Arcon, the towering hollow bronze
statue that appears in many of your sketches and drawings as a
giant green hand. You liken it to a “Homeric horse,” and describe
how one travels through the structure and materials of the body,
only to arrive at the head and look out “through the eyes of the
saint” over the view of the lake, “as if one were gazing from a
celestial observatory.”42

I grew up on the east coast, in rural small-town U.S.A.,
surrounded by farmhouses, grain silos, and tobacco rings which
may explain my affinity for vernacular architecture and the simple
forms you use in your projects and drawings. The social gathering
places of my childhood were the country church and the public
school (where both of my parents, and my grandmother, had worked),
with the occasional local carnival or county fair, perhaps kindling
my curiosity for the role of community (and religion/ritual)
in the spaces we share. The annual church bake sale, where I always
looked forward to helping, is one place I remember observing
strong female role models, such as my grandmother and a favorite
godmother who were in charge. Come to think of it, one of my strongest recollections is when I fainted face-first on the altar, during one of my many appearances as an “altar boy,” right in the middle of communion. (Must have been my earliest experience of cross-dressing?)

It was a hot summer Sunday morning, and I was wearing all of the heavy vestments (the robes) and kneeling, while the preacher stood with his back to the congregation, blessing the sacraments (the little wafers) for communion. I enjoyed the ritual of it all. The next thing I remember is waking up in the vestry (the side room attached to the altar) where my mother had scooped me up and whisked me off to the side, with a sore nose and a bloody lip from where my face had hit the floor. It was a strange sensation that left me with a very physical understanding of materiality—the hardness of wood, and perhaps a healthy dose of skepticism toward what religion had to offer.

In your book you tell us: “Perhaps the observation of things has remained my most important formal education; for observation later becomes transformed into memory. Now I see to see all the things I have observed arranged like tools in a neat row; they are aligned as in a botanical chart, or a catalogue, or a dictionary. But this catalogue, lying somewhere between imagination and memory, is not neutral; it always reappears in several objects and constitutes their deformation and, in some way, their evolution.”

This is similar to how I would describe the experiences that are the source of my fictions. I draw from a whole range of situations I’ve either observed, read about, or been part of myself, but they are always transformed in the process. You could think of critical fictions as situated, textual interventions. Hélène Frichot writes: “So fictocriticism... owns a minoritarian voice, both queer and feminist, but is also localized, operating in response to immediate problems and places.” Oh, did I mention that I was a queer feminist? It’s funny, I would describe my “feminist awakening” as a slow architectural one, but I’ll save that story for the next letter. I’d also like to talk more about design education and memories.

With architectural affection,

Beda Ring

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Dear Aldo,

After an incident earlier today involving Adelina’s cockatoo Hugo, I’m now officially in conflict with my neighbor! But I did make a new friend! We met in the waiting room of the emergency clinic, Bernice, a visiting academic from Yorkshire, who’s here with her partner and kid, and lives in the center of Mozzo. She heard my broken Italian, while I was venting (and swearing) about my neighbor, and introduced herself. Today, of all days, I didn’t have time for a trip to the doctors when I have the demolition crew here to cut the openings in the floor slabs for the indoor pool and elevator. The pizza oven guy cancelled, but they’ll also make the opening for the chimney anyway.

The more persistent I am in making changes around the Case Unifamiliari, the more Adelina accuses me of ruining the good atmosphere among the residents. She tries to single me out as a contrary individual, with no respect for authority and lacking in moral obedience and proper behavior. (Well, at least she got that last part right!) I don’t know why I let her get under my skin. Bernice suggested that maybe it hits too close to home, since Adelina is also an educated, female designer who even claims some kind of feminist position, or at least an interest in supporting “women in the design field,” and that I probably expect more from her. When I complained that Adelina was so self-righteous, Bernice asked if, possibly, it reminded me of my own white privilege and brought with it an uncomfortable feeling, even if it was something I was aware of. And, of course, she’s right, but enough of my neighbor troubles.

In my last letter I left off talking about how the memories of certain experiences, or as you call them observations, help generate the work that we do, while I also mentioned my architectural feminist awakening. The combination of these two got me to thinking about a central concept in feminism, situatedness, and its relationship to those memories. You know, how our positions allow us to have certain experiences in the first place, and affect both the way we perceive and are perceived, as well as the space we have to act? Many prominent feminist scholars have written on this
idea, from Adrienne Riche in her essay *Notes Toward a Politics of Location*, to Rosi Braidotti and her work *Nomadic Subjects*, to Donna Haraway and her concept of *situated knowledges*, which she calls “views from somewhere.” They all suggest that there is a necessity and political potential in distancing oneself from notions of abstraction, objectivity, universalization, and detachment, while the feminist subject is situated within specificity and an acknowledgment of partiality. As Haraway says, “The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular.”

You don’t really explore your own position in your writing, Aldo, but I’m not surprised, since you have the privilege of assuming the “norm” in architecture, allowing your position to become hidden or in the “background.” One of my favorite feminist critical writers, Sara Ahmed, describes this as an orientation, putting certain things within our reach, while others are hidden or beyond our scope. She points out that the paths we choose are also dependent on certain paths we are already given, which clear ground to provide an area to act, with its accompanying privileges.

Although, Aldo, you don’t explore your own position, you do write: “In recent years, I have read many things about my work - often the most strange and disparate things... I have learned only that many opinions are valid, even when they do not coincide with what the artist had in mind.” I like to interpret this as your openness toward more than one position. You continue: “I always think of a place in a particular way. Certainly in any given place many things come together; a place presents itself as a result of many observations: the panorama from the balcony, the flowing water, the drift of the conversation, the gestures, and all those things that we call ‘love’.” Here, I see that these observations are made up of many aspects that could be interpreted as both partial and specific.

I wonder what you would think about my writing, and why I feel it is important to look critically at your work from a feminist position? In “Why Architecture Needs Feminism,” Despina Stratigakos asks: “Do architecture schools have a responsibility to better prepare their graduates - male and female - for the profession’s gender politics?” My answer, as a queer feminist architectural researcher and teacher, employed by a Swedish school of architecture and with previous practical experience in Stockholm and abroad, is loud and resounding ABSOLUTELY! Stratigakos notes: “That these discussions are not happening in most architecture schools is unsurprising. To an astonishing degree, the “subject” in their curricula, as communicated in the studios and history/theory courses, remains male and white.” I would add that if students read Aaron Betsky’s *Queer Space*, they might also discover that this white male “subject” they’re hearing about isn’t always straight.

This awareness about where we come from, how we got there, and how this affects the decisions we make or the things we propose, as well as the privileges we enjoy and the power we exercise in why architecture needs feminism. Stratigakos suggests: “Feminism as a matrix of politically conscious social, spatial and environmental strategies that build on the achievements of previous generations while also reaching out to a broader community of the oppressed, regardless of gender - could provide a direction for collective action...it insists not only on the necessity but also on the possibility of change.”

Think about it, Aldo, the fact that you were an educated, white male, both a professional and academic, played a big part not only in the types of experiences that were available to you, but also the space you were entitled to and the voice you had to tell about it. The same goes for me, with the exception of the “male” part, that is! My white, middle-class background, in a family of educators, helped put the opportunity to study architecture at the university within my reach, both culturally and economically. Just as my gender, in a male dominated field (even more so 25 years ago), enabled certain situations rather than others, although it would take me many more years to understand this.

I also think about the fact that I’m now middle-aged and (voluntarily) culturally displaced, living in a place that never has, and probably never will, feel like home, while the place I used to call “home” doesn’t feel like home either anymore. This kind of displacement can be both liberating and alienating at the same time. Surely this affects the writing that I do.

You were, what, 50 years old when you wrote *A Scientific Autobiography*? And your career as an architect was just taking off then, as you were receiving larger commissions. You had already traveled extensively, you had positioned yourself politically as an intellectual of the “left” (especially in your support of the student revolt of 1968/70), and as an established international academic and teacher, with a network of important people in your field in Europe, Asia and North and South America. You also worked far from your home city Milan, especially with your teaching activity in the U.S., which is something we have in common, although I moved in the opposite direction and much more permanently. And we both took for granted our free movement across national borders, made possible by all of the above privileges.

But Aldo, did you ever consider how gender affected you as a teacher in relation to your architecture students? Or even how it might have affected you and your classmates in relation to your own teachers? The type of encouragement or critique you received, or the opportunities that came your way? Stratigakos points out that feminist scholars have called for and encouraged changes in studio pedagogy since the early 90s, in order to address the inequalities of the discipline, “but a strong and conservative sense of the ‘foundational’ role of such [design studio] courses has meant that few schools have implemented any real changes... More and more, the absence of women and people of
CHAPTER TWO

Aldo, I think you have to question the pedagogic savvy with, as you say, “inexperience and stupidity” in a sarcastic way. In the passage about the critique of your student work, you describe how you were asked to show your architectural education at Politecnico in Milan was much the same way. However, I would argue that it is your practice of what I call persistent vulnerability that allows you to see Professor Sabbioni’s harsh critique of your own student work as a compliment.53 When speaking of the unexpected mistakes or changes that always occur on a construction site, you indicate an affinity toward the inconsistencies in life, even embracing a sense of vulnerability, when you write: “I believe that any original order is open to practical changes, and that it allows for all the failures of human weakness.”54

In the passage about the critique of your student work, you disclose that Sabbioni, someone who you admired, encouraged you from making architecture and commented that your drawings “looked like those of a bricklayer or a rural contractor who threw a stone to indicate approximately where a window was to be placed.”55 In other words, he connected your drawing abilities, among others, to your gender and his own expectations that you were not “real” architects. Who weren’t “real” architects? Who were my ancestors? I became more and more unsure, as he repeated the same question over and over: “WHO ARE YOUR ANCESTORS?”

As in most architectural educations at that time, the overwhelming majority of references to architects, thinkers and writers were men (you were one of them Aldo), as were the professors, lecturers and guest critics doing the referencing. In an article from around the same time of this pin-up (1993), Anthony and Ahrentzen called it “great men and great monuments” in the “mister-mastery-mystery” phenomenon.56 Anthony and Ahrentzen also note that this was part of, and reinforced by, a “highly patriarchal master-apprentice model” practiced in the design studio.57 But ancestor also implies a closer tie, a “familial” bond, and when I was unable to give an acceptable answer, because these elusive ancestors were “out of my reach,” this critic simply stood up and walked out. Perhaps this is, in part, why the current Mozzo renovation project involves re-construing my “forefathers” (you), while I also try to locate and resurrect my “foremothers,” through my conscious and persistent feminist referencing.58

In any case, this lost pedagogical opportunity and particularly “non genial” (in every sense of the word) moment stuck with me. The architectural familial line I was given to follow didn’t match my orientation, and the paths I was following didn’t seem to overlap with the cleared ground of an architectural orientation, or at least I needed some help in understanding how they did.60 Likewise, there was very little gender awareness (not to mention the overwhelming whiteness of the student body and faculty), and the generally accepted model of critique resembled what can only be described as “tough love.” In other words, harsh criticism was doled out for the individual’s “own good,” with the intention to yield a benefit in the long run.61 It was sink or swim, which didn’t seem so bad to me at the time and was kind of exciting, but compared to my present Swedish educational context, it was brutal.

From your description, it sounds like your architectural education at Politecnico in Milan was much the same way. However, I would argue that it is your practice of what I call persistent vulnerability, that allows you to see Professor Sabbioni’s harsh critique of your own student work as a compliment.53 When speaking of the unexpected mistakes or changes that always occur on a construction site, you indicate an affinity toward the inconsistencies in life, even embracing a sense of vulnerability, when you write: “I believe that any original order is open to practical changes, and that it allows for all the failures of human weakness.”54

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Although you claim that this comment “filled you with joy,” Aldo, I think you have to question the pedagogic savvy...
in both of these cases, I noticed subtle indications in this
passage that perhaps convey the deep impressions left by this
pedagogical experience, and others like them, in your statement:
“i believe that i was one of the worst students.” however, rather than disproving sabbioni’s accusations or “armouring up” for some kind of defense, you own it and redirect (re-orientate) this criticism into a celebration of your own human weaknesses. you suggest that your drawings, unorthodox and imprecise as they were, came out of the “felicity of drawing,” which sabbioni misinterpreted as incompetence. remaining vulnerable, you point out that this “naive” characteristic of your drawings has not only characterized your work as an architect, but also been a great source of (professional and personal) joy.

now, it’s only fair that i tell you one of my own “non genial” pedagogic moments. we all have them. i was a young teacher, with only a couple years of experience teaching in the first years, when a female professor invited me to be an external critic for a diploma student’s work. when i walked into the room and introduced myself to this student’s supervisor, a middle-aged (male) practicing architect, he asked me if i was old enough to have finished my own diploma work. less flattered by this challenge and insult rolled into one, i then proceeded to meticulously take apart his student’s project, in order to “prove” myself.

although the critique was constructive and not unfounded, i did allow the consideration what kind of critique might be best for the student in this particular stage of development of his project, or the possible consequences of an unnecessarily harsh critique. directly afterward, the same male supervisor commended me for my sharp critique. i think i may have even gotten a pat on the back. i had passed the test and won him over, but at the expense of the student. although there may have been some positioning of a less antagonistic nature, i still haven’t had the feminist analytical apparatus that would have enabled me to act differently.

it wasn’t until my early thirties, with the help of inspiring, politically aware female students i met during my first years of teaching, that i developed both an understanding and an identity as a feminist. perhaps, since i never intended an academic career, i had always gotten by as being “one of the boys” as a matter of survival, when faced with the prospect of making it in the profession. stratigakos writes: “acting or dressing ‘like a man’ – the advice women have received for decades as the means to blend into the workplace – only entrenches a masculine norm.” this is where the second experience with my three “paternal architectural figures” comes in.

during the final school year of completing my architecture degree, i worked part-time with a lovely 83 year-old (male) architect, the “old-school” kind with a twinkle in his eye, his front shirt pocket lined with mechanical pencils, and hundreds of stories about his experiences in “the profession” that he was all too anxious to share. in the office, he used to show off his perfect handcrafted lettering and how he could accurately mark measurements to scale by eye. with age came knee problems, so this architect swam daily to stay in shape and invited me, and one of my friends, to come along to a private swimming pool where he swam regularly. (i suspected he secretly wanted to show off what great condition he was in, by out-swimming the youngsters who were 60 years his younger, which he did.)

the next time we met at the office after the swimming, he told me that i was “feisty, like one of those feminists.” surprised, since i was so used to being “one of the boys,” i asked what made him say that? he had seen me dive straight into the swimming pool head first, rather than testing the water with my toes and gliding in gradually “like most women do.” although he turned out to be right, i didn’t yet identify as a feminist. come to think of it, aldo, this was probably the first time my love for bathing and my profession intersected... and it made a feminist out of me!

through my work on this research project, i had hoped to find that things had changed since then, even though a casual glance around my own context said the opposite. well, there are definitely more female students and teachers now (although professorships and other academic positions of power lag behind), but the glare from the “whiteness” still seems to shield itself from detection. as architectural scholar kathryn h. anthony puts it: “too male, too pale.”

likewise, critique situations tend to look about the same today, albeit less harsh. in 2004, architectural academic helena webster published an ethnographic-type study on the way the design tutor is most often experienced by students in a design studio (in the uk), which revealed a “substantial gap between espoused theory and theory in practice.” webster found three main types of styles of tutoring, what she calls “the entertainer” – the tutor who merely relays anecdotes of their own experiences and historical references, “the hegemonic overlord” and “the liminal servant.” her research suggests that of the three types, “the hegemonic overlord” – who uses everything from coercion to bullying in order to align students with their own particular architectural ideology – is the most prevalent according to students. however, most tutors see themselves as acting more like “liminal servants” – the preferred more open and empathic pedagogue.

i would argue that teachers tend to teach the way they were taught, and despite seemingly good intentions of academic pedagogical courses, changing the habits of an architectural culture takes more than a few obligatory credits in courses that often don’t understand that particular culture. best-case scenario, teachers have room to discuss pedagogical questions.
Worst-case scenario, this pedagogical training becomes nothing more than an institutional marketing exercise, a way to brand the faculty as “competent” pedagogues and carry on as usual.

Webster states: “design tutors in architectural education tend to have little explicit knowledge of how students learn; why, as teachers, they do what they do; or how what they do leads to quality student learning.” She also argues that they seem to use “tacit” teaching practices that draw both on their own experiences of design education and on practices they see within their own context. Based on earlier research, Webster suggests that this lack of explicit pedagogical theory is problematic, as “implicit theory cannot be scrutinized for its assumptions, beliefs, inconsistencies and prejudices.”

Since I hope that my dissertation can be a resource for students, as well as teachers and academics, I looked around to check what else was already out there. I found two books directed toward students, with the intention of describing architectural working methods, the traditional critique situation, and offering practical tips for survival. The first book, listed as recommended reading for our first year students and written by a former colleague at KTH, who in my experience is a competent and caring pedagogue and critic, Jadwiga Krupinska, is called What An Architecture Student Should Know. Although the book is informative as to how things are in design education today and how they (historically) got that way, the author doesn’t problematize how implicit, but very clear, phenomenological position in architectural education and practice, which I’m afraid may leave the students with the impression that this is the only position. But besides the fact that it only glosses over the issue of gender, what worries me the most is that it remains uncritical of the academic architectural discipline. To suggest that students learn strategies to “cope” with the way things are, even if well intentioned, only helps to reproduce and maintain the status quo.

The other book, The Crit: An Architecture Student’s Handbook, by Rosie Parnell et al., focuses on demystifying the process of the traditional critique with humor, and, like the first, tries to provide tips. The final chapters, however, do raise some critical issues within the current system, specifically regarding gender and race in relation to power, and point to a need for change, while offering some possible alternative formats for the design crit.

If we move from a more intimate critique situation to thinking about inequities on a larger institutional level, Ahmed argues that institutions make symbolic commitments, often relying on institutional habits—“a continuation of willing what no longer needs to be willed,” in order to appear committed to a cause, without actually putting itself behind it. Regarding her work around racism and diversity in the institution, Ahmed describes it as the feeling of coming up against a “brick wall,” through what she calls “non-performative commitments.” She argues that institutions tend to follow “the tick box approach to diversity”—making policies and the documentation of these policies, enabling the institution to look good, without ever giving those tasked with the diversity work the power to enact and enforce any real changes contained in those policies. A bit of gossip Aldo, Ahmed recently resigned from her position at her current institution, “in protest against the failure to address the problem of sexual harassment.” She states: “Sometimes we have to leave a situation because we are feminists.”

Despite the fact that we have an active diversity program at KTH that works toward raising awareness about these issues, there remain instances where these policies are ignored, whether out of indifference or resistance, without consequence. And although this work continues to be important, Aldo, I wonder how we make these issues meaningful for those who hold the power and privileges that allow them to continue to be resistant or indifferent, without being held accountable. And by “meaningful,” I don’t mean convincing those who already hold certain privileges to care (because I think that’s a naïve expectation). I mean by doing the work that makes it impossible for them to continue not to.

For this reason, Aldo, my project isn’t about educational “reform,” based on empty rhetoric or skillful marketing strategies to hide problematic and complicit structures. Nor even in serving as a well-intentioned contribution that aims to mitigate outdated methods and models of architectural teaching and evaluation. I’m interested in new ways of approaching teaching (and learning) that directly address these structures. To borrow from the religious theme of my last letter, this renovation is all about “converting” a culture, not reforming it and practicing what it preaches. So, maybe it’s time for a new version of something like the radical pedagogies that you were part of in the 60s and 70s.

With radical architectural affection,

Beda Ring
Dear Aldo,

Happy birthday! A stubborn Taurus, huh? I bet we would have some stand-offs with my fiery Aries temperament. Today, the contractor is coming to install the pizza oven! It’s the last big piece of the construction, since the pool and elevator were installed.

Then we can finally start finishing the surfaces on the first floor. Ade is driving me crazy, but having Zite on the other side helps balance it out. She always knows when to stop by, at just the right time, with some sweets and encouragement. I’ll have an extra pastry in your honor today. I think I’m going to speak with Zite about a small intervention I’d like to try upstairs that would affect the wall between us. Meanwhile, the new garden features are almost in place, although Ade has filed complaints about two of them with the Building and Planning Department at the municipality. Bernice’s kid Brooke has been hanging around on her lunch breaks, but I can’t tell if she’s interested in what’s going on, or just waiting in anticipation for the pizza oven to be up and running. That kid asks lots of questions!

I ended my last letter without telling you of the third “paternal architectural figure,” and how the paths of all three of them crossed, but I thought I would begin with some of my architectural “ancestors,” as the two are connected. Besides the female architect/artists I mentioned, there were some other more masculine figures whose passionate works of (mostly) paper architecture inspired me that seemed to be located in an obsessive combination of handcraft and myth; Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, Louis Etienne Bollé and Claud Nicolas Ledoux, Walter Pichler and Hannsjörg Voth.

And then there were the films of Andrei Tarkovsky! Stalker was his filmic exploration of the relationship between science and art, but I was also partial to Nostalgia in its mystical Italian setting, and even The Sacrifice filmed in Sweden, all with their explorations of room and light. Aldo, you mention that you did a translation of Boullé’s work, and that he taught you about the connection of light and shadow to time, how it displays and consumes architecture, so this is a reference we share."

Theoretically, my design training followed a phenomenological tradition, with an emphasis on tectonics and material sensibilities, and a lineage of phenomenological philosophers, through the poetic writings of Gaston Bachelard and
Juhani Pallasmaa (without the critical revision of post structural theories). In terms of built architectural works, Louis Kahn was a favorite, but I particularly fell for the “Swiss guys,” like Luigi Snozzi, Livio Vacchini, Peter Zumthor, and Peter Märkli to name a few, where the forms were bold and the craft of building was impressive. Even today, with my queer feminist filter, I can’t help but feel admiration. Although I do think their work would not only withstand, but benefit, from a little less formal seriousness and a little more critical fun.

I say this to suggest that there is no need for, as Hilde Heynen pointed out at a symposium I attended recently, the overwhelming majority of architectural educations that adhere to this type of phenomenological school, to stand in antagonistic opposition to a feminist or other more critically aware approach. Of course Aldo, you were always there too, but no one ever really knew where to place you.

I think that my experience with the last significant “paternal architectural figure” early on, gave me insight into the “family” relationships (and drama) that are inextricably bound up with the serious practice of architecture. As Dana Cuff writes, “It is misrepresentative to talk about the office culture, just as it is to speak of any culture as homogeneous when it is made up of diverse sets of individuals in complex relationships.” As I mentioned, the “Swiss guys” interested me, especially the architects in the Italian speaking part – Canton Ticino, and my school had its European Study Abroad program located in the small town of Riva San Vitale, Switzerland, where I had visited during my studies. Immediately after finishing my architectural degree, I had the chance to work for a Swiss architect in a small mountain village, just outside of Lugano and around the corner from the school. (Close to your weekend home Aldo, between Lago Maggiore and Lago di Como.)

The “swimming architect” (the protector), who had “outed” me as a feminist, came to visit me in Ticino. While staying at the school’s accommodations, run by the “ancestral critic” (the admonisher), this architect asked to meet with, or perhaps check-up on, the architect who was currently employing me (the abandoner). Shortly after this conjunction of all three, which for me had a congealing effect, legitimizing my place in the architectural family tree, things intensified.

Without going into detail of the events that followed, suffice it to say that this 25 year old, newly graduated female architect, living abroad for the first time and in her first “real” meeting with professional architectural practice (although the work consisted almost entirely of architectural competitions), had an exciting but very turbulent office experience. In a dramatic disappearance of the maestro into thin air, with a suicide investigation at Ponte del Diavolo [The Devil’s Bridge] at the St. Gotthard Pass (the same one depicted in an illustration you use in The Architecture of the City), this year-long experience came to an abrupt end.

Although this case later proved not to be a fatal one, I just Googled “architect’s deaths” and found that Le Corbusier died during a swim in the Mediterranean Sea, Carlo Scarpa fell down a flight of concrete stairs in Japan, Antoni Gaudi fell under a tram in Barcelona, your own demise came with a car accident in Milan, and I’ve heard that Louis Kahn had a heart attack in N.Y. Penn Station, so architects seem to have a propensity for drama in the “family.” And for the sake of a gender consciousness, let’s not forget the Brazilian architect Lota de Macedo Soares, who had a romantic relationship with one of my favorite poets Elizabeth Bishop, who took her own life, and Zaha Hadid, the first woman to win the Pritzker Architectural Prize like you Aldo, who recently left us all too early. Speaking of gender consciousness (or lack of), Karen Burns from Parler points to “the online Stratigakos obituary of Hadid citing some of the evidence-based explanations for women’s minority status in architecture,” and she writes about the publication Artforum’s decision to publish an “eight-page obituary of Iraqi-born architect Zaha Hadid written by six men.”

What were they thinking?

These experiences during my formative years have put the “real world” of serious professional practice that many practicing external architectural critics tend to bring up, as a measure in relation to student design work, in a new light. It has always been entangled with relationships, conflicts, and “family” dramas, often proving to be better than fiction. As you express it, “For this reason, ever since my childhood, saints’ lives and mythological stories have shown me so many things disturbing to common sense that I have forever come to appreciate a certain spiritual restlessness, something latently bizarre in the order of life.” My supervisor, Hélène Frichot, often comments that my critical fictions remind her of a B movie or a soap opera, but it makes me wonder, what kind of lives does everyone else lead? For me, this is everyday.

Since then, I have practiced for a number of smaller offices, in different countries and with varying gender constellations, culminating with a trio of young male architects close to my own age, where the practice functioned like a working relationship with my “brothers.” Like most siblings, some design decisions were made in harmony, while others not so much. But despite the occasional drama, this “family unit” always reconciled and the experience of working on projects of different scales, with their particular enthusiasm and expertise in design and interiors, taught me a great deal that has been helpful in my work on the renovation of this row house.

Aldo, you were probably part of some groups that might have been described today as an architectural “boy’s club,” weren’t you? When I look at the photos of the editorial staff from Casabella, or even some of the photos from your early teaching days in Milan and Spain, I think you’d have to agree. architectural academic and sociologist Garry Stevens concludes in his controversial Bourdieuian-based social study of architecture
that “architectural success” throughout history, both of individual architects and the development of architecture as a discipline, has had as much to do with social background and social networks, as it has with design skill or intellectual talent.93 He calls it an architectural “reproduction system” based on collegial or student-teacher relationships.94 In other words, “family ties” matter!

Although Stevens’ study supports my claim that it is important to examine this disciplinary lineage, I should note that Stevens seems to be dismissive toward any other position than his own – that of the sociologist (or perhaps that of the overzealous Bourdieusian scholar).95 He does, however, mention the aspect of gender, but confines his own study to aspects of class. Anyway, speaking of paternal architectural figures and on a less serious note, Stevens explains, that his former university department (Department of Architectural and Design Science) had the acronym DADS, which made me laugh out loud!96 Even funnier is that Stevens makes no comment on the humorous implications of the acronym in relation to his topic.

So far, I’ve talked about my early theoretical and practical references, but I haven’t discussed the pedagogical model, the Bauhaus, that most influenced my design education, with its hands-on design training in the metal, wood, pottery, and graphic printing shops. It was a clear example of “learning by doing” that characterizes much of architectural pedagogy today. I have to say, I quite enjoyed it and feel like it still influences the way I work and teach.

For this reason, I was intrigued when I found Katerina Rüedi Ray’s article, “Bauhaus Hausfraus: Gender Formation In Design Education.”97 It discusses the formation of the Bauhaus and its relation to gender. It made me wonder how gender formation early on might have produced traces or effects that go undetected today, by becoming naturalized and hidden in the ideology and practices of the design studio, especially since she points out that the Bauhaus is one of the most influential design pedagogies in architectural education.

Rüedi Ray paints a picture of what can only be described as “cult-like” rituals and expectations, where the “master-apprentice” relationship resembled a type of monastic worship and obedience. Students and masters were disciplined with rules for everything, including dress, movement, haircuts, fasting and diet! There were even masochistic rituals, involving mysticism and physical pain, implemented to establish obedience and a sense of social belonging. In forming their new identities, Rüedi Ray suggests that the students were to feel inferior to their masters, yet superior to everyone else, giving them a sense of power. It makes me wonder if remaining traces of this influence aren’t at least partly responsible for the subsequent macho, masochistic tendencies of the studio culture, described by Dana Cuff in her study of the culture of architectural practice from 1991?98

Rüedi Ray goes on to explain that events, such as festivals or theater, where students and masters interacted in a noncurricular setting, were also used regularly to reinforce “collective identity formation.”99 She argues that through these activities, especially the theater, the Bauhaus methods aimed not only to reinvent spaces and things, but to extend their control over spatial and social behavior: “Theater was the foundation for architecture; fantasy anticipated reality; identity formation preceded the formation of the physical environment.”100

I said, didn’t you say, “Perhaps the magic of the theater, especially resides in this mixture of suggestion and reality.”101 You describe the theater as a useful tool that “is experimental as science is experimental,” that is, although a fiction plays out on its scene, that fiction is often carefully planned and rehearsed beforehand and can be repeated night after night.102 The direct connection to the body and the aspect of repetitive performance make it a perfect place for the experimentation with the performativity of gender, but according to Rüedi Ray, the Bauhaus theater operated in an abstract, (seemingly) gender-neutral form, to create a collective disciplinary identity synonymous with its ideology.103 Of course, the illusion of a gender-free figure was always male (and white). Rüedi Ray writes: “The gender neutral model of identity reinforced masculine cultural and economic authority at the school.”104

This abstract experimentation, however, did allow the students to transgress traditional gender identities, which led the locals in Weimar to regard the Bauhaus as promiscuous and immoral. Fear of this reputation in turn, led to changes at the school, and what Rüedi Ray calls a “return to the dominant fiction of patriarchy,” where female students met extra restrictions in admission, less access to workshops deemed male areas of work, and no admittance to study architecture.105

Gropius, the head of the Bauhaus, delegitimized the artistic abilities of female students in his first address to the school, stating that the experience of death and war was “the driving force of artistic creativity and an exclusively masculine right and privilege.”106 Ironically, feminist architectural critic Diane Agrest pointed out that within this neutral gendering system, the male architect symbolically appropriates the female body, with its ability of conception and reproduction, in the “creation” of a built work, and has done so since the time of the Renaissance.107 Death and war, birth and creation… Talk about wanting it both ways!

Oh Aldo, while I was reading about architectural “family ties” and the teacher-student relationship at the Bauhaus, I found a photo in Otero-Pailos’ book of Jean Labatut, described as “one of the most influential [architecture] teachers of the mid-twentieth century in America” and part of architectural phenomenology’s history.108 Labatut was awarded a prestigious architectural award for teaching (1973), The Jefferson Medal, from the University of Virginia, where one of his former students was dean of the architecture school. Likewise, the heads of eight,
EIGHT! prominent architecture schools at that time were Charles Moore, later known for his connection to postmodernism and queer space. Otero-Pailos mentions that the group of students closest to Labatut ended up forming professional partnerships and working relationships with each other, where the core group surrounding Moore referred to itself as “the family.” (You probably landed right in the middle of these circles, Aldo, since you and Moore were contemporaries.)

Anyway, in the photo, Labatut is painting bare-breasted male students with body paint as part of his military-inspired “camouflage” course at Princeton University in 1943. In another, he himself is pictured without a shirt, standing together with two of his male students, also topless, inside his Princeton Architectural Laboratory (Instead of DADS, this time it’s PAL!), studying lighting conditions in an architectural model for a church. Topless? Otero-Pailos doesn’t comment the images specifically, but explains that Labatut developed something he called Eucharistic architecture that had to do with the Catholic connection between the experience of the body and soul, or bodily experience, and that it later developed into a secular form to become phenomenology’s poetic architecture. I guess I don’t have to point out that these practices would make it difficult for students who didn’t have a white, male body with a certain physique to participate equally?

I think it’s interesting that Labatut, located in the Beaux-Arts tradition and devoutly Catholic, and the Bauhaus masters (mainly Gropius, who Labatut was in conflict with), both drew on military experience (WWI) and ties to religion or mysticism, as they employed “homosocial” rituals (a term coined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to indicate intense same-sex bonding that was not sexual... the modern day term is ‘bromance’) as part of their design pedagogies. In these patriarchal institutions, where discipline and faith were held as sacred, I’d say that the importance of certain forms of flirtation have always already been present, and have been greatly underestimated and overlooked!

Although these sound like extreme examples now, I think there are still traces of this type of studio identity formation in architectural education. I have fond memories of regularly occurring events called “soup talks” from my university days. These were evenings held at one of my studio teacher’s farmhouse in the countryside, which involved communal cooking – soup and bread, followed by student-led presentations and discussions on a topic of interest, in a more informal context. Perhaps these were my first examples of pedagogical stewardship and staging architectural conversations?

Another example, within our Critical Studies masters studio at KTH, is when my colleagues Brady Burroughs and Katarina Bonnevier took a group of students on a weekend excursion into the Swedish countryside, for full-scale building workshops, a site visit, walks in the forest, and communal cooking. I was fortunate to be invited to join them. In both cases, the boundary between institutional life and personal life was blurred, and at least in their case, there was a conscious intention to conceal the studio as a collaborative group, a common practice in architectural education, not the least with the elaborate study trips we take. However, I do see the danger in these practices to engender a cult-like culture, where bonding and familiarity can become exclusionary, even manipulative. Power and authority can be seductive!

As a matter of fact, I’ve tried to work toward the opposite effect with my PhD seminar events, through the use of costumes, staging of fictions, and gender play. In a way, I guess the costumes may have functioned in a similar manner to what Labatut might have been after with the shirtlessness, and even the Bauhaus with their theater, in the attempt to temporarily dissolve identities. The difference is that my motives were not to instill obedience, to control, or to create a new collective identity, but rather to push myself, and my colleagues, out of our routine selves and temporarily test something else, even if it was only to become aware of our routines and habits.

I’d like to think that my project begins to liberate what Rüedi Ray calls “the fantasy filled, multiple, nonpatriarchal identities” that are repressed by the architectural profession (and education), which she claims “lies behind the continuing pernicious gender and race imbalances.” I’ve been pleasantly surprised; first, at how easy it’s been to get serious academias to play dress-up; and second, how tangible the shift in the conversation feels when everyone seems to let their guard down for a moment. I was curious if the culture of architecture schools in the U.S. had changed much since my studies, so I found a 25 minute film online, produced by students at Pratt Institute called Archiculture: a documentary film that explores the architectural studio from 2014. Through interviews with students, faculty, and prominent practitioners, the film presents, in my opinion, the continued mythologizing of the architect (or starchitect), studio life, and the design critique. The studio and working habits, as well as socializing mechanisms, where the studio is referred to as “a second home” are the same. However, one positive change is the indication of a shift toward more ethical interests in the profession and in design projects that address these issues in the studio. This desire and pressure to move in that direction came directly from the students.

Helena Webster echoes my observation, as she explains that the pedagogy of architectural education has gone through very little change, with its project-based learning and reflective techniques through tutor-student dialogue in the design studio, held up as the ideal model for all professional education by Donald Schön’s influential book The Reflective Practitioner in 1983. These same practices endure, despite various critiques of this model, including blindness to asymmetrical power relations and no recognition of students’ own personal positions and competencies. Aldo, your students in Milan seem to have been quite
politically engaged, as they were responsible for staging protests against “architecture as a bourgeois authoritarian instrument” in the mid-sixties.\textsuperscript{118}

Pedagogy is the theme of two recent journal issues, the experimental cultural think tank Archis’ Volume on Learning, and SenseLab’s interdisciplinary art and academic collective online research journal Inflexions on Radical Pedagogies, both from 2015.\textsuperscript{119} Likewise, Beatriz Colomina, along with a team of PhD students at the school of architecture, Princeton University, have compiled an “open archive” called the Radical Pedagogies project, a collaborative research effort to document and exhibit historical examples of experimental pedagogical practices within architectural education, at the intersection between architecture, pedagogy and politics.\textsuperscript{120}

Aldo, your pedagogical work is mentioned, as is Black Mountain College, another reference (through its Bauhaus ties and geographical location) in the formation of my architecture school, but importantly so are examples from Africa, East Asia, Australasia and Eastern Europe. Similar to Colomina’s early feminist architectural theory anthology Sexuality & Space, this project seems to have a thoughtful approach to selection and representation.\textsuperscript{121} Colomina cites the important role of these short-lived, highly experimental, radical pedagogies from post-WWII to disrupt normative assumptions and practices of the status quo and provide necessary critique of institutional authority.

Likewise, Beatriz Colomina cites that authors in Volume identify a crisis in the system of educating designers today, with calls for a move away from the neoliberal, profit-seeking professionalization of education (or at least an honesty about it) and a move toward more ethically, politically and socially conscious pedagogical practices. The contributions in Inflexions present examples of pedagogical practices and design responses in the spirit of radical pedagogy. I appreciated one example in particular that described studying the practices for collecting sea salt. Melora Koseky refers to Paulo Freire’s pedagogical ideas to call for “a pedagogy of moments as a ‘problem-posing education’ in the minor key,” where “learning suffuses all of our multiple subjectivities” for a pedagogy that is at once emancipatory and ordinary, in the actual and metaphorical act of gathering salt from the sea.\textsuperscript{122} (Of course, my love of the sea made me biased.)

Education seems to be a relevant topic (again) within design-related fields, with ideas about possible ways to go about it ranging from reform to revolution. Besides the wave of radical pedagogies in the 60s and 70s that you were part of and that Colomina’s project documents, similar critiques and calls to recognize the cultural and political responsibility of architectural pedagogy, as well as the inclusion of women, people of color, and students, were voiced again in the early 90s. One such example in academic writing is the compilation Voices in Architectural Education, edited by architectural educator Thomas A. Dutton.\textsuperscript{123}

Dutton cites Henry A. Giroux, a founding theorist in critical pedagogy: “All pedagogy...is essentially a political issue and all educational theories are political theories. Inherent in any educational design are value assumptions and choices about the nature of humankind, the use of authority, the value of specific forms of knowledge and, finally, a vision of what constitutes the good life.”\textsuperscript{124} The scary part, Aldo, is that Dutton goes on to point out that the move toward “professionalization in the design studio, where discipline, job skills, and entrepreneurialism are encouraged and valued, coincided with a political shift to the right in late capitalism, supporting ideals of (Western) tradition, nationalism and cultural conformity.

Twenty-five years later, we are experiencing the culmination of that shift that brings with it daily examples of irreversible ecological destruction, violent racism, homophobia, and the undermining of earlier progress for women’s rights. In terms of architecture, I would say that we have also reached the culmination of what Dutton calls “the cult of the image,” where digital technology has enabled a dominant culture interested primarily in projects that produce pleasing “architectural selfies.”\textsuperscript{125}

Besides the element of personal power dynamics, the projects assigned in studio, the references held up as “good,” and the subsequent assessment criteria used in critiques, is never neutral! But, as Dutton also suggests, architectural education has a tendency to conveniently (or naively) disconnect itself from political responsibility to merely serve the needs of the profession.\textsuperscript{126} Based on Webster’s research around the rituals of critique, it almost seems like it would be revolutionary simply to admit to students upon arrival that “architectural value is a contested issue” and to demystify the otherwise inexplicit positions lying behind design criticism.\textsuperscript{127}

Aldo, in terms of contested architectural values, critics have accused you of producing work that is simultaneously scenographic and lacking in its expressiveness.\textsuperscript{128} Your response counters and complicates the practice of following one single path that many architectural studios and critics promote. You write: “I believe I have made it clear that I consider any technique possible; I would go so far as to claim that a method or technique can be a style. To consider one technique superior to, or more appropriate than, another is a sign of the madness of contemporary architecture and the Enlightenment mentality which the architectural schools have transmitted wholesale to the Modern Movement in architecture.”\textsuperscript{129} You go on to specify these values as “moralistic” and “petit-bourgeois,” not far from the political values of the neoliberal professional mentioned by Dutton above.\textsuperscript{130}

Another way you counter the ideas of discipline and conformity are to suggest the primacy of the event; “private acts, unforeseeable occasions, love affairs, repentances.”\textsuperscript{131} Begin with the heart of events that occur in and around the spaces and move toward thoughts about order and construction. Why are most first-year students initiated with a string of formal exercises around
abstract notions such as order, structure and geometry, rather than beginning with a task that connects something they know, like a story about the entanglement of bodies and events, to material and/or spatial qualities? I’ve taught first-year studio, and the students could just as well, if not with more enthusiasm, build a model based on the conflict within a love triangle, or the thrill of a teenage love affair, or why not the dramatic death of their favorite architect? This might open up for discussions of gender, race and sexuality, beyond distant canonical concepts like symmetry, proportion and structure. This starting point might also help “level the playing field” Webster describes in the critique of architecture. This might open up for discussions of gender, race, and/or spatial qualities? A story about the entanglement of bodies and events, to material and perhaps beyond. If not with more enthusiasm, build a model based on the conflict within a love triangle, or the thrill of a teenage love affair, or why not the dramatic death of their favorite architect? This might open up for discussions of gender, race, and sexuality, beyond distant canonical concepts like symmetry, proportion and structure. This starting point might also help “level the playing field” Webster describes in the critique of architecture.

Regarding the driving force behind creativity, you chime in: “It is difficult to think without some obsession; it is impossible to create something imaginative without a foundation that is rigorous, incontrovertible and, in fact, repetitive.”

Some might interpret this as a call for disciplined knowledge of the so-called “basics,” before attending to whims, but I choose to interpret this as the need for a deep and recurring connection to something we can relate to, something we love, allowing curiosity to lead to creative imagination. Some might also claim that I put too much value on fantasy and imagination, as I presumptuously move myself into your row house and start renovating, and that I’m having way too much fun for it to be considered “serious” academic work. However, bell hooks has something to say about the ethical and political aspects of imagination: “Imagination is one of the most powerful modes of resistance that oppressed and exploited folks can and do use... Without the ability to imagine, people remain stuck, unable to move into a place of power and possibility.”

I must say that my own pedagogical practice has been strongly influenced by my colleague Brady Burroughs, and the previous work she, along with her teaching and research group FATALE, have done within critical pedagogies. Both their Architecture and Gender courses and their masters design studio are based in queer and feminist theory and have the underlying idea to question, even alter, architectural practice through a focus on “positioning, participation and collaborative work, and the critical reflection on power.” Specific techniques that I have continued to develop, following their example, are the use of critical fictions and the staging of critical conversations, to combine the pedagogical moment with the event.

FATALE’s events were often called salons. Salons have an exciting and interesting history as creative, theatrical and cultural gatherings, as well as for supporting the work of women writers, many of whom lived unconventional or queer lives. Some well-known literary figures (all known to have had same-sex relationships), such as Gertrude Stein, Natalie Barney, and Virginia Woolf were all active in hosting this type of gathering. However, for this project, I felt uncomfortable with the connotation the salon has to such a privileged class, especially with the idea of queer Camp culture and an examination of privilege, so I simply use the term events. Come to think of it, with the Camp theme a beauty salon might have worked!

This act of staging a critical conversation often includes dress code (or costume), spatial arrangements and/or decoration, a framework (often a fiction) to act within, and refreshments. I think the work of FATALE has made me interested in the possible intersections between pedagogy, practice, and research, and Aldo, the titles of what you describe as your filmic drawings, “Other Conversations” and “The Time of an Event,” would make suitable titles for one of these pedagogical gatherings!

While I believe there is also much to be learned from the many self-organized, community based, participatory, and open-access initiatives, currently aimed at the decolonization of knowledge, I would locate my particular project in critical pedagogies that remain within the institution (and perhaps the ivory tower), in direct relation to its power to reproduce and perpetuate a culture of architects. In other words, although its aims reach beyond reform, it doesn’t claim to be anarchist, subversive or even radical, but it is critical.

One practice in particular, whose pedagogical ideas resonated with my own, this relation to this renovation project, was that of Fake Industries Architectural Agonism (FKAA). In an interview, Cristina Goberna and Urtzi Grau point to the historical shift in the role of the architect from artist, to intellectual, to today’s professional consultant, where “design studios are largely focused on creating workers instead of taking risks and experiments.” They explain the idea behind their agonistic, rather than antagonistic, approach to the current order of things: “in working with “copies,” instead of “the new,” as a form of resistance co-optation by market forces. Their design studio does not focus on originality, but rather on “copies and corrections of works of architecture that already exist.”

While they seem to work at a more urban scale, their idea of the replica rang true for my process of reconstruction in the row house. They state: “In romance languages, the replica is not only a copy, but also a right of reply. It has a direct connection with speaking to power. The right to replica(tes) is the right to answer back to power.” I think this is a great description of the renovation, “an answer back,” rather than an attempt at an original design.

This answer back, makes me think of bell hooks’ Talking Back, or the coming to voice she describes as “an act of resistance.” In much of hooks’ work on critical pedagogy, she emphasizes the importance of understanding the positions we speak from and the stories we have to tell. She performs this type of understanding in an inventive way, in a text “Paulo Freire” (1994).
about how Paulo Freire and his work (in an intersection with the many black teachers in the segregated school system of her childhood) deeply affected her writing and thinking about teaching practices. The text is a dialogue with herself, that is, a text written between her own voice, Gloria Watkins, and that of her pen name, bell hooks, in a playful attempt to find “a way to share the sweetness, the solidarity” she feels with Freire, a sensibility she is unable to achieve in essay form.143

So, even the way we tell our stories is important. Next time, Aldo, I’ll tell you more about how I deal with my own positions and about working with experimental writing practices. But first, I’m going to try out that pizza oven!

With pedagogical architectural affection,
Beda Ring

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Letter Four
Personas and performative writing

15 August 2012, Mozzo

“Like most people I lived for a long time with my mother and father.”
- Jeanette Winterson, Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit

“I am I because my little dog knows me.”
- Gertrude Stein, Identity A Poem, Play 1

“So I’m supposed to be what I write? No more? No less? But every writer knows this isn’t so… The “I” who writes is a transformation- a specializing and upgrading, according to certain literary goals and loyalties- of the “I” who lives. It feels true only in a trivial sense to say I make my books. What I really feel is that they are made, through me, by literature; and I’m their (literature’s) servant.”
- Susan Sontag, Where the Stress Falls, “Singleness”

Dear Aldo,

First, I should warn you that the second floor is already haunted, just in case you decide to pay us a visit. Our ghost is pretty moody too and prone to some “spirited” temper tantrums, so I wouldn’t want you to have any unpleasant surprises. I started noticing strange things happening around the house sometime in June, and they’ve continued all through the summer. Karma.

I’m just finishing up the final touches on the first floor now, some painting and a few wall-mounted details. The graffiti artist has been here all day (and eaten almost all of the sweets Zite dropped off yesterday)! The upstairs is going to be more of a single gesture, with a few specific details, but I’ll tell you more about that some other time.

I know that I’ve already spoken briefly about critical fictions, but bell hooks’ text made me think about performative writing and how the way we write, and the positions we write from, open up new possibilities. For example, one of the main sources on Camp, the style and approach that lies behind this renovation, is Susan Sontag’s list of 58 points in her “Notes on Camp,” which is performing a more informal analysis, while it simultaneously
imitates the contradictory nature of Camp. Another is Gertrude Stein, who used the autobiography to stage a telling of the self. In her Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, Stein writes a story about her partner (and herself), in the guise of her partner Alice as author.

You even do an autobiographical performance, in a way, Aldo, by writing your catalogue of projects as an autobiography, which allows a certain freedom in tone, writing style, and content. Adam Phillips suggests, from a psychoanalytic point of view, “one’s autobiography might be different at every moment.” In fact, he cites the French psychoanalyst J.-B. Pontalis who says: “One shouldn’t write one autobiography, but ten of them, or a hundred because, while we have only one life we have innumerable ways of recounting that life to ourselves.” This is where Stein’s and hooks’ decision to write from positions, other than their own, becomes interesting.

Writing under a pseudonym—a fictitious name or pen name, and the use of personas—a character assumed by an author in a written work, are techniques used historically, by writers for a number of reasons. According to Carmela Ciuraru, author of Nom de Plume: A (Secret) History of Pseudonyms, these reasons can be: to achieve anonymity; to escape expectations of a previously established authorship; to enable acts of political disidence; to transgress oppressive limits of race, gender, sexuality and nationality; to change genres and/or write in a genre generally considered less “serious,” taboo, or personally compromising; or as a creative tool for self reinvention. Joyce Carol Oates writes: “Writing under a pseudonym gives one the sense of discovering oneself by way of redefining oneself.” However, as Ciuraru reminds us, co-opted by egocentric and capitalist interests, the pretense of the pseudonym can also be used to self-promote or generate publicity.

Aldo, here’s a selection of some of the well-known pseudonymous writers I could find through a quick online search. You will probably recognize many of them:

- A.S. Byatt (Dame Antonia Susan Duffy), Acton Bell (Anne Bronte), Alice B. Toklas (Gertrude Stein), Antosha Chekhonte (Anton Chekhov), Ayn Rand (Alisa Zinov’yevna Rosenbaum), bell hooks (Gloria Jean Watkins), Carson McCullers (Lula Mae Smith), Claire Morgan (Patricia Highsmith), Colette (Sidonie Gabrielle Colette), Currer Bell (Charlotte Bronte), Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel), Edgar Box (Gore Vidal), Elena Ferrante (identity unknown), Ellis Bell (Emily Bronte), Émile Ajar/Romain Gary (Roman Kacew), E.V. Odle (Virgina Woolf), Gabriela Mistral (Lucila Godoy Alcayaga), George Eliot (Mary Evans), George Orwell (Eric Blair), George Sand (Amandine Aurore-Lucie Dupin), H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), H.E. (Sayeh Hushang Ebtehaj), Isaac Bickerstaff (Jonathan Swift), Isak Dinesen/ Pierre Andrezel (Karen Blixen), Jane Somers (Doris Lessing), Jean Rhys (Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams), Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson), Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens), Pablo Neruda (Reyes Basoalto), Radclyffe Hall (Marguerite Radclyffe Hall), Robert Galbraith (J.K. Rowling), Stephen Dedalus (James Joyce), Tennessee Williams (Thomas Lanier Williams), Toni Morrison (Chloe Anthony Wofford), V. Srinivas Shishkov/Vivian Cambood (Vladimir Nabokov), Vera Haïj (Tove Jansson), Victoria Lucas (Sylvia Plath), Victor Eremitta/Johannes de Silentio/Constantine Constantius, etc. (Søren Kierkegaard), William Athelting/Alfred Venison (Ezra Pound), William Lee (William S. Burroughs), and over 70 “heteronymns” (Fernando Pessoa).

I’ve been known, on occasion, to employ these same techniques in my critical fictions for similar reasons, but I almost lose track of who it is that’s actually doing the writing! I use these techniques to undermine expectations of academic convention; to question single authorship and the notion of the academic bio; to promote the idea of collaboration; to explore several positions simultaneously; to complicate the notion of gender; to provide a critical distance to my own work; to reinvent, rediscover and redefine myself; to liberate and situate the narrative voices; to conjoint academic rigor with creative playfulness; to maintain the fiction throughout the dissertation; and even to generate interest for the work from three different areas of architectural culture. These techniques, combined with critical fictions, also make it possible to ethically work with situations involving people and places that are deeply connected to me.

I’ve been reading Judith Butler’s article “Giving an Account of Oneself” to help me understand my own use of different personas throughout my writing. Drawing on the work of Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero (Do you know of her Aldo?), Butler describes how Cavarero raises the question of “who” rather than “what” a subject is, as she proposes a theory that we are beings exposed to each other in the world, each with our own unique story. Butler writes: “In her view, one can only tell an autobiography, one can only reference in “I” in relation to a “you”: without the “you,” my own story becomes impossible.”

According to Butler, Cavarero suggests that collective, plural pronouns are often privileged in contemporary political movements and schools of thought, avoiding the “you” and invoking what she perceives as an air of morality rather than ethics. “Indeed, many ‘revolutionary’ movements (which range from traditional communism to the feminism of sisterhood) seem to share a curious linguistic code based on the intrinsic morality of pronouns. The we is always positive, the plural you is a possible ally, the they has the face of an antagonist, the I is unseemly, and the you is, of course, superfluous.” So, not only the way we write, but an awareness of who we choose to be when we write, and who we are writing to, have ethical and political implications on the writing.

When speaking of the concept of (architectural) identity, its loss or the inability to fix any absolute identity, you say: “Identity is something unique, typical, but it is also a choice.”
Cavarero’s concept exposure puts this idea of “choice” into question, or rather the conditions under which we choose. Part of the human condition is the inherent corporeal quality of being seen, where “I” and “you” are exposed to each other, and in that moment we are co-produced. This mutual interdependence entails an element of vulnerability, as “it is not that over which I can have control.”

For this reason, I think the autobiography as a genre is especially good at enabling a certain vulnerability, although as soon as I begin to tell my story, I invoke control in deciding what to include and what not to. Butler also points out that the act of telling one’s story is always a reconstruction, partial, and under constant revision, and that in this “partial blindness about ourselves” lies an ethics of a condition we share with others. In other words, the realization and recognition that we are incapable of giving a complete and coherent account of ourselves, and in turn, that this is an impossible demand to make of others, works against what Butler calls the “ethical violence” of such demands and “obligates us to suspend judgment.” Butler argues that this ethical approach to acknowledging the limits of what we can know about ourselves, brings about a “disposition of humility and generosity,” putting us in a position that asks forgiveness for what we cannot know, and forgives the other for being in that very same position.

My colleague Brady Burroughs’ work around the concept of architectural flirtations (also an influence, as we share a base in queer feminist theory, with a particular interest in Camp) focuses on this shift from judgement to generosity. Just as Butler identifies this “inevitable ethical failure” as the possibility for “a new sense of ethics,” Burroughs proposes an intentional disorientation of the figure of the critic or the architect through the misperformativity of Campy practices, in order to place these habitual identities into crisis, to achieve a purposeful failure. So, the ethics of the failure enacted through architectural flirtations aligns with the perpetual limitations of giving an account of oneself.

What if the studio teacher or the critic took this as a guiding principle in the meeting with the student? Or the practicing architect with the client? Or the architectural researcher with the reader? Butler’s conclusion is that this condition of exposure to one another is “the reminder, of a common vulnerability, a common risk.”

As an architect who tells stories, exploring this type of “whoness” is connected to the characters I develop in my critical fictions that allow you, the reader, to slide into and test new positions temporarily, while I, the researcher, question my own shifting positions, as author, teacher, researcher, architect, even human. It’s about the positioning and repositioning we do constantly, in relation to the situations we’re in, and a critical awareness of the power and privileges that are associated with these different roles in specific contexts.

For instance, to reflect the way language frames and constructs our thoughts, I’ve tried to work with characters and subcultures that have different primary languages, even though I write (mostly) in English. You of all people must understand Aldo, with English, French, German and Italian, the identity crisis that multiple languages can sometimes bring and its accompanying access (or denial) to new knowledge.

As another part of my character research, I have used simple costumes and selfies, inspired by the artist and photographer Cindy Sherman, as a way of testing the alternative identities I write from. In an interview article that describes Sherman as “the original shape-shifting selfie queen” and “the face that launched a thousand gender-studies PhDs,” Sherman talks about her transformations as both a way to test and figure out who she was, or wanted to be, as well as offering the viewer characters with different narratives, who take on a life of their own. She says, “I want there to be hints of narrative everywhere in the image so that people can make up their own stories about them… But I don’t want to have my own narrative and force it on them.”

I tend to think of my own transformations as a form of drag, since the costumes are intentionally ad hoc and the resulting characters are meant to be parodies. Like Sherman, I hope they also allow the reader to explore these character positions from a place within their own experiences, and to pose new thoughts and questions about who they are or who they want to be. Besides that, it’s been lots of fun!

Aldo, you discuss the temporary condition of the empty theater in relation to another type of vulnerability, the feeling of abandonment. You said: “this brief abandonment is so burdened with memory that it creates the theater.” This made me think of the recurring loss of exposure between the audience and the actors, as they co-create themselves. Becoming all of these characters, and in a sense, temporarily losing my own identity in order to re-present the new identities to myself through the theatrical portraits, has helped bring these voices to life. In a way, this temporary self-abandonment has driven the writing and informed my design decisions to create the renovation.

Just as you write of your architectural predecessors Aldo, my interest in performative and experimental writing practices doesn’t come from nowhere. Academically, there is a local lineage of work at KTH in Stockholm, within Critical Studies, that employs these types of writing practices in a critical way. These include: A discussion of garden theories and literary garden representations in the form of a narrative dialogue between two historical writers and the narrator (Katja Grillner), situated at Hagley Park, Worcestershire, England in Ramble, linger, and gaze (2000). Malin Zimm investigates the mediation between architecture and narrativity in Losing The Plot (2005), exploring the intersection of plot and spatiality through comparative studies of literary works and architectural spaces.

In a series of lectures as scripted drama, Katarina

Last but not least, Hélène Frichot has brought her expertise in *flòtocríticism* from the Australian context, to apply it to her new Swedish one, both in teaching and in writing. In her recent academic articles, she addresses notions such as gentrification, real estate, and “becoming Scandinavian,” while organizing (re)orientations courses for masters students around themes like “gentri-fictions” and “The Queens of PoMo,” as well as organizing a two-day workshop and symposium on *Architecture-Writing: Experimental Approaches* (2012).167

Aldo, since your practices involved design, teaching, and writing about architecture, I understand that you have some questions about these more experimental writing practices and their relation to architecture. I’ll try to answer a few:

Internationally, is this writing architecture really a “thing”? In their introduction to a special themed issue of *Architectural Theory Review* on “Writing Architecture,” Naomi Stead and Lee Stickells begin with a brief survey of previous publications and gatherings produced around themes having to do with “the role and medium of writing as an architectural practice.”168 Among the conferences and events, they list the “First International Conference on Architecture and Fiction,” themed *Once Upon A Place* and held in Lisbon (2010), while I attended the second conference in the series themed *Writing Place* and held in Delft (2013).169

Stead and Stickells also point to two influential figures in particular, whose work contributes to the development of this field, Katja Grillner, my colleague and Professor of Critical Studies at KTH, Stockholm, in her earlier work with AKAD and courses in “Writing Architecture,” and Jane Rendell, Professor of Architecture and Art at the Bartlett, UCL, with her practice “site writing,” combining criticism and critical practice, where both have a critical (and feminist) approach to experimental writing practices.170

Do these practices take into consideration both form and content? Another area Stead and Stickells mention is the question of the form of the publication itself and the effect it has on the writing of architecture, whether a handmade fanzine, a traditional book/journal, or somewhere in between.171 This is a question I have yet to tackle, since the work of writing a finished dissertation and its graphic form will come after the renovation, but I do have some ideas.

To reinforce the sense of the fictions, I want it to have a pulp fiction feel in its graphic design and materiality, but I will most likely make the size and format a little larger to accommodate the drawings and to keep the book from being too thick. In other words, the last thing I want it to look like is a generic academic dissertation, and it should be far from the “slick” aesthetic of architectural monographs. I want it to be accessible to a wider audience, beyond the academy (i.e. practitioners) and even beyond the discipline, and most importantly, to be a book someone can love.172

What’s so special about these practices and how can they affect architecture? Jane Rendell says the simple answer is that “the architectonics of writing offers a new way of imagining architectural design.”173 But, she adds, within this emerging field, it is no longer a matter of oppositional critique or just a complement to architectural design, rather (feminist) writing practices can offer “new conceptualisations of positionality, subjectivity and textuality.”174 I would add that for these same reasons, new (feminist) writing practices might also prove effective in reconfiguring architectural education in the design studio.

Why do we need to question the conventions of writing? In *Emergent Feminist Writing Methodologies* (2012), Mona Livholts argues that certain forms of writing also privilege certain kinds of knowledge. In other words, “instructions and rules about writing are not neutral or innocent guidelines, but are shaped by political forces. The corporatized neoliberal ideology, driven by ratings, rankings, and counting, risks suppressing the critical potential of the contribution of writing methodologies in feminist studies and other critical fields.”175 By writing a dialogue with your alter ego, or by reflecting on your architectural projects in the form of an autobiography, you are able to make connections and discoveries that may have been overlooked or missed in a more conventional text.

This brings us to a sensitive subject, Aldo. I know that you had many figures populating your gallery (*of Critical Fictions*), as you mention Italian filmmakers such as Luchino Visconti, Federico Fellini, and Michelangelo Antonioni as influential in your work. Likewise, you name literary figures, such as Herman Melville, William Shakespeare, Anton Chekhov, Ernest Hemingway, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Dante Alighieri. I don’t know how to put this, Aldo, but I had to ask them to leave. When I moved in they were vacated from the premises, in order to make room for my own inspirations. Of course, they’re still welcome to visit.

told with an underlying bittersweet humor, have been invaluable. While there are many authors of fiction (mostly female) who have inspired me, here I’ll name only one, my all time literary (s)hero, Ali Smith. I would credit her creative work as the number one source of inspiration for my critical fictions and the one who has taught me the most about the art of joining form and content. With words as her material, Smith crafts language, experiments with form, is inventive with the structure of parts to the whole, while using humor to explore content with ethical and political themes. Often, the characters are both odd and ordinary, as are the events both absurd and everyday. I’ve even kidnapped a few of her characters from There but for the (2011), Brooke and Bernice, and included Ali Smith (as herself) in the fictions! I know. I know. I’m gushing.

Examples of other work that use humor, parody, or less serious forms of culture in relation to art, architecture, or academia and that build community, have either contributed to new ideas or simply the feeling that I was not alone. From the feminist art activist work of the Guerrilla Girls; to the campaign behind Architect Barbie, co-created by Despina Stratigakos and Kelly Hayes McAlonie; to the humor of the social-media experiment Shit Academics Say by Nathan Hall; to the online archive Academia Obscura by Glen Wright. I find humor to be an effective critical tool, but it can also be tricky to hold the line between being provocative and being offensive, while also being aware of its potential exclusionary aspects. Humor is both subjective and contextual, and relies on the fact that the intended audience is familiar with- or initiated in the subject under scrutiny, in order for them to “get it.” Otherwise, it risks being understood as anything ranging from hurtful, to obscure, to pretentious.

In her article “About That Noguchi Coffee Table: On humor in design criticism,” Naomi Stead cites the long tradition of the use of humor in architectural and design criticism. She writes about “humor as criticism,” used by FYNCT – Fuck Your Noguchi Coffee Table blog, and how they play on a type of doubleness, in presenting something curated with great care, a selection of objects that a certain group can identify with, even like, only to be violently rejected in the short accompanying caption. (It kind of reminds me of the way my manifesto works, in reverse.)

Stead points to how the authors of the blog use their expertise knowledge and precision, to subvert “a certain mode of middle-class taste,” showing how constructed and copied most seemingly “original” interior designs (and those that strive for those status symbols) are. The part that keeps it from being pretentious, according to Stead, is that they are also implicated in this taste, by having this specific knowledge in the first place. Similar to Camp humor, in “poking fun at a particular sensibility and regime of taste,” they (and those who can identify with it) are not making fun of it; they are also part of the joke.

In terms of what I said about humor being tricky, if I think about my neighbors and how they might react to this FYNCT blog; Ade, the designer, would definitely be offended, because she’s the ultimate target of it all (and she has no humor). I think Zite might either find it pretentious or simply not care, since she is a bit older and has much more of a “bohemian” take on things. As for the guy in the house on the end, with the ping pong table, I think he might feel excluded, because I don’t know that he would “get it.” At least that’s my (judgy) assumption, based on what I’ve seen in his living room.

Alas, before I wrap up this letter, I’d also like to mention some more popular forms of culture that have been inspiring to me, so as not to give credit only to the usual sources considered “high culture” and worthy of mention. TV series like Scandal and How to Get Away with Murder, written and produced by the media titan and woman of color, Shonda Rhimes, with strong female leading characters (also women of color), political themes, feminist views, and dramatic twists, have been inspiring (and sustaining) throughout the grueling writing process. I’ve learned a lot about the art of suspense by spending time in “ShondaLand.”

Likewise, the show Jane the Virgin, developed by Jennie Snyder Urman and based on a Venezuelan version by Perla Farias, has also been instructive, modeled after the Latin American telenovela form. It uses over-the-top characters and soap opera drama in a way that could be described as Campy, again with a strong female lead character, tackling difficult issues in a light-hearted way. “Rogelio de La Vega” is one of the best diva characters ever!

And let’s not forget RuPaul! The reality television series RuPaul’s Drag Race, where drag queens compete for the title of “America’s next drag superstar” has been an important source, not only for its informative connection to Campy queer culture through the art of drag, but also for its similarities to design studio. Drag queens are given design (or performance) tasks with certain materials and parameters, under the tutelage of RuPaul and staff, which they then present and receive critique for each week. The drag queens even live and work in a creative space together that resembles a design studio, only instead of tracing paper and chipboard there are sewing machines and lipstick. What I appreciate the most is the sense of community that is emphasized, even in a competitive environment, and the clever use of Camp humor as a critical tool to learn and develop as artists.

Well, I should be getting back to hanging those portraits in the entrance hall. I’m really pleased with the way they turned out, although they seem to frighten my young friend Brooke who often comes around unannounced to “help.”

With experimental and fierce architectural affection, Beda Ring
34. Lesbian Lives Conference
   University of Brighton
   15-16 February 2013
   photo: Janne Bromseth

35. Critical Writing Workshop
   LiAi masters architecture course
   UMA, 29 October 2013
   photo: Alberto Altés
Dear Aldo,

I’m writing from vacation on my favorite Greek island, Lesvos. It’s early September, the light is sweet, the figs are ripe, and the annual Sappho Women’s Festival is just getting under way. I decided that a change of scenery for a couple of weeks (and a break from Ade) would do me some good. The sunshine, sand and the sea don’t hurt either!

While waiting at the airport I read about your project in Chieti, Italy, a submission for a student housing competition that included typical beach huts, like your drawing The Cabins of Elba. You say: “it turned out that happiness made me think of beaches… The sea seemed to me a coalescence capable of constructing a mysterious, geometric form made up of every memory and expectation.”

I got excited when you referred to a verse about a seashell from Alcaeus, a Greek lyric poet from Mytilene, Lesvos, and how this verse contains the idea of form, material and imagination. (I’m in Sappho’s village, Skala Eressos, on the southwestern side of the island.) You explain that this memory and feeling of happiness is bound up with youth and your “love for summers spent by the sea.” Is that why you used crushed seashells from the bottom of the sea in Skala Eressos to remind me of summer’s inevitable return, and a yellow washed-out sweatshirt (a hand-me-down from my Dad) that has been my comfy “writing uniform.” Every time I Skype with my sister, she comments: Are you wearing that again? You look quite stylish in the photos I’ve seen of you Aldo, but let’s just say that I won’t be making any appearances on the Milan runways in my PhD attire! The fact that I can wear that is dependent on my working from home, or rather, often from the kitchen or balcony in the row house.

Although I acknowledge the idea of the design studio as a collective space of creativity, when it comes to writing, for me it’s the exact opposite. The mere idea of a formal office space designated for writing, with a bunch of other stressed-out academics around, kills the creativity for me. It makes you wonder about the “genius” move by (neoliberal) institutions to save money, by making research areas open landscape. And don’t get me started on the ventilation systems! I get this sense when I visit Zite’s place, where things have acquired meaning and hold memories.

Even though I had to pack light, I still brought my La conica espresso maker you designed for Alessi that I use daily, and some seashells from the bottom of the sea in Skala Eressos to remind me of summer’s inevitable return, and a yellow washed-out sweatshirt (a hand-me-down from my Dad) that has been my comfy “writing uniform.” Every time I Skype with my sister, she comments: Are you wearing that again? You look quite stylish in the photos I’ve seen of you Aldo, but let’s just say that I won’t be making any appearances on the Milan runways in my PhD attire! The fact that I can wear that is dependent on my working from home, or rather, often from the kitchen or balcony in the row house.

For me, I think that creativity must be connected to informality, and the same reason I usually get the most fruitful ideas when I’m working out at the gym (although less frequent during the PhD), or taking a shower (also less frequent in the final phase of the PhD), or watching Scandal. In moments where I leave the place of full concentration to do something else and shift my attention elsewhere, the ideas have a chance to surface. That’s not to say that they don’t require a whole lot of concentrated work to develop into something worthwhile, which can only be done through writing and then re-writing, but the
importance of other “less serious” activities are not to be underestimated.

While we’re on the subject of how I would describe my creative writing process, maybe I should tell you something about the research project as a whole? Or, how I go about it. I tend to think of it as “working backwards,” or (borrowing a term from my colleague Katarina Bonnevier) an “intentional post-justification,” where I do first, then reflect, analyze and piece it all together afterwards. This process usually ends in posing new questions rather than finding conclusions. I think it’s similar to the way we work with design as architects.

Aldo, you write: “I have always believed that in life as in architecture, whenever we search for something, we do not find merely what we have sought; in every search there is always a degree of unforeseeability, a sort of troubling feeling at the conclusion.” I would suggest that this “troubling feeling” is most likely the new questions raised along the way. I wonder if anyone really works “forwards”?

This process usually ends in posing new questions rather than finding conclusions. I think it’s similar to the way we work with design as architects.

I’m a little suspicious of research that begins with an intended research goal, and then ends up there. It’s the same with writing; I never end up where I thought I would, when I set out to begin with. Ahmed says that “[r]esearch involves being open to being transformed by what we encounter.”

Likewise, my project follows what I like to call (borrowing a term from Katja Grillner) a “method of opportunities,” in that I didn’t stake out a plan to follow from the beginning and stick to it, but rather I’ve allowed the work to take me in different directions. In other words, the original project description I wrote in order to apply for the PhD position, a study of women’s bathing spaces through three case studies, transformed into something completely different as I followed impulses, got involved in projects and events that interest me, and made the most of opportunities as they presented themselves.

Whether a conference, a course assignment, a teaching experience or an artistic event, these fixed points served as signposts along the way and created intermediate deadlines for completing fragments. I then post-justified, situated and assembled them, as I found my way to a more coherent project. I can say that I never imagined I would end up here, or rather there, at the row house in Mozzo! (Oh, I just got a whiff of charcoal and smoke. Debby and Patrick must have fired up the grill outside for the Friday night barbeque. This and souvlaki — the reason behind my vegetarian downfall!)

Although I suspect most research, even the more traditional kind, involves these kinds of unforeseen moments, it may seem unorthodox to admit to relying so much on intuition and chance. Katja Grillner writes: “In scientific research the acknowledgement of absence of, or uncertainty in relation to method, would seriously undermine the reliability of the results (as well as the authority of the researcher), which
is why methodological reflections rarely capture what happens in the margins of the research process, decisions that are merely coincidental or affected by unexpected turns around the experiment or researcher.”

Posing questions around the methodologies of art- and design-based research, Grillner speaks about “the possibility to forget that one might have known what one was doing at an early stage (embracing the seemingly intuitive).” This reminds me of Aldo, of your description of your creative process as “forgetting architecture”: a mixture of consciousness and abandonment, and in doing so, temporarily freeing yourself from the constraints of the discipline. Grillner makes the point that even though one’s method may feel intuitively driven and even chaotic in the moment of experimentation, there is usually an underlying (forgotten) “compass” guiding us.

Another aspect of this intuitive way of working is my desire to incorporate others in my work, not in a participatory way, where I have trouble finding equal ground. So far, it’s happened through what I would call active invitation or collaborative coincidence. I value the help and influence of others, whether it comes from my “ancestors,” or the folks I come into contact with on a regular basis, or even in a brief encounter. I mean, Aldo, you had offices in New York, the Hague, Tokyo and Milan simultaneously, so it would be ridiculous to assume that you single-handedly produced every “Aldo Rossi project.” Right?

That’s another thing I enjoy so much about the form of A Scientific Autobiography; it allows for the complexity surrounding a body of work and tells of the stories (and people) that usually don’t receive the attention they deserve. One such collaborative coincidence came a few months ago, when I received a letter from one of my friends and PhD colleagues, Seh in Umeå, in response to a letter I had written explaining my ideas about the renovation project in Mozzo. The barrage of emails and “status updates” can become very tedious and overwhelming, so I enjoy the slowness and thoughtfulness of a well-composed letter.

Anyway, Seh brought up Émile Zola’s letter, J’accuse [I accuse] from 1898, as an example of “how strongly it performed in a political sense.” She wrote: “The format of the letter strongly invites me as the reader to respond. What I want to refer to is not the content of the letter but its strength in a form that locates the reader in a condition of an urge to reply, to react, to get involved! Whatever reaction one makes to a letter is a statement; even ignoring it is a statement!” She’s right! What better way to engage people in the work you do, than by addressing them directly in a call to action? Seh even suggested that part of my dissertation be written in letter format. Maybe I’ll use some of these letters to you, Aldo?

I’m thinking about having an Open House here in Mozzo, as my next PhD seminar. I think I’ll ask everyone who attends the Open House tour to write me a postcard and mail it before they leave. This would be an example of active invitation, where I solicit engagement and feedback on the project from others, and then they can decide whether or not they wish to participate. If I do my job, then hopefully I’ll get some postcards.

At other seminars, I’ve built “living diagrams” or Campy versions of the tableau vivant, with colleagues dressed in my silly character costumes; I’ve staged architectural taste tests using donuts as a metaphor for my work; and I’ve even invited a group to an Architectural Flirt Aid course where everyone wore white lab coats. It’s been surprisingly easy to solicit people’s temporary involvement. The only time it almost backfired was when I made the snacks table “women only,” to make a point about how gender can be privileging. Maybe that crossed the line? (Relax, everyone got snacks eventually, but it was obvious that many were confronted by this restriction.)

Another form of active invitation occurs during the presentations of my work, whether at academic conferences or lectures for students. In both cases, I try to work with the pedagogical potential in sharing work, while questioning the practices and norms of “what usually happens” in these academic environments. I’ve tried several elements of performance, in order to push the boundaries and get my listeners involved. Sometimes I put on a simple costume myself, while presenting as a specific character from the critical fictions. Other times, I’ve invited volunteers from the audience to dress up and read with me in dialogue.

Likewise, I sometimes provide the audience with small bells attached to satin armbands and ask them to participate by “jingling” when the narrative shifts from one mode to another. (The bells have been popular!) I’ve also used messages in paper airplanes, in order to get immediate responses during a lecture, as these are something disarming and familiar from childhood. Both the costumes and the involvement of the listeners not only make the work more accessible, but it helps to break the conventions of the traditional academic presentation.

Aldo, I know that you like theater analogies, so I guess what I’m trying to say, is that all of the different roles are necessary for a drama to reach its full potential, not just the leading role, and it’s possible to set the scene and direct those roles within your own performance, through invitation and collaboration.

Well, I think I’m going to hop on my bike and go for a quick dip in the sea, before everyone arrives for the barbeque!

With theatrical architectural affection,

Beda Ring
37. Writing Place Conference
Audience participation at TU Delft
25-26 November 2013
photo: Sophia Banou

38. Audience paper airplane messages
Architecture and Gender course, KTH
20 November 2013
photo: Beda Ring
Dear Aldo,

I’ve been back in Mozzo for a few weeks now, and I have just started work on the second of three acoustic details upstairs. They are partly a response to my neighbors and partly a solution for my ghost problem. The first one turned out fine, and now I have the company of Zite’s cats whenever they feel like visiting. They make reading challenging in a whole new way! But I’m all for “an ethics and politics committed to the flourishing of significant otherness” that supports “co-habitation, co-evolution, and embodied cross-species sociality.” As a matter of fact, all of the details upstairs deal with species of significant otherness, now that I think about it. My friend and I were out taking some measurements for one of the details today, and I swear I saw one of the neighbors in the house next-door looking my way with a pair of binoculars!

This friend, we’ll call him T, is a construction engineer and teacher at an architecture school in Brussels. Speaking of collaboration and inviting people into your work, I asked T if he would be willing to take a look at what I had planned for the details upstairs, and he agreed. I set the parameters for myself as a quick charrette, similar to a student design task, based on programmatic requirements that emerged during the development of the narrative in one of my critical fictions. I had a good idea of what I wanted the details to do, and even a thought about how they could playfully connect back to your work Aldo.

I emailed the sketches and models that came out of this quick charrette to T and he said that they looked buildable, with a few minor adjustments. T then offered to come to Mozzo to help me with the actual construction, since he was curious to test them out at full scale. He even brought me a housewarming gift, as he knew how much I enjoy your drawings — a book on your graphic work that he found in the local bookshop in Ghent! He bought the last two copies, one for me and one for himself.

And then there were the drawings for my forthcoming dissertation. Aldo, I always swore that I would never be one of those old, out of touch architects (like many former bosses) who sit behind a younger architect and “back seat drove,” while the other person did the CAD drawing. But here I am! It’s been so long since I used a CAD program that I asked Malin Heyman, a former student now colleague at KTH, to help me prepare drawings for my publication.

I had drawn the plans by hand, with a pencil, triangles, and a parallel bar (which I still have), in the beginning when I was working on the original room specifications I told you about. However, my eyesight isn’t what it used to be and my drafting skills are rusty, so the drawings weren’t very precise or particularly “publishable.” For the elevations, I had made digital collages to go by, but even they were rough.

So, with the hand drawings and collages as a rough guide, and links to websites with all of the specified products in the room specifications, Malin and I sat together at the computer, while she CADed the final drawings for publication. Oh, what patience she had! As for the drawings of the details upstairs, Henri, a practicing architect who is studying and documenting these details for an academic article, offered to draw them up with a simple drawing program, since they were only sketches and not to scale. I have to say, it was nice to work together with these friends on parts of the project, as a change from all of the solitary work you do otherwise in writing the PhD.

The encouragement and support, even the occasional conflict, of working collectively is something I learned a lot about through working with Brady Burroughs and her colleagues, in some of the early FATALE events. As I mentioned before, FATALE is “a group of architects, based at KTH, pursuing research and education within, and through, feminist architecture theory and practice.” In 2007, the five founding members of FATALE organized elective coursework in architecture and gender, and thereafter a masters studio with a base in feminist theory. I was invited as a guest to review the students’ work and to hold a couple of workshops. I was also able to help out at one of the “salon” events they hosted, with themes addressing the intersection of architecture and feminist theory. This one was perhaps the most demanding, in terms of collaboration, a two-hour installation and performative event called The Incompatible Modalities Salon at the Woburn Studios in London, as part of the “Sexuate Subjects: Politics, Poetics and Ethics” conference at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL in 2010.

Another group that collaborates with FATALE on occasion, the art and architecture collective MYCKET, heard that I had spent a lot of time on Lesvos, in Sappho’s village. In 2012, they invited me to participate in one of their “Club Scene” events, Sappho Island, playing the part of the Oracle at Delphi in full costume and telling hundreds of participants their fortunes.

What we were able to accomplish together as a group, in both cases, taught me a great deal about collaboration, performance, and the practice of “event making,” where the events themselves became an extension of the research. Since...
then, I’ve learned of similar groups that work collaboratively, such as taking place — “a group of women artists and architects who formed in 2000 out of a shared interest in questions of gender and spatial practice,” and PARLOUR - an association for research, opinion and discussion aimed at “expanding the spaces for women in Australian architecture.”

Talking about collaborations reminded me of the first time I visited the Case Unifamiliari and met the local Bergamo architect that collaborated with you on the Mozzo houses, Attilio Pizzigoni. I must admit that I was somewhat reluctant to contact him at first, for fear that he might not approve of my intention to renovate “his” (your) project. I also didn’t know what his political position was in terms of feminism, or how he might react to the fact that my project is firmly located within a feminist position. Likewise, I wasn’t sure what “feminism” meant in the Italian context, as the meanings of concepts are not directly transferrable from one culture to another and often take on different meanings.

For me, it was perfectly fine that we shared an affection for the Mozzo houses and an admiration for you Aldo, so it wasn’t necessary that we had the same political position or opinions. This was the first time I had encountered the specific difficulties of working with feminist research practices in a male dominated profession. When I met Attilio, he seemed like a kind and generous person who was realistic about the changes already made to the row houses by previous residents. I was relieved! As my Italian is limited and anything but correct, and I was so enjoying our conversation about the project in Mozzo with his stories about you, I didn’t dare to reveal my feminist affiliation. I always give my friend Jo a hard time about it, but I guess I was a reluctant “feminist killjoy” myself in this case, since I didn’t want to ruin the easy connection we had.

Since then, I’ve been troubled with ethical concerns of how to use the “non-archival” material from my meeting with Attilio, mostly email correspondence and photos, as part of my publication. In response to a question I sent about a year later, once I had moved in to begin the renovation work, asking him about the origins of the row house project, he sent me a beautiful seven-page letter. It described everything from the political context of the time, to influential figures and how he came to work with you, to anecdotes about specific design decisions. (This is when he told me about the crushed seashells in the façade.) I wrote him back right away, to “come out” as a feminist and to let him know that I would not use his words directly in my project, so as not to place him in a context that might make him feel uncomfortable.

I’ll save our correspondence and the photos from my visit, and hope to do a separate documentary article instead, in collaboration with Attilio. But I did want to tell you about my first impressions of Mozzo and my meeting with Attilio, not as a willing collaborator in my feminist work, but rather as an expert architectural informant and keeper of the archives for the original Case Unifamiliari project.

We spent the day of the spring equinox together, first visiting the Case Unifamiliari in Mozzo, then lunch with his family at his home (designed by his father, the architect Pino Pizzigoni), overlooking the stunning city of Bergamo. Finally, the day ended with hours of digging through the archive of documents and drawings in his architecture studio next-door. Attilio’s wife, Donatella Guzzoni, was also his partner and the structural engineer on the project, which made my feminist heart happy. This is a fact that you don’t readily find in the publications on your work Aldo, although I have to give Attilio credit for making this clear in his own publication.

Part way through the day, I asked Attilio about his initial reaction when I first contacted him, an email from an unknown female architect in Sweden out of the blue, asking for information about a project he had completed almost 40 years ago. He admitted that my name, Jo, had allowed him to assume that I was a male architect (although he played it cool when we first met) and that in digging through all of the old documents and drawings on my behalf, many memories had returned, along with a desire to share them. Attilio’s enthusiasm was contagious, and the meeting with him felt like another “paternal” professional figure (this time “the encourager”). He even suggested that we collaborate in the future on an exhibition about the Mozzo project.

When you collaborated on the row house project together, Attilio was only 28 years old, and you, sixteen years his elder, had been one of his teachers at the School of Architecture at Politecnico di Milano. (He commented that, as a teacher, you were quite strict and demanding.) His continued affection and admiration for you as a mentor is apparent, as he still refers to the Case Unifamiliari project as “the Rossi houses” and cites the experience of this collaboration as one of the defining moments in the formative years of his architectural career.

During our conversation, while driving through the streets of Bergamo, Attilio tried to formulate what it was that made you so special as an architect. He described it as an “intellectual charisma,” in that you managed to maintain an autonomy of thought, independent from the dictates of commercial speculation and professionalism, even in the face of marginalization. Here, he gave the unorthodox realization of the Gallaratese housing block outside of Milan, together with Carlo Aymonino, as an example; a building that was temporarily occupied by protesters over exorbitant prices, before the apartments were eventually inhabited.

(Some, I’m not the first one to occupy one of your projects! I visited this project as an architecture student and met a very angry gatekeeper who, after some pleading in broken Italian on my part, let me in for a quick look around.) Attilio also pointed out that you did not lose sight of civil and social
responsibilities, or the importance of history, and that this autonomy of thought wasn’t that of the “elitist ivory tower,” but rather a desire to affect change through built works.221

As a community, my first impression of Mozzo was that of a quiet, well-to-do residential area, but perhaps more conservative or reserved than I had anticipated. This feeling may have been unfounded, but as I walked around the part of the neighborhood closest to the row houses, I could see curtain after curtain pulled aside and then shut, as soon as I looked in their direction. No one came outside, and there was no one in the gardens. I almost began to feel suspicious of myself!

And then there was the presence of the church, which was physically tangible, as the church bells rang constantly and nuns seemed to pop up out of nowhere. I only met one neighbor, in the apartment building just across from the row house on the corner, who was curious about why I was so curious about the strange green house. He invited me into his yard, to get a better angle for a picture from the entrance side and mentioned that he had once seen a bus full of people (likely architects) stop outside of the house, as everyone filed out to get a look and a photo. He seemed impressed, when I told him that we had studied this building at architecture school in the U.S..

The visit to the row houses themselves was brief. Since the houses are privately owned, and Attilio had lost contact with the original owners, most of whom had already moved away in the last 40 years, we didn’t have any access through the entrance gate. We managed to get the neighbor on the end, who was out working in his garden and who I now call “the ping-pong guy,” to let us in. This neighbor even invited us inside his house, to see the first and basement floors and a quick view of the garden. Someone was taking advantage of the weekend to sleep-in on the second floor, so I never got to go upstairs. The interior was much smaller and darker than I had imagined. Shortly after we thanked the ping-pong guy and returned outside to take some exterior photos, Ade came out and threw us both off of the property.

I think it’s time for a Swedish “fika” and then maybe a dip in the pool.

With collaborative architectural affection,
Beda Ring
40. Photo from *Case Unifamiliari* architectural archive, Bergamo, IT
   photo: Beda Ring

41. Photo from *Case Unifamiliari* architectural archive, Bergamo, IT
   photo: Beda Ring
Dear Aldo,

Tonight is the winter solstice ritual. That gang of yours I evicted earlier, to make room on the gallery, is still hanging around outside. It’s almost as if they’re camped out, waiting to be reinstalled! I know they don’t like to follow my rules, but otherwise they’ll take up all of the attention (and drink up all of the grappa).

You’ve said: “Today if I were to talk about architecture, I would say that it is a ritual rather than a creative process. Rituals give us the comfort of continuity, of repetition, compelling us to an oblique forgetfulness, allowing us to live with every change, which, because of its inability to evolve, constitutes a destruction.” But Aldo, don’t you think it depends on how and in what context the ritual is enacted? I agree that part of the ritual relies on following rigorous and repetitive acts, and that if these acts are performed routinely, one may become detached and unengaged. You could say the ritual becomes habitual, much like the habits of a profession.

However, I see the winter solstice ritual as a celebration or a break in the ritual of everyday activities, where by offering instruction on how to act, they might instead heighten awareness and temporarily break certain hidden habits. For instance, your pals’ habits of grabbing center stage and interrupting or speaking over someone else.

By now Aldo, you’re probably asking yourself “Why me?” and “Why choose this particular project?” Attilio asked me the same thing. My immediate reply was “because I love these houses.” I’ve always admired the floor plan, with its simplicity and symmetry, under the auspices of choosing spatiality over function. That is, in the way you choose to represent the idea of it in your presentation drawings. Attilio showed me the original mylars! Of course, in the built work, there were more functional decisions than you let on, where it was necessary to install things like water and sewage systems, for example.

You write: “architecture becomes the vehicle for an event we desire, whether or not it actually occurs… the dimensions of a table or a house are very important- not, as the functionalists thought, because they carry out a determined function, but because they permit other functions. Finally, because they permit everything that is unforeseeable in life.” Sorry, but it’s a bit of a “Vaffanculo!” to all of those modernist form follows function guys, isn’t it? I thought so.

I think this is an interesting discrepancy though, that the published drawing presents an idea of the project as a fiction of intention, while the reality of building puts other constraints on that architectural expression, and then there’s the interpretation, in words, of both. Pier Vittorio Aureli picks up on the consciousness of your proposal as a critical intervention, in his discussion of your monumental 1962 competition entry in Turin, where he writes: “it staged a critical and dialectical confrontation with the existing city… which proposed to offer a civic reference exposing the new geography of Turin’s labour force.”

In other words, an expression of power to confront the power of the dominant class, where he positions you as “a political subject committed to the formation of a cultural alternative to the bourgeois domination of the capitalist city,” which is close to the way Attilio explained your approach to architecture. Aureli argues that your “austere and simple formal language” is based in a conscious political rejection of capitalist consumption and its thirst for novelty, which resides in an architectural theory that appropriates and reinvents the city toward political ends. Perhaps we could call this your version of “an answer back”?

Although I’m not certain that the Casa Unifamiliari is part of this urban political project, my representation of the renovated plan as “an answer back” may be close to it. Why not an example of filling that space with the theatrical exaggeration of the “unforeseeable in life,” in order to see it differently at an oblique or queer angle. In Aaron Betsky’s chapter “Queering Modernism,” he suggests that Charles Moore, in his manual for building a house, “presents a queer version of the home,” that “allows you to ‘camp out’ or make a space for yourself.” Betsky likens Moore’s recipe for normal middle-class life to a libretto that was “to be sung alive and out loud by different performers and at different pitches.” This renovation is my rendition.

Moore writes: “Rooms are unspecifiable spaces, empty stages for human action, where we perform the rituals and improvisation of living. They provide generalized opportunities for things to happen, and they allow us to do and be what we will.” Does that sound familiar, Aldo? In your words, “The theater is very similar to architecture because both involve an event- its beginning, development, and conclusion. Without an event there is no theater and no architecture.”

I also realized, after halfway through the renovation, that the Casa Unifamiliari reminds me of my childhood home. The symmetrical organization of the floor plan around a central stair is nearly identical, while both share a simple pitched green roof and a raised covered porch entry. My grandfather, a carpenter, built this house in 1936, using lumber from Stauffer’s saw mill in Bud’s Creek, Maryland, and the Sears, Roebuck & Co. “Lexington model” catalogue house plans as a guide. You mention...
how the memory of a place and its personal entanglements, can be fundamental to your architecture: “Truly every architecture is also an architecture of the interior, or, better, an architecture from the interior: the blinds that filter the sunlight or the line of the water, together with the color and form of the bodies that live, sleep, and love one another behind the blinds, constitute, from the interior, another façade.” You describe The Hotel Sirena, situated along a lake, where a girl, Rossana, and the intoxicating contrast of color, between the rose of her name, her flesh and the acid green of the hotel façade holds its place firmly in your heart. In the same way, I suspect that these tacit memories from childhood made the row house in Mozzo feel like “home,” before I even moved in.

In terms of my pedagogical and political interests, it was important for me to revisit one of the primary references from my education as a young architect, or one of my “ancestors.” I’m not interested in being discounted or relegated to the margina, where I can do my feminist work without displacing or reimagining the center. Aldo, you’re a tricky figure, somewhere between modernism and postmodernism. Architects either love you or hate you, but there is bound to be an opinion, and therefore, also an interest. In a way, it’s an act of invitation to those who already hold power, along with a critical message. You are like the carrier pigeon delivering that message, as the vital link between us. However, you’re not only my object of architectural affection, Aldo, but also one of the main figures in the relatively recent writing of at least four or five other theorists that re-examine architectural work from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Charles Rice, architectural historian and critic, reviews and compares these written works; The Project of Autonomy: Politics within and against Capitalism by Pier Vittorio Aureli; Architecture’s Desire: Reading the late Avant-garde by K. Michael Hays; Utopia’s Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again by Reinhold Martin; and First Works: Emerging Architectural Experimentation of the 1960s & 1970s by Brett Steele and Francisco Gonzales de Canales, discussing the concept of autonomy as the common denominator, and its different interpretations by each author.

I wonder if anyone has done a study of “theoretical homosociality” within architectural discourse? Rice does note that Hays “serves to perpetuate an obsession with these architects.” (It is an obsession I’m aware that my work risks contributing to.) Rice’s comment, “that different things can be said about the same people or examples is key to the formation of a contemporary debate,” encourages me to offer my work as another critical voice, at least in relation to the Aldo you were between 1971-1981.

Rice explains the subtle distinctions between three different versions of your autonomous project; Hays poses it as a disciplinary turn inward; Aureli makes the case for a historicized, political subject with critical intention; while Martin introduces the question of power in “an engaged political project, using architecture’s projective capacity to imagine an alternative proposition.” Based on the comparison of these three interpretations, Rice comments on the relationship between the project and the written word, and suggests that the re-writing of previous architectural references can provide a “theoretical re-examination of the discipline.” I would argue that critical fictions provide the possibility to perform this function, while also reimagining an architectural predecessor, or one of Martin’s utopian ghosts, in “new forms of projection.”

Unlike my theoretical peers Aldo, I didn’t choose you for your typological studies, your ideas on the autonomous project, or your political interventions in the city, but rather for your playful drawings, your theatrical volumes, your exaggerated artificial verdigris roof, and your autobiographical memories and pedagogical disclosures.

With campy architectural affection,

Beda Ring
Dear Aldo,

Tomorrow is the Open House event! I’ve spent all week preparing, with some extra help from Marie-Louise and Malin, who flew in a couple of days early. Iro arrives today (Greek time). We’ve got some sweets from Zite’s, a disco compilation playlist, and enough fluffy slippers for everyone who shows up.

My colleague Henri T. Beall arrives tomorrow morning, to stay in the guest room upstairs. I hope Henri’s not afraid of ghosts (or allergic to cats).

Another colleague, Brady Burroughs, arrived this morning, with a group of architecture students from KTH. They’re getting a quick glimpse of Bergamo’s città alta today, and I think she mentioned something about a “performative protest” of the gender-bias policies of one of the churches tomorrow morning? Apparently, only female visitors have to cover their legs, if they’re wearing shorts, for admittance to view the interior. If they don’t get arrested, then they’ll be here by lunchtime, before the Open House starts in the afternoon. Brady had trouble finding a cat sitter, but it all worked out at the last minute. It will be a full house!

I think my PhD friends Jo and Seh are also flying in early tomorrow morning and will catch a taxi together from the airport. Brooke, Bernice, and Bernice’s partner Terence have offered to help me with the pizza making. Of course, Ade has scheduled a contractor to replace the awnings on her terrace during the same time as the Open House, but we’ll just turn up the music until we can’t hear the drilling anymore.

What am I hoping will come out of the Open House event? New discoveries, new questions, new connections. A love story perhaps? You write that the description of architectural projects “is like the testimony of a crime or a love affair… in either case, it is a construction.” Like a crime or a love affair, this (re)construction is a testimony of passion, risk taking, and flirting with danger, as “an answer back to power.”

Well, I’m going to cook another pot of espresso, but I hope my letters have helped situate the project and given you a better understanding of my practices, positions, and concerns. Even though the renovation is finished, there’s still much (queer feminist) work to be done, and I’m sure there are yet some skeletons to clear out of the basement, but I do feel that this conversation has brought us closer, Aldo.

By the way, I just found out from the realtor that I can stay here for six more months, and then it’s back to Stockholm for the winter. Mannaggia! Do I hate the winters in Sweden!

With flirtatious architectural affection,
Beda Ring

p.s. I received a call from a Greek woman who wanted to interview me, so I set up an appointment for the day after the Open House.
Notes on the curating of letters to Aldo

Following the renovation, with its culmination in the Open House event on March 21, 2013, I began a collaborative project with two of my colleagues from KTH, Brady Burroughs and Henri T. Beall. The result of that collaboration is this book, where I have gathered a selection of my letters to Aldo and given them titles, to make up the chapter discussing practices, positions and contextualization of the work that has gone into this project. I have also chosen letters that coincide with certain key points or events during the renovation, in order to allow you, the reader, to follow along with the construction process. Some of the main themes discussed are design practice research, architectural ancestors, the blossoming of a feminist position, critical pedagogies in architectural education, experimental and performative writing practices, academic research and presentation methods, ideas on collaboration, and the choice of an architectural object of affection.

The collection as a whole also places the architectural ideas of Aldo Rossi, through his writing, into new contexts and relationships, by reinterpreting and relocating a center of architectural discourse. Read as a bridge between the theoretical framework of Chapter One and the performative pulp fictions of the First, Second and Third (Love) Storeys, this chapter offers the how in relation to the what.

Endnotes

FOR FULL REFERENCES WITH ACCESS DATES, SEE BIBLIOGRAPHY.

1. The tendency to call all male architects by their last names only, in the assumption that everyone should know who one is speaking of, while female equivalents are typically referred to by first and last names, unless of course, they are referred to by first name only, to show a familiarity in a affable fashion. See Ahmed, Sara. 2014. “Affirmative Subjectivities” Durham and London: Duke University Press, 148-149.
4. For more on critical fictions work in Critical Studies in Architecture, see Chapter Four: Personas and performative writing.
18. Biggs, 4-6.
20. Biggs, 121.
22. Borgdorff, 121.
27. See First Storey: Renovating Rossi Tall Tales.
37. Fraser, 3.
38. Fraser, 3.
39. This architectural document is included in the dissertation between the First Storey and the Second Storey.
41. The three exterior garden features are described in the First Storey. Renovating Rossi.
For more on the history, criticality and architectural implications of the salon see Bonnevier, Katarina. 2007. “Do Bodies Matter?” in Chapter One: Conversation Two.

98 Cuff, Dana. 1999.
99 Ruedi Ray, 74-75.
100 Ruedi Ray, 74-75.
104 Butler, Judith. 1990, 171-190.
105 Ruedi Ray, 76.
106 Ruedi Ray, 76.
107 Ruedi Ray, 76.
108 Ruedi Ray, 76.
111 Otte-Paatis 2010, 98. See also Aaron Betzky’s chapter on Charles Moore in Queen Space. 1997.
112 Otte-Paatis, 27.
113 Otte-Paatis, 66-67.
115 The Critical Studies master’s studio course took place during the Fall term 2011, consisting of two complementary design courses arranged around a central animal theme. Feminist Design Tools: The Bestiary. organized by Katarina Bonnevier and Dorothy Bouroughs. 2007. “Do Bodies Matter?” in Chapter One: Conversation Two.
124 Dutton, xvi.
141 Moore 2015, 24.
143 Hooks 2015, 148.
146 Phillips, 73.
152 Butler 2001, 34.
156 Butler 2001, 27.
203

ARCHITECTURAL FLIRTATIONS

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER TWO
MEDITATIONS ON LESBIANS WHO MEDITATE ON LESVOS

An exploration on the inhabitation of separatist space

BEDA RING

Sappho sunset, Skala Eressos, Lesvos, Greece

PHOTO: BEDA RING
“Stand up and look at me face to face, friend to friend; unfurl the loveliness in your eyes,” wrote Sappho, the ancient female practitioner of lyrical poetry and desire, the insatiable aristocratic mentor and lover, the unbridled feminine instigator and native of Lesvos, Greece. Vulnerability, desire, and empowerment in the spaces made by women for women, more specifically by women who love women, is the theme of this exploration. We will dive deep into the world of the feminine, splashing in lesbian spaces created through bathing rituals on the island of Lesvos.

At the eastern end of the beach in the tiny Greek village Skala Eressos, Lesvos – Sappho’s birthplace, stands the main blue-stucco building of the beachfront café Zorba the Buddha. This is where The Skala Women’s Rock Group gathers every morning at 10 am for their daily swim to the rock and breakfast afterwards. From this place, springs a series of spaces where lesbian women bathe together.

Monique Wittig’s novel *The Lesbian Body* is a main source of inspiration, in the written discovery of these spaces that are not always normally or naturally accepted, not the least in the social arena of a tiny village on a traditional Greek island. (However, Eressos prides itself on being an “alternative community” with a high level of acceptance for all). In Wittig’s unique experimentation with language and her direct physical approach to different narrator perspectives, from human and non-human animals, to nature and inanimate objects, she attempts to write the lesbian body. This is my attempt to write lesbian space.

By ‘lesbian space,’ I am referring to specific spaces generated within queer communities between lesbian-identified women, where explicit separatist or “women only” spaces are temporarily appropriated and delineated, shifting both the androcentric and the heterosexual norm.

It is not to say that these spaces are bereft of men or people who identify as straight, but that for at least a moment, these individuals and their habits are no longer the standard measure. In a description of temporary separatist spaces and their connection to fiction, Wittig writes:

“The descriptions of the islands allude to the Amazons, to the islands of women, the domains of women, which formerly existed with their own culture. They also allude to the Amazons of the present and the future. We already have our islets, our islands, we are already in process of living in a culture that befits us. The Amazons are women who live among themselves, by themselves and for themselves at all the generally accepted levels: fictional, symbolic, actual. Because we are illusionary for traditional male culture we make no distinction between the three levels. Our reality is the fictional as it is socially accepted, our symbols deny the traditional symbols and are fictional for male culture, and we possess an entire fiction into which we project ourselves and which is already a possible reality. It is our fiction that validates us.”

In the background, lies a local Greek culture with ties to ancient mythology and the religious traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church. Beside it, are the sannyasin guests from the nearby Osho Afroz Meditation Center, located in Kampo, the valley between the summer village along the waterfront – Skala Eressos, and the year-round village perched up in the hills about 5 km from the sea – Eressos. Parallel to both the Greek local culture and the sannyasin guests, is the international community of lesbian women, many with their “New-Agey” angels and goddesses in tow.

The meditation center is open seasonally, May-September, and offers special courses and events with invited
guests, daily meditations, and creative activities such as pottery, jewelry making, painting and “meditative agricultural activities,” otherwise known as gardening. Accommodations at Afroz are very simple and include rooms in stone houses, wooden huts, or tents, with shared bathroom facilities. There is a vegetarian restaurant with an accompanying organic garden to supply the kitchen, the open air Buddha Hall under a large oak tree for meditation, two stone meditation halls and a bar. It draws spiritually interested people and followers of the controversial Indian mystic, guru and spiritual teacher Osho – who advocated very open attitudes toward sexuality, from all over the world.¹

The beachfront café in Skala Eressos, Zorba The Buddha, takes its name from an Osho expression that attempts to describe a way of living as a “whole human being,” or what Osho calls “homo novus,” a combination of mystic, poet and scientist. Osho describes this as a meeting of polarities, “East and West, man and woman, matter and consciousness, this world and that world, life and death” to create a new human being, Zorba the Buddha.² In short, a philosophy of life where you can have your cake and eat it too; a combination of the peaceful Buddhist meditation and mindfulness with Nikos Kazantzakis’ Zorba the Greek’s vitality and lust for life. Due to this connection, the café is highly frequented by the sannyasin guests from the center, while its location makes it the space where The Skala Women’s Rock Group meets every morning for their daily swim.

Initiated by a few enthusiastic women from the international lesbian community, The Skala Women’s Rock Group, also known as The Sappho Sirens, formed in May 2010 to establish a place for creativity and community for “women” travellers through their morning gatherings.³ This non-commercial, volunteer initiative has been maintained by a small group of regular extended guests for six consecutive seasons and continues to grow, reaching the status of a local lesbian institution and a main attraction for many summer visitors. The group meets daily and swims together, out to the rock and back, followed by a certificate (or laminated medals) ceremony and breakfast at Zorba’s.

It is not uncommon among the groups of lesbian women who make the “pilgrimage” to Sappho’s birthplace, to also identify themselves as “spiritual,” whether astrologers, healers, non-denominational ministers, or just the average person, enthusiastic about yoga or thanking her goddesses (or angels) when something good happens. On special occasions, gathering around a set of Angel, Goddess or Fairy Cards (similar to Tarot cards but with more positive affirmations) after the swim may start off a conversation. Other spiritual practices, such as full moon ceremonies on the beach with specific rituals of chanting or prayer and nude bathing, even dancing around a fire, reinforce the sense of community within the “women’s space.”

There is a local saying that claims once you swim to the rock, the tiny islet located approximately 315 m from the shore, at the eastern end of the beach in front of Zorba The Buddha Café, you will always return to this place. Skala Eressos, Lesvos is a place immersed in “spiritual energy.” Steeped in local myths, the place is attributed with the ability to amplify personal energy. If you come here in a “good place,” you might find bliss; however, if you come with your demons, they may very well destroy you. A fair share of stories is in circulation, proving both cases, trust me!

Above all else is the awe inspiring nature that makes up this place, with its cliffs of volcanic earth lit up in a red glow during the long summer sunsets and the crystal clear sea, which provides a watery black surface at night to receive the light of the full moon. Or the quiet rustling of the olive tree branches in the soft September breeze. Or the symphony of croaking frogs from a pond, in the pitch dark of night. Or the buzz of singing cicadas in a tall grassy field,
during the heat of late afternoon. Or the sweet scent of mimosa, or the pungent traces of a lemon tree, drifting onto a terrace and lingering. Or the ominous black clouds and violent rains of the autumn storms, with winds that turn the sea wild. It is a place by which one can’t help but be moved, regardless of one’s own spiritual inclinations.

“Qualities of the human spirit, like those identified by the Dalai Lama, including compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, and a sense of responsibility are all vital expressions of care that can lead to the formation of an atmosphere of learning that is truly awesome,” writes bell hooks. She continues: “To most of us, spirituality is about practice, how we live in the world and how we relate to self and others.”

According to hooks, it is this sense of spirituality and openness that leads to greater connection, collective learning, and a better understanding of our community and ourselves. It is in this sense I understand the spiritual, as I explore the spatial implications of vulnerability, desire and empowerment among women, and how they unfold within the ritual or practice of bathing together.

An experiment in the critical writing of place in relation to desire, the following meditations develop out of three specific locations, with three distinct narrative positions: a male sannyasin excluded from the separatist women’s space, exploring ideas of community; a local Lesvian seagull observing the human-animal territorial and mating rituals of friendship; and the temptress Aphrodite in an introspective verse to Sappho, delving into the relationship with the self.
44. Fire dance, Skala Eressos, Lesvos, Greece
PHOTO: BEDA RING

45. Stormy sea, Skala Eressos, Lesvos, Greece
PHOTO: BEDA RING
46. Landscape toward Andissa, Lesvos, Greece
PHOTO: BEDA RING

47. The Rock, Skala Eressos, Lesvos, Greece
PHOTO: BEDA RING
Invitation

Dear Reader, YOU are cordially invited to the island of Lesvos, in the village of Skala Eressos, Sappho’s birthplace.

Join us as we visit three ‘women-only’ bathing spaces:

- A magical beachfront café
- A semi-inflatable motorboat in a secluded cove
- And a secret underwater cave.

Don’t forget your towel and sunscreen (bathing suit optional). You are also advised to bring bottled water, as the days can be HOT in the Mediterranean sun.

We will embark on an architectural storytelling, navigating through the archipelagos of community, the intimate inlets of friendship and The grottos of self-introspection.

Welcome!

Aphrodite will be your host! However, we will also hear from Eshan, one of Osho’s sannyasin & Archimeaty, the local Lesvian seagull, as we follow the Goddess of Love in her desirable encounters.

Invitation
Invitation
Invitation
I first saw her the day she swam with the Sappho Sirens to the rock. It was there she met the Greek captain. We made eye contact and I knew at that moment that I had to have her. Later that day, after I had come from my afternoon meditation at the center, she seduced me. We had drinks, laughed and held hands, as we watched the sun set from the couch in the corner at Zorba’s. She pulled me toward her, caressed my face and looked deep into my eyes, while she ran her fingers through my hair. She told me that she had never seen a more beautiful man, not since Adonis, one of her mortal lovers. (Legend has it that he was killed by a wild boar while out hunting and that the world’s first roses sprouted from the drops of his blood.)

Everything around me seemed beautiful, even Zorba’s was more magical than ever. I was intoxicated, ready to follow her home, follow her anywhere. We were so close that I could smell her skin, feel the heat from her body, and our connection felt like electricity. And then she just left! She jumped up, said that she was going home (alone) and wished me goodnight. We haven’t spoken since, and now I can’t even get her attention.

They gather over there every morning at 10 am, those women, under the shaded beachfront deck across from the main blue stucco building of Zorba the Buddha Café. Zorba the Buddha is an Osho name for the one who lives life fully, but they probably don’t know that. I’ve heard them call it “Buddha Bar”! That’s how appropriation works, they pick out the parts that mean something to them, forget the rest.

The group spreads out, occupying at least one-third of all the tables and chairs! They even take a couple of the sofas with those stupid colorful cushions in Ikea-textiles. Figures, the invasion of Northern European culture here, just like their invasion. From the sofa where I sit at the other
end, the yellow walls of canvas protecting against the wind are her backdrops, and the thin white linens draped from the wooden rafters frame her like curtains on a stage. Even the strings of tiny lights sparkle like her eyes.

Yesterday, I heard that she met Santosh under the oak tree of the Buddha Hall at the meditation center, and then they went off to his wooden hut! He’s always so damn smug, just because his sannyasin name means ‘satisfaction or contentment,’ like it means he has some kind of special powers with the women. I argued with him one day about the spiritual meaning of our names, and he made fun of me in front of everyone. He said “Ok Eshan, Mr. longing and desire. You’re just jealous because you can’t get no satisfaction.” And then he began singing the Rolling Stones tune, while everyone laughed. Now she’s standing there hugging one of those women, flirting and kissing her on the shoulder but smiling at me!

They make such a big deal about their connection to Sappho, just because this is her birthplace and most of them are women who love women too, but I doubt that they are so interested in her poetry, or even know much about her history. No one else in the village is either, or the rest of the island for that matter. Most seem to have written her off as a love-crazed, tormented lesbian (with a little “l”). I read it in that lesbian guide that was lying around on the counter at Zorba, while I was waiting to meet her. It said, “Her association with female homosexuality has unwillingly caused the gifted poet to be somewhat exiled from the pantheon of great personalities on the island. The mention of her name brings an embarrassed smile to most locals who ignore Sappho’s poetry and focus on her sexual preferences.”

Osho says that sex is sex, but that the only “natural” sex is heterosexual. He blames organized religion – mainly Christianity, for homosexuality, as it keeps the sexes apart with its puritanical morality. He explains that true “deep” relationships are built on Hegelian dialectics, fighting and loving, and that that can only happen between opposites. Osho claims that same-sex relationships are shallow, with too much understanding and no fighting, which is of course why they are called gay, because “they are always smiling.” Not that I doubt him, but I have seen some arguments among the women here, and I promise you, no one was smiling.

Osho also says that the women’s liberation movement (and groups like this one) is causing lesbianism. “Why depend on men, even for love? Sisterhood is beautiful. Love your sisters. The natural outcome will be that many brothers will be left alone.” He says that homosexuality is a result of repression and guilt from our modern day institutions, and that once one has fully accepted their homosexuality, without guilt, then they will slowly become heterosexual or “natural” again. I don’t know, these women seem pretty comfortable with their sexuality and not one of them has ever hit on me. Well, there was that one time, but she was Swedish and she told me that some lesbian women sometimes choose to sleep with men. How does that even work?

I don’t understand why they’re so insistent on their “women only” space. Once, I asked them if I could join them for the swim and one of the leaders explained to me that the group maintained an explicit “women only” rule, but that it was based on self-identification, not on biological bodies. She said that if I identified as a woman, then I was welcome. I argued that I had seen a little boy swimming with the group just the other day. She told me that the sons of lesbian women or single mothers were also welcome, up to a certain age. The intent was to make a “safe space” for all of the many experiences of “women;” however, husbands, single straight men and gay men were asked to respect the space of the group and to find another activity
to occupy their time between 10-12 am. She insisted that it was a crucial part of community building.

Malakismeni! We’re all a community here, aren’t we? I told her that the Greek men in the kafeneias with their afternoon ouzo don’t make a fuss. She began to cite a section from that lesbian guide where it points out the similarities between the function of the Greek kafeneias as a male sanctuary, in their gathering of a community as a “popular council,” and the separatist spaces of the bathhouses on the island for the women. If you ask me, the real reason most of them are there has to do with privilege, not gender or sexual preference. It costs money to get there, surfing on their iPhones, eating their omelettes and sipping their smoothies after the swim. Ok, so some of them do get involved in the local community, joining traditional Greek dance groups or volunteering with the animal rescue, but most of them go back to their real homes for the winter season when things get tough. Why does she want to be with them?

Now they place the group’s hand-painted sign at the corner of the deck, propped up against the tree where Yolanda sits with her beads, marking their territory like they own the place! In a single file like ducklings down the stairs to the beach, the gong sounds, the canoe is pushed into the water, and the flock of swimmers head out toward the rock. They take it so seriously, like it’s a mission or something, but sometimes I do hear them laughing or singing a song together from out there. They seem to be having fun.

Once they are all back safely and everyone’s had one of Dharma’s post-swim treats, the daily ceremony begins. Every single morning they line up (blocking the traffic, as if they didn’t already take up enough space!) for the initiation of new swimmers and the handing out of certificates or medals... applause... photograph. When she got her certificate, one of them kissed her on the cheek. She smiled and kissed them back. Was there desire in that smile? She said that she felt like she was welcome there, that she belonged there, but even spaces of friendship contain desire – for acceptance, respect, and love.

I notice that she is spending a lot of time with the Greek captain lately. It’s obvious that even when they aren’t together, they both know exactly where the other one is. What is she up to? Ugh, maybe I’m just imagining things.

It almost feels like those women are on their own little island. Many of them come back year after year, but still they remain separate from everyone else. I guess we do the same thing, in a way. The meditation center becomes another island, and both of our islands happen to overlap in this space that we share at Zorba’s. We have Osho, our master, and they have their goddesses. Besides we both have a spiritual desire, if there is such a thing, in the every day desire to connect, to belong, to provoke, to resist, to transform, to transgress, to question, to understand, to hope, to trust, to fit in, to make amends, to heal, to experience, to express, to know, to love. Actually, I guess that’s what allows us to co-exist here.

There’s always an element of vulnerability in desire. In desiring something (or someone), there is a double sense of anticipation, coupled with the risk of failure, rejection, or loss. However, in order to fully realize empowerment, I think it is a necessary risk. She makes me feel vulnerable. Wait, I think she finally sees me! She’s coming this way!

I can feel my heart beating in my chest. Act natural. Act natural. Don’t look. I’ll make some room for her next to me on the sofa, and... She just passed me by, without even a glance! I watch her as she walks along the side of the road, disappearing in the distance toward the harbour. I bet she’s on her way to meet the Greek captain at her boat.
SECOND MEDITATION

They leave the harbour, motor past the rock and speed by the SQUAWK “women’s beach” with its cantina, a section of the beach in Skala Eressos unofficially designated as a space for “women-only” nude bathing—under constant contestation, negotiation, and dependent on sheer numbers of women to appropriate the space. Although, I have to say that when the cantina passed from “lesbian-owned” hands (Cantina Moon) to a local Greek family (Da Luz) with a much more “masculine” profile, the clientele on the beach became a little more SQUAWK interesting for my tastes. There were lots of cute Greek boys yelling “Malakas!” (Greek for “asshole” or “dude”), all sweaty from playing with their (volley) balls! Gullally, a “women’s beach” isn’t my cup of worms. I prefer the section of the beach in front of the fish restaurants, where all of the Greek families sit, even though the young Greek kids chase me, but to each her own.

Picking up speed, the Aeolian Village disappears behind them in the distance, as they motion a sign of farewell with one finger (the middle one) raised in the air; their own daily “ritual of resistance.” Queens please! I can do a fly by splatter of 3-4 human animals at once. And believe me, I have SQUAWK impeccable aim! You think a finger from 700 meters away is gonna matter to anyone? Okaaay. You obviously didn’t get a PhD in fierce! (Drag for intense or powerful)

The Aeolian Village is a British owned, all-inclusive resort, where predominantly well-to-do British families seek warm temperatures, water sports and co co co coAWCKtails. You can almost spend a couple of weeks there and not even notice that you are in Greece, while on holiday (British for vacation) inside that little “oasis” of a gated community.

I’ve overheard some human animals defend the complex as necessary for the economy of this tiny village, while
others say that it is “a clear example of colonialist exploitation and disregard for local cul cul cul culture.” They say that the company behind it employs very few locals, since their clientele is uncomfortable with non-English speakers. Piss off! (British for “get out of here” or “screw you”) It’s not like they’d want to hear GREEK while in GREECE or anything. Heaven forbid! Oh relax, I’m not giving them shade (see below), I’m only SQUAWK taking the mickey out of them (British slang for teasing).

For those of you who aren’t familiar with the concept of “shade,” Dorian Corey, a drag queen role model of mine from one of my favorite documentary films, Paris is Burning, explained it like this: Shade is a developed form of reading (Drag for insult) where “I don’t tell you you’re ugly. But, I don’t have to tell you, because you know you’re ugly. And that’s shade.”

Some human animals also claim that the company behind this resort does not make many contributions to the village in terms of infrastructure, support for education, arts and culture, or have any concern for the general welfare of the area, beyond those that SQUAWK directly put money into their own pockets, i.e. tennis court facilities or floating boat platforms for their guests. It’s been called a purely capitalist venture with no interest (or conscience) for the place it inhabits, but I don’t know that they’re so bad.

I’ve found really good crisps (British for chips), biscuits (British for cookies) and even a few left over chips (British for French fries) on the tables by the swimming pools. The best places are where the prams (British for baby strollers) are parked or near the bins (British for trash cans). And the guests wear lots of jewelry, so my couture wouldn’t have the same bling without what I’ve managed to to to to to to appropriate indefinitely! And the British boys... Gull! (Drag term of endearment), they make me wish that I were more SQUAWK interspecies interested.

Little beetles when they turn bright red in the sun on the first days of arrival. Mmmm!

All I’ve ever found on the “women’s beach” are abandoned plastic water bottles filled with sand, to anchor their nylon tents and brollies (British for umbrellas), cheap plastic lie-lows (British for inflatable mattresses), and an unfathomable number of Crocs (Lesbian for shoes). And when there are a lot of them, they tend to scare away all of the cute sweaty Greek boys!

The lesbians (with a little “l”!!! Darlings, let’s put on our shade(s) and read (Drag for insult), shall we? The library is now open! (Drag for let the insults begin) Plastic, plastic, plastic! Gull (Drag term of endearment), I’m all for the “artificial” when it comes to creating theatrical illusions, but when it comes to footwear or the environment? All T, all shade (Drag for “I don’t care if I offend you.”), with those Crocs on, they are definitely NOT serving fish! (Drag term for presenting yourself in a feminine way) Y’all know what I’m sayin’? Not a lot of SQUAWK resting on pretty here. (Drag for relying on beauty instead of humor or intellect)

Can someone please explain to me why none of those other land-bound creatures don’t show the lesbians how things are done farther down the beach? What’s the saying? Give a lesbian a fish, and she’ll eat for a day. But teach a lesbian to fish... Oh, never mind, even I know that teaching a lesbian to “fish” is beyond the capacities of even the fiercest (Drag for intense or powerful) drag mother! That’s not to say that there aren’t feminine lesbians, but we all know that only us “real” women have the charisma, uniqueness, nerve and talent required!
ning of the “women’s beach,” and covered with palm leaves for roofs, from the dying palm trees in front of the Aeolian Village. The Aeolian Village planted the palm trees in order to give the section of the beach directly in front of the resort a SQUAWK “authentic” exotic feel; however, these trees seem to be struggling in their current “natural” environment.

Most of the Aeolian guests that do manage to make it from poolside to the sea tend to wear bathers (Australian for swimsuits) and to occupy the neat rows of wooden sunloungers (British for beach chairs) and umbrellas provided by the resort. Since there’s so much noise from the watersport activities at this section of the beach, I prefer to perch on the bamboo constructions further down. Except, of course, when these structures are occupied and there’s no wind. Then there’s lots of funny smoke coming up from between the dried palms that tends to make me hungry for the crisps at the Aeolian.

Needless to say, it’s pretty laid back (and very nude) at the end of the beach. Not too far from this end, in the direction of the turtle pond, is a grey parrot named Koko who lives at Heliotopos, but he’s well into his 50’s and that’s a little too mature for my taste. I’ve met Niko, the fit (British for sexy) gull from Mesotopos, at this part of the beach on occasion. Wouldn’t mind ruffling his feathers! He said that there were too many cats around the fishermen’s places in Tavari, so I told him: “Big cats are dangerous, but a little pussy never hurt anybody.” Then I properly introduced myself as Archimeaty Glamazonia, from the house of Glamazonia, and made it very clear that he was welcome in Eressos ANY-TIME. Chanté you stay, henny! (Drag term of endearment)

Now they’re practically SQUAWK flying across the water, past the first ridge with a silhouette said to resemble Sappho’s profile. (She’s an ancient Greek poet, sort of like the RuGull for lesbians.) They swish by the second ridge with the rusty shipwreck in the tiny cove, where the sheep graze on dangerous slopes above. Heeeereee, heeeere, heeeere, here, here, here, they come! I can see them from the pointed rock growing out of the sea where I’m perched. They’re both wearing sunglasses, but I don’t think they see me! Uh oh! Muuuuuhaaaaaaat chit! NOT TOO CLOSE! I shake off the water they splashed as they glide into the secluded cove with their “secret” underwater cave. And I had just gotten my feathers looking fierce too! (Drag for intense or powerful)

A gust of wind picks up, so I make a loop, gliding along the ridge of the grey lava rocks surrounding the cove. Practicing some of my choreographed moves, I swoop down the front of the cave and turn SQUAWK upside down, and then veer off on a sharp left to where the white crustaceans grow along the bottom. And... and... and... SPLASH! into the shimmering blue-green sea. Mmmmm, gotcha! Lunch! It was an easy target, swimming all alone in the shallow part. Although, I must say that the next cove over offers a much “tastier” fish of another sort. That’s where Mama Ru gave me my beating tips (Drag for applying make-up) on how to roll in the dry seaweed to dull my plumage, and where I learned to cluck (Drag for hiding male genitalia) for the first time, back in the day. I’ll never forget, once I was finished with my make-up and ready to do my first soar down the flyway, Mama Ru said, “Now, sissy that squawk!”

The wind dies down and the boat rocks gently in its anchored post, with a “glup-glup” noise. I fly over them again, just to get a closer look. They don’t even notice me from under the canopy. Ouaooou, something shiny! I’ll get that later when they’re SQUAWK out swimming. Sometimes the Greek captain comes out here alone. On occasion, there are only two human animals in the boat, but most often three or four. Apparently, we both like chasing after “fish,” although she never seems to catch one. (Now that was shade!)

I feel fascinated by the other one today, and I don’t usu-
ally pay much attention to the human animals. Could it be one of the immortals? Aphrodite, is that you having some fun? Gull! It’s been a while! You look absolutely sick’ning! *(Drag for fiercer than fierce)* I watch their courtship dance. Or is it some kind of exercise or game? I can never tell the difference with them, but I can tell that the captain likes to play. Shifting positions, flapping their towels, stretching, posing, and offering food gifts, negotiating with the shade and each other. Moving in close to chat – too intimate, moving apart again, but not too far – detached.

**WAAAAAAAAAARNING! DOOOO NOT NOT NOT NOT NOT NOT TOUCH!** Skin against skin may cause sudden outbreaks of laaaaaaatent desires and lead to un ne ne ne ne ne ne ne ne ne ne ne ne necessary difficulties! Whooo gullll! Aphrodite is voracious! *She* does as she pleases! As the legendary RuGull, my drag mother, always says: “Oh no, she betta don’t!” I think there’s more than just a ki ki *(Drag for chatting or gossip)* going on up there, if y’all know what I mean! Like I said, the captain didn’t catch the fish, the fish caught her. I can’t even see the Greek captain anymore, and I’m starting to feel SQUAWK warm under these feathers of mine.

At the splash of the anchor, *this* species always removes the artificial coats they use to attract a mate and to protect them from the natural elements (to compensate for their obviously inadequate bodies), leaving them less distinguishable and more of the same flock. Without plumage, fur, or scales, they must constantly protect their bare skin with a co-co-co-co-Coconut liquid that they assist each other in applying. (I can tell that some even look forward to this part.)

All of the human animals on *this* boat are of the types that have two lumps hanging just above their stomachs. *(Despite this, they seem to be able to swim well enough.)* They do use strange plastic containers with large tubes on their heads and rubber prostheses on their feet (since they have no gills or webbing either). The Greek captain appears to be taking a longer swim than usual, all the way around to another cove. She must need some time to cool off after Aphrodite got a hold of her!

When there are more than two of these creatures on the boat, their behavior is even more SQUAWK peculiar. They swim off in opposite directions when hunting or lounge around while sleeping or cackling away, and are quite frankly not very skilled in the art of attracting a mate. Everyone knows that FLooooOCKS are more efficient and secure for hunting and mating! (Although there are rare instances of elaborate displays by some of the, shall we say, “alpha” members of the flock.)

Otherwise, I usually get so bored with them that I either go *mopping* *(Drag for stealing)* for my avian couture or practice my moves for the flyway. Aphrodite has removed the canopy and is lying spread-out over the front of the boat, soaking up the sun on her bare skin. She’s *serving* *(Drag for presenting oneself in a certain way)* “goddess realness” *(Drag for a presentation that is believable)* like a queen. The Greek captain climbs up from the ladder at the back of the boat, but remains at a safe distance in the captain’s chair, with nothing but her hat on.

Here comes a small fishing boat, with creatures of another type without the lumps, motoring towards the cove! These boats usually just pass by. Otherwise, tensions rise in the group and they become territorial. **DANGER!** They reach for their artificial caw-caw caw-caw-caw-COATS in order to defend themselves, if necessary. The Greek captain jumps up and starts getting dressed.

Aphrodite stands up slowly with hands on her hips in all her naked goddess glory, balanced on the nose of the rocking boat, and stares straight at them, as if she SQUAWK dares them to come closer. She seems to recognize the young handsome one on the fishing boat. I fly in closer for
a look, just in case there are any unattended fish. He stares back at Aphrodite. Whooo gull, this one’s filled with longing and desire! Eventually, the captain of his boat gets a glimpse of Aphrodite and changes course. They are soon out of the cove.

After their territorial victory, Aphrodite and the Greek captain stay well into the evening. I watch them for a while, hardly speaking to one another, as the full moon rises over the ridge in solitude. No T, no shade (Drag for meaning no disrespect), but this whole “we’re all here in this immense world together” thing is getting SQUAWK boring! Gull, a little moonlight disco is just what this party needs! I think I’ll flap over to Mesotopos and see if I can’t “accidentally” fly into Niko. As Mama Ru always makes clear, the creed of drag is about empowering people, even when it’s fundamental to serve some Tea (Drag for gossip, or delivering the unadulterated truth or difficult news). “So Aphrodite, I love you darling and you will always be in my heart, but I’m afraid it’s time for me to sashay away!”

50.
Dancing Nude, 2011, Skala Eressos, Lesvos, Greece
PHOTO: TZELI HADJIDIMITRIOU
THIRD MEDITATION

THE DAY I BECAME THE CROUCHING APHRODITE

Here, I rest, in this “hollow habitation.”
Poised on my pedestal,
frozen in time, in space,
Waiting inside your cave.

It is I, Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty.
Some know me to be capricious, irresistible and whimsical,
even vengeful on occasion.
Equally lethal to immortals as I am to humans and animals,
there is no one I cannot persuade,
If I set my mind to it.
I was born out of the sea,
but I thrive within fire and conflict,
reveling in emotional and physical passion.
My appetite is insatiable!

How did I arrive here? You may ask.
The simple answer is on a boat.
A fast boat with a Greek captain.
But how did I arrive here?
And where is here?

Here is an instant, a body, an identity, and an underwater cave.
It is a pilgrimage, an ancestry, a ritual, a feeling, and an introspection.
Here is a state of mind.
I’ve become comfortable here, in my suit of marble.
Compressed fossils. Life to stone.

Even when the fish nibble at my thighs,
I no longer feel.
My back is stiff;
torso twisted,
breasts are perfect,
knees bent,
arms severed
and I have no head!

I’ve forgotten what it was like to be whole.
Dis(mis)placed, I am at home.
At times, I long to break this pose,
Leave here.
But I like it here.
Here is familiar, safe
and alone(ly).

I came here gladly, because you asked me to.
You said,
“So come to me now, free me from this aching pain,
fulfil everything that
my heart desires to be fulfilled; you, yes you,
will be my ally.”

The rocks under my feet,
Covered with a thin slippery carpet,
Soft green algae.
Although on the inside of the cave,
the floor of the sea changes.
She likes to rearrange the furniture,
throwing rocks about to suit her moods.
We get along, the sea and I.

She entices me with reflections of sunlight
Dancing on the underside of the cave
Kissing its belly and touching the surface of its opening.
All around the soft rounded edges,
The lips of stone hang suspended just above the waterline,
protecting the dark interior.
Flames of light lick the walls,
meeting each other in a frenzy and then dispersing.

I plunge into her and she receives me.
She lifts me up, and I am weightless.
Her caresses are gentle, her vastness refreshing.
Her coolness brings goose bumps to my skin,
nipples erect.
My body is covered in salt when I leave her.
Even Aeolus, the keeper of winds
cannot distract me;
I cannot hear him howling in my ear
For I am submersed.

It was not the sculptor Praxiteles who created me.
I am not his Echo in this cave.
You called me here Sappho,
And I came willingly.
I was shot, but not by Eros.
The weapon was in her hands,
And here I remain.

This is the space of poetry,
The space of desire.
It is here we build our dreams.
It is here we play.
It is here we find love, lust, friendship, gratitude and joy.
“[I was dreaming of you but]
just then
Dawn, in her golden sandals
[woke me]”
And I was still here.

Citations in the order they appear:
Wittig, 15.
Balmer, 66. Sappho, fragment no. 78
Balmer, 42. Sappho, fragment no. 28
The intent of these meditations is to tell the stories of “women-only” bathing spaces, explore aspects of vulnerability, desire and empowerment in lesbian space, and in a small way, it is a visibility project to revive the memory of an important female poet, Sappho, in connection to a place that has forsaken her. The fact that Skala Eressos, Lesbos is Sappho’s birthplace is the main (if not only) reason this village has become a place of pilgrimage for lesbian women, who come seeking a legacy and perhaps, whether consciously or not, to pay homage to a foremother. Although tourism often brings both positive and negative consequences to a place, in terms of economic growth and cultural exploitation, without the large group of international women who come each year, Skala Eressos would be a very different place.

Sara Ahmed writes: “So, it takes time and work to inhabit a lesbian body; the act of tending toward other women has to be repeated, often in the face of hostility and discrimination, to gather such tendencies into a stable form.” Ahmed’s quote reminds me of the importance to make and maintain, even if only temporarily, lesbian spaces like the ones portrayed in these meditations. This project identifies and legitimizes these spaces in resistance to oppressive norms and laws, as well as the internalized oppressions that are otherwise felt by lesbian bodies.

In the Dictionary of Philosophy “meditation” is defined in two senses; first in religious terms as “the act of attempting to behold some spiritual object or gain spiritual insight,” and in the epistemological sense it is “synonymous with knowledge or the act of acquiring knowledge; the activity of thinking or pondering.” Well-respected (male) philosophers throughout time have written meditations, from the personal writings of Marcus Aurelius to Edmund Husserl’s treatise on transcendental phenomenology, enlightening
mankind with their thoughts on questions of an existential, ethical and moral nature. Men writing for men, or as Husserl puts it, “...a world of men and things.” Although there is an element of the phenomenological in my study, the focus here is on the effects of desire and the phenomenology is a queer one, guided by queer and critical race theorist Sara Ahmed’s ideas on orientation and inhabitation in relation to systems of social norms.

Likewise, inspired by black feminist and theorist bell hooks’ writing on spirituality and community building within spaces of pedagogy, these meditations follow bell hooks’ mantra “I am because the story is,” rather than Descartes’ (whose philosophy was the foundation for Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*) androcentric “I think therefore I am.” hooks writes: “The stories I tell about who I am constitute the me of me-as-I-see-it as I tell it. For me, stories infuse writing with an intimacy that often is not there when there is just plain theory.”

The meditations speak of the space between women, where the category “women” is self-identified, not biologically based or even necessarily feminine. In order to escape what Braidotti calls “the phallocentric vision of the subject,” these subjects are not constant but rather made up of many stories that change and shift over time, likened to Braidotti’s notion of the “nomadic subject,” where desire is the catalyst for these multiple identities “in between self and society.”

The narrative voice also occupies several positions with “situated knowledges,” a notion that feminist Donna Haraway explains simply as “views from somewhere.”

Much of the narrative, behind the meditations, develops out of physically being in a certain place over time and would not have been possible without these valuable “lived” observations and experiences. As one of my colleagues, Jennifer Mack, so succinctly described it: “It’s sort of like a deep hanging out,” in reference to her own ethnographic approach to architecture and urban planning research.

Queer public performance artist and social choreographer, Ernesto Pujol, describes the *method of vulnerability* he uses in his site specific performance pieces, which includes submersing his own body in a place; making deep connections with local participants; clearly articulating his intentions through manuscript writing; releasing control and trusting in intuition; experiment and discovery; enacting the piece; and then reflecting over and documenting the entire process from beginning to end. I not only agree with Pujol’s intentions to create a space of discovery, connection and generosity, but also find this to be a very good description of my own working process during this piece. Pujol writes: “The method of power is anxious, exhausting and incomplete. The methodology of vulnerability is much more thorough, in terms of the psychic disarmament I hope for.” It is this *psychic disarmament* that allows for what Pujol calls “educated not-knowing” to occur, where one temporarily suspends judgement, making oneself vulnerable, in order to discover things outside of one’s usual habits and assumptions.

Located in the realm of performativity, this work explores desire in the inhabitation of separatist space, through fictional modes of writing as a critical writing practice, in order to examine contemporary sites of study in an ethically responsible way. In other words, I could have never imagined beforehand that I would need to find my seagull voice (and a drag queen one at that), in order to get at areas of vulnerability that were personally too close. Critical fictions enabled me to work with situations involving people and places that are deeply connected to me, while displacing them ‘just enough,’ so that I could approach them with an element of criticality.

A key element in this experiment was my participation in the underwater nudes, literally submersing my body,
and the resulting photo that was an initial inspiration for the idea and framework of the meditations. The photo is a continuation of a series of underwater nudes called Dancing Nudes, an experimentation around water, light and the female body, by Greek photographer and native of Lesvos Tzeli Hadjidimitriou. This particular photo was taken in Skala Eressos in September 2011, where I participated by being photographed in an underwater cave.

The Crouching Aphrodite in the title of the third meditation, refers to a statue called The Crouching Venus of Vienne by an unknown sculptor, one of many Roman copies of the 3rd century, loosely derived from the Greek sculptor Praxiteles’ works and now located in the Louvre. I stumbled upon this image, while searching online for statues that reminded me of the photograph of myself, which led to the idea of “becoming” the character Aphrodite in the narrative.52

In a conscious feminist approach, by using my own body rather than exploiting someone else’s, I was able to get at the very heart of what it means to be both vulnerable and empowered. It is my way of putting my body in the way. To be photographed nude is a moment of vulnerability and exposure that builds on a great deal of trust between the photographer and the “photographee.” I choose the term “photographee” rather than model, as I feel it implies more agency on the part of the one being photographed, making it a mutual action. To then see my own body, as an object without a head, is an experience filled with both enchantment and discomfort. And finally, to write about it feels like an act of empowerment, as I reclaim the part I played in being photographed, while making it a source of new stories and possibilities for inhabiting lesbian space. The performance is re-enacted again and again, within the contexts of the readers.

On the meditations

In the first meditation, I explore the vulnerability found in feelings of longing and exclusion from a position outside of the temporary separatist space created by The Skala Women’s Rock Group at Zorba the Buddha Café. (Perhaps important to mention: From the 2015 summer season onward, the activities of the group were expanded to include an LGBTQI and friends sunset swim once a week, in order to address issues and concerns raised over the exclusion posed by the designated “women only” identity of the group.) Ahmed writes: “Lesbian desires create spaces, often temporary spaces that come and go with the coming and going of the bodies that inhabit them.”53 While those inside the group may experience a sense of community and belonging, Eshan, the male sannyasin, looks from the outside-in, locating points of conflict and nuancing the concept of desire.

Taunted by Aphrodite, he is torn between feelings of hope and rejection, the struggle with jealousy and desire for what he cannot have, and the Osho practice of polyamory that celebrates sex and emphasizes sharing and enjoying rather than possession.54 Eshan posits the possibility of co-habitation of two different “separatist” spiritual groups with conflicting sexual politics, while questioning society’s relational norms and gender roles. However, it is important to remember that the sexual politics (and practices) within the queer community are diverse. In other words, queer research tends to suggest that lesbian and gay identities follow what would be considered a more conservative model, where monogamy tends to be the rule, while queer identities more regularly claim a freer sexual practice, closer to that of the Osho followers, but these claims are, of course, generalizations.55

In their book The Ethical Slut, Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy talk about being sex-positive in a monogamy-cen-
trist, sex-role-bound culture. They write: “We have all been taught that one way of relating—lifelong monogamous heterosexual marriage—is the only right way. We are told that monogamy is “normal” and “natural”; if our desires do not fit into that constraint, we are morally deficient, psychologically disturbed, and going against nature.” Eshan’s connection to the teachings (and espoused homophobia) of Osho, also briefly mentioned in Easton and Hardy’s book, as well as his vulnerable position in relation to an immortal like Aphrodite, problematize the model of the “traditional couple” and the strong male position. Eshan wants to be here, but remains there.

The second meditation works on two levels simultaneously. In the relationship between Aphrodite and the Greek captain, it deals with the sometimes, shifting boundaries between sex and intimacy in the spaces of friendship and lovers. The two negotiate personal space within a limited area, as well as explore (and exploit) the freedoms found in the naked body, within separatist spaces. The vulnerability of this space, especially when perceived as threatened by an element of patriarchy, provides a chance for response in either the Greek captain’s defensive manner of getting dressed (putting on her armour) or a willful act of persistent vulnerability, as Aphrodite stands atop the boat, naked and facing the threat head-on.

Parallel to this interaction, is the judgy, sassy seagull Archimeaty Glamazonia’s narrative voice, questioning assumed hierarchies between human animals and non-human animals in the spirit of companion species and significant otherness. This voice also creates some necessary distance to the spaces of my own experiences. Seen through the eyes of Archimeaty, the women are hopeless hunters, terrible at mating rituals, and woefully exposed to the elements by their inadequate anatomy. And finally, true to his Campy position, Archimeaty becomes bored with everything natural and serious and opts for a moonlight disco in the stud Niko’s neighboring town.

Meanwhile, this gull “in drag” discusses spatial politics and territorialism through a “colorful” description of the various sections of the beach, as well as the power of language to colonize space, through the witty (mostly) British idioms and the abundance of “drag” terminology. Subcultures, like the drag community, invent their own vocabulary as an act of resistance to the power that the language of dominant society holds, just as the use of idioms and slang have a direct relation to power in both social and cultural terms. As noted by linguistics scholar Dr. Franz Andres Morrissey in his article on idioms, “The distribution of social power regulates who can use such language and who can’t... Considerations of appropriate language regulate their use, culturally, regionally and socially.” While Archimeaty alternates between a more “proper” narrator voice, and a Campy one full of drag lingo and innuendos, she purposefully disturbs the otherwise regular flow of the narrative.

Without the definitions for the slang or drag terminology provided in parentheses, the center or the “typical” academic reader may feel confused or left-out, much like academic writing may make those outside of the academy feel. In other words, it’s a slight shift of the center. As for the misogynous base in much of the drag terminology, as well as the often inappropriate insults that are part of reading, I choose to understand them as coming from a place rooted in Camp performance. That is, as practices considered to be a fundamental part of drag culture, albeit misogynist, and often done with both affection and creativity. In my opinion, the formalized practices or performances, such as reading, create a necessary distance that removes them from a personal level (which could be hurtful), and transforms them into a shared sport and a parodic art form.
In the realm of explicit performance, even the misogyny makes fun of misogyny. In other words, it is an example of a Campy form of flirting with the act of critique.

The third meditation, Aphrodite’s answer to Sappho, is about being here. It is about being comfortable in your own skin, even if it at times feels like “a suit of marble.” Besides being in the present, in all of the different positions we occupy and negotiate at a specific time and geographical location, here encompasses the many other places we exist simultaneously through our own memories, travel in our thoughts or daydreams, even our ancestry – both familial and chosen, as well as in the thoughts of other people who manifest us in some way when we aren’t physically present. Looking inward at the spaces we inhabit alone and the longing for connection with others, through intimacy and trust, this meditation negotiates the territories of our mind and soul, spiritually and existentially.

Aphrodite’s answer to Sappho speaks about the inner struggle we face in negotiating personal boundaries with those we feel closest to, or “…how we understand where I end and you begin, where we meet and how we are separate as individuals.” In Sappho’s poem to Aphrodite, asking her for help in matters of the heart, she writes: “So come to me now, free me from this aching pain, fulfil everything that my heart desires to be fulfilled; you, yes you, will be my ally.” This “calling” is understood in several senses, beyond the direct plea to a lover. It is the calling of the pilgrimage lesbian women make from all over the world to the birthplace of Sappho, who has become synonymous with women’s love for women. It is the calling for some of us within ourselves to occupy the lesbian body. It may also simply be the calling to come and be with someone close to you who asks.

The connection of sexual energy to a spiritual awareness, such as a connection to nature or the sea, allows for a more sensual inhabitation of space, while an undertone of the text has to do with occupying lesbian space, the lesbian body and the possibilities of empowerment through poetry and desire between women. Easton and Hardy write:

“Sexual energy pervades everything all the time; we inhale it into our lungs and exude it from our pores…. we think erotic energy is everywhere – in the deep breath that fills our lungs as we step out into a warm spring morning, in the cold water spilling over the rocks in a brook, in the creativity that drives us to paint pictures and tell stories and make music and write books, in the loving tenderness we feel toward our friends and relatives and children.”

Connected to these themes of empowerment through poetry and desire, Aphrodite cites three male figures; Praxiteles, Echo, and Eros, to conjure the transgressive power of the female gaze. She emphasizes the fact that her existence (in the photograph) does not seek to satisfy the male artist or sculptor, such as Praxiteles, the first Greek sculptor (4th century BC) credited with portraying the nude female body, as previously only male bodies were sculpted without clothing. Nor does it aim to reflect the male ego, as the artist behind the photo is also female.

In Ovid’s tale of Echo and Narcissus, Echo longs to seduce Narcissus, but is only capable of repeating his words. Destroyed by his rejection, she remains doomed to an existence in lonely caves. Although Aphrodite sometimes feels trapped in her cave and “suit of marble,” she states clearly that she is NOT his Echo and seeks freedom through her poetry, art, dreams, desire and friendship. And finally, the reference to Eros, the god of physical love, son of Aphrodite and Ares (god of war), “who ruthlessly shot darts into the heart, causing both joy and pain,” can be compared to Susan Sontag’s likening of a camera to a phal-
lus or of photography to the act of shooting a weapon.\textsuperscript{66}

Sontag writes: “Still, there is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them, by seeking them as they will never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed.”\textsuperscript{67}

Sontag’s connection between cameras and guns brings up the aspect of power between the photographer and photographee, mentioned earlier. Although there is no automatic guarantee in the balance of power, it is important to point out that this specific photograph captures the female body, by the female gaze of a female photographer.

While I agree that photography can be a violating act, especially without consent, I believe it is possible to find a balance and a sense of empowerment, in an atmosphere of trust and in the spaces and company of creative women. The non-prose form of this last meditation focuses on the rituals of poetry between women. As Adrienne Riche writes:

“Poetry is above all a concentration of the power of language, which is the power of our ultimate relationship to everything in the universe. It is as if forces we can lay claim to in no other way, become present to us in sensuous form. The knowledge and use of this magic goes back very far: the rune; the chant; the incantation; the spell; the kenning; sacred words; forbidden words; the naming of the child, the plant, the insect, the ocean, the configuration of stars, the snow, the sensation in the body. The ritual telling of the dream. The physical reality of the human voice; of words gouged or incised in stone or wood, woven in silk or wool, painted on vellum, or traced in sand.”\textsuperscript{68}

Through this architectural storytelling, I raise issues, ideas, and spaces that aren’t usually present in traditional architectural education. By telling new stories, building spaces and bodies with narratives, I want to suggest other ways of approaching architecture that can change the way architects think about space and the way architects think about themselves. Architecture isn’t only about the formal, material and tectonic aspects of our built environment. Nor is it only about the theoretical. It also has to do with bodies, souls, and the interactions, desires, and dramas between them. If we begin by looking at the most vulnerable, passionate or empowering moments in life, what kind of architecture will we make then? And how do we go about making it? There is a beautiful Greek proverb that says “Whoever did not walk in a moonlit night, and in the morning with the dew, did not enjoy the world.” (οιος δεν επερπάτησε τη νύχτα με φεγγάρι, και το πρωί με τη δροσιά, τον κόσμο δεν εχάρη.) Let’s start there.
53.
Village of Skala Eressos, Lesvos, Greece
PHOTO: BEDA RING

54.
Bamboo structure and volcanic cliffs at sunrise,
Skala Eressos, Lesvos, Greece
PHOTO: BEDA RING
Unrequited love involves longing or desire, whether it be openly pronounced or in secret admiration, where such affection is either rejected or simply not returned. Stories of unrequited love are often riddled with missed chances, mixed communication, and a one-sided yearning for connection or belonging. Through a series of chance encounters and (mis)communications during one March afternoon, the first love story textually materializes a factual fiction of desires, in relation to the existing built work of a past (male) reference of iconic architecture, with a few additional exterior features in place.

Aldo Rossi, an architect who vehemently refused to be categorized and who wrote A Scientific Autobiography – a personal factual fiction of his own, figures in the story as the previous owner of the excitable bull terrier ghost in the yard, but more importantly as the co-author of the built framework and threshold of suspense for the narrative as a whole. Meanwhile, the built work – a small row house project in Mozzo, Italy, plays the role of what Rossi might call “the fixed scene of human events,” where small acts of vulnerability in a constant state of anticipation pose critical questions about power and privilege in the quotidian life of one residential block.2

Originally, I began my PhD research with the idea that I would study “desire, community and belonging in women’s bathing spaces,” with a focus on the small village of Skala Eressos on the Greek island of Lesvos. (I envisioned several sunny years of blissful “field work” to my chosen place of study. Hey! You can’t blame me for trying.) At the time, I worried about the project not being architectural enough and remaining in a spatial study of place and social relationships. However, the project developed in another direction, moving not only from south to north, from a mythical Aegean island to an average middle-class residential area in northern Italy, but also toward a hands-on approach to the point of architectural nerdiness. In the renovation of a favorite built work by Aldo Rossi and Attilio Pizzigoni, Case Unifamiliari in Mozzo (1977), remnants of the original research idea remain, visible in the newly renovated bathing area on the first floor and inspired by the Meditations text on Lesvos I wrote early on (also included in this book).

Another place of concern arose from the experimental nature of my research and writing, and my uncertainty in how this would be both received and evaluated. No matter how willing you are to take risks, or confident you may be in your flirtations, there is always some desire for acceptance and acknowledgement. Would there be a mutual response, or would it go unanswered? Reminiscent of the spurning of an unrequited love, Aldo Rossi writes:
“I do not want to go into my failures in this autobiography of my work; or rather I want only to mention and not discuss them. My most beautiful designs for competitions have always regularly been rejected.”³

*Case Unifamiliari* consists of four two-story units, with drive-in garages underneath. It has a traditional vernacular stucco exterior in pale ochre and a cross-gabled verdigris roof, intersecting with the four entrance porticos over the stairs, leading up to the main doors, and covered in the same green aluminum roofing. A slender sunken parking area, covered in stone paving, adjoins the length of the entrance façade, while four private gardens, separated with fencing and shrubbery, line the opposite façade with its gallery and terraces. There is a small strip of grass-covered earth on either end of the gable facades, property to the row houses on the ends. On January 1, 2012, I walked into one of the then vacant row houses at *Case Unifamiliari*, locked myself in and began renovating. (Of course, I had to wait until the neighbor on the end, nearest the main road, opened the gate and let me in, as it’s private property and the metal fence is quite high.)

Part of a PhD project within Critical Studies in Architecture at KTH in Stockholm, this critical fiction begins to “build” a queer-feminist house from the inside out and the outside in, in an act of occupation and renovation. Through close encounters situated around events, rumors and the effects of the interior changes spilling out into the immediate surroundings – in the guise of enchanting sounds, scents and *fablesque* garden features, it chronicles the adventures of Jo, my research colleague from Belgium.

While my other colleague Seh follows the guided tour at the Open House event, wandering *inside* through the rooms of the renovated row house, Jo’s failed attempts and missed chances at connection, communication and belonging, *outside* of this project of reconstruction and imagination, keep him from ever actually setting foot *inside*.⁴ In the engagement of this particular building, the uncertainty of desire, as well as the longing to get in, remain unresolved.

The first storey of this section is a tale of longing and unrequited love.

*Beda Ring*

Researcher

8 September 2016, Stockholm
Stories of anticipation in close encounters of the (un)desirable kind

Intro

Caprice, the neighborhood gossip of the residential area Mozzo, just outside of Bergamo, Italy, stood watching from her garden, across from the 1977 Rossi/Pizzigoni row houses, Case Unifamiliari, as chaos broke out. Zite’s three Cornish Rex cats had escaped from Beda Ring’s; the American-Swedish PhD student, also Zite’s neighbor and cat sitter, who had occupied and illegally renovated the house next door in the name of feminist architectural design research. The creatures ran rampant around the fenced-in parking area, taunting the ghost of the sleeping bull terrier. Caprice had been watching (with binoculars) all along, from her own kitchen window in the building next door.

With all of the visitors shuffling into the renovated row house, most dressed in black from head to toe, she began to worry that they were funeral goers. Had Beda’s elderly neighbor Zite passed? And the funeral on a pagan day like the spring equinox! Caprice made the sign of the cross. What would happen to her favorite delicatessen around the corner, LA ZITELLA, owned by Zite? And where would she and Anna now meet for their espresso? Frustrated that the angle and elevation of her building made it difficult to see exactly what was going on in her neighbors’ sunken parking area, she decided to go out and “sweep” the patio in her yard, which just happened to be at the edge of the adjoining lot, overlooking the entire spectacle.

Caprice could see some of the visitors running about trying to catch the skinny, ugly creatures with big ears, as one shouted to another: “How’s this for an impromptu study of companion species?” While the other answered: “I’m feeling some significant tiredness right now.” Then they both laughed. Apparently, this was humor. Boh? Strange bunch!
Later that day, she would recount this scene (with the usual exaggerations for dramatic effect) to her good friend Anna, named after Anna Magnani – the most celebrated Italian actress of the post-war era, who was known in the neighborhood as Madre Pagani (an unfortunate surname in light of her chosen calling). Over their daily espresso and favorite pastries—sfogliatine and babà, both would purse their lips and shake their heads in mutual disapproval. That is, if nothing had happened to Zite, the owner of the delicatessen! Both Caprice and Anna secretly looked forward to “the soon to be spinster” Beda’s next mishap with anticipation, providing valuable new matter for their scrutiny and entertainment.

The terrier, still loud despite being a ghost, is the former companion of the late architect Aldo Rossi and a familiar and accepted presence to the residents of the Case Unifamiliari, commonly seen sleeping in the bushes along the gable façade of the building. He was awoken a second time by one of Beda’s Belgian colleagues, Jo, who came late to attend the Open House event for the renovation project. Jo’s flight had been delayed, so he was late arriving to the airport in Bergamo, where he missed his meeting with Seh, another PhD colleague, who was supposed to share a taxi with him to Mozzo.

Originally from Tehran, but studying in Umeå, Sweden, she had arrived much earlier and had already disappeared inside the row house. Seh had booked her flight at the mere mention of an architectural “occupation.” This aligned with her research ideas to propose a series of “interruptions” in order to resist architectural complicity and to materialize political struggle.

Similar to Beda, Jo’s research also dealt with pedagogical questions, where he wrote about proposals that he designed and built, on his own and together with students, not to mention that one of his main references was also Aldo Rossi. The chance to see the inside of a project by Rossi clinched his positive RSVP to the event, even though Bergamo required international travel, which made Jo feel moody and unsettled. Now, in addition to the delayed flight, the main gate was locked with a “No Trespassing” sign!

Jo peered through the green metal gate, looking for signs of anyone who might be able to let him in. He noticed a neighbor in the house next to Beda’s, peeping from behind the curtain of an upstairs window. Jo waved and motioned to the locked gate. She seemed to be looking straight at him but didn’t acknowledge him. The curtain shut.

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see a person approaching along the sidewalk. Ahead of this person, was an eager medium-sized canine with a curly greyish-brown coat, a white patch just below the chin, and dark tips on the ears. With Jo’s slight fear of dogs, this trip was quickly turning into a nightmare. As they came closer, he could hear a woman’s voice: “Sigá agóri mou. Pio sigá! Írema agóri mou!” as the dog pulled her ahead to where Jo was standing. Weary of the shaggy beast but desperate, Jo extended his hand to the wet little nose as he explained his predicament, and asked the woman for some assistance. She replied (in a thick accent):

“Ach, my friend, it sounds like you have the evil eye. You know? I’m very sorry, but unfortunately I am only visiting this place, so I do not know any person who lives here. How is your condition? You could try to climb the fence, no? It’s not too high, and there is this, how do you say, chi? Uh, Eξε! in the structure, where you can put your foot. I think, probably it is possible. Ελα, try! Bravo!”

Jo had not counted on having to climb over any fences and had never done anything of this sort, but since he had already traveled all this way, he decided to give it a try. He could see that the ground in the narrow space between the end of the building and the gate was much softer than the stone parking area and almost a meter higher, which meant less of a drop. He found a spot and started climbing, however, the thick shrubbery in this area blocked his view, so he couldn’t see what was on the other side. Jo plopped down and stumbled right over the sleeping terrier. Aaaah! Startled, Jo let out a scream. The terrier was harmless, but barked loud enough to send Jo scrambling through the metal door to the parking area.

With his heart beating in his throat, he walked back to Beda’s row house, second from the end, and stomped up the terracotta steps of the portico. Ugh! Jo knew that his friend Beda’s intentions were acts of reparation, healing and connection, ultimately grounded in a pedagogical desire to change the way architects think about space and the way architects think about themselves, but was an “occupation” really necessary? Jo, a trans man (born biologically female), was androgynous in appearance, but passed as a man and preferred the pronoun he. Perplexed upon seeing the “Women Only” sign posted in the front entrance, Jo begins to write a text message to his friend Seh, asking for instruction.

![Message from Seh](attachment:seh_message.png)
Mixed signals

Jo tries calling Seh and then Beda, who is busy hosting the event, but no answer from either of them. (His friend Beda was one of those who always had the signal on her phone turned off.) The Open House guided tour didn’t start for another half an hour or so, and although a bit cool for a spring equinox, it was a pretty decent March afternoon. Jo decided to wait outside and take a closer look at the exterior of the building, now that he was inside the property. Someone else would surely show up late for the event, and he could follow them in.

As Jo walked the length of the row houses and rounded the corner of the end of the building a second time, careful not to disturb the sleeping dog, he noticed that these now thirty year-old row houses had just been painted and were well maintained, with almost no signs of wear and tear. However, on the creamy new surface, someone had graffitied a vulgar message: Fottiti Berlusconi!

Jo thought to himself, probably someone else who was frustrated with the bolted gate at the entrance!

He was surprised to see that the neighbor on the end had removed part of the exterior wall, from the level of the first floor slab down to the ground, and had replaced it with a glass wall. Also, one of the other neighbors had replaced the original clear fenestration of the portico with translucent glass. Otherwise, the original concept seemed to be intact, contrary to what Beda had mentioned about the interiors.

Jo, remembering the camera in his bag, decided to take a photograph of the entire façade. How often was he face to face with the work of one of his architectural idols? He moved back, toward the zigzagged concrete retaining wall opposite the entrance façade. The yard was so narrow near the entrance that it was impossible to find a place where half of the building wasn’t cut off in the frame. Since it widened perspectively at the other end, maybe he could manage a shot from there?

Jo walked along the edge of the wall looking in his viewfinder, making sure not to set off any car alarms in the process. As he neared the next to the last angle in the wall, close to the palm trees (a signature Rossi element), he heard a child’s voice but couldn’t tell where it was coming from. There was no sign of anyone.

“The fact is... the façade is symmetrical and quite uniform, in contrast to the irregular angles of the site.”

Jo squinted and looked everywhere, but he couldn’t see the source of this voice that he was hearing. It sounded as if it was right next to him!

“The fact is... there are three new built features located on the grounds and nearby surroundings that act as communal interventions and play an important part in the daily lives of the residents.”
The voice sounded muffled, almost as if someone was speaking into a container.

“The fact is... new constructions can also be camouflaged into an existing environment to bypass aesthetic codes of the tenant association, leaving them almost undetectable for inattentive onlookers.”

Jo began to worry that all of those long research hours and his slight sleep deprivation were finally beginning to catch up with him. Again the voice!

“The fact is... all of the features are connected in some way to the spring equinox and winter solstice, along with rituals open to all, to build community and to mark the changing of the seasons.”

At this point, Jo, already weary after the TWO dog encounters, fence climbing, exclusion from the Open House event, and left with no word from his friends inside, began to wonder why he had come in the first place? He ignored the voice and backed up as far as he could, in an attempt to get the photo he wanted, as a memento of his visit.

Just as he was about to press the shutter release on his camera, a wooden panel flung open out of nowhere, hitting Jo in the head and knocking him out. He fell to the ground. A little Italian nun wearing a full habit, perhaps in her early 80’s, came running over from the row house on the end, farthest from the entrance. She offered Jo some help, while startling him half to death with her sudden appearance and loud exclamations, as he slowly regained consciousness.

MADRE PAGANI: Si è fatto male?!! Tutto OKAAY?!!! OKAAY???!!

Quickly on his feet again but unsteady, Jo shook off the surprise of the open panel in the cabinet (that he hadn’t even noticed) hanging on the retaining wall behind him, and focused on the concerned neighbor. A slightly younger, fashionable woman wearing an elaborate hat accompanied Madre Pagani. This woman offered Jo a sweet from a plain cardboard box, smiled, patted him on the cheek and returned inside.

Now that Jo seemed fine, Madre Pagani began speaking in a very animated manner, shoulders slightly hunched forward with “the tips of [each] hand brought sharply together to form an upward-pointing cone... shaken more or less violently up and down.” She took out a small paper pouch with heirloom tomato seeds from a pocket in her robes and placed it into one of the drawers inside the wooden cabinet. They had been passed down in her family for generations and were now at risk, thanks to pending EU legislation and multinational agricultural companies like Monsanto. Jo noticed that a distraught look had come over the face of his “holy rescuer.”

She realized that Jo didn’t speak any Italian... so she tried instead.

MP: Eh, scusa! Da tomaaytos, aava mia faaamilee. “Eh, aye, aye reescape dem! Capisci?!

To which Jo simply nodded and smiled.

MP: Eh! Non capisci niente!

Jo understood from their choppy, yet engaging conversation that Madre Pagani had been paying a visit to Beda’s neighbor in the row house on the end, and that she knew of his friend who was “occupying” the row house next door. Before Beda, there had been a family from the south with two small children, but they had outgrown the space at the arrival of the third child. Even though the two oldest boys could share the second upstairs bedroom for a while longer, there would soon be no room for “La Nonna” (the grandmother) from Napoli, who visited regularly. They built a new partition wall downstairs, making a small extra room to the left of the entry hall, but as Nonna was getting older, her bad knees made it difficult for her to climb the narrow, steep stairway to the upstairs bathroom each time.

Madre Pagani had heard that Beda left part of that wall standing after the recent renovations, to form a space where guests could engage in illicit and pornographic acts together. Jo laughed, because he realized that Madre Pagani’s “sources” must have misunderstood, but he didn’t correct her. He was familiar with the floor plan of the first level and thought that she must be talking about the changing area for the tiny indoor pool that was partially sunken into the basement level. This was a dry space, modeled after simple Swedish saunas, where one could leave clothing and valuables without worrying about them getting wet and/or enjoy a “fika” together after a relaxing bath. In Swedish, “fika” means to have a coffee and bun with friends, but in Italian, it meant something entirely different!

There seemed to be plenty of rumors in circulation, with stories of everything from pagan magic, to social upheaval, to “deviant” sexual practices. Apparently, from what Jo could gather, “neighbors” (although there seemed to be only one recurring name – Caprice) speculated as to what exactly went on inside the “occupied” row house and why it was even necessary to undertake such extensive renovations in the first place? A well-known and highly regarded Italian architect, together with a younger local architect, had given these living spaces a certain order. Who was this ragazza Americano to come in and change it? And by force nonetheless!

Of course, it was a different matter when a nice Italian family needed an extra room for the Neapolitan mother-in-law. Although many of the neighbors had been invited in for an espresso, Madre Pagani had yet to see the interior with her own eyes. She visited Beda’s neighbor sometimes, hoping to get a glimpse, but mostly relied on...
the reports she received from her friend Caprice, who kept a close watch from the building next door. She had heard from a friend of a friend of Caprice’s niece, who was also the neighbor on the other side of Beda’s, that the entire first floor was like an adult playground for artists, poets, half-naked hippies and their pets. It had the sense of a bathhouse - library - theater, with a little bakery on the side. This made Jo remember a conversation he had had with Beda about the “Three Bs.”

BEDA RING: Do you know what the Three Bs of academia are Jo? That’s how I planned the renovation of the rooms on the first level of the row house. What are the three things you need to survive?

JO: Hm, I don’t know. What are they?

BR: C’mon, take a guess.

J: Uh, let me see. BRAINS?

BR: Oh, definitely not! Try again.

J: Okay, uhhhh, an impressive BIO?

BR: Nope, overrated and they all sound the same.

J: I don’t know, uhm, BALLS?

BR: Really Jo?

J: Well! I told you I didn’t know, and you always go on about the patriarchy, blah, blah, blah, so I thought...

BR: Bathing, Bakery, and Books, of course! If you have those three things, the rest takes care of itself, believe me.

Maybe that’s why she put up that sign in the entrance today? To prove a point about the stupid comment I made. Balls? Really? What was I thinking?

Madre Pagani grabbed Jo’s attention again, when she saw him drifting away in his own thoughts. She knew for a fact that the entry hall was paved with strange marble tiles that were magic, most likely possessed! This friend of a friend of Caprice’s niece had passed from the bathing area over the entry hall with wet feet, in order to grab a coffee and bun from the bakery, and words of warning had magically appeared in the squares of white marble: PRI GE PRI GE.

There would be a “price” to pay for the scandalous renovations and activities that were going on there!

Jo thought of how much Beda complained about “the Italians” who never remembered to take off their shoes in the entry, even though she had made a place for them and provided guest slippers. Again, like the “fika,” this was one of those culturally Swedish practices that Beda had transplanted to the Italian row house. It was funny how she couldn’t wait to escape the “suffocating atmosphere” of her Swedish home, but as soon as she was someplace else, several of the Swedish traditions followed.

There were also reports that the second floor was haunted, but no one had ever dared to go upstairs to confirm this suspicion. (Madre Pagani quickly made the sign of the cross.)
Jo saw the irony in Madre Pagani speaking about his friend Beda's lack of “family values,” when she herself had chosen an unmarried life in a convent full of women, but he became confused about what any of this had to do with pasta? And weren’t there plenty of cats at convents too?

MP:  


J:  

   Uhhhhm... Jo felt warm and flushed and began looking for his escape.

MP:  

   Anda eeeerrryy tinga, Greece! Greece! Greece! She izza craaazy for Greece! Perché?

At an opportune silence, Jo politely thanks Madre Pagani for her concern and begins fumbling with his camera to check how badly it had been damaged during his fall. The body of the camera is chipped, the lens is crooked, and when he turns it on nothing happens. He would probably have to replace the whole thing. Could this day get any worse?

Once Madre Pagani had exited the main gate and was out of sight, Jo went to get a closer look at the cabinet that had caused his “accident,” and where Madre Pagani had placed the small pouch of seeds. It was a long, slender wooden box, symmetrically divided and painted in the same green color as the roof, the gate, and all of the exterior details of the façade, such as doors, shutters and drainpipes. The box was hanging from metal cantilever brackets, also painted green, attached with flat metal hooks on the back, over the edge of the retaining wall. At first glance, it looked like some kind of utility box that was part of the original scheme, but now Jo realized that this was something Beda had added, and she had disguised it to blend in with the other details.

Jo, talking out loud to himself: “Yeah, she managed to remember to make it high enough off of the ground, so that the cars could still park here, but she forgot to figure in the extension of the flap in relation to someone’s head!” Besides all of the small drawers in varying sizes, sort of like an apothecary cabinet, there was one larger compartment where this hinged flap folded back in on itself, to form the front side and a lid. Now he understood! This must be where the voice was coming from earlier! Had the child whose voice he had heard been hiding inside, knowing all along that Jo couldn’t see her, laughing at his surprise and confusion?

There was even a peephole built into the front piece. She must have gotten scared and run off when she realized that her joke nearly gave me a concussion. Again, out loud to himself: “It figures Beda would encourage this kind of behavior!” There were, no doubt, all kinds of child safety regulations being broken. Upon closer inspection, Jo finds an “official” looking sign printed on one of the short sides of the cabinet. Unfortunately, it is written in Italian, however, at the bottom is a small patch for scanning with a smart phone and a note in English: *For information in other languages please scan the QR code and select your language of choice.*

Jo scans the QR code and selects English: *Il Gabinetto dei Segreti (The Cabinet of Secrets)* has seventy-seven compartments where residents and guests of *Case Unifamiliali* are welcome to place old family recipes, photographs and letters from unrequited loves and lost friendships, mementos and talismans of unspoken desire or regret, heirloom seeds soon to be banned by the EU, or any small objects of obsession, addiction or secret sentimental value. The drawers remain anonymous, but by placing the secrets together in a collection, the burden of pride, shame and sadness is shared, as is the knowledge (or realization) that the cabinet is almost always full. Every year, on the spring equinox, the compartments are emptied by those who wish to take part in the ritual of letting go.  

Madre Pagani had mentioned that there were, of course, the occasional incidents of theft and vandalism, but for the most part, these new places of shared ritual for the residents were respected. Jo noticed that one of the old photographs had slid out of its drawer, most likely when the flap had flung open. As he picked it up and blew away the dust, Jo saw a sepia-tinted photo printed off-center, with a small stain in the bottom left-hand corner. Two young women with brunette hair in identical polka dot dresses, stood outside in a garden among flowers, hedges and blossoming trees. One had her long hair rolled into two tightly swirled braids, one on each side of her head, and was looking at the flower she held in her right hand and smiling. Or was she blushing? The other, perhaps the one who had given her the flower, had medium length hair, casually pulled back in a hairband and was standing rather squarely, with her handbag in one
hand and also looking down at the flower.

There was an air of anticipation in the photo. The one receiving this gesture of kindness, or of love, looked a bit tense or uncomfortable, seemingly unaccustomed to accepting such a display of affection, much less to having it photographed. Both women avoided meeting each other’s gaze. On the back was residue of dried glue and a slight tear from being pulled from a photo album, with more recent writing in neatly lettered black ink ‘ATHENS STREET MARKET, 2011’.29

Jo wondered who took this photo and under what circumstances, and what did it mean to the current owner and person who had placed it in the drawer? Then he stuck it back into one of the empty slots. The photograph reminded him that he had never managed to take a photo of the façade, so he takes out his iPhone. He sees Beda’s neighbor, the one who was peeking out of the upstairs window earlier, right in the middle of his screen, as she comes out of her garage and walks in his direction. He waits until she is out of the frame, but doesn’t have a chance to take the photo, before this woman walks straight up to him and begins yelling.

Jo tries to explain that he is only there for the Open House, but she tells him that the entire project is illegal and that he is trespassing on private property. She saw him climb over the fence earlier and is prepared to call the authorities, if he doesn’t leave now. With no choice but to walk toward the main gate, Jo looks back to see if she’s still watching. The angry neighbor stands a few meters in front of her row house with her hands on her hips and glares back. Jo walks out through the door in the gate, where Madre Pagani left earlier. He sees Beda’s neighbor, the one who was peeking out of the upstairs window earlier, right in the middle of his screen, as she comes out of her garage and walks in his direction. He waits until she is out of the frame, but doesn’t have a chance to take the photo, before this woman walks straight up to him and begins yelling.

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...style’s authority dismantles authority, reveals it as a load of macho balls.

Style is never not content.

The last thing literary style is is a matter of indifference; that’s why it’s so powerful a stirrer of love and passion, anger and argument.

You might be able to spray fashion on like a perfume. But style is integral. It’s what things really smell like.

Style will also discomfit us, since art’s about both, being held and being flung open.30

Again, with the “balls”? Had Beda told everyone? Jo climbs up a second time and the woman, Ali, is still staring at him and smiling. Jo smiles back, feeling like someone has really seen him, really gotten him, and besides being slightly smitten with this stranger, he feels an enormous desire to go off to a nearby café and work a bit on his own writing. How could she have known that his research, a type of “research-by-design with words,” was completely dependent on these types of arguments? In addition to doing or proposing, rather than writing about a certain area or phenomenon, there was, in fact, a political dimension to writing critical fictions that borrowed from different styles of writing, to question traditional forms of academic writing and to make the work more accessible!

Ali also understood the importance of style as a means to think and act critically, in order to enhance the content. The part about literary style stirring passion and being flung open by art, in the way that only fiction can project or imagine otherwise, reminded him of one of his favorite quotes by black feminist bell hooks: “Imagination is one of the most powerful modes of resistance that oppressed and exploited folks can and do use... Without the ability to imagine, people remain stuck, unable to move into a place of power and possibility.”31

Jo was caught up in his own thoughts, but the odd tinkling sounds and splash-
ing echoes, along with the distinct smell of freshly baked sweet muffins... Was it cherry? ...coming from inside the house, drew him back to the present moment. Jo looks up a third time, but Ali has disappeared inside, replaced by the familiar stern looking neighbor next door. She was placing a birdcage with a loud, squawking cockatoo in the gallery, on the other side of the wall where Ali had just been standing. Caught climbing on the gate, shortly after he had been thrown off the property, Jo felt the look of judgement and turned away.

Feeling a bit empty and a little lovesick, Jo decides to wander over toward a fountain he notices on the leftover piece of land, just across the main road (Via Giuseppe Verdi) that runs parallel to the entrance gate. As he approaches, he sees a stunning female nude statue with an acid green patina standing, slightly leaning to the side with her hand to one ear, as water lightly trickles down from the mouth of the fish she holds with the other hand above her head. More of a pond than a fountain, it seems to be a gathering place for local seagulls and other small birds. There is a small, raised plinth just in front of the leaning statue.

Upon arrival at the fountain, Jo meets a child throwing breadcrumbs to the small fish in the murky water. This is her own ritual, practiced every day after lunch, as she takes advantage of the traditional Italian 2-hour lunch breaks at home. The nearby park has a larger pond, but with signs outlawing the “feeding of wild life,” with anything other than purchased food bags on site at local vendors. And besides, a gang of local kids, bullies who claim the pond as their turf, had made it painfully clear that they don’t take kindly to children who aren’t like them, children like 10 year-old Brooke Bayoude.

She was the daughter of Terence and Bernice, young academic parents from Yorkshire, teaching and working temporarily on a research fellowship at the University of Bergamo. They had rented a place closer to the center of Mozzo, near Brooke’s school and the community library, as the prices in Bergamo were well beyond the limits of an academic salary. Brooke spent much of her time alone, writing facts in her Moleskin notebook marked History.32 That is, when she wasn’t striking up conversations with strangers who also looked like they didn’t belong.

Jo recognized the voice! He felt a tinge of pain in the bump on his head. BB: The fact is... unlike confessions of another sort, this ritual offers no promise of resolution or forgiveness. However, some of the residents have admitted to me that they regularly confide in
the green goddess and find solace in knowing that there is always a willing ear nearby.

BB: The fact is... imitating the act of confession, in a country where Catholicism is still such a strong influence, God has been replaced by a goddess in this contemporary communal ritual.

J: Jo wondered why she began almost every sentence with "The fact is"? What's wrong with this kid? Were all kids this annoying?

BB: The fact is... the pond in the park is an example of the effects of the neoliberal capitalist society we live in.

J: I'm sorry, what did you just say? How old are you anyway?

BB: I'm 10, and I was saying that the pond in the park, with its standardized food bags for sale, is indicative of the political shift towards "progressive" conservatism we are currently experiencing across Europe. What do you do?

J: Uhhhhh, I work at a university... as a researcher and teacher in architecture.

BB: Ah, ok! So let me explain it like this: The pond is like an educational institution, and the food bags are like the imposed move toward standardization and fees, leading to a system where education just feeds the market and has lost its intentions of higher learning, critical thinking and knowledge production. You could call it a 'Cognitive Capitalist Take-Over.' Or, in pond terms, giving the fish and ducks the same commercially processed artificial diet, day in and day out, Digestive Capitalist Take-Over.33

J: Uh, yeah well, I guess you’re right? Now that you mention it, I have noticed a similar tendency in architecture schools. You know, where institutions seem to be more concerned with churning out 'employable' architects and keeping their customers, I mean students, happy. Rather than question the role of the architect or the ethical responsibility of the discipline, now it’s all about 'eye candy' facades in the press and entrepreneurship. Criticality doesn’t really sell, until of course, it gets co-opted and used to promote what it was critical of in the first place.

BB: Do you do anything architectural that directly affects people in a political or social way?

J: Well, naah, not exactly, but...
Brooke was quiet for a moment. She wrinkled her forehead in a look of concentration and squinted her eyes.

**BB:** Is this the same INSTITUTION that we talked about earlier? You know, the one in the Cognitive Capitalist Take-Over?

**Jo** began to say something, paused, sighed: Yeah.

**BB:** Well, maybe what you’re doing will change academia then?

**J:** Uhm, I hope so, but I’m not certain that it will do that either.

**BB:** Then why are you doing it?

Jo began to feel frustrated, overwhelmed, and defeated, not to mention a great disdain over the fact that a 10 year-old girl’s questions had reduced him to this state of self doubt. How the hell was he going to survive the questions from the opponent at his upcoming seminar? He knew that he should have given up earlier and gone to that café to work! Brooke realized that she had made Jo feel bad. It happened sometimes when she was “too clever for her own good,” so she began in a consoling tone.

The fact that all of the work was the result of a joint effort. And a year after Aldo Rossi? Only Venturi was recognized, despite the fact that all of the work was the result of a joint effort. And a year later, the petition was rejected. That’s even scarier!187

**J:** Yeah, I’ve heard something about that before. But I’m sure things have changed since then. The jury can’t possibly be made up of all white guys today. I mean, that would be ridiculous!188 Uh, anyway, I didn’t go into the row house, because I saw the ‘Women Only’ sign posted in the entrance.

Brooke was surprised. She looked Jo up and down, and landed with a determined stare at Jo’s baby-smooth jaw and high cheekbones, but then just shrugged and continued.

**BB:** Oh, that! The fact is... gender is just a social, cultural construction anyway. One time, I even got to wear a mustache. I was a dragon king!189 There’s all kinds of costumes in the gallery. Besides, the sign is just for the bathing area, not the entire house. And the fact is... Beda just puts it out there sometimes for research experiments, to mess with people and see how they react, so she has something to write about.40

**J:** Really? So, you think I can go in?

**BB:** Yeah, sure. Beda makes fun of serious things, says that sometimes humor is the best weapon. I guess it’s kinda like when she sneaks out from her own “occupation” to eat pizza with my parents? Doesn’t seem so serious to me!

During this intense conversation with the precocious child, Jo has completely lost track of time and missed the beginning of the Open House.

**J:** I have to run. It’s already started!

**BB:** But don’t you want to hear about the spring ritual at the fountain? The fact is...

**J:** Sorry, maybe another time!

**BB:** Okay. The fact is... I have to go back to school now anyway.

Jo runs across the street to the front entrance gate again, but no signs of anyone entering or leaving. This time he notices the “beware of dog” sign, right next to the “no trespass-
A little late for that! As he scouts out a good place to hop the fence toward the gallery side of the building, Jo realizes that he’ll land in another neighbor’s private yard. Hopefully, this one will be more understanding than Beda’s angry neighbor. He climbs the gate again and uses the huge magnolia tree in the first yard to block her view. Halfway over, the cockatoo on the angry neighbor’s gallery begins squawking like the loudest living burglar alarm Jo has ever heard. He hurries over, before that woman comes out to see why the bird is making so much noise. Jo heads straight for the door at the end of the building into the parking area, tiptoeing past the sleeping bull terrier.

Jo hides in the shadow from the stairs of the first entrance portico, to check if he can see anyone looking out of the windows in the next row house. The coast is clear, so he run-walks over to Beda’s house and up the terracotta steps again. Jo tries the door – locked, and no one answers the doorbell. The entrance portico is narrow, the door is solid, and there are no windows where he can peek in. Beda has placed an intricate patterned rubber doormat outside and filled the steps with plants and herbs that give off an intoxicating scent. He hears voices outside, coming from the other side of the building. The guided tour must be in the garden right now. Jo heads back around to the gallery side of the houses in disappointment, wondering how he will get their attention.

**Tall Tales**

As Jo rounds the corner of the last row house and up the five stone steps to the metal door, leading into the yard along the gable façade, he walks around the shrubbery to find a group of men milling about in an elaborate campsite. Where did they come from? It was as if they had appeared right out of thin air. Jo caught the attention of a couple of them, as they came up to greet him. A gentleman named Max, with a German accent, and an eccentric fellow named Dante shook hands and patted Jo on the back with a “Welcome my boy!” as they invited him in to join them for a late afternoon aperitivo.41

There was something different about them, but Jo couldn’t put his finger on it. Max explained that they had pitched camp in the place usually intended for the winter solstice ritual, which was a garden feature of a more temporary nature and wasn’t being used for the spring activities. They were using stools as both seats and tables to hold their espresso cups and grappa glasses. These were otherwise stored neatly in two stacks, just inside the corner of the lower terrace on the end. This neighbor was a young, friendly guy who had agreed to allow the “fuoco” to take place in the extended part of his garden. Jo understood that this was the same neighbor who had replaced a small part of the entrance façade with a glass wall and, according to these gentlemen, had turned his garage into a ping-pong room. Jo thought to himself: So, this is part of the third communal garden feature that Beda is responsible for.

During the winter solstice ritual, the stools were placed in a semi-circle formation in front of the gable, with the arc tangent to the façade and the opening toward the moon. Likewise, the mobile fire pit that they were now using for cooking food and for warmth, was lit at nine o’clock sharp and placed within the semi-circle, causing shadows
of the sitting group to be cast on the wall of the façade behind them. Both men agreed that Il Fuoco Dalla Luna (The Fire By The Moon) suited them, since it was a place for story-telling, debate, and call to political action, and was known to conjure up quite lively gatherings among the residents (with a little help from homemade grappa supplies).

Dante, the more poetic of the two, explained that the fire encourages heated discussions, while the moon silently guides toward creative, respectful arguments, steering them away from false consensus or blame. However, Max and Dante found Beda’s instructions for the event too limiting, as she was adamant that the evening always began with a round, allowing everyone to state one pressing matter they wish to challenge, resist, or improve during the coming year. They weren’t used to waiting for a turn to speak and didn’t see any harm in just letting those who had something important to say speak up.

And then there was the ritual itself! Each person writes down their one pressing matter of concern on a piece of paper, dips it into a jar of honey and then throws it into the fire. This reminded them more of witchcraft than ritual. It was a bit too “feminine” for their taste. Jo understood that his friend Beda had argued with Max on this issue, using a quote from Isabelle Stengers, a female physicist, which was Max’s own area of expertise, as Dante teased: “putting out of equilibrium” eh Max!

Jo also knew of the text he was referring to. Beda had talked about “Stengers’ witches” and explained that it was a similar idea to what Sara Ahmed calls disorientation, or in physics, putting “out of equilibrium.” It was the idea that rituals, such as those of neo-pagan activist witches, were “modes of gathering” that managed to disrupt or shift our habitual mode of existence as “I” and instead temporarily form a more communal existence, in order to achieve something transformative, which she names magic. Max ignored Dante and explained that after all of the hocus pocus, the evening followed a more casual form, as the semi-circle dispersed into varying constellations scattered over the garden, with one or several discussions carried out by fireside.

Seated around a makeshift table, where Jo could see one of the paper airplanes out of the corner of his eye, were Herman, William and Anton. They unfolded the paper and took turns scribbling what looked like “edits” in red on the message inside, or in physics, putting “out of equilibrium.” It was the idea that rituals, as those of neo-pagan activist witches, were “modes of gathering” that managed to disrupt or shift our habitual mode of existence as “I” and instead temporarily form a more communal existence, in order to achieve something transformative, which she names magic. Max ignored Dante and explained that after all of the hocus pocus, the evening followed a more casual form, as the semi-circle dispersed into varying constellations scattered over the garden, with one or several discussions carried out by fireside.

Seated around a makeshift table, where Jo could see one of the paper airplanes out of the corner of his eye, were Herman, William and Anton. They unfolded the paper and took turns scribbling what looked like “edits” in red on the message inside, as they chuckled and toasted each other with shots of grappa. Jo thought for a moment about how moved he was by his own airborne message, just an hour or two ago, but surely it was all in good fun. He decided not to say anything and risk being misunderstood as contrary or oppositional. It felt nice to be welcomed into a group, after the morning he had had.

The Italians, Luchino, Michelangelo and Federico sat off to the side, smoking, fiddling with a movie camera and scratching the belly of the bull terrier. Jo notices one of them look up and signal to someone in the gallery of Beda’s house, above where Ali was standing earlier. He follows his gaze, only to see the curtains of the second floor window quickly shut and a shadowy figure move away from the panes of glass, as the early evening light begins to disappear. Jo knows that the Open House takes place on the entrance level only, and he wonders whom the Italians might know inside and why they are milling around upstairs? Maybe the second floor was really haunted?

The loud, jovial group explains that they previously resided in the second row house from the end, before they were temporarily evicted by that woman. Jo knew that they were talking about Beda, but he didn’t think it was necessary to tell them that that woman was his friend. What did it matter anyway? As part of the renovations, Beda had to make room for all of those “intellectual-looking,” women and various characters Jo had seen on the gallery space earlier, her inspirations and references, like Ali. Consequently, all of Aldo Rossi’s inspirational sources, i.e. these gentlemen, were kindly asked to vacate the premises.

Despite their recent displacement, Jo found them surprisingly at ease, hardly bothered, since all of the times before they had ALWAYS managed to reinstall themselves in their rightful place again. Jo thought of how Beda always went on and on about the relentless, never-ending battle against male dominated power structures and anti-feminist values, and the security of established canons, which (uncritically) deem certain works of certain authors as “master works” or “classics.” Still, he didn’t think it was necessary to divulge his own personal position on this issue. Why cause trouble?

Jo asked whether there wasn’t a way to expand the gallery to accommodate everyone, but the group quickly discounted his idea, claiming that it was an awful lot of unnecessary effort, when it was just a matter of time before proper order was restored. They would just enjoy themselves during the wait. Besides, they were more comfortable with the way things were, the way they were originally intended.

The group mentioned their friend Aldo, the architect, who had designed the row houses, with their help and inspiration, of course. Jo added: “Along with his collaborator, Atilio Pizzigoni. Right?” They looked confused for a moment, but ignored him. Herman took credit for the overall vernacular “look” of the house, with its pitched roof, repetitive forms and local Bergamo color scheme (with the exception of the green roof), as it was his work that taught Aldo about the relation between observation and memory.

In his autobiography, Rossi cites Charles Olson’s account of Herman Melville’s life and work in his book Call me Ishmael, as an important reference for him in understanding the relation between observation and memory. He writes: “Even the search for the unforeseen is united or reunited with some form of the real.” Rossi asks what “the real” signifies in architecture and goes on to explain the effect of his own personal memories and impressions on his architectural work, showing how the tangible and intangible are inextricably bound. This building was filled with Aldo’s memories from the typologies of Northern Italian industrial landscapes, as well as that green verdigris color on the roof that came directly from a love affair with a girl named Rossana at The Hotel Sirena, where the intoxicating contrast of color, between the rose of her name and the acid green of the hotel façade still held its place firmly in his heart.

Anton’s contribution, on the other hand, lay within the details. Rossi writes: “Chekhov’s interiors also more closely resemble those of villas than country houses, and
they are always extremely sensitive to the seasons. The architecture remains in the small details, as if forever awaiting the sound of the shooting of the "gull," the light on the stair, the boat which crosses the lake as in a glass dome. For example, upon entering into the rather small, cubic space of the entry hall, with its checkered floor and austere white walls, one is immediately confronted with the narrow floor to ceiling opening containing the simple, solid stairway leading up to the second floor. On either side are symmetrical doors, leading to two equal spaces to the left and right of the stair.

(While Anton continues to explain, Federico – an avid doodler who had now joined the group, grabbed the paper the others were scribbling on earlier and began to sketch the floor plan for Jo on the back.) Anton suggested that the dramatic effect lie in the choice imposed by the symmetry, along with the element of concealment and compression in the narrow stairway, providing a sense of “waiting” in the architecture itself. Now that those feminists led by that woman had taken over, this subdued masterly balance was being displaced with decoration, manifestos and their “ethics.” There was now a fake pink Murano glass chandelier and red velvet curtains hanging in the hall, for heaven’s sake! The place had become exaggerated, campy and tasteless.

Jo was confused, because she remembered Beda describing a very different reading of Aldo Rossi’s discussion of a villa project, specifically a corridor, from his writing in A Scientific Autobiography. She was so excited when she read this that she had called Jo to read him the quote aloud:

“The corridor was a strip of space that seemed surrounded and gripped by private acts, unforeseeable occasions, love affairs, repentances. And especially by images which do not leave their imprint on film but which accumulate in things. For this reason, the interior is important: one must always imagine the effect produced by a person who leaves a room unexpectedly. One asks oneself whether there are adjoining rooms and similar questions, which ultimately mingle with considerations about protection against dampness, water levels, roofs, and finally, the soundness of the construction.”

Beda said that Rossi suggested we begin at the heart of events that occur on the interior – conflicts, love affairs, and move towards thoughts about construction and detail. She even admitted to something she had overlooked (or ignored) in the past, precisely because of the norm for what architecture should be and how it should be made. Beda said that as she re-read Rossi’s thoughts behind his architectural decisions, she realized that she had misinterpreted his use of the theater as a model for his architecture.

She had assumed that he designed spaces as if they were neutral stages, to act as the background for the events of life (similar to what Anton described), but he actually began with the events themselves! He said that without an event, there is no architecture, not the other way around! Jo happened to have his copy of A Scientific Autobiography with him (in case he had a chance to work on the plane), so he looked up another quote he had marked during his conversation with Beda. Jo read aloud:

“The theater is very similar to architecture because both involve an event- its beginning, development, and conclusion. Without an event, there is no theater and no architecture. I refer, for example, to the procession in which Hamlet’s body is carried away, or to Uncle Van-ya’s solitude, or to any two people who are talking in some house with hatred or with love, and of course to the grave. Are these events, forms of functionalism, of necessity? I certainly do not think so; if the event is a good one, the scene will also be good, or it should be so.”

At the mention of Hamlet, William chimed in to the conversation, completely disregarding Jo’s intentions and using it as an excuse to talk about himself. William claimed that he was obviously responsible for the theatricality of the spaces. He spoke of the drama of uncertainty found in the priority of spatiality over function. He said that in its simplicity, the use of space in the row house is unreconciled, in a state of “To be or not to be?” to allow for what his friend Aldo called the “unforeseeable” in life, and to avoid what Aldo often referred to as “…the whole moralistic and petit-bourgeois aspect of modern architecture.”

William cleared his throat and began reciting in a theatrical voice:

“…Architecture becomes the vehicle for an event we desire, whether or not it actually occurs… the dimensions of a table or a house are very important- not, as the functionalists thought, because they carry out a determined function, but because they permit other functions. Finally, because they permit everything that is unforeseeable in life.”

With this renovation; however, it seems rather “To be QUEER or not to be? THAT is the question!”

William lamented the Sapphic theme of the new bathing area in one of the two large symmetrical rooms and complained that Sappho’s fragments (and not his Sonnets) were given “pride of place” in the poetry corner. In Greek no less! At least they could make a decent muffin, but that was women’s work, wasn’t it? All Jo could think of was “Bathing, Bakery and Books,” the Three Bs. William assured Jo, however, that he had nothing against the new specificity that the watery space had acquired, now that it was frequented by a steady stream of naked ladies! "Huh, huh!" as he winked and punched Jo hard in the upper arm. Jo flinched, but made a knowing, if somewhat forced, smile, as he thought: “Ball!”

Of course, the greatest tragedy of the renovation, according to William, was these gentlemen’s displacement from the indoor-outdoor gallery space along the rear facade. In true drama queen style, he explained that the controlled order of the solemn
pillars of the small portico, aligned with all of the adjoining porticos of neighboring row houses, that once engendered a grand dramatic effect and spoke of permanence and stability (comparable to the uncontested lineage of the canon that the work of these gentlemen belonged to), had now become a chaotic and unpredictable space, filled with costumes and paraphernalia, where practically anything (and anyone) was allowed.

It was no wonder that damn bird made so much noise, when it had to look at that mess all of the time! William asked Jo if he had seen the “riffraff” that was now occupying the gallery? Jo felt something flutter in his stomach, and he immediately thought of Ali. Another paper airplane comes sailing into Jo’s path out of nowhere. Jo could see, through the branches of thick shrubbery that were still bare after the winter, the nearest window of Beda’s house was now slightly open. Oh no! Could she have overheard their conversation? He blushes again, this time out of embarrassment.

As he bends down to pick up the new message, he catches a glimpse of the ceiling from the space inside, which until now, had been masked by a glare on the surface of the glass. What he sees captivates him and sends his imagination reeling. Now, he understands what Brooke had described earlier as “an upside down silver wheat field, blowing in the breeze.” Jo thought she had just been exaggerating to win his approval, as kids often do. This is where the tinkling bell sounds were coming from! He reads the note quickly and then crumples it into his pocket.

**ALL IN GOOD FUN?**
“I know it is wet and the sun is not sunny, but we can have lots of good fun that is funny.”
— Dr. Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat*

**RIGHTFUL PLACE?**
“In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds.”
— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

**UNNECESSARY EFFORT?**
“Unwearied ceaseless effort is the price that must be paid for turning faith into a rich infallible experience.”
— Mahatma Gandhi

**PROPER ORDER?**
“We’re all born naked, and the rest is drag.”
— RuPaul

**ORIGINALLY INTENDED?**
“I never intended for the Monster Ball to be a religious experience, it just became one.”
— Lady Gaga

The others looked at him, waiting for a report, but all Jo could do was give them an innocent grin. One of them said something derogatory about the “Women Only” sign Jo had encountered at his arrival. Without thinking, Jo asked, “But isn’t this, in fact, a separatist group of sorts, too?” His question was met with incredulity and suspicion. Jo could feel the sense of comaraderie begin to shift into something more like indignation and mistrust. He remembered Beda teasing him about his reluctance to confront others, even when he found their opinions offensive, just to save his own hide and fit in with “the boys.” She would say:

“I know it’s not a good feeling Jo. As Sara Ahmed says: ‘You become the problem you create.’ But come on Jo, wouldn’t you rather be a killjoy? ‘A killjoy: the one who gets in the way of other people’s happiness... How many feminist stories are about rooms, about who occupies them, about making room? ‘You are a feminist, aren’t you Jo? Willfulness as a form of intentional disloyalty is important! ‘Willfulness could be rethought as a style of politics: a refusal to look the other way from what has already been looked over. The ones who point out that racism, sexism, and heterosexism are actual are charged with willfulness; they refuse to allow these realities to be passed over.’”

But it’s a really awful feeling and the only thoughts running through his mind are: **Why did you have to go and spoil everything? And just when we were getting along so well, too!** This feeling is confirmed, as Jo overhears Luchino’s response to Federico, who has just recounted Jo’s question in Italian. “Vaffanculo!” By now, it is getting late and Jo checks the time, only to see that the Open House ended over an hour ago! He had intended to try to catch someone on their way out, in order to slip inside for a quick peek. His mobile phone displays the notification “LOW BATTERY- 10% of battery remaining” and he sees that he has one missed call and another text from Seh.

**JO! where R U?**

**going for pizza**

w Beda & Bernice

Trattoria Caprese in

Città Bassa

Via Daniele Piccinini 2

join us!!

Jo panics.

**Outro**

Jo decides to make a swift exit and try to catch a taxi to the restaurant. He remembers that the taxis only accept cash, and he’s afraid that he doesn’t have enough to get into town. His newfound “friends” have begun to go about their business, as if Jo no longer exists, and are reluctant to loan him the money. Eventually, they scrape together enough to get rid of him.
Jo takes one last look at the row houses, as the taxi driver starts the meter. The
car pulls off and he sinks into the seat thinking about his day, with *Case Unifamiliari*
disappearing into the distance. First, he met the aggressive friendliness of a gossipy
conservative, seed-saving activist nun, who wanted to marry him off to his friend Beda.
Then there was the grilling by a precocious 10 year-old, who questioned his research
capabilities and explained the effects of neoliberal capitalism on educational institutions
(through a pond metaphor no less!). Lastly, he was confronted with the complacency and
sexism of this reactionary grappa-drinking “old boy’s club.”

He wonders if his friend Beda has any idea what kind of trouble she’s caus-
ing? Not only was the renovation illegal, but the three new communal features she had
installed in the garden had stirred things up, with rippled effects radiating outward and
overlapping. They were subtle instigators, like a whispered gossip, that set a whole string
of events in motion. During one afternoon alone, he had experienced first-hand how the
mere presence of this project got under people’s skin, and he had the bump on his head
and the bruise on his arm to prove it!

Jo knew that Beda’s intentions were what she called “desirable reconstruc-
tions,” which not only involved a critical position toward situations with power relations
she identified as problematic, but also included a proposal of new possibilities with more
ethical alternatives. He also knew that she had an inclination for drama and liked to
break the rules, a.k.a. a problematic relation to authority!

She loved to tell stories with all kinds of fantastic twists and turns, which
seemed innocent enough, but she still somehow managed to find ways to undermine
power, whether at the scale of unjust world orders, sluggish or indifferent institutional
systems, or simply in the language she used. Beda, the avid bather that she was, always
“dove in head first” too. This was surely going to get her into trouble one day!

Suddenly, Jo felt the crumpled paper in his pocket and remembered! *What about
Ali? I never actually got to speak to her.* He took out the note again, and this time noticed
that there was something else scribbled on the back, a phone number! He fumbled for
his mobile, quickly entered the number and listened in anticipation as it rang. Finally, a
voice answered “Hello?” Then Jo heard a familiar beeping sound, followed by silence…
his battery was dead.
In Italian, Boh! means “I have no idea!”

In Italian, PRIGE means “price.” As a person’s steps, memories, or dreams are often shamed by her school teacher, Mr. Warburton, for her “cleverness.” Smith 2011, 281-285.

Despite the risks of stereotyping, through the portrayal of the group of historical male artists as misogynist/anti-feminist, although the case may be made in support of this argument within much of their work, these identities are temporarily “hijacked,” and not meant to represent the actual individuals. They are used to represent Aldo Rossi’s own references, as well as a literary/artistic canon.

In Greek, “Sigá agóri mou. Pio sigá! Írema agóri” is loosely translated as “Fuck off!”

References to a media explosion over homophobia and transphobia are made by Guido Barilla, chairman of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, and the subsequent boycotts of the brand by the queer community. See Davies, Lizzy. “Pasta firm Barilla boycotted over ‘classic family’ remarks.” The Guardian, September 26, 2015.

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ARCHITECTURAL
ROOM SPECIFICATIONS

Case Unifamiliari
House 2, Plan 01
Via Giuseppe Verdi

Interior Renovations

Total number of pages: 24
(Including this page)

CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENT
2012-01-31

beDA RING ARCHITECTS AB
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+46 08-790 6000, bedaring@kth.se
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## ROOM SPECIFICATIONS

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## SCOPE OF PROJECT

The project includes all interior renovations on the first floor of: House 2 - Case Unfamilari, Via Giuseppe Verdi.

## 01 GENERAL INFORMATION & INSTRUCTIONS

All painting and finishes are given with the notation according to the Swedish standard NCS Color Scale, in Matt, Semi-Matt, and Glossy.

Painted surfaces should be matched to existing surfaces, unless otherwise indicated, and building systems and/or new built elements should be painted according to specifications listed under each room; however inspired initiatives and suggestions will be considered.

All materials as originally specified in this document, where the construction document does not indicate, "or similar," unless you have a better idea. Ask!

Where the material producers have installation-, execution- and/or maintenance instructions, these should be followed, unless otherwise indicated. Some experimentation possible.

Materials and work(person)ship, as well as quality control, are partly dependent on local availability and partly on friends’ labor in exchange for room and board (pizza). All materials and work conditions should follow sustainable and ethical codes.

Where possible, small local businesses, especially those owned by women and/or ‘minoritarian subjects’ should be given priority for contract of services.

There is no “minimum level” for the skill of craft(person)ship, as everything is to be done with enthusiasm, care and a love ethic.

Existing structures, interior elements and partitions, and surfaces should, where specifications do not indicate otherwise, be restored after renovations. The restoration should, in principle, be equal to the level of surrounding renovated work(person)ship. Required restoration also applies to color, finish, texture and re-filling of cakes and sweets supplies in BAKERY.

Restoration refers to repair of damages, filling of holes after drilling or other repairs or replacements after demolition, etc. All removed materials should either be recycled, donated or disposed of in an environmentally conscious manner.

It is requested that all construction work take precautions not to damage the existing building, building elements, or building systems, and to maintain the building’s structural stability during construction. However, any and all disturbance to my neighbor in the middle, House 3, will be overlooked. Have at it!

Existing floors, surfaces, and interior elements not affected by the renovation work should be protected during construction, as all changes are improper, but not imprecise.
02 CLARIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGY

The term "Camp" refers to a queer aesthetic that is artificial, a theatricality that is over-the-top, and a humor that is both provocative and vulnerable. A Camp sensibility should be applied to all alterations and finishes.

The term “privilege” refers to advantages granted only to certain individuals or groups, solely based on gender, race, sexuality, class, ability, age, etc. All privileges are subject to reflection and review, in order to actively dismantle underlying systems behind these privileges.

The term “queer” refers to that which is not straight, or that which deviates, in all senses of the word, whether built materials, gender or sexuality.

The term “feminist,” in this case, refers to the idea that the relationship between female persons (and/or any other positions located in an oppressed or subordinate position, including our companion species) to white, straight, male persons, should be changed to one of equity. Full compliance with this idea is required and non-negotiable.

ROOM SPECIFICATIONS CONTENTS

The room specifications denote all work to be completed in the respective rooms. Some text may refer to the drawings provided. Both forms of documentation should be read together.

The Room Specifications follow an order of each consecutive room on Plan 01, in a clockwise motion, beginning with the ENTRY and numbered accordingly.

Each room description includes a general description, as well as instructions for demolition of existing structures, newly built partitions or other interior elements, and surface treatments.

Room numbers in the room specifications denote completed rooms, after the renovation, and are used in correlation with the drawing Floor Plan 01.

D. description
F. floor
B. baseboards
W. walls
C. ceiling
M. miscellaneous
### Architectural Flirtations

**101 ENTRY**

D. A tight, cubical space that functions as a transition from a traditional vernacular exterior in pale ochre stucco w/verdigris aluminum roof, to a Campy interior.

The entry also serves as a mental transition space from traditional habits and assumptions, to queer feminist political manifestations.

This space is entered directly from the stairs and landing of the entrance portico covered in terracotta tile, through the slender, solid wooden front door painted in verdigris green.

**Demolition**

Remove checkered floor tile and existing baseboards.

**Structure - structural changes**

None.

**New interior partitions or built elements**

None.

### Surfaces

F. The flooring is replaced w/new checkerboard pattern tiles, in same dimensions of original flooring.

On top surface of all white tiles, the word “PRIVILEGE” is laser-engraved and then re-filled with a matt white porous composite, sanded smooth so as to be almost invisible.

(However, every time the floor becomes wet, moisture causes the word “PRIVILEGE” to temporarily turn dark, becoming visible until dry again.)

All white tiles should be set randomly, so that the word is “right side up” and legible when reading from all directions.

- **B. New plastic baseboards, to cover seam between floor and wall.**
- **Materials**
  - PLA-
  - Polylactic Acid
- **Dimensions**
  - 60 mm (h)
  - 10 mm (d)
- **Color/Finish**
  - dk pink/flocked

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<td>5 (24)</td>
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<td>House 2, Plan 01</td>
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<td>Rev.</td>
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<td>date</td>
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<td>Initials</td>
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<td>Rev. date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
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### ROOM SPECIFICATIONS

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### Architectural Flirtations

**101 ENTRY (cont.)**

Section of baseboard is standard depth (10mm), plus extruded silhouette of head, torso and front legs of a French poodle. (See Detail 1)

All cut and exposed ends should be “flocked” prior to installation.

W. All walls are to be painted.

Hologram portraits in faux gilded gold frames hung, in pairs, on walls shared with FIKKA - to left of ENTRY, and with BAKERY - to right. Two on each.

Hologram images change as viewer changes position. Louis Kahn becomes Anne Tyng, Le Corbusier becomes Eileen Gray, Robert Venturi becomes Denise Scott Brown, and Mies Van der Rohe becomes Lilly Reich.

Portraits should be hung so that top edges of portraits align with tops of doorframes.

On wall containing opening to stair, hangs the fifth hologram portrait, left of stairway upon entering.

Frank Lloyd Wright, shifts between 3 of his feminine counterparts, of the many women who worked in his Taliesin studios: Marion Mahoney, Isabel Roberts and Lois Davidson Gottlieb.

On same wall with opening to stair, right of stairway upon entering, hangs the manifesto: I hate architecture.

Both FLW portrait and manifesto should be hung so that top edges align with tops of other four portraits.

On inside of exterior wall, toward BAKERY, hang three wall-mounted Art Nouveau brass wall hooks w/ wooden bails on ends, Austria ca 1920s.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructions</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Color/Finish</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Biodegradable thermoplastic used in 3D-printers.</td>
<td>holes 40cm on center</td>
<td>Flocking is a process of depositing small particles onto an object to achieve a velvety texture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pale yellow-white paint</td>
<td>NCS S 0502-Y/glossy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A1 print</td>
<td>841 mm (h) 594 mm (w)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A1 print</td>
<td>841 mm (h) 594 mm (w)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A1 print</td>
<td>841 mm (w) 594 mm (h)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>brass</td>
<td>ca 1700 mm (h) a.f.f. petina</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wood</td>
<td>ca 1700 mm (h) a.f.f. red/lacquered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions</td>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Dimensions</td>
<td>Color/Finish</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>101 ENTRY (cont.)</strong></td>
<td>metal frame</td>
<td>ca 1320 mm (l)</td>
<td>off white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) gypsum board</td>
<td>2 @ 1320 mm (w)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>panels w/one</td>
<td>2 @ 990 mm (w)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>corner milled</td>
<td>115 mm (d)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave 20 mm gap on 3 sides, between edge and wall, 100 mm gap on 4th side in front of stair.</td>
<td>¼ circular hole milled in 1 corner w/corner as center</td>
<td>50 mm (dia.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface of new ceiling finished similar to upholstered cushion in quilted pattern. (See Detail 2)</td>
<td>synthetic Eco leather subst. w/brass tacks</td>
<td>tacks placed 330 mm o.c. to mirror corners of floor tiles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A copy of a Murano glass “Goldoni” chandelier w/3 lamps to be hung from center of milled hole in upholstered ceiling. All cables hidden.</td>
<td>Model GLD-566 3 lights</td>
<td>550 mm (h) 600 mm (w)</td>
<td>fuchsia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 mm from wall with stair, track to be mounted on original ceiling for floor to ceiling length curtain, aligning w/door frames and hanging just above first step. Cut to fit.</td>
<td>ceiling mount aluminum track</td>
<td>2500 mm (l) 60x60 mm (w,h)</td>
<td>silver/matt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Large double wheel carriers</td>
<td>RECMAR 3120 (or similar)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RECMAR 7140 (or similar)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40 pcs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When curtain is drawn, it hides stairs to PLAN 02 and sets the stage for political speech acts and runway extravaganzas.</td>
<td>velvet curtain</td>
<td>2 x 1250 mm (w) 2400 mm (h)</td>
<td>deep red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M.</strong> Free-standing furniture to be placed left of entrance door, along wall shared w/FIKA. Golden stool.</td>
<td>Johansson Markaryd stool</td>
<td>340 mm (dia) 440 mm (h)</td>
<td>gold cushion gold stand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Also 6 pairs fluffy slippers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>gold or pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin red carpet, from entrance door to stair, making everyone that crosses the threshold a runaway “glamazon.”</td>
<td>runway carpet</td>
<td>900 mm (w) 2500 mm (l)</td>
<td>crimson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>102 FIKA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. An elevated dry space, bounded by edge of door opening to bathing area. Used for undressing and storage of clothing and valuables. Doubles as relax area and complementary space to adjoining wet space w/pool.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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**102 FIKA (cont.)**

**Demolition**
Remove interior wall partition.

**Structure - structural changes**
None.

**New interior partitions or built elements**
Flush w/door opening, build new partial partition wall to form niche.

- **galvanized steel studs**
  - finished wall 500 mm (w)
  - 100 mm (d) floor to ceiling

New bench, built in place as box construction, with hinged lid to allow for storage. Fit to niche, with seat height 470 mm.

- **wood**
  - 380 mm (w)
  - 470 mm (h)
  - ca 1650 mm (l)

**Surfaces**

- **F.** Elevated floor built-up in area extending from exterior wall to new partition wall with wooden joists perpendicular to exterior wall 350 mm o. c., covered with wooden decking.

- **wooden decking**
  - 150 mm (w)
  - 25 mm (d)
  - ca 2400 mm (l)

- **in treated cedar**
  - 122 mm above bathing area finished floor.

**B.** No baseboards. Natural gap between wooden deck and walls.

**W.** All wall surfaces inside FIKA area to be painted same base color, up to (but not beyond) edge aligning w/ outer edge of new wall partition and elevated floor. (*Outer surface of new partition and header joist to be painted color of bathing area.)

- **light yellow ochre NCS S 0540-Y10R/ semi-matt**

On back wall of niche, above bench, hang (8) wooden pegs, evenly spaced in two rows of four at 1400 mm and 1800 mm above finished floor.

**Special painting instructions:**
Graffiti mural on back wall of niche. An interpretation of painting by Antoine Christian Zacharie, ca 1868.
*The Female Companions of Sappho.*
102 FIKKA (cont.)
Mural covers and incorporates wall, pegs, and bench, transforming FIKKA area into rocky cliffs of Sappho and her 11 female companions, standing in relation to watery space (BATHING) of Aphrodite, continuing their conversation.

In corner opposite changing niche, (The Poetry Corner) 2 small triangular shelves constructed to hold copies of Sappho’s fragments in Greek and other translations, as well as Monique Wittig’s The Lesbian Body, Rita Mae Brown’s collection of poetry The Hand That Cradles The Rock, and several volumes of poet Elizabeth Bishop. A special edition of Gaston Bachelard’s Water and Dreams published exclusively for this library, sandwiched in-between Sara Ahmed’s Queer Phenomenology and Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble, bound in one continuous binding, to put things into perspective.

The bottom shelf aligns w/bottom edge of window. Above top shelf hangs a glass “matisma” or Greek evil eye.

C. Ceiling to be painted same base color as walls, light yellow ochre.

M. Two compact Italian foldable wooden beach chairs covered in white canvas.

Low circular table.

103 BATHING
D. Long rectangular room, adjoining FIKKA area at one end, opening onto gallery at the other. Sensuous wet space, where clothing is optional and surfaces cater to the touch of the skin.

Demolition
Remove existing flooring.

Cut rectangular opening in floor slab for installation of sunken indoor pool, rotated at 7° angle to wall w/stair. (See PLAN 01)
For exact dimensions, consult w/pool builder.
103 BATHING (cont.)

Structure- and structural changes
Additional structural members added to basement level, to support floor and weight of pool above.

Equipment room located in basement, along wall bounded by stair, w/extra ventilation to account for added humidity.

New interior partitions or built elements
Large Japanese soaking tub for 2-3 people, constructed on site and sunken in floor. Top edge of pool on 3 free sides, 120 mm above finished floor.

4th side along wall, 160 mm a.f.f. Exterior finish in composite material to simulate stone.

Underwater lighting on inside pool walls. Box "waterfall" in same composite material on side along wall, facing bench.

Pool is not chlorinated. Filled w/ natural water from one of many hot springs the area is known for.

A replica of Roman 3rd century statue Crouching Aphrodite, stands submerged in corner of pool, with neck and top of shoulders above waterline. Although headless, provides constant bathing company. (See PLAN 01)

Surfaces
F. Entire floor is first covered in continuous vapor barrier, before applying 3D photo image floor base, depicting clear shimmering sea water and giant swimming fish from above.

The image base is then covered w/polyurethane and epoxy self-leveling screed layers.

Rectangular metal drain cover plate around perimeter of pool.

Materials | Dimensions | Color/Finish
--- | --- | ---
consult w/structural engineer. | | |
composites | 3000 mm (l) | warm off-white
2000 mm (w) | (similar to sand)
700 mm (d) | NCS S 1010-Y40R
edge of pool | 250 mm (w) | |
pool bench | 500 mm (w) | |
400 mm (h) | | |
composite | 550 mm (l) | sand
400 mm (w) | NCS S 1010-Y40R
Pool is not chlorinated. Filled with natural water from one of many hot springs the area is known for.

A replica of Roman 3rd century statue Crouching Aphrodite, stands submerged in corner of pool, with neck and top of shoulders above waterline. Although headless, provides constant bathing company. For image see: https://www.kimbellart.org/ collection-object/crouching-aphrodite.

For image see: http://www.imperialae.com/gallery/3d_epoxy_floors- page0.html (image 14)

Stainless steel | 150 mm (w) | |
**ROOM SPECIFICATIONS**

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**Interior Renovations**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W. Walls covered in vapor barrier and painted in medium blue-green hue, similar to color of the Aegean sea in the early September sunlight.</td>
<td>water-resistant paint</td>
<td>medium blue-green</td>
<td>NCS S 0530-B50G/glossy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighting in bathing area provided by 5 wrought iron, wall-hung candle sconces (similar to those used by Gunnar Asplund inside Woodland Chapel at the Woodland Cemetery) producing scent of melted candle wax.</td>
<td>(5) wrought iron sconces, evenly distributed along wall</td>
<td>70 mm (dia) 150 mm (w) 1750 mm (h) a.f.f.</td>
<td>black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In corner nearest gallery, 2 pairs of double hooks hung on inside of exterior wall for towels. Hooks should not obstruct inner glass door when opened.</td>
<td>IKEA Svartsjön (or similar) coated steel</td>
<td>180 mm (h) 60 mm (d) 1200 mm and 1800 mm a.f.f.</td>
<td>black hooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Ceiling is covered w/vapor barrier and a curved cornice is added to section of wall directly opposite pool. Same cornice added to wall behind pool, bottom edge aligned w/door opening, to achieve vaulted illusion similar to the thermal baths of Gera, Lesvos.</td>
<td>Regency Mouldings (or similar) Large cove with step plaster cornice</td>
<td>160 mm (d)</td>
<td>medium blue-green NCS S 0530-B50G/glossy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceiling and cornices are painted same color as walls (except for section inside IKEA area, to be painted ochre).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. A metal triangular self-standing sign, engraved with the words “Women Only” on one side and “Photography only upon consent.” on the other, is kept inside IKEA bench for special occasions.</td>
<td>folded aluminum</td>
<td>500 mm (l) 250 mm (w) 300 mm (h)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**104 GALLERY**

D. An outdoor covered terrace on ground level that mediates between the first floor and the private garden directly behind the row house. Enclosed on all sides by fencing and shrubbery. The terrace is divided by two pillars that delineate three equal sections.

The first section, outside of the BATHING area, functions as a communal dressing room w/ costumes, make-up, and props, allowing guests to be who or what they wish to be in the moment and encouraging experimentation.
104 GALLERY (cont.)
An outdoor shower is installed in central section, for rinsing off before and after the warm pool.

The third section, outside of BOOKS area, functions as a gathering place for important literary figures and other inspirations. Most often frequented by Ali Smith and Shonda Rhimes, while Jeanette Winterson, Gertrude Stein, Toni Morrison, Virginia Woolf, Gerd Brantenberg, Elizabeth Bishop, Nicola Barker, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Susan Sontag, and Elizabeth Strout all visit on occasion. The list is specific, but endless.

**Demolition**
Remove section of ceramic tiles from floor in front of column outside side of BOOKS area.

**Structure- and structural changes**
None.

**New interior partitions or built elements**
None.

**Surfaces**
F. Replace section of tiles w/square mosaic floor tile in Mediterranean pattern, w/slope for run-off towards existing drainage grill at edge of terrace. Square area of shower floor to be twisted 7° in plan to align w/angle of interior pool. (See PLAN 01) Fill remaining gaps w/tile in original color to match existing terrace.

Outside new tile area, a thin garden fence in an “L” shape, is built parallel to and (300 mm) from the outer edge. Climbing vines of “seven sisters” roses, w/rose, pink and lilac flowers in clusters of seven, are planted and tied to fence.

Between new tile area and garden fence, cover w/patch of landscaping gravel.

In corner outside of BOOKS area, a portion of floor tiles to be painted in an irregular geometric area, continuing from points along the walls. (See PLAN 01)

(9) mosaic porcelain floor tiles 250 x 250 mm (l, w) mixed patterns
 metal posts metal fencing 1400 mm (h) dark green
 stones pastel pink
 exterior water-proof paint bright yellow-orange NCS S 0570-Y10R
104 GALLERY (cont.)

B. No changes to original.

W. An outdoor wall mounted pool shower to be installed on column, above new square area of mosaic floor tiles. Water connection drawn from existing outlet for garden hose.

Wall mounted metal hook/tie-back for curtain, hung on back of column.

In corner, outside BOOKS area, mount outdoor wall mounted galvanized steel barn lamp, half-way between edge of door line and ceiling, 300 mm from corner.

Paint triangular area on walls and shutters, depicting a "light ray," beginning at lamp and widening downwards toward floor. Yellow-orange area shines a constant beam of light on guests and conversations, outside BOOKS.

*Note: Free standing furniture should also be partially painted, as it stands according to the plan.

Mirrors line the insides of shutter doors to BATHING area, to facilitate dressing area when opened. Mirrors should cover two separate sections with slats in each door, leaving a gap between top and bottom section, following door frame dimensions.

A medium metal First Aid cabinet w/fold-out panel is mounted on flat side of column, outside BATHING to hold makeup and function as dressing table/vanity. Medical supplies replaced w/ mirror and makeup.

Self-adhesive vinyl lettering used to cover the "s" and to insert an "i" before the i in 'First' on the cover.
**ARCHITECTURAL FLIRTATIONS**

**ROOM SPECIFICATIONS**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Color/Finish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>String Light Co.</td>
<td>(15) bulbs</td>
<td>clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vintage Metro</td>
<td>14630 mm (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor String Lights (or similar)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECMAR #3118</td>
<td>18 mm (w)</td>
<td>silver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aluminum ceiling mount track (or similar)</td>
<td>19 mm (d)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca 800 mm (l)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Redoute woven textile (or similar)</td>
<td>2000 x 1200 mm</td>
<td>coral pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtain hung on extended carriers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECMAR #7130</td>
<td>ca 150 mm a.f.f.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double wheel carriers (or similar)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECMAR #7185</td>
<td>16.5 in. (l)</td>
<td>silver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaded chain curtain drop w/hook (420 mm)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>portable canvas wardrobe (on wheels) to hold costumes, props, and accessories, placed in corner outside of BATHING. W/short end facing outward and opening toward length of the terrace. Sits just behind edge of opened shutters.</td>
<td>1100 mm (w)</td>
<td>off white/ to match</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>portable canvas wardrobe (on wheels) to hold costumes, props, and accessories, placed in corner outside of BATHING. W/short end facing outward and opening toward length of the terrace. Sits just behind edge of opened shutters.</td>
<td>500 mm (d)</td>
<td>to match</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>portable canvas wardrobe (on wheels) to hold costumes, props, and accessories, placed in corner outside of BATHING. W/short end facing outward and opening toward length of the terrace. Sits just behind edge of opened shutters.</td>
<td>1700 mm (h)</td>
<td>facade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>steel K.Petersen #P517, #S139 (or similar)</td>
<td>chair 400 x 330 mm</td>
<td>dark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Free-standing French folding chairs and (1) garden table placed in yellow painted area outside of BOOKS.</td>
<td>table 610 mm (dia)</td>
<td>green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Cushion storage box, beneath First Aid Kit.</td>
<td>wooden/cedar</td>
<td>painted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Cushion storage box, beneath First Aid Kit.</td>
<td>450 (w)</td>
<td>verdigris green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Cushion storage box, beneath First Aid Kit.</td>
<td>300 (d)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Cushion storage box, beneath First Aid Kit.</td>
<td>700 (h)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**108 BOOKS**

D. More of a nightclub feeling than a library, the BOOKS space or bell hooks library, is known for it's shimmering, tinkling ceiling. A gathering space inspired by Piper disco, designed by Pietro Derossi w/Gruppo Strum, part of Italian radical design of the 60s and 70s. Filled w/movable architectural elements and fluctuates depending on how and who inhabits the space, w/a lift “accessible” to everyone from garage.

For images and info on radical disco see: https://www.ica.org.uk/whats-on/designer-discos
105 BOOKS (cont.)

Demolition
Remove original terracotta floor tiles.
Cut rectangular opening in floor and ceiling slab for installation of lift.

Structure- and structural changes
Any additional structural reinforcement required due to new opening in floor and ceiling. Consult structural engineer.

New interior partitions or built elements
Installation of interior elevator, w/access from garage ramp in basement. Runs through all 3 storeys. When not in use, functions as private reading room on 1st floor.

Surfaces
F. Floor surface covered in polished concrete.
medium warm grey

B. None

W. All walls painted pale pink hue.
Long wall, which extends into BAKERY area should be painted up to a vertical line that aligns with edge of oven.

On short wall, above lemon yellow soft stair elements, a stencil photo image is painted in black, depicting a close-up of a giant bumble bee. A reminder of our tenuous ecological situation, and reference to Gloria Gaynor ("I will survive") w/her disco hit "Honey Bee" from 1975.

For video link see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohwftj6mMSw

On long wall, rising up behind bookshelf carts, like go-go dancers (or an iPod ad campaign, w/o the product placement), stenciled silhouettes are painted in dk grey, depicting Gavin Butt, Jane Rendell, Sara Ahmed, and bell hooks gettin’ their groove on.

C. Centered in the rectangular space hangs a disco ball w/LED light.
*Ball should hang lower than underside of new ceiling fixtures.

Four 6 in 1 LED spotlights installed between trellis panels in ceiling, forming corners of a square around disco ball.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Color/Finish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aritco 4000</td>
<td>1170 x 910 mm</td>
<td>fire engine red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villahiss (or similar)</td>
<td>1170 x 910 mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platform size: 880 x 805 mm</td>
<td>(at 7° angle)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paint</th>
<th>NCS 0510-R20B/ semi-matt</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pale pink</td>
<td>Dk grey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12" mirror ball
Cheap DJ Gear
MBKIT-12 (or similar)
Chauvet DJ Hex3
IRC RGBAW and UV Slimpar (The Glow Company) (or similar)
**ROOM SPECIFICATIONS**

**Case Unifamiliar**
**House 2, Plan 01**
**Interior Renovations**

**Status:**
**Construction Document**

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| **105 BOOKS (cont.)**  
From ceiling, hang thousands of identical thin steel lines, each weighted w/a brass bell of varying sizes, shapes and sounds. The steel lines are hooked onto a lightweight metal trellis w/solid steel hooks. (See Detail 3)  
Homage to black feminist thinker bell hooks. A lively ceiling that is anything but a “glass ceiling,” where the sounds of “bell” filter throughout the entire row house, spilling into the immediate surroundings.  
M. (5) Movable sections of stair elements w/three 150 mm steps. (4) straight sections, plus (1) corner end piece. (See PLAN 01)  
(Based on CKR’s Flower, OFFECT: http://www.offect.se/en/products/accessories/flower)  
(4) 3-tier industrial metal bookshelf units on wheels. The books, including a notable collection of fiction, mythology, and fables, as well as a complete set of volumes authored by bell hooks, are organized in groups by author and color coded within the units.  
(2) wooden planks, stored behind bookshelf units, used to make a flat surface across two units, w/one on each end; for workspace; food preparation; or group meals.  
Plush orange carpet and solid color cushions, matching bookshelf units, on hand for alternate furnishing.  

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</table>
| **106 BAKERY**  
D. Conjoined w/BOOKS area, a secondary, more intimate space, for creative cooking, pizza baking, and gossip, the BAKERY is home for the wood fired pizza oven.  
Besides basic kitchen functions, the BAKERY is always stocked with sweets and small cakes from the local delicatessen. It provides a more secluded area from the disco space, for more intense conversations.  

**Instructions**

**Materials**

- stainless
- conductive thread
- Stainless Steel
- Shock Cord Hook
- brass sleigh bells
- various
- 24 mm (dia)
- Standard wire
- wall trellis panels
- (8) 170 x 46 mm
- (6) 104 x 46 mm
- cold foam w/
- self-skinning
- polyurethane surface
- 680 mm (w)
- 762 mm (d)
- 450 mm (h)
- lemon yellow
- NCS
- S 0575-G90Y
- steel w/epoxy
- powder coating
- 762 mm (w)
- 468 mm (d)
- 762 mm (h)
- blue
- pink
- orange
- NCS S 1040-B; NCS S 1050-R20B; NCS S 0570-Y40R; NCS S 2030–G30Y

**Dimensions**

- stainless
- 60g
- 3/16” (5mm)
- stainless
- silver polish
- galvanized
- S 0575-G90Y

**Color/Finish**

- stainless
- stainless
- stainless
- stainless
- silver polish
- galvanized
- lemon yellow
- NCS
- S 0575-G90Y
- blue
- pink
- orange
- NCS S 1040-B; NCS S 1050-R20B; NCS S 0570-Y40R; NCS S 2030–G30Y

**Date:**
2012-01-31

**Rev. date**
BR
### 106 BAKERY (cont.)

**Demolition**
Remove existing kitchen and original flooring.
Bore hole in ceiling slab for insulated oven chimney.

**Structure- and structural changes**
None.

**New interior partitions or built elements**
A new interior wood fired pizza oven, located along the wall shared with the neighbor from hell, to be built on site.
Oven w/min. 50 mm clearance above.
New kitchen counter with double sink, cooking range, and compact refrigerator below, built along length of end wall. Area below counter covered w/dark wood panel w/cabinets and drawers.

**Surfaces**
- F. Floor surface covered w/square ceramic floor tiles in checkered pattern. Tiles should align with tiles in adjoining Entry.
- B. Baseboard in a thin rectangular wooden section stained black.
- W. Wall behind oven covered w/white ceramic tiles from floor to ceiling, w/hook for pizza peel and brush.

Inset above pizza peel is a mosaic sign: “You can’t make everybody happy. You are not pizza.”
(Copied from *Giro Pizzeria Napoletana* in Stockholm)

Wall opposite oven covered w/ wood paneling from floor to bottom edge of countertop. Paneling stained in dk brown/red tone. Walls above counter and paneling painted.

On end wall, above counter and to either side of window, wall hung shelves for extra storage.

**C. Ceiling painted in white tone to match white wall tiles.**

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mugnaini</td>
<td>1400 mm (l)</td>
<td>brick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Piccolo 80 PA</td>
<td>1100 mm (w)</td>
<td>stainless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(or similar)</td>
<td>1800 mm (h)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ca 200 mm (dia)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New kitchen counter with double sink, cooking range, and compact refrigerator below, built along length of end wall. Area below counter covered w/dark wood panel w/cabinets and drawers.</td>
<td>600 mm (w)</td>
<td>stainless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ca 2400 mm (l)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Floor surface covered w/square ceramic floor tiles in checkered pattern. Tiles should align with tiles in adjoining Entry.</td>
<td>fired clay (recycled)</td>
<td>305 x 305 mm</td>
<td>alternating off white - dk terracotta/ matte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Baseboard in a thin rectangular wooden section stained black.</td>
<td>wood</td>
<td>50 mm (h)</td>
<td>black stain/ glossy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 mm (d)</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 mm (d)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Wall behind oven covered w/white ceramic tiles from floor to ceiling, w/hook for pizza peel and brush.</td>
<td>fired clay</td>
<td>203 x 203 mm</td>
<td>white/glossy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Inset above pizza peel is a mosaic sign: “You can’t make everybody happy. You are not pizza.”**
(Copied from *Giro Pizzeria Napoletana* in Stockholm)

Wall opposite oven covered w/ wood paneling from floor to bottom edge of countertop. Paneling stained in dk brown/red tone. Walls above counter and paneling painted.

Stainless steel | gold plated |

On end wall, above counter and to either side of window, wall hung shelves for extra storage.

C. Ceiling painted in white tone to match white wall tiles. | paint Stockholm’s white |
<p>| NCS S 0502-Y/matt |</p>
<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(4) Ceramic pendant lighting fixtures w/exposed bulbs hang evenly spaced above counter.</td>
<td>Edison Light Globes</td>
<td>330 mm (dia)</td>
<td>light blue w/white cord and ceiling rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. (8) Circular stackable stools Stored next to counter.</td>
<td>E27 light blue porcelain pendant (or similar)</td>
<td>425 mm (h)</td>
<td>red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>molded plastic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stainless steel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alessi La Conica</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stainless steel 90002/3</td>
<td></td>
<td>stainless</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Heavy duty curtain track - silver anodized aluminum

White synthetic Eco "leather"

Milled corner 50 mm dia.

Brass upholstery tack

Large double wheel carriers

Light-weight metal frame

Gypsum board

Ceiling mount aluminum track

Large double wheel carriers

Red velvet curtain

Murano glass chandelier copy of Goldoni

REFLECTED CEILING PLAN AND SECTION
Existing floor slab

Screws into slab

Wire wall trellis panel

Stainless steel shock cord hook

Stainless conductive thread

“Farmer’s knot”

Brass sleigh bell 24 mm

Disco ball 300 mm dia.
Following is a list of prepared questions by the Architecture and Gender students from KTH. Their task was to formulate 1-2 questions each, to ask our host Beda Ring after the guided tour. A copy of the questions were to be written down and handed in during the hour long break, in-between the tour and the Q&A session. Since then, the students and I together have made some modifications, minor revisions and/or corrections to the original questions, and even added a few new ones, for publication in this book. I have chosen to include the questions only, without responses, in order to allow you, the reader, a chance to reflect on the changes of the renovation and to invite you to pose your own questions.
1. You've expressed an appreciation for the original design and organization of the floor plan of this row house, in that it doesn't pre-determine function and opens up for the imagination of other ways to inhabit these spaces. How did this affect your reasoning in regards to the way you chose to inhabit these spaces, since they become more determined functionally through the renovation?

2. There seems to be a combination of 'high' and 'low,' when it comes to the items you've specified, everything from DIY and IKEA to the extravagance of a Murano glass chandelier (even though it's a copy). How did you balance the use of design/kitsch or architectural/Camp and how much is determined by practical aspects as opposed to aesthetic ones, or even theoretical ones? For instance, how did you handle the question of budget?

3. You say that your project aims to shift the culture of architecture and to make structural changes within the discipline, rather than mere "reform," leaving an existing structure in place. I was wondering why your renovation, with the exception of the pool and the lift, makes very few structural changes in the existing building and rather works within the original system?

4. How did you negotiate between breaking the habits of the profession, and the desire to appeal to a practicing audience? In other words, were you concerned, or even strategic, about working in a way that is familiar to architects, while making design decisions that are perhaps unexpected or unorthodox?

5. You address the power of language through your room specifications, but by drawing on the humor of Camp, I wonder what your thoughts are on the power of humor? Doesn't humor also carry with it certain norms?

6. Is this a "real" proposal, something that should be considered or evaluated in terms of its architectural qualities? Should we take this renovation seriously, or not?

7. If campy Architectural Flirtations are about uncertainty and contingency, where does the uncertainty and contingency lie within these very controlled and specific room specifications? In Gavin Butt's words, how does it "stall the moment of judgement and commitment" and "make space for the entertaining of less familiar possibilities"? (Butt, 2006: 191)

8. Can you describe some of the ways in which this renovation enacts a queer feminist architectural practice, and give a few specific examples?

9. Did your choice to write the renovation in the form of room specifications have anything to do with the fact that Susan Sontag wrote her essay on Camp in note form?

10. To follow-up the previous question, as I understand it, a vital aspect of Camp is not sincerity, but style. Camp is often decorative, emphasizing texture, sensuous surfaces, and color. Could this be another reason you chose to use the form of the room specification document, which specifies these very material aspects?

11. In what ways do you consider the flirtatious mode of engagement of the room specifications to be a successful critical scholarly investigation?

12. While we're on the subject, Sontag states in her essay: "While it's not true that Camp taste is homosexual taste, there is no doubt a peculiar affinity and overlap." (Sontag, (1964) 1986: 290) I'm interested to hear your thoughts about how this might relate to the queer Campy renovation of this row house, which a more judgmental eye (i.e. architectural) might find to be in bad taste. How do gender, sexuality and race enter into the discussion of taste and the experience of space?

13. What kind of architectural flirtation would you say that this renovation encourages, if any, in relation to its inhabitants and/or guests? Is your intention that this encounter somehow helps toward a transformation of the norms or preconceptions they bring with them, which in turn promotes another level of awareness about power and privilege in relation to architecture? Is your intention pedagogical?

14. Since you talk about Camp's ability to "dethrone the serious," I wondered if there are any parts of the renovation that are purely for fun? Or, is the over-the-top excessiveness always motivated by an underlying critical or theoretical connection?

15. Did you really listen to a different soundtrack for inspiration, while you worked on the specifications for each room? And do you think it affected your design decisions in any way?

16. You mentioned that the pizza oven was a free-standing element in an earlier sketch, dividing the Books and Bakery, and that adding the lift later to make the project accessible, required changing the spatial organization to one that is perhaps less dynamic. Would you say that the fact that this part (the lift) wasn't there from the beginning, led you to discover some of your own blind spots? That is, in concentrating on aspects of gender, race and sexuality, you might have temporarily overlooked concerns dealing with age and accessibility?

17. Sontag writes: "Camp taste is a kind of love, love for human nature... Camp taste identifies with what it is enjoying... Camp is a tender feeling." (Sontag, (1964) 1986: 291-292) I found the gentle description of each room, through the room specifications, to be quite loving and appreciative. Is this what you mean by having an ethics of love in our
orientation or mode of working? What effect do you think an ethics of love had on this particular existing architectural work that represents, or is a stand-in, for the center of architectural design?

18. You mentioned that this renovation was a very quick, almost charrette-like process, what you call “brainstorm-build,” where you immediately tested ideas in 1:1 scale, in order to further the writing. What would you have done differently, without the time constraints of the PhD, if you had allowed more time for the development in the design process itself, before building in full scale?

19. I was wondering why you call the room specifications an “academic exercise” when it seems so directly connected to practice?

20. I’m interested in ecology and the sustainable aspect of the project. I was wondering about the materials specified. You claim that the intention of the specifications are to generate conversation through design, and that you were very free in choosing materials and products online (from anywhere), in order to quickly give a clear image of the atmosphere you were proposing. However, in the actual building process, you diverged from the specifications and paid more attention to local availability of materials, finding recycled materials, and the environmental impact of transport, etc. Can you elaborate on this process?

21. Even though it’s built, do you still see the renovation as a theoretical construction? Sort of like testing theory at 1:1 scale, to see what theory might look like?

22. As a private space, how does this renovation enable change? Isn’t it limited by the (im)possibility of experiencing the space? In other words, who has access? And who do you think should encounter the space?

23. During the tour, someone asked about the ethics of using the painted yellow light ray on the Gallery that you openly admitted to “sampling” directly from the design of the Rayen Vegan Restaurant in Madrid, by the firm fos. You said that you were interested in what the equivalent of a “direct quotation” by a design reference would look like in built form. I was wondering if you think this practice of “sampling,” outside of research, would still be ethical?

24. I get the sense that none of the living spaces are meant to be comfortable, but rather that they constantly make demands of their inhabitants. Is this a purposeful tactic to invoke a challenge or resistance to the feeling of certainty and commitment, in order to keep the flirtation alive?

25. You talked briefly about the doubt you felt while working on the design proposal, and the risk it posed in relation to your written research. (i.e. it is risky to make a proposal that is subject to the kind of architectural critique you are critical of.) You said that in those moments you thought of your design students, and found support in bell hooks’ words to go ahead and do it anyway. “I never ask students to do an in class writing assignment that I am not willing to do. My willingness to share, to put my thoughts and ideas out there, attests to the importance of putting thoughts out there, of moving past fear and shame. When we all take risks, we participate mutually in the work of creating a learning community.” (hooks, 2010: 20-21) As a student, who faces this self-doubt on a daily basis, I find this interesting and wonder if you could expand on these thoughts?
Lessons in Love

In an attempt to practice the same vulnerability we call for in *Architectural Flirtations*, my co-authors and I agreed to lay bare some of our own assumptions, biases, and struggles from our particular positions, here in the introduction to each love storey. Mine is that of the pedagogue, or the design studio teacher, disillusioned with a perceived hubris and complicity within the architectural profession and critical of similar neoliberal currents in the culture of institutions of higher learning, both of which I am part of. It felt disingenuous to prepare students to become part of that very same culture and discipline, even if my efforts and that of my colleagues, was to instill or encourage a *critical sensibility* along the way. Architectural academic and writer, Naomi Stead argues that a *critical sensibility* “has the potential to challenge assumptions and received ideas about architecture, and assist students in developing other ways of thinking about its fundamental meaning, purpose, and nature.”

Lessons in love is a matter of ethics, particularly in moving toward what black feminist and scholar bell hooks calls “a love ethic.”

“Faith enables us to move past fear. We can collectively regain our faith in the transformative power of love by cultivating courage, the strength to stand up for what we believe in, to be accountable both in word and deed... Embracing a love ethic means that we utilize all the dimensions of love— ‘care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect, and knowledge’—in our everyday lives. We can successfully do this only by cultivating awareness. Being aware enables us to critically examine our actions to see what is needed so that we can give care, be responsible, show respect, and indicate a willingness to learn.”

An entire education and discipline built on learning through *critique* and *criticism* does not come from, nor lead to, a place of generosity or embrace an ethics of love. At best, it is competent, critical, yet guarded, and at worst, it is fearful, competitive and alienating. Despite efforts and initiatives in the opposite direction, many of them feminist or critically orientated, I would argue that the dominant attitude of the discipline as a whole continues to turn a blind eye toward its role in the perpetuation of the status quo. It is a discipline with practices that protect its own privileges and maintain a false sense of freedom from accountability in regards to social, political, and economic inequities. The need to not only cultivate an awareness of the effects of this *culture of critique* that
architecture is built upon, along with its accompanying habits and inherited alignments, all of which are both gendered and racialized, but also to propose an alternative, began to feel urgent. Likewise, the institutional move toward a neoliberal model of education, content with practices of entrepreneurship, control, and self-promotion, affirm a position of ethical disregard. An architectural pedagogy with an ethics of love is not disinterested in critical thinking, experimentation, and engaged learning, where students are challenged to form a position of their own. It dares to ask uncomfortable or inconvenient questions, making mere “management” difficult and demanding courage, strength, and accountability from its leadership. Not to belittle all of the hard work I know is involved in attaining academic positions, especially for women and people of color, but the pressure to satisfy increasingly competitive measurement and performance demands in the pursuit of promotion and tenure, and the expectation of sacrificing one’s personal life for a professional one, only reinforces the underlying problems of a discipline of complicity.

An architectural institution with an ethics of love sees (and respects) its teachers and researchers as people, not as exploitable part-time solutions to a staffing plan for a given curriculum, and is concerned with encouraging professional strengths and personal well-being, where time and resources are allocated with both in mind.

During a period of about 1 ½ - 2 years, Beda Ring, a PhD candidate in Critical Studies in Architecture at KTH in Stockholm, Sweden, illegally occupied one of the row houses from the 1977 Rossi/Pizzigoni project Case Unifamiliari in Mozzo, Italy, and began renovating in the name of queer-feminist architectural design research. The renovation is said to have adopted, what Susan Sontag describes as a “Camp sensibility.” In her “Notes on ‘Camp’” from 1964, she writes: “The whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious. More precisely, Camp involves a new, more complex relation to ‘the serious.’ One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious.” In The Second Storey, with its focus on pedagogical situations, I take very seriously the fact that we are proposing to shake up a central part of architectural education, criticism and critique, in order to flirt with the idea that there might be another way.

Wandering through the seriously fantasmic and extravagantly sober rooms of the renovated first floor, the Open House tour of Case Unifamiliari describes detailed facts of the material transformation of the interior, with the help of architectural room specifications. This fictional-factual document, meant to describe in detail an intended future condition, along with a plan, interior elevations and a few important details, is included in-between The First and Second Storey as an introduction to the renovations. It is my hope that this document can also help make the research more accessible to practicing architects, as it works with a familiar form. In the capacity of design practice research and inspired by architectural scholar Katie Lloyd Thomas’ description of...
these very practical documents as “drawings with words,” beDA RING ARCHITECTS use words to propose material changes to this existing modernist interior that pose questions of privilege, power, and ethics.  

In this critically playful adaptation of an architectural room specifications document, Beda asks not only how fiction can displace the assumptions already built-in to the practices and methods architects use in architectural practice, but she also explores how the words architects use to describe what is to be built, possess a real power and the possibility to instigate political change. In other words, it flirts with the specification and materialization of built changes. In a new, more complex relation to ‘the serious’, critical writing practices may open up for important connections between the research and practice of architecture, while proving helpful in resisting its habits and preconceptions.

Following the room specifications, we have also included a documentation of the questions prepared by my students from the Architecture and Gender course at KTH, for a Q&A session with our host Beda Ring, about the Campy queer-feminist renovation of the Mozzo row house. The session took place directly after the guided tour, inside the room labeled 105 BOOKS on the specifications document, but it is better known as “bell hooks’ library.” Beda’s former students, now colleagues, Marie-Louise Richards, Malin Heyman and Iro Kalogeropoulou, who came to help host the Open House event, arranged seating and set-up an elaborate snack table, catered by the local delicatessen owned by Beda’s neighbor on the end, Zite.

What are the spaces of your dreams that support creativity and learning? Ours involve generosity and reparative acts, informed by an ethics of love. In the background, is a school of architecture, part of an educational institution of power, formulating a document that attempts to describe “The ABC’s of an Architectural Critique,” based on a culture that maintains the lineage of an antiquated form of evaluation. In the foreground, is a flirtatious performative seminar series, arranged and enacted collectively, in an attempt to re-examine and re-invent the practice of critique and criticism, through pedagogical stewardship and the art of staging critical positions in an architectural conversation, formerly known as critique. Open House tells stories of pedagogical stewardship, through six dream sequels during a lazy afternoon nap in the summer sun. In the chronicles of this architectural pedagogue, where a group of students make these places come to life, with the help of theoretical oracles and the work of passionate pedagogy, there is passion for learning with compassion.

The second storey of this section is a tale of lessons in love.

Brady Burroughs
Pedagogue

9 September 2016, Stockholm
Open House

Acts of pedagogical stewardship
Brady Burroughs

Prelude

“I love you honey. I love your money. I love your automobile. I love you baby. I don’t mean maybe. You’re the sweetest thing on wheels. I love your kisses. I wouldn’t miss it. No matter how I feel. I love you honey. I love your money. Most of all I love your automobile.”10 As the Patsy Cline tune fades into the background, a serious voice announces the time and weather before the start of the next program, with its familiar “Summer! Summer! Summer!” signature melody on the Swedish radio station P1. This daily program, a tradition and favorite pass-time for many on lazy summer days, features one new voice a day from June to August, current newsworthy, noteworthy or otherwise relevant personalities, who tell stories across the airwaves and play music of their choice.11

Today’s guest is Liv Strömquist, Swedish cartoonist and author of political and feminist satire. Liv is speaking about her experiences as a creative person, more specifically a creative menstruating person, and how conditions for creativity are gendered.12 Comparing her current art collective in Malmö, a city in southern Sweden, to the spirit found within a group of Scandinavian artists from the late 1800s called “Skagenmålarna,” she describes how they offer support to each other through encouragement and sharing ideas, rather than trying to compete or to be unique.

For me, it’s the beginning of a much deserved summer vacation and break...
from the academic year. There’s my sun chair, a book (unopened), and the remainder of a tall glass of homemade blackberry lemonade on the small wooden pier. A fish jumps. The sun is warm on my skin. The scent of freshly cut grass lingers in the breeze and mixes with the murky smell of the small inland lake, as I drift off into a pleasant afternoon slumber.

The portable radio sounds over the flutter of birch leaves and the hum of the neighbor’s lawn-mower. The last thing I hear Liv say is this:

“Encouragement from others, especially women and female friendship, has been absolutely crucial for me to be able to create in my life... When I watch popular TV programs like ‘Idol,’ I think about this, about what conditions that I needed myself, to develop a creative practice... Then I think, that I really, REALLY don’t believe that creativity and a creative practice can grow under these forms of competition, elimination and a jury that sits and judges you. Most people, especially young girls, already have a horribly critical jury within them that sits there and criticizes all of the ideas they have and everything they can think up. I, myself, absolutely have one of those ‘inner saboteurs’ that tell me my ideas are shit, that I suck, that I’m boring, that I should just quit, etc.. I have certainly needed situations that are characterized by mutual support instead of sharp elbows, and love instead of critique, to be able to create at all.”

Intro: The Golden Emergency

“Oh, yes sir. I can boogie. But I need a certain song. I can boogie, boogie-boogie. All night long.” The Spanish female vocal duo Baccara chimes in as the giant disco ball spins, scattering golden specks of light on the sterile white walls and clean surfaces. There is a person, whose name tag says Dr. Jane, with punk-orange hair and a lab coat pacing back and forth in front of the three odd looking go-go dancers atop the low metal cabinets. Dr. Jane is reciting the same five words over and over with authority, “Collectivity, Interiority, Alterity, Performativity, Materiality. These are the five thematics of current feminist critical spatial practices. Repeat after me!”

Everyone changes into a white lab coat, as they file in to what appears to be an emergency room - disco-tech, cloaked in a shimmering gold ceiling. I’m caught up in the stream of lab coats and find myself in one of two groups, as someone shoves a package with my name on it into my hand. The group I’m in seems to be much more at ease, like they belong to the space, while the other group looks like outsiders who are slightly uncomfortable and almost as surprised as I am. A neon sign flashes up on one of the walls “An Army of Lovers Will Never Lose,” and I realize that this gathering is an initiation of sorts.

I take a closer look at the small white package I received upon entering. It’s
Architectural Flirt Aid Kit with golden animal figurine

Photo: Brady Burroughs

marked FLIRT AID KIT and inside I find a plastic pouch containing stardust, one golden animal figurine, and my own personal horoscope! (Seriously? Was this a joke?) On a slip of paper are instructions for use: IN CASE OF ARCHITECTURAL EMERGENCIES; 1) A PINCH OF JOY 2) A DASH OF COMPASSION 3) A HANDFUL OF SPIRIT. APPLY GENEROUSLY. IF CONDITION PERSISTS, REPEAT. Dr. Jane calls our attention and a state of urgency ensues, as “the patient” on the operating table is revealed before us; architecture is in dire need of resuscitation and we are its only hope!

Again, Dr. Jane commands our attention, only now the nametag reads Disco Jane. She demonstrates Flirt Aid tactics for the entire group, in the form of dance steps! The whole group begins to wiggle around in groovy disco moves and I start to giggle, but they seem to take it very seriously. Everyone takes out the glitter pouch, so I follow suit. Disco Jane instructs us on possible techniques for scattering the glitter, in tact to the beat of the music and in sync with the gyration of our hips. (Although the training isn’t very physically demanding, I notice that some of the members of the other group drop out at this point, never to return.)

In a true demonstration of skill and simultaneous coordination, Disco Jane explains, while boogieing down, “this is the matter at hand and that the modes of working characteristic to a feminist approach... are highly appropriate for tackling the three stranded collapse of ecology, energy and economy that faces us now,” which she diagnoses as the most critical symptoms of our patient. In this unorthodox call to action, alliances are formed, strategies forged, and the two groups are given their tasks. Let the healing begin!

Sequel One: Speed Dating for Three

We rush out of the room in an excited frenzy, and I follow the group down the alley to an inconspicuous doorway. Above the entrance, the sign reads “Flirt Club,” and I’m soon inside another nightclub space similar to the last but not the same. The lighting is much lower and the mood is flirtatious. There is a long golden table set with candlelight, a line of vases holding single roses down the center, and pairs of chairs facing each other across the table. I recognize the same people from the architectural emergency training session, but there’s something different about them. I can’t put my finger on exactly what it is, but even I feel more elegant and smarter than usual! There are three hosts this time, who introduce themselves as Susan, Gavin and Eve. The trio asks everyone to find a place at the table and explains that we will have three minutes to get to know each other, before we switch partners. This procedure will be repeated consecutively for one hour, so we should be prepared with some questions in advance.

The first person I talk to is Gavin, another Gavin, which seems strange, as it’s not every day you meet two Gavins, and he insists on calling me Susan. He begins to tell me about an interesting architectural renovation project he’s recently visited in Mozzo, outside of Bergamo, Italy, of all places! The stress of the time limit and the noise of all of the simultaneous conversations are palpable. Gavin continues: In his opinion, this renovation "can be seen to reside in the ways in which the serious is engaged as playful..."
65.
The Flirt Club, session one, KTH, Stockholm
Photo: Brady Burroughs

66.
Speed dating at The Flirt Club
organizing group: Malin Heyman, Iro Kalogeropoulou, Marie-Louise Richards
Photo: Brady Burroughs
He says that he can only understand the humorous decision to place an indoor pool and oversized pizza oven in an already tight living space, as a flirtatious act. I ask what he means by that? Gavin explains that the intention is obviously not about making an “ideal” living space, but rather about flirting with accepted values and ideas about form, taste, function, and... But then the conversation is cut short, as the time is up, and I move on to the next person.

This time I face Susan. Two Susans, what a coincidence! I begin by mentioning the previous conversation I had with Gavin, about the renovation of a row house called Case Unifamiliar by Aldo Rossi and Attilio Pizzigoni in Mozzo, Italy. It turns out that she has also been there! Susan seems to have a slightly different take on the intentions of the renovation than Gavin’s “flirtation” idea, and connects it to a concept located within queer culture, called Camp.

She tells me: “Indeed the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration... I am strongly drawn to Camp, and almost as strongly offended by it.” I ask if she can give me a concrete example, and she laughs and cringes as she describes that “delightfully hideous and horribly fabulous” epoxy floor, with the 3D swimming fish image in the bathing area. I am just about to ask her what affect she thinks this Campy renovation might have on architectural culture, and again, time is up.

My next partner is Eve, and “the chemistry” isn’t really there. Although Eve is obviously well read in psychoanalytic and queer literature, which is an interest we share, the conversation is stilted and difficult. It seems that this is not only the case with me, as the awkward silences in her previous conversation, allowed her to overhear parts of mine. Without any indication on my part, Eve begins to tell me her view of Camp and its relation to the renovation project in Mozzo, which she is also familiar with and labels as queer feminist research. She has a clear appreciation of the performative aspects of Camp, such as the artifice and exaggeration that Susan referred to earlier, even the playfulness and humor that Gavin understood as flirtatious, but suggests that we should rather view camp as, among other things, the communal, historically dense exploration of a variety of reparative practices.”

Eve points to the Campy make-over of the otherwise modernist cubical entrance hall, with its red “runway” carpet, art deco details, and fuchsia glass chandelier hanging from a quilted faux leather ceiling, as a place for transformation. Here, the framed manifesto, I hate architecture, simultaneously denounces and empowers, while the fuzzy guest slippers comfort (and humble) each and every architectural glamour queen that passes through. Eve is adamantly that what some paranoid critics may perceive as impiety, or merely an attitude of silliness toward a serious architectural culture of critique, is in fact, a matter of disciplinary healing. I remember the critical condition of my architectural patient. Time is up.

I sit to face my new partner and realize that again, I am across from another Gavin! I look around the room and it’s filled with Susans, Gavins, and Eves, cloned into slightly different variations of themselves. It reminds me of Don Siegel’s 1956 B-horror movie, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, which alluded to the menacing banality of societal (or professional) conformity. Although this group seems sincere, the film also led to the slang term “pod people,” referring to clone likenesses lacking human emotion. To break the ice, I mention to this Gavin that the expression “pod people” is a good description of those with neoliberal tendencies behind many of the institutional decisions in academia today. He looks confused, so I clarify that capitalist values, supported by measuring and ranking, seem to place managerial and entrepreneurial concerns over the more social and critical aspects of learning, research and design.

This Gavin begins to whisper, so that the others don’t overhear: “Recently it has become apparent that criticism is in trouble.” And I heard that “Such worries about the capitalist co-option of criticism and critical culture are echoed by the growing unease in the academy about the ossification of critical theory, particularly within the arts and humanities.” This Gavin is quite the gossip!

I am able to spend more than the usual allotted 3 minutes with this Gavin, as the hosts serve us a romantic dinner for two, accompanied by fireworks, the highlight of the evening! I ask Gavin if he’s visited the queer feminist renovation of the Rossi/Pizzigoni row house in Mozzo that everybody is talking about? He answers that indeed he has, and that the conversation he had with whomever was behind the rose colored curtain, in the outdoor shower on the Gallery, has gotten him “thinking about the performativity of the critic’s address to his or her objects, and, in particular, in thinking about the event-ness of the critical encounter.” He recounts the situation with enthusiasm, and we kind of “hit it off.” I start to get the feeling that he’s flirting with me!

I wake up to a tickling in my ear. One of the cats has made her way down to the pier and is licking my face. I shoo her away and turn down the volume of the radio. A voice drones on in an interview with last year’s Swedish Eurovision winner, Loreen, something about spirituality and vacuuming? I quickly doze off again.

Sequel Two: Rituals of Community

I hear the screech of seagulls in the distance, and I notice that I am now wearing sandals, a loose linen dress over my bikini, lots of beads and bracelets, and my long hair is tied up in a watery-patterned batik turban on my head. The limits of the place I’m in are imperceptible; it is nowhere, limbo, like floating in the middle of the sea. As I’m handed a strange blue drink in a tall glass, our spiritual guides for the evening welcome us and divide us into four elemental groups; earth, water, fire, and air. Again, I recognize the faces, but this time three new people are in charge. The spiritual guides instruct us through a ritual, to unlock the key to “the other realm,” or what they promise is an elusive state with an ethics of love.

We work within our elemental groups, toward a constantly shifting center
located between us. An eerie, not entirely human voice, echoes through the air and introduces itself as Isabelle. It says: "We do not know what a practice is able to become; what we know instead is that the very way we define, or address, a practice is part of the surroundings which produces its ethos."²⁵ We begin working across groups, drawing on each other’s strengths, and are able to fulfill the task. For a moment, everything goes completely dark. Five candles are lit along the wall of a giant underwater cave and the entire group is enclosed within this warm, blue concave space. Water trickles down from the other side, as “the voice” begins to recite a poem:

My voice rings down through thousands of years
To coil around your body and give you strength,
You who have wept in direct sunlight,
Who have hungered in invisible chains,
Tremble to the cadence of my legacy:
An army of lovers shall not fail.
(Sappho’s Reply, 1974, Rita Mae Brown²⁶)

I find a place to sit on one of the dry soft spots on the ground, as several smaller groups gather in informal constellations around a cornucopia of goodies. I relax into an engaging conversation about the capitalist market in relation to the current economic crisis in Greece. There are conflicting positions about the effects (and responsibilities) of tourism and ethics of the modern day colonization of struggling countries by all-inclusive resorts, through the buying, selling and building on foreign land. The conversation meanders, eventually landing in the importance of feminist self-critique, in order to retain (or reclaim) a relevant position of resistance. We talk about the danger for all “critical positions” of falling into the habitual use of once effective “critical tools” and undermining their own critical intent.

Isabelle speaks again. "But when we deal with ‘tools for thinking’, habit must be resisted... The relevant tools, tools for thinking, are then the ones that address and actualise this power of the situation, that make it a matter of particular concern, in other words, make us think and not recognise."²⁷ I bring up the situation with our architectural patient, who remains in critical condition, and ask if there aren’t some unhealthy habits formed around the culture of critique and criticism? Someone else in the group hints at a possible addiction to power and control. From Isabelle, we hear: “I would prefer not to appeal to the strong drug of Truth, or to the power to denounce and judge, to deconstruct and criticise.”²⁸ I start to wonder if critical rehab is in order? One of the guides hands me a small pill and instructs me to place it on my tongue, and instantly I’m transported to the middle of a forest.

Sequel Three: Tweetlets at The Beastlet

Birds are chirping all around me and I can hear the distant sound of a gurgling brook. It smells of earth and moss and is quite dark here, from the dense foliage above, but I see a
clearing up ahead. I walk in that direction and arrive at a structure made of two thick, braided cables stretched between the treetops. Hanging from these taught lines are large, billowing golden textiles, shimmering in the breeze. A detail in one of the textiles catches my eye, and I realize that it’s a giant clothesline for golden underwear! On each of the lines, hang an enormous pair of shiny boxer briefs and a matching sequined tank top. All that glitters may not be gold, but these golden outfits definitely glitter! The garments look like something out of a giant Pride parade. I wonder if it’s some kind of art installation, and what message it might be trying to convey about laundry or domestic work and LGBTQ rights, out here in the middle of nowhere? There’s no time to ask, since the activities seem to be starting soon.

I see some of the usual group gathering, but notice that some of them have really hairy arms! Maybe I just didn’t notice before, under the lab coats? I’m startled as one of their tails(!) accidently brushes up against my leg. A chiffon and tulle covered diva with a martini in one hand, introduces herself as Gizelle Gazelle (must be French) – spokeswomanimal for The Beastlet, and asks us to find a place to sit or perch. Three small clusters are arranged in front of a giant outdoor screen, where a live Twitter session begins in the list “Beastlet 2.0,” inviting all humanimal residents of The Beastlet – a sanctuary for mythical creatures, to a community discussion with the architects involved in proposing renovations and additions to this sanctuary.

I reach for my mobile phone and find that my pockets have been replaced with scales, from the waist down to be precise, my long undulating tail has knocked over part of the seating in my section, and… oh goddd! It’s just hanging right out there for everyone to see! Another creature from my group flies over and offers me a mobile phone, already logged into Twitter as Cuff the magic dragon. I try to say thank you, but only fire comes out, and I accidentally singe the end of my companion’s tail feathers.

So, it seems the giant gold outfits were for actual giants, a couple named Bob and Tim, who have been generous enough to accommodate this gathering in their living area. I can sense the anticipation. Apparently, there were many conflicts and misunderstandings with the previous architects, who had difficulty relating to and living area. I can sense the anticipation. Apparently, there were many conflicts and misunderstandings with the previous architects, who had difficulty relating to and incorporating the concerns of The Beastlet residents in the original sanctuary proposal. For this reason, the Tweet format is intended to keep the arguments concise and incorporating the concerns of The Beastlet residents in the original sanctuary proposal.

I take my complimentary yogurt, granola, and wild berries snack from the platypus at the refreshment grove, and watch as the silent texting begins.

Vulverine @Wolverinna  Mar 12
#FirstTopic “the teacher is the learner and the learner is the teacher” #teacherandstudent

Gen. Hathi Senior @HathiElephant  Mar 12
A lot of teachers are know-it-alls. #beastlet20

Frolic @Gaambool  Mar 11
I heard: I’m not here to teach. You’re here to learn. (it was said in a bad way) #beastlet20

Cuff the magic dragon @makingoffanArchitect  Mar 12
Crit = hazing? #beastlet20

Gaby Gorilla Baby @GabyGorillaBaby  Mar 11
Becoming an established diva doesn’t come easy, but it’s less intricate than earning fully fledged-architect status. #cuff #beastlet20

heavy_with_wings @corichards  Mar 12
#beastlet20 I go with the teacher who agrees with me #First-Topic

The Tweeting is interrupted when a swarm of thousands of fairies fly down from the treetops in front of the screen. As they hover in place, they give off a strange sound, like the tinkling of tiny bells. The fairies manage to block the light of the screen in a formation that causes these words to appear: “ENGAGED PEDAGOGY MAKES US BETTER LEARNERS BECAUSE IT ASKS US TO EMBRACE AND EXPLORE THE PRACTICE OF KNOWING TOGETHER.” After about 20 seconds, they’re gone.

Harper Hippo @hippopmania  Mar 12
We are discussing being vulnerable together. #beastlet20

Cuff the magic dragon @makingoffanArchitect  Mar 12
Implicit assumptions about gender? Charette = designer boot camp? #beastlet20

Elephantom @Elephantomia  Mar 12
Is competition bad? #beastlet20

Harper Hippo @hippopmania  Mar 11
Us hippos never abandon our herd. Label me feminist. Label me architect. Think about it and we’ll take it from there. #beastlet20

The fairy swarm gathers again: “THE ORIGIN OF KNOWLEDGE IS LOVE” Then the wind
Out of nowhere, the tinkling swarm appears: “THERE CAN BE, AND USUALLY IS, SOME DEGREE OF PAIN INVOLVED IN GIVING UP OLD WAYS OF THINKING AND KNOWING AND LEARNING NEW APPROACHES.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I see one of the giants heading in the direction of the screen, with a huge can of bug spray in his hand! Several Beastlings let out a gasp of horror, but before Bob has the chance to turn the community gathering into a macabre scene, the fairies are gone for good.
Is it the job of the architect to help the client imagine their desires? #beastlet20

“Helping the client to realize what they want” ha! Telling them what they want… #architectandclient

why telling them what they want? We learn the tools to start visualizing AND realizing imaginations, this is our service

“Your ideas are great, mine are just better” regards, your architect #ashamedofmyself #beastlet20

The small portion of berries and yogurt only wet my appetite. Now, I could hear my stomach begin to growl in the midst of this heated (silent) discussion, and every time I tried to clear my throat to cover the rumbling sounds, puffs of smoke escaped from my nostrils. No sooner did I look toward the refreshment grove to see what else they might have to offer, when I heard a “Ciao bella!” No longer in the forest, I was struck by the scent of freshly brewed espresso.

Sequel Four: A Fruitful Killjoy

In the private rectangular garden of a row house with a verdigris roof, bounded by 2 meter high fencing and shrubbery, the usual gang is setting up for a picnic with two rows of tables; one bare with some cutting boards and knives, and one set with a colorful checkered tablecloth and cutlery in the shade. I see someone on the gallery send a paper airplane across the green shutters to a costume area at the opposite corner, just missing the stream of water from the outdoor shower, when it dawns on me. I must be outside of the queer feminist renovation project in Mozzo, Italy that I heard so much about from Gavin, Eve, and Susan!

Fruit begins piling up on the bare table, as everyone shows up with their contributions, wearing an apron and ready to prepare the food. Everything seems to be shaping up for a pleasant picnic, until one person shows up wearing only an apron. This, of course, causes some minor and major trouble in the conservative little Italian neighborhood, where public nudity is, to put it mildly, frowned upon. The outdoor shower alone, had solicited petitions from neighbors in adjacent buildings, but authorities approved it on the grounds that the design provided a curtain and an interior “green wall,” allowing for proper discretion.

Although the apron does cover almost all of the “important parts,” except for an occasional view of this person’s rear end, angry neighbors contact the authorities, charging our entire group with the attempt to corrupt their children and sully the upstanding good name of this residential area. This kind of attention annoys some in the group, while the rest continue with the food preparations.

I become curious, so I ask this person, who goes by the name of Zahra, whether
it was perhaps a simple misunderstanding of the apron dress code listed in the invitation? Or was there another motive behind the obvious drama s/h/e was causing? According to Zahra: “to refuse the place in which you are placed, is to be seen as causing trouble, as making others uncomfortable. There is a political struggle about how we attribute good and bad feelings, which hesitates around the apparently simple question of who introduces what feelings to whom.” S/h/e explains that by “going against the flow” and “getting in the way” s/h/e is attributed with killing joy, in merely placing h/er/is body in the way.

Zahra also believes that the reaction has a lot to do with the fact that h/er/is androgynous body does not readily disclose a gender, and that it makes it even more provocative for people to face the fact that gender can be so indeterminate, even with only an apron between them. Those men who would have otherwise been more than willing to make sexist catcalls and assert their entitlement to comment the body of a scantily clad woman, were unable to judge whether such a comment, in this case, would land them in a compromising queer situation. Were they desiring, even flirting with, another man? Their power of entitlement was taken from them with this uncertainty, hence, the indignation and uproar. “This is why being a killjoy can be a knowledge project, a world-making project.”

The naked killjoy drama, compliments of Zahra, gave everyone plenty to discuss over the fruit salad preparations. Now, the main topic of discussion becomes whether or not Zahra is welcome to a place at the table with everyone to eat. I think about the division within the group and remember what the fairies had said about the “pain” involved in giving up old ways of knowing and thinking. Zahra was willing to take a risk and face the disagreement and conflict that arose.

I ask Zahra if s/h/e had anticipated these difficulties, not only from “the outside,” but also from within h/er/is own group, even though all of us were explicitly, more or less, orientated in a similar feminist direction? Zahra tells me: “It is the experience of ‘coming up against’ that is named by willfulness, which is why willful politics needs to be a collective politics. The collective here is not assumed as a ground. Rather, willfulness is a collecting together, of those struggling for a different ground for existence. You need to be supported when you are not going the way things are flowing. This is why I think of a feminist queer politics as a politics of tables: tables give support to gatherings, and we need support when we live our lives in ways that are experienced by others as stubborn or obstinate.” Zahra walks directly over to the picnic table with the tablecloth, helps h/er/im/self to a large portion of fruit salad, takes a seat, and begins to eat.

Outro: Sharing tables and pizzas

In the shade of the trees along the lake, the breeze gives me goose bumps, as I lie there while my recent slumber slowly wears off.

I see something fluttering in the grass and go to pick it up. It’s a paper airplane with a note scribbled inside, like an airborne message in a bottle. I open it and read: “Without the event, there is no architecture. Not the other way around. Aldo Rossi said
Aldo Rossi, the Italian architect and co-designer of *Case Unifamiliari*, made me think of my dream about the picnic at the renovated row house in Mozzo, Italy, and as my stomach is usually not far behind my brain, I have a craving for Italian pizza!

I hop in the car and drive to the local pizza place. On the radio, they play one of my favorite Italian artists, Gianna Nannini. “Bello! Bello é impossibile!” I sing along and think of how queer and Campy the video for this song from 1986 is, and I wonder if it was meant to be that way, or if it was just a coincidence? I would have liked to ask Susan about this. I park the car and go in to order, humming the tune to myself along the way.

Inside, I have a moment of déjà vu; the room has a familiar golden tint, and I recognize all of the faces of the other customers from my dream! Besides eating pizza, they are gathered around one large table, pouring over a set of maps. A little unsure of whether I’m still dreaming or not, I cautiously ask if I can join them.

One of the groups from the emergency room has made a set of First Aid maps, suggesting a possible intervention and course of action in the care of our architectural patient. Even though the patient’s condition remains critical, I am hopeful that the gathering around this table, as well as the eventual gatherings around different “tables of operation,” promise healing situations where the effects of unhealthy habits of critique and criticism may be reversed.

**Rewind: Course Framework and Conditions**

Behind this sequence of dream narratives is the recounting or retelling of a fast-paced, performative text seminar course, consisting of six sessions, each with its own theme. The recurring Architecture and Gender course is offered both Fall and Spring terms at KTH, where the current responsible instructor largely determines the overall content. This particular course was based on and around my own research—which explores the possibilities of shifting the culture of critique in architectural education through flirtation, by way of my colleague, Beda Ring’s critical fictive renovation of a collaborative row house project by Aldo Rossi and Attilio Pizzigoni from 1977, called *Case Unifamiliari*, in Mozzo, Italy.

Each week, the session themes were supported by readings in sets of three, with one text from queer/feminist theory, one from architectural theory, and one unpublished/unfinished paper or writing experiment from Beda Ring’s ongoing PhD work. The narrative does not, however, reflect all of the texts we read, since in reading and discussing these texts together with the student group, I was better able to distinguish and select those that were most relevant to my project. I organized the first and last sessions, while course participants hosted the four remaining sessions in smaller groups.

Besides the given texts, there were three existing conditions that all of the groups were required to work within: 1) the space of a standard seminar room at the architecture school (A1), with its contents and limitations, including tables, chairs, movable wooden screens, and standard suspended linear fluorescent lighting; 2) a time frame of 2 hours; and 3) a 500 SEK budget. Another factor that provided an extra dimension to this course,
was the fact that I chose to run two different courses parallel to each other, one with masters architecture students from within the school in an elective worth 3 credits, and another with participants from outside of the school, in a continuing education course worth 7.5 credits. Although it was a bit of a juggling act, this allowed the combination of resources, so that we would have a budget to work with, as well as helping to establish a good-sized group with varied backgrounds, experiences, and disciplines.

Everyone read the texts and attended the 2-hour seminars centered on the readings; however, each group had different tasks, in order to reflect the expectations of effort required according to the amount of credits for the separate courses. Those that were following the 7.5 credit course, were given the larger task to host one of the seminars in smaller groups; including invitation, dress code, room and scenography, snack, preparatory instructions to the participants, conversation structure, and finally, a 5-7 minute digital documentation of their session. Those that were following the 3 credit elective course, were asked to work on a group project to produce a pedagogical handout on how an “architectural conversation, formerly known as critique” could take place.

The seminars were held once a week and lasted 3 hours, with the text sessions filling the first 2 hours. During the last hour, I tutored the hosting group for the upcoming seminar the following week and checked-in with the elective students, who used that time to workshop on their group assignment. There was an idea to minimize the necessity of organizational work outside of the constraints of the seminar, in order to allow more attention and time to the texts themselves and a desire to reinforce the feeling that we did the work together, collectively.

Play: Brief Seminar Descriptions

The course introduction was set up as an “Architectural Emergency Room – Disco,” with candlelit tables covered in golden tablecloths, a projection of a giant rotating disco ball on one wall, and Patsy Cline tunes in the background. Each student received an architectural Flirt Aid Kit, containing instructions on how to use the enclosed magic talismans in the case of “architectural emergencies,” as a welcome to the course and as a way to set the tone for what the impending task of seminar organization might entail.

Besides explaining the set-up and tasks of the course, the introductory session focused on the current field of feminist architectural research, through Jane Rendell’s text “Critical Spatial Practices: Setting Out a Feminist Approach to some Modes and what Matters in Architecture” (2011).41 I should also mention that after the first seminar, there were several participants registered in the (FeX) continuing education group who dropped out of the course, stating that it “wasn’t what they expected” or that their schedules would no longer allow it; however, I noted that the overwhelming majority of those dropping the course were male students, so it made me wonder whether the staging or the glitter was too much or experienced as too feminine to be serious? Perhaps this is something I should have addressed directly, in order not to lose the students who were most provoked and who might benefit the most from an off center perspective?
The first of the student-led seminars, The Flirt Club, worked with the ideas of flirtation, Camp, and reparative acts, from texts by Gavin Butt, Susan Sontag, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. The invitation to this session came as a link to a blog called The Flirt Club, inviting everyone to an evening of glitter, glamour and “Reparative Speed Dating.” We were asked to choose and pose as one of the three authors, as inspiration for both the dress code, as well as for the formulation of two questions about Beda Ring’s Room Specifications for the Rossi/Pizzigoni row house renovation.

Not surprisingly, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick was the least popular choice, as her text was the most dense, academic, and difficult. Participants, including the hosts, posing as clones of Gavin, Eve, or Susan, discussed the texts intensively with their partners of chance for three-minute intervals, before switching to the next partner. This mode of “consecutive” conversation repeated itself for an hour, as everyone played musical chairs along the single table, decorated with the same gold tablecloths, candles and roses, that stretched from one end of the room to the other.

The flirtation with the seminar form and conversation structure opened up for different intensities, as well as frustrations, in a varied repetition of halted conversations. As one of the participants, I can say that although the depth of a continuous close reading was lost in this format, these were among the most urgent discussions of theoretical texts I’ve ever heard!

Subsequently, the original blog was updated with the documentation from the session and served as the final digital presentation. Soon after this course, I asked one of the members of this group, Marie-Louise Richards, to help me set up a similar blog for the distribution of PhD material, prior to Beda’s midway seminar, while Marie-Louise began applying herself for research positions in the intersection of performative, curatorial and critical race theory.

And almost two years later, I received a message, along with photos, from another member of this group, Malin Heyman, who is now my colleague teaching in the first year studio at KTH. She had initiated a similar (and much appreciated) “speed dating critique” for a review of her students’ design projects. This kind of “ripple effect” of mutual learning and empowerment is where I see the potential for shifting a stubborn, self-perpetuating architectural culture.

The second student-led seminar had a spiritual bent to it, as the theme was taken from Beda Ring’s experimental text on the mystical, watery women’s bathing spaces in Lesvos, Greece. Prior to this session, we were asked to come as our elemental sign and to bring one important quote from the readings, as a basis for discussion. Isabelle Stengers’ text “Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices” (2005) figured as the main theoretical work, lending itself to conversations about ritual, habit, and tools of thought, while the issue of separatism, raised in the Lesvos text, gave rise to critical discussions on feminism.

The hosting group invented a short “hands-on” ritual requiring teamwork, similar to an obstacle course, at the beginning of the seminar in order to help transform the participants’ state of mind. Once the ritual was completed, discussions were held in small informal groups on picnic blankets on the floor. Although the casual atmosphere, in my opinion, perhaps affected these separate discussions, with the content tending to veer off in other directions, the gathering of the entire group at the end (standing in a circle) helped to collect and summarize important themes.

The third seminar was held with the lights off, but this time rather than candlelight, it was lit up by a digital world of Tweets projected onto a large screen. The invitation to this session asked everyone to set up a Twitter account as a humanimal character, based on the golden animal figurine they received in the introductory Flirt Aid Kit, and to join a curated group or Twitter list called “Beastlet 2.0.” At the time, I was unfamiliar with the Twitter format (still am), so the students’ technological competences took the lead. The chapter “The Making of an Architect” from Dana Cuff’s Architecture: The Story of Practice (1991) was the basis for the topical theme “formation of the architect,” while an early text (no longer included) from Beda Ring’s PhD work, about a teaching experience in a studio project to design a mythical humanimal sanctuary called The Beastlet, helped form the tone and atmosphere of the session.

There were background sounds of bird chirping and forest noises, along with a “nature inspired” granola-berry yogurt snack. The room was divided into three parts, with taught lines between movable wooden screens; hanging from the lines as soft dividers were the golden tablecloths, pinned with clothespins. We were asked to Tweet possible topics of discussion and to reTweet or follow other interesting Tweeters, before the session. The text seminar discussion was then conducted from participants’ mobile phones to a group Twitter list that everyone could follow in a live-stream on the projected screen.

The length of a Tweet and simultaneous (non)order of a digital chat session, of course, played a part in the type of discussion that was possible. Some students also reflected over whether the format of a Twitter session and the staging of the seminar room, might be in conflict with one another, as the whole point of Twitter was that you could contribute from anywhere. They felt that the seating in three small groups, rather, led to more direct chatting with each other and less Tweeting.

By the time the final student-led seminar was to take place, 2 of the 3 hosts had dropped out of the course, due to unforeseen personal situations, so we had to rethink. The remaining host and myself, decided to organize the session in a way that everyone pitched in, in order to make it feasible for him to handle the preparations on his own. Each participant received a personal email invitation, with instructions to wear an apron (in the case of the course, everyone was fully clothed underneath), bring a particular fruit ingredient that would be incorporated into the snack – a fruit salad, and to write down a personal “killjoy” story as the basis for discussion. The session was staged as a “killjoy picnic” in the garden of the renovated Rossi/Pizzigoni row house in Mozzo, Italy, inspired by Beda Ring’s text about the exterior garden features she added to the immediate surroundings.

Sara Ahmed’s article “Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects)” (2010)
73. Architectural killjoy launch, 1st year studio, KTH

74. First Aid Maps for students, teachers, critics and audience in red, blue, yellow and green. Group assignment.

Students responsible: Reid Josling, Olga Charlotta Tengvall, Lisa Palm, Elsa Jannborg, Henni Ruobonen, Andreas Nyström, Kari Svangstul, Astrid Linnér, Emma Jarlhäll Borg, Jasmijn Kok

Photo: Brady Burroughs
served as the theoretical base for the initial discussions that took place around preparing the snack, which involved chopping fruit and whisking cream. Once the fruit salads were ready, the entire group moved the discussion to the picnic table, set with plastic tablecloths and paper plates, to share some food and key ideas that came out of the earlier conversations. As a finale, the final task of the day was to make a paper airplane, with a secret architectural killjoy message inside, and to launch them as a group in the first year studio on the floor above. The idea was to send some of the ideas out into the world beyond the seminar course, although there is no way of knowing what effects (if any) this gesture produced.

The invitation to the final gathering, and examination of the course, came as a YouTube link to a short video, telling of Beda’s impending eviction by the Italian authorities from her illegal occupation and renovation of Case Unifamiliari. It welcomed everyone to an afternoon of activism, inside the new Bakery in the renovated row house, in order to plan a strategy of resistance. Gianna Nannini serenaded us, and we enjoyed take-away pizza as a snack. Each seminar group presented a 5-10 minute digital documentation of their session, with some reflections, for the rest of the group.

The participants were encouraged to invite friends and colleagues from outside of the course, who they wished to share the presentations with, but no external critics were invited. (It ended up being just the participants.) Meanwhile, the elective course students chose to produce a set of four pocket instructional guides, hand outs called “First Aid Maps” for an architectural critique, advising courses of action and reflection for four different positions; the student, the teacher, the critic, and the audience. The entire group had a short discussion around these maps, followed by some casual comments and an anonymous written evaluation of the course.

Fast Forward: Intentions and Reflections

Throughout the dream sequels in the narrative retelling of the course, I try to give a little taste of what the experience of each session was like, in both structure and atmosphere, along with some of the main topics of discussion. Important theoretical ideas from the authors of key texts, take on the form of eight distinct oracles; Jane Rendell as the boogieing head of the architectural ER, Gavin Butt, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Susan Sontag as their Campy cloned counterparts, Isabelle Stengers as the omniscient posthuman voice, Dana Cuff as the instigating humanimal Tweeter, bell hooks as the erudite swarm of fairies in formation, and Sara Ahmed as the naked apron-wearing killjoy, Zahra. With the help of a few fictional twists, these oracles offer “theory as liberatory practice” or as bell hooks writes in her article of the same name, “a place where I could imagine possible futures.” As most of the hosting groups chose to base the theme of each session on Beda Ring’s texts, which are materialized through the renovation of the Rossi/Pizzigoni row house in Mozzo, Italy, the order of the narrative (and many of the details) is based on a journey through the rooms of the renovated first floor.

The structure and intent of this performative seminar course was to focus on collective learning, rather than individual performance, through the shift from critique to conversation, something not altogether usual in the shared habits of an architectural culture. It not only functioned as a “live” experiment of the pedagogical ideas within my research, but also provided a “test audience” where students could read Beda’s (unpublished/unfinished) writing and offer valuable feedback. I am reluctant to speculate on what the students might have experienced, learned, or gained through participation in the course, as this is individual and course evaluations, although anonymous, still retain the influence of the power dynamic between teacher and student. Likewise, it would feel condescending to speak for my students, in some attempt to qualify and quantify student response.

However, we did dedicate part of the concluding session to talking casually about the course itself, and I asked the students to fill out the required course evaluation form. From the discussion and the response of the written evaluations, I think it is safe to say that most everyone was satisfied with what we were able to accomplish together, while some even mentioned that they had “enjoyed” theory for the first time and now felt less intimidated by theoretical texts. This alone, I see as an accomplishment.

If I linger on the aspect of enjoyment for a moment, as it relates to the idea of flirtation and a shift toward pleasure, away from the seriousness of a culture of critique, I will briefly describe what I experienced as a very telling encounter. This encounter reminded me of the fact that flirtation alone is not enough, as it is quickly discounted as being frivolous and lacking the depth of more serious endeavors. Flirtation needs its queer political direction and mode of willful persistence, if it is to displace a long-standing culture of critique and offer an empowering, ethical alternative.

When presenting the visual material from this course at a symposium attended by many of my architectural research colleagues, I was asked a question about whether and/or when I decide to just say “f *ck it” in relation to the institutional criteria and expectations for an elective course like this one, in order to have the freedom to do “something else”? Now, my assumption is that behind this question, lies an implication (based on the photo documentation I presented) that it looks like we’re having way too much fun to be doing anything “serious” or “real” academic work. Here, I begin to hear the habits of a culture of critique, guarding the inherited lineage of a serious architectural discipline.

My answer to this question was that I am certain that this course not only fulfills, but exceeds, every requirement placed on an elective seminar course of this type. (The intended “learning outcomes” listed in the course description include: providing tools for pursuing feminist interpretations of architecture and by extension creating new architecture, through the study of contemporary feminist theory and architectural practices.) Furthermore, it is less challenging, and quite frankly uninteresting, to just do whatever you feel like. In other words, although the images I presented did not look like the seminar courses we have become accustomed to, in a discipline filled with critique and judgement, the sessions were in fact, even more precise and “architectural” in the careful staging and execution of the discussion.
I would go so far as to argue that many of the students went above and beyond what was required, simply because they were engaged in a role of responsibility that they would not have had otherwise in a typical academic text seminar. One bonus learning moment, for those that arranged the sessions, was a taste of what it was like they would not have had otherwise in a typical academic text seminar. One bonus what was required, simply because they were engaged in a role of responsibility that (Which is why I signed up for the course in the first place.) I hope in briefly responding pedagogy is all fine and well, but what does it have to do with gender and architecture?

I use the term “staging” as it involves inviting someone into a situation, setting up a framework or putting guiding elements in place, taking care of the ‘guest’ within that framework, while remaining flexible enough to creatively react to whatever happens during the development of “the pedagogical event.”

Stewardship requires an openness and generosity that allows the ‘guest’s’ actions to influence, and even change, the original idea or framework. It is also the best alternative I have found to address asymmetrical power relations in teacher-student relationships, as well as my desire to include others in my own work. In her online article “Against Students,” Sara Ahmed writes: “We are reminded when we read these posts of the immense power that academics have over students: They grade student essays and exams; they have discussions about students in meetings that are closed; they sit on committees that decide funding; they have access to confidential files that hold personal information. It is very important to recognize “power over” as a modality of power.”

Regarding teacher-student power relations, although I may use my power in an unorthodox way, including baking cakes and dressing up in silly costumes, and I may encourage a discussion of power relations openly in the classroom, I am acutely aware that I still retain authority as the teacher. So, pedagogical stewardship isn’t a naive belief that existing hierarchies are somehow magically eradicated, or that I can temporarily become one of my students’ peers, but rather it is about sharing responsibility and establishing trust in a mutual effort toward learning.

Also worth mentioning, is the underlying intention of this seminar course in relation to architecture and gender. The recurring Architecture and Gender elective course is a complement and contribution to the standard architecture curriculum that I, together with colleagues in a feminist teaching and research collective called FATALE, initiated in 2008. Although the responses to the student evaluation at the end of the course were in general very positive, one issue came up that I think is an important one to elaborate on. I’ll rephrase the question like this: “Sure, the discussion of architectural pedagogy is all fine and well, but what does it have to do with gender and architecture? (Which is why I signed up for the course in the first place.)” I hope in briefly responding to this question, this may provide the missing link that makes up for the lack of time to properly debrief after our seminars and to catch these important gaps.

I can begin by saying that in order to change a system that perpetuates itself, like the one Dana Cuff describes (although things have changed since then, it is striking how much has remained the same), I would argue that there must be a cultural shift. In order to bring about that shift, I whole-heartedly believe that the core lies in the way we learn and the way we are fostered to do the things we do as architects. For this reason, I would argue that “talking about pedagogy” is one of the very things we must do, since this is where habits are formed and then carried into professional life, as well as passed down from one generation of new educators to the next.

While I do believe that the primary responsibility for this shift rests upon the educational institution itself, and those of us who represent and work within it, another important lesson from this course is that we’re all in it together. This shift can and will not happen, without the engagement of students. It can’t be a one-way relationship. The roles of “the learner” and “the teacher” must transform to be mutually reciprocal, perhaps even flirtatious. In other words, it has everything to do with gender and architecture, as a “culture” touches (and regulates) every aspect of the group that is part of that culture; everything from its bodies, to its relationships, to its rituals, to its very purpose.

If we go back to Liv Strömquist’s experiences as a creative person, or more specifically a creative menstruating person (and as I’m a bit older than Liv, I can add a creative pre-menopausal or post-menopausal person to the list, which brings with it a whole host of other “fun” challenges), and how conditions for creativity are gendered, I believe in a cultural shift towards passionate pedagogy, where mutual support and vulnerability offer an alternative to sharp elbows and architectural conversations critically flirt with critique, as they boogie away in a fierce and liberating disco!
Floor plans of seminar sessions

Diagram: Brady Burroughs

The Golden Emergency

Rituals of Community

Killjoy Picnic

The Flirt Club

Tweetlets at the Beastlet

Pizza with Gianna
som präglas av inbördes hjälp istället för vassa armbågar, och en inre Laila Bagge. Jag har verkligen behövd sammanhang börde lägga ner osv. Precis som andra har inombords, har jag ingen sån inre hjärtans tro 'Laila Bagge' som säger till mig som man har och allting man kommer på. Jag själv har verklig...
What makes love “A Love to Die For”? And where do expressions, pairing paradoxical notions of frivolous flirtation with serious subjects, such as “flirting with danger” or “flirting with death” come from? In his book, On Flirtation, Adam Phillips draws attention to the fact that not until faced with thoughts of war and death, occasioned by the eruption of the First World War, did Freud begin his writings involving the concept of flirtation. Freud suggested that life is only of value when we can risk it (in things like war or love), where the risk is considered very serious.

According to Phillips, Freud contends that death is the ultimate “forbidden knowledge” and that flirtation is humankind’s way of protecting ourselves from this inevitable truth, by creating the illusion of our own immortality, which leaves us in an extremely vulnerable position. Freud poses flirtation with the serious as a knowledge project and suggests that this also gives rise to a sense of morality. He compares the real confrontation with death one experiences in the face of loss, particularly in losing someone we love, to a “continental love-affair” involving deep passion, where there can be serious consequences, as opposed to what he calls an “American flirtation,” which he contends has no real consequences because of its superficiality. So, it follows that according to Freud, “A Love to Die For” is both serious and committed.

Where does that leave us in the construction of our final love storey? Well, Phillips talks about the psychoanalytic (i.e. Freudian) idea of the impossibility of love, where desire is fueled by wanting to know, or to possess fully, something or someone in a way we cannot, and that this counterintuitive desire for what we cannot have is the very thing that sustains desire. Or in Jacques Lacan’s words: “Love is giving something you haven’t got to someone who doesn’t exist.” In this model, Phillips explains that love is an impossible knowledge project, where the knowledge one seeks, if attained, may potentially kill the original desire, rendering it no longer “A Love to Die For.”

The belief that perpetual waiting for and wanting what is inherently unavailable (or unknowable), is both the source and catalyst of desire, was influential for many (male) members of the literary canon. Phillips mentions Goethe’s Faust, “the legendary figure for whom knowledge and desire are synonymous; and for whom their equation, their contract, spells death.” Another who enlists the literary figure of Faust, in relation to resolving the conflict between faith and (scientific) knowledge, where Faust’s desire for Marguerite - a beautiful innocent girl, is seen as a weakness and obstacle for rational knowing, is the German Nobel prize winning physicist Max Planck, who wrote Scientific Autobiography and other papers in 1949, a
precursor and reference for Aldo Rossi’s own book in 1981. Even Aldo Rossi writes of similar sentiments in *A Scientific Autobiography*: “That is, everything becomes representable once desire is dead... Almost paradoxically, whenever there is a loss of desire, the form, the project, the relation, love itself, are cut off from us and so can be represented. I do not know how much of this is cause for joy or melancholy, but I am certain that desire is something that exists beforehand or that lives in a general sense; it cannot coexist with any design process or ritual.” According to Rossi, the achievement or representation of a design only becomes possible, once the obsession for that thing is reconciled and no longer exists. However, this view of love seems a bit pessimistic, even if at times it may feel true. (I also read in the *New York Times* that Rossi named his son Fausto and his daughter Vera. Vera in Italian means truth. Faust and Truth!)

bell hooks, on the other hand, in her analysis of the concept of ‘love,’ cites the work of psychiatrist M. Scott Peck to define love as “the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth... Love is as love does. Love is an act of will – namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love.” In hooks’ model, we have the description of a mutual exchange with the vulnerability, performativity and willfulness of architectural flirtations! So, I’d say that this is something we can work with. And let’s not forget, as the LGBTQ rights struggle has taught us (and continues to teach us), Love is political! Rather than a Freudian impossible and moral dilemma, I would like to propose that “A Love to Die For” is a reciprocal and intentional action, one that comes from a place of ethics and sees contradictions, partiality, and uncertainties as sources of possibility.

Ahmed says that “love is also what gives us a certain direction” and that “it is often loss that generates a new direction,” when we are “knocked off course” as a result of losing a loved one or when a love relationship ends. My involvement with this project came at a time of great personal crisis and upheaval, after the loss of someone close to me. The writing provided a place of focus and respite to begin the process of healing, and ultimately to discover a new beginning. For this, I am eternally grateful.

In “Theory as Liberatory Practice,” one of my (our) favorite theorists bell hooks writes about the relationship of theorizing to personal struggle: “I found a place of sanctuary in ‘theorizing,’ in making sense out of what was happening. I found a place where I could imagine possible futures, a place where life could be lived differently... Fundamentally, I learned from this experience that theory could be a healing place.” hooks explains that when theorizing becomes part of our lived experience, as a means toward “self-recovery” and “collective liberation,” the gap between theory and practice disappears. It is this space I was fortunate to find and work from, thanks to the kindness and encouragement of my co-authors and friends.

The text in this section has only one voice, and it is my own. Or, at least, it is my own recounting of other
voices. Perhaps unintentionally reinforcing the idea of the autonomous megalomaniac architect? However, in this case, the patriarchal (often male) authority is countered by a queer female body. Intimately connected to my role as the practicing architect in this trio, I explore how three acoustic details inspire unexpected (and sometimes unwanted) connections between otherwise independent individuals. It is an introspective piece, written in the form of journal entries and annotated dialogue, from my experience of living in the midst of the Case Unifamiliar renovation project and speaking to the persons most directly affected by it, the neighbors. Below, is a short description of Flirting with Death.

In the gap between the last lines of Book IX, the story of Iphis and Ianthe, in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, and the beginning of Orpheus and Eurydice in Book X, a fictional tale traverses time and space, maneuvering between literature and architecture in a critical contemporary re-mix of these age-old myths. Iphis, named after the gender complex mythical figure, was once a sought after artiste—the famous DJ Orfeus. Now a ghost, she plays out a backwards twist on Orpheus’ fate, as it is she who dies rather than Eurydice (Henri), landing her in her own personal purgatory on the 2nd floor of a renovated row house in Mozzo, Italy, between her neighbors Hades (Ade) and Persephone (Zite).

Silenced by death and starved for the attention she is accustomed to, Iphis can only make her presence felt through sensorial bodily sensations connected to the newly constructed acoustic details. This architectural work from 1977 is revitalized using the literary method of critical fiction, simultaneously as Eurydice, one of Ovid’s (many) semi-existent female characters, regains voice through Henri’s journal entries and annotated dialogue. Henri T. Beall, architect and writer, comes to stay in the renovated row house, in order to do some research and documentation for an academic article. Unbeknownst to Henri, the spirit of her dear departed friend (almost as frequently her nemesis) Iphis, haunts not only her thoughts, but also the very rooms where she will be staying.

This architectural pulp fiction engages with an existing building, a 1977 row house project by Aldo Rossi and Attilio Pizzigoni, in a dialogical process of drawing, modeling and the queer feminist (re)storytelling of Ovid’s myth. It uses fiction as a means of design and the architectural detail as a tool for writing, to explore situations of life (and death) through the practical application of what we call architectural flirtations, or another mode of operation for the practice of research, pedagogy and design. While the underlying myth acts as a gentle guide that frames and propels the narrative forward, the proposed details upstairs are concerned with sound—sounds that arouse a response from the auditorily sentient spirit upstairs!

The third storey of this section is the tale of a love to die for (and dedicated to Ela Tora).

Henri T. Beall
Practitioner
10 September 2016, Stockholm
Flirting with Death

Goddess in the Details

Henri T. Beall
It's been almost five months now. I can't stop thinking about that day.
It was as close to a perfect day as a day could be. (Except for the ending, of course.)
And what an ending it was! I wouldn't have expected anything less for your ending. But it was unexpected.
My therapist says that I should keep a journal, write down my thoughts for myself.
But it’s easier if I imagine that I’m writing to you.

“Que sera, sera
Whatever will be, will be
The future’s not ours to see
Que sera, sera
What will be, will be”

If only you had known how dead-on those lyrics were.
(pun intended)

We had been out on the boat all day, speeding over the surface of the sea, stopping to swim or picnic, and laughing about old misunderstandings. (With us, there were many.)
We anchored just off of the coast of Ancient Andissa. You wanted to show me where your chosen namesake Orpheus’ head and lyre had washed up on the Lesbian shores.
You stood naked, poised at the nose of the boat, arms outstretched with a smile from ear to ear, as you bounced with the crests of the sea and sang out verses of that song at the top of your lungs. They echoed off of the golden ridges of volcanic rock, lit up by the setting sun.
(I admired your full soft curves.) This grand performance was for me, or rather I was its witness, as I watched from the cool Aegean Sea, laughing and cheering you on.

When you did have clothes on, you wore what made you feel comfortable. No time to fuss with petty things like one’s appearance. You had more important things to think about. You wanted so badly to be the maestro and craved a constant audience, and I was often glad to oblige. You had the charisma to command everyone’s attention when you spoke your mind (although it sometimes resembled an air of male entitlement). And of course, you loved the company of women, lots of them.
Iphis (Ιφις), you shared your name with the mythical figure, born a girl, raised as a boy (to avoid female feticide), and transformed into a man by the goddess Isis, in order to consummate the marriage to her true love Ianthe and live out their days happily ever after. It was one of the few Greek myths with a happy ending. A queer happy ending at that, depending on how you look at it.

I asked if you chose the mournful figure of Orpheus as your stage name “DJ Orfeus,” because you found happy endings unbearable? You said that it stood for the enchanting tunes you could mix, just like Orpheus’ power to charm with his music. You definitely had talent and the most sensitive ears in the business. No wonder you were one of the most sought after DJs on the European continent, male or female. Unfortunately, your ego was never far behind.

I once heard you lament the fact that you were “trapped in an epoch of mediocrity, surrounded by inferior people with no sense of values, aesthetics, or philosophy”!

I laughed and said “Good thing you aren’t trapped in an epoch of humility, ‘cause then you’d be in trouble.” You rolled your eyes.

But it’s not like there is any shortage of megalomania in my own profession. At a talk in Stockholm, the Palestinian architect and writer, Suad Amiry, said: “Architecture is one of the most egotistical professions in the world.” Then again, she had never encountered DJ Orfeus!

In rare moments, self-doubt would kick in, followed by painful bouts of hopelessness and misgivings over your own capabilities. With no warning, the space between us suddenly became fractured, broken, and it made me feel invisible. These were the worst moments.

You were like an unpredictable tornado, and tornadoes tend to leave destruction in their wake, which led to certain ‘social difficulties.’ Let’s face it, boundaries and sensitivity were not your strong points, and this caused you more than a few conflicts along the way. Even we had a turbulent relationship, to put it mildly. You thought that I was too sensitive and stubborn.

Remember the time when we went for a couple of years without speaking and then bumped into each other, and were pals again shortly after? You said: “See, it took five minutes.”

I thought to myself: “Yes, two years and five minutes, but ok.”

Stubborn.

I found your personal quirks endearing, but it was your complete disregard for the rules of conduct and unrelenting energy that I loved most about you. It was liberating!

That day.

We were sitting in the boat, arguing over whether or not “karma” and “the evil eye” were superstitious nonsense. You were an emphatic believer. I was (and still am) skeptical.

I began to tell you my idea for a new project, an article on an unusual architectural renovation project, by one of my colleagues from Stockholm, just outside of Bergamo, Italy. I knew that you considered yourself an aficionado of Italian culture, so I thought you would be interested.

Your response: “Why Bergamo? Of all places! It’s like the purgatorio of Italy!”

(For someone so adamant in their belief of karma, you weren’t exactly subtle in dishing out judgments.)

A fishing boat, with several loud young men, began approaching where we were anchored. You looked at me with a frown and said: “Here comes a boat-full of stupidity.” You shouted and motioned to them to go someplace else, as they waved and veered out of the cove. Your reputation always preceded you!

I dove in. Now, as you sang, neither of us noticed the seagull fly by in a low swoop over the boat. As the sea surged in a delayed reaction from the other boat’s departure, you stepped back to regain your balance and slipped on the wet surface, compliments of the seagull. Besides the bump on your head from the fall backwards, (despite your moaning) you were ok.

You let out a bloodcurdling scream, and I thought you were still going on about the bump on your head.

They said that the small, but deadly Ottoman viper must have found its way into the boat from the warm sun-drenched rocks at the harbor. It was just a baby.

Your fall must have startled it, when it lunged out from its hiding place.

The bite was just below the knee.

In a matter of seconds, this close to perfect day turned into the worst.

All that kept running through my mind was the argument we would have had, over whether this was karma for scaring away the fishing boat, or proof that someone really had given you the evil eye. It was an argument we would never have.

Iphis?

Where did you go?
78. Neighbor portraits and Plan 02 (not to scale), Case Unifamiliari, Mozzo, IT

MONTAGE: HENRI T. BEALL, DRAWING: MALIN HEYMAN

ping-pong guy  Adelina  Beda  Zite

dog house

Detail 1
The Tencophone

Detail 2
The Birdbath

Detail 3
The Lovebug

ARCHITECTURAL FLIRTATIONS
THIRD STOREY
Case Unifamiliari, Mozzo, Italy
Scale 1:50
Drawing: Malin Heyman
Zite’s melancholic canzoni
“So to the music of his strings he sang,
And all the bloodless spirits wept to hear,”
– Ovid, X. Orpheus and Eurydice

21 March 2013, Mozzo (morning)

I’m just getting settled after my taxi ride from the airport to Mozzo. It’s a small but nice guest room, with a bed and an antique secretary cabinet for writing. Cozy.

As I sit down to write my initial impressions upon arrival, I’ve made a spontaneous decision. See, I’m not so stubborn. I had intended to conduct formal interviews with the residents of Case Unifamiliari, but after my brief introduction from Beda, I’ve decided instead to record and transcribe my informal conversations. It’s a more efficient use of my time, since I’m only here for a couple of days.

I’ve only been here for a little over an hour, and I’ve already gotten enough information to keep me busy until lunchtime! So, here it goes!

Conversation with Beda Ring (upon arrival on the day of the Open House): (Beda Ring BR) (Henri T. Beall HB)

BR: Welcome! Come in! Come in!
HB: Thank you. I heard about this renovation back when the first floor was just under way, but I see a lot has happened since then! Oh, I’ve seen these black and white checkered floor tiles in many of the churches and chapels I visited in the area. Is there some connection?
BR: Well, I guess you could say that the entry is about a “rebirth” of sorts, but perhaps not the kind of transformation that the Roman Catholic Church had in mind.
HB: I see. Well, I look forward to hearing more about it. It was very kind of you to invite me and offer me a place to stay in your guest room.
BR: Sure, no problem. Like I said, as long as you are ok with ghosts.
HB: Ha ha, right! I don’t believe in ghosts, except for those dedicated souls you sometimes see haunting the academic corridors.
BR: Uh huh.
HB: Anyway, I’m interested in doing an article on the new details you’ve constructed upstairs.
BR: Ah, ok. Be my guest! Why don’t I show you upstairs, so you can get settled before the event begins. Grab yourself a pair of slippers.
HB: You can never trust those stairs. They're always up to something!
BR: Uh, yeah, ok. There's always the elevator.
HB: Sorry, it's a habit of mine.
BR: Tell you what. I'll make you some tea, once I've shown you to your room. It's just down here, next to mine.
HB: There's the elevator all right! I see you've taken down all of the original interior partition walls, and replaced them with new ones. Wow! And the red.
BR: Yeah, I freed up the central stair block and added diagonal partitions extending from the outer square volume, with transparent sliding doors that shoot out to touch the stair block, to make it easier for the ghost to move around freely. The plan is sort of like a pinwheel, twisting the original structure. Apparently, the whole "moving through walls" thing is quite uncomfortable, makes them cranky, not at all like in the movies or cartoons. And I had enough of the temper tantrums! They gave me a headache.
HB: Tantrums? Uh, well, in any case, it's really pink in here!
BR: Isn't it great? That's a nod to the French architect Odile Decq. I saw a film recently, about five outstanding contemporary women architects, that featured Studio Odile Decq's renovation for the Opéra Garnier Restaurant in Paris. Do you know it?
HB: No, but her name sounds familiar... Wasn't she recently announced as the winner of the Jane Drew Prize, as part of the Women in Architecture awards? I remember it popping up in my Facebook newsfeed, not too long ago.
BR: That's her! Apparently, she's also an educator and started her own experimental architecture school in Lyon. Anyway, the second floor of the restaurant is this freestanding, white undulating plastic shell that is completely deep red on the inside: walls, floor, furniture, everything! It's like bathing in color, erotic even. So, I wanted to try my own variation in pink. The details came later.
HB: So, what determines the sinuous line along the walls, where the pink stops and the white begins?
BR: An algorithmic computation combining the academic journal-ranking index, citation impact, article-level metrics, and author-level metrics for all of the feminist architectural research scholars' work in Europe. I figured that this was a better use for this kind of data.
HB: So how do you read it?
BR: Oh, you don't. It's just a nice line. I asked a friend from the Parametric Design department to take the data and help me come up with a curve. We set the zero point at floor level, and I gave them the total length I would need to reach all the way around the outer wall of the second floor. They printed it out in sections, so we could transfer it to the walls, before painting. (Of course, we had to cheat and move the zero point up a meter, since the ranking system didn't seem to value the critical, feminist, or educational journals as much as the more technical ones. I wanted it to land around "boob height," you know, about 1200 mm.)
HB: Right. And you painted the existing parquet floor and re-finished all of the furniture in the same pink!
BR: NCS S 1070-R20B! What's Campier than an entire floor in "Barbie pink"? Right? I keep expecting RuPaul to come walking out of the shiny red elevator and say: "Hello! Hello! Hello!" And besides, there is an architect Barbie now. I was sorry to hear about your friend, by the way. I heard that you were close.
HB: Yes, thank you. But working on assignments like this helps get your mind off of things.
BR: Just be mindful of the kinds of sounds you make up here. I think the ghost has sensitive ears, maybe even misophonia. It's a neurological disorder, where certain feelings are triggered by specific sounds. The studio is its favorite room.
HB: Sure, thanks. Uh, not to nitpick, but is it even conceivable that a ghost would have a neurological disorder, or feelings for that matter? I mean, doesn't the ghost part cancel out all of the human, earth-bound stuff? Hypothetically speaking, of course.
BR: All I know is that every time the bells in the ceiling downstairs jingle, everyone inside gets goose bumps. I think it must make the ghost ticklish, and it sends out some kind of "tickle energy" that we're susceptible to.
HB: Are you serious? Oh, I get it... something to make the Open House a little more exciting, huh? (wink) So, what's going on with this wall in the studio? Look, a cat just came out of the bottom there! Do you have cats?
BR: I suppose I should start by telling you the story of our next-door neighbor, Zite, in the house on the end.

Zite's story (according to Beda):
Around the neighborhood, she's known simply as "Zite," which is short for "la zitella" [the spinster], typically a derogatory address. Although she is an older woman who lives alone with three cats, the name is one of affection, rather than slight, as she owns and runs a small delicatessen on 88 Via Alfredo Piatti, just around the corner from Case Unifamiliari, called LA ZITELLA. One of the local favorites in Mozzo, LA ZITELLA is known for its slow, personal service and considered to have the finest selection of small cakes and sweets in all of Bergamo. Living up to its name, LA ZITELLA also specializes in packaging and portions, directed toward single households, and boasts an elaborate selection of assorted sweet wines, sherry, and gourmet cat food. Although it is more of a shop than a café, Zite has made space for a tiny table and two folding chairs for her most regular customers, an
elsy nun named Madre Pagani and her best friend Caprice, who come almost every day for an espresso, pastry, and gossip.

As Beda kept the home Bakery stocked with small cakes and sweets from her shop, Zite often dropped by her neighbor’s for an espresso and a chat on her way home. She was sympathetic to the renovation project and didn’t oppose the makeover Beda suggested for the wall of her music room upstairs. However, as she was away from home for many hours during the day to tend her shop, Zite asked Beda if she could incorporate a passage in the design to allow her cats to pass freely between their row houses. That way, they could find company when they were lonely. Beda liked the idea of communal cat sitting, and Zite was pleased with the results, but she mentioned several times that since the changes in the adjoined wall, she had felt an occasional draft in that room.

Zite had been to see Luigi Tenco live in concert, together with her best friend Gigi, at the 1967 Sanremo music festival, where the then 28 year-old singer (known for songs of love and despair) committed suicide on January 27th in his hotel room, just before the festival ended. At the live performance, Zite found herself pushed to the front of the crowd, holding Gigi’s hand at the edge of the stage, with an unobstructed view straight into Tenco’s sad eyes. Rumor has it that Zite fell in love, but it is unclear whether the object of her affection was Tenco or her dear friend Gigi.

On the same day that Tenco took his life, Gigi confided in Zite that she had accepted a marriage proposal from her long distance boyfriend to run off together and elope, and that this in Zite that she had accepted a marriage proposal from her long distance boyfriend to run off together and elope, and that this...

Zite had dedicated a room upstairs to her two favorite things, Tenco and her hat collection. Always elegant and chic, Zite was a bit of a fashionista and her hats were her trademark. Even the awning in front of her shop was adorned with a Tou-Lautrec like sketch of a woman in a smart hat. Zite also had a flair for interior decorating and countered the sparse modernist interior of her home with an enviable collection of memorabilia, artifacts, and memories, in a way that was cozy and stylish.

Next to her rocking chair, was her prized possession, a beautiful old gramophone that sweetened the sound of Tenco’s voice, as she sipped her favorite sweet cherry wine in the evenings. According to Beda, the sentimental melancholic ballads calmed the ghost upstairs, so she found a way to “borrow” Zite’s music from next door, while providing a better solution to storing and displaying Zite’s hats on her side, in addition to the cat passages. With a giant photo wallpaper of Tenco himself covering the wall, Zite could look into those sad eyes and remember that evening with Gigi.

Prior to construction, while taking some interior measurements and inventory of the hats one day, Beda had asked about a kitschy, airbrushed oval medallion hanging on the wall in a gold frame, just above her rocking chair. Zite explained that it was Pio of Pietrelcina, more commonly known as Padre Pio. He was the patron saint of healing from Benevento, in Campania, where Zite had spent many summers as a child with her grandmother, who was widowed quite young. Many believe that those healed by this particular saint experience a flowery perfumed scent, as a sign of his miracle.

While visiting her grandmother, at the age of 8 or 9, Zite overheard the story of how Padre Pio had saved the town’s butcher. He had been rushed to the hospital with a serious heart condition, only to awaken from surgery to the fresh scent of lilac. That year, she remembers following her grandmother and everyone in the village, on a journey to the Padre Pio Pilgrimage Church, built in the village of San Giovanni Rotondo. Since then, Zite has always believed that Padre Pio can heal “broken” hearts and keeps his icon nearby, waiting patiently and wondering if she will ever experience that sweet floral fragrance.

Conversation with Beda Ring (continued):

BR: When the music sounds slightly muffled, it’s just the ghost interfering with the sound waves. I think it likes to compress itself into one of the conical spaces and feel the vibrations of the music move through it. Even muffled, it’s more pleasant than the racket from the other side of the house! In case you’re wondering, I call the detail The Tencophone.

HB: Is it designed specifically for Tenco’s voice?

BR: Well, not only for his voice, per se, but that’s the only one it’s ever been used for.

HB: Yes, right, of course!

BR: Well, I have to get downstairs for a while, to prepare for the Open House. Oh, and by the way, today is Tenco’s birthday, March 21st, so be prepared for an extra dose of his ballads! Zite usually closes the shop and takes the afternoon off.

HB: Ok, but before you go, do you happen to have a Wi-Fi network I can use?

BR: Yep, it’s releasethecockatoo. One word.

HB: Excuse me? Release the what?

BR: The network: releasethecockatoo One word. It’s a message to my other neighbor, so she will see it every time she goes online to find her network.

HB: And the password?

BR: destroyimperialistwhitesupremacistcapitalistpatriarchy

HB: Uh, ok? Got it!
The Tencophone
Detail One

Acoustic megaphone

A wall-sized element, made up of lightweight frames and cross members, provides a structure to hold 16 acoustic megaphones. The structure is encased in a partition wall system, around a new structural column and lintel to account for the loads of the large opening in the firewall. Together, the structure functions as a giant speaker insert, transmitting Luigi Tenco’s melancholic ballads from Zite’s gramophone to Beda’s study. It also provides 4 cat passages between the row houses and a hat display for Zite’s hat collection.
Description of Detail One. The Tencophone:
(Beda explained that she set up the details as a quick charrette, similar to a student design task. They were based on the programmatic requirements that emerged during the development of the narrative of her critical fictions. I think I’ll draw up the details later, as documentation for my article, since Beda’s sketches are a bit sketchy. I should also get some photos of that model.)

Based on the principle of an acoustic megaphone, a wall-sized element, made up of light-weight frames and cross members, provides a structure to hold 16 acoustic megaphones in a regular grid formation. The structure is encased in a partition wall system, around a new structural column and lintel to account for the loads of the large opening in the firewall. The element is placed at a 7° angle to the original structure, but orthogonal to the twist of the new interior partitions.

Together, the structure functions as a giant speaker insert, transmitting Luigi Tenco’s melancholic ballads from Zite’s gramophone to Beda Ring’s study. It also provides 4 cat passages between the two row houses and a hat display for a selection of Zite’s hat collection. The surface of the wall element on Zite’s side is covered with a wallpaper portrait of Luigi Tenco, while on Beda’s side the surface is painted in Barbie pink. The interior elevation of the element on Beda’s side resembles the cubical ossuary from Aldo Rossi’s Modena Cemetery, 1971, only with circular openings instead of square ones and, of course, a shift in scale.

Interlude:
Sometimes Iphis slid through the conical spaces, like her own secret passage through the wall, for a change of scenery (and to help herself to Zite’s homemade Italian cookies, especially the ones with fig filling! Besides sensitive ears, she had a sweet tooth.). Overwhelmed with feelings of tenderness, whenever she watched Zite weeping as Tenco sang Vedrai Vedrai, Iphis reached to tooth.). Overwhelmed with feelings of tenderness, whenever she watched Zite weeping as Tenco sang Vedrai Vedrai, Iphis reached out to caress her lightly across the cheek, in a gesture meant to comfort and console. However, it had the opposite effect, sending a shiver through her body, as if there was a draft in the wall. Iphis felt immense disappointment and frustration, so she scrunched herself up and hid inside the space of the openings in the wall, where she could be alone to sulk.

21 March 2013, Mozzo (lunchtime)
Just got back from LA ZITELLA. Charming place! I ran out to pick up some lunch before it closed, so I could eat up here in my room while I finish up my notes. I can already hear the music next door. It’s melancholy and soothing. Suicide and broken hearts! Wow! It makes me think of you Iphis. How you loved Italian music and drama!

I almost imagine that you would have been pleased at your own dramatic demise. You would have said: “Pathos!” like you had meant for it to happen that way. But I’m sure you would go absolutely insane listening to the same sad songs over, and over, and over. It’s a good thing you’re not here!

The Tencophone, huh? “Not only his voice, per se.” Per se? Ugh, academics!
“Hi, I’m a pretender, I mean pre tenure.”27 Allow me to unpack that concept for you.”

I automatically think of the drag terminology “packing,” techniques used by male impersonators, or drag kings to create the illusion of having male genitals, by placing padding or phallic objects inside the front of their pants, which makes the thought of academic unpacking even funnier.28

Those academic expressions! They sound so phony. The per se phonies. Persephone! Get it?
I know, I know, you would have rolled your eyes at that one. Persephone (Περσεφόνη)- fonis (φωνής) in Greek meaning “voice,” and per se (περί σε) meaning “approximate.”29 You could say it’s the detail of approximate voices. Or maybe voices in proximity? That works!

I remember you telling me the story of Persephone, since she’s mentioned in the tale of Orpheus, your chosen namesake. She was abducted and raped by Hades, and then held captive in the underworld. Her father, Zeus, finally struck a deal with Hades, allowing her to spend spring and summer with her mother, giving rise to the seasons. I guess Persephone would have had reason enough to listen to Tenco, too?

From now on, I’ll think of Zite as Persephone. Well, today is March 21”, the day of the spring equinox when Persephone gets a temporary reprieve from her abductor, and Zite is taking the afternoon off. Personally, I’m more interested in the sunlight springtime brings.

I stayed up all night to see where the sun went. Then it dawned on me. Ha ha ha!

I do like the Wi-Fi password though. Persephone sure could have used a little feminist help destroying the patriarchy, stuck between Zeus and Hades! Speaking of Hades, I saw a good one the other day: How do you make holy water? Boil the hell out of it! He he.
Ade’s discordant pizzicato

“And with her this compact that, till he reach the world above and leave Avernus’ vale, He look not back or else the gift would fail.”

–Ovid, X. Orpheus and Eurydice

21 March 2013, Mozzo (afternoon)

Another colleague from KTH, Brady Burroughs, is here with a group of students. Nice group. They’re all getting ready to have a Q&A session with Beda, now that the guided tour is over. I decided to come upstairs for a moment and jot down some notes, while the students are preparing their questions. I’ll go back down to listen when they gather in the library, and then Beda has promised to end with a pizza picnic in the garden!

I heard loud squawking noises coming from the backside of the house, out on the gallery. Between the squawks, it almost sounded like the bird was saying “over the wall, over the wall”? I went out to see what the noise was and found the other neighbor, accompanied by her cockatoo, who goes by the name of Hugo, on the gallery next door.

This neighbor, a woman in her mid to late fifties, introduced herself as Adelina. She looked me up and down with a disapproving sneer, until I produced a lighter for the cigarette between her lips, as she fumbled through her pockets. (Beda gave me the lighter for some candles in the guest room, and I still had it in my pocket. You know I detest smoking!) The first puff stemmed the initial nicotine nervousness, while the second helped with the agitation over “the intruder” she had just thrown off of the property.

Conversation with Adelina (A):

HB: The cockatoo has quieted down now and seems to enjoy crunching on those twigs.
A: Something or someone must have provoked him.

(Her look makes me feel guilty.)

I place Hugo out here every day for one hour, and he’s well behaved. Otherwise, I keep him in my showroom with my Nordic design collection.

HB: Nordic design? What a coincidence! I’m a Swedish architect. Henri Beall, pleased to meet you.

A: So, you are a friend of my neighbor? Are you involved in this mess?

She was paying at the counter, when I walked in. Not sure if I heard correctly, but it sounded like she had a Greek accent. Anyway, we made eye contact as she passed by, on her way out to her shaggy dog that was tied up outside. She had beautiful eyes!

Aaaachooo!
HB: Uh, you mean the renovation? No, not really. Or, rather, I’m doing some research for an article about the renovation. Beda is a colleague of mine and invited me to stay here in the extra room upstairs, during the Open House event.

A: In the “haunted” one?

HB: Oh, I don’t believe in that kind of thing.

A: I’ve said all along there are no ghosts here, but the Devil is another story!

HB: The devil?

A: Never mind. So you are a Swedish designer? I am also a professional designer, mostly interiors. Would you like to see my showroom?

HB: I’d love to. I think I have another 30 minutes or so, before the Q&A session begins downstairs. One moment, and I’ll pop right over to your entrance.

Conversation with Adelina (continued in her house):

HB: I hope you don’t mind if I take some notes and record our conversation, as I’m trying to document my impressions of the place while I am here.

A: Of course not, as I’m the spokeswoman for my WHITE group, I’m quite used to being interviewed and having my opinions featured in the press. Here we are.

HB: Wow, very “Scandinavian.” It’s just like a showroom from one of the posh areas of Stockholm.

A: Well you should know, after all! I just love the purity of it all, the whiteness and the “blonde” coloring of the birch wood! I even had the vintage birdcage refurbished in white, to compliment the atmosphere I’m trying to achieve. The bird is the final touch, don’t you agree?

HB: Lovely, but... uh, doesn’t he get lonely in here?

A: Lonely? He’s the lucky one who gets to spend so much time with great design. I just wish he didn’t make such a mess! His incessant clutter ruins the order and cleanliness and disrupts the minimal aesthetic I’m trying to achieve.

HB: I understand that this is a very sensitive issue. Eggcellent design isn’t a yolk.

A: Ha, you’re a clever one! My greatest [Migratest- missed opportunity] fear is that your “colleague” will ruin the reputation of this respectable neighborhood, with her scandalous shenanigans that she calls design. And I thought the Italian family from the south were troublesome!

HB: Well, have you ever been tempted to renovate parts of the house, in order to make it fit your own living situation better?

A: Absolutely not! Besides this room, everything is original, as intended by a very famous Italian architect, Aldo Rossi. You’re an architect. You’ve heard of him?

HB: Yes, of course.

A: As a designer, you must understand that I had no choice but to replace the flooring in this room, due to the sensitive nature of the Nordic design pieces. They demand a certain ambiance and the original wooden parquet just wouldn’t do.

HB: But don’t you think that Aldo Rossi, and his co-designer Attilio Pizzigoni, would have expected there to be changes over the years? If I’m not mistaken, I think Rossi wrote: “the building of a place that is relatively permanent yet receptive to personal modifications is still something that I can accept within a limited disorder of things; for it is honest, and it responds to our aspirations.” Maybe they would even find it interesting?

A: Nonsense! This is a signature building, which was the reason I, I mean we, moved here in the first place! My former husband and I, that is. We were young and it was slightly out of our price range at the time, but it was a very important step toward achieving the life I, I mean we, wanted for ourselves.

HB: Well, I guess it depends on your view of “signature architecture” and whether you agree that authorship is what constitutes architecture. I think it also raises an interesting question about how much an architectural design can “withstand” or how flexible it can be regarding changes, before it turns into something else?

A: If someone were to buy one of these houses today, they would want an “Aldo Rossi row house,” not an unrecognizable row house renovated by your colleague!

HB: So, it’s the property value you’re concerned with?

A: Not that I plan on selling my home anytime soon, but I’m concerned for the good of the neighborhood, and the design, of course!

HB: Of course! But isn’t the fact that it is, as you say, a “signature building,” also the reason why you have so many interested “intruders” on the property, like the one you were troubled by earlier? Don’t you think it’s understandable that people are interested for the same reason you want to preserve this idea of authorship?

A: Should I be punished and live on constant display, simply because I have good taste? I expect my privacy to be respected in my own home.

HB: Yes, but don’t you show your showroom to someone? Excuse me if I’m making assumptions, but isn’t that the whole point of a showroom from the south?

A: That’s different. I’m very selective in who I invite into my showroom.

HB: But isn’t it a little flattering, and even fun to show others who have the same interest in design?

A: Until the buses start parking outside on the street. Believe me, the novelty wears off quickly. And remember that these houses have been here for almost 40 years!

HB: You have a point.

A: I had the good sense to throw your friend, along with that... uh... visitor, over to your entrance.
other architect who claims to be a student of Aldo Rossi, off of the property the first time she visited. If I had only known then!

HB: You mean the co-designer of the project, Attilio Pizzigoni?
A: I live in an Aldo Rossi house. Punto! Whoever may have helped him is not my concern.

HB: According to Beda, he was quite young when they did this project together (28, I think), but he’s also an established architect in Bergamo today.

A: It doesn’t matter. Your colleague has already brought down the value of this building with her ghosts!

HB: I thought you said there were no ghosts?
A: Exactly!
HB: Ok? Well, I should probably get back to the event next door, but thank you for your time and generosity in showing me your collection.
A: Certo! And if you find you need a more serious subject for your article, it isn’t so far away.
HB: I’ll keep that in mind.

Conversation with Beda (upon my return):

BR: Where were you? We’re getting ready to start the Q&A session with the students.

HB: I met your other neighbor, Adelina, up on the balcony, and she invited me over to see her Nordic design showroom.

BR: Oh, so you’ve met Ade.
HB: But, in Italian, doesn’t that mean… Hades?
BR: Yes, exactly, she’s my neighbor from hell!
HB: But she wasn’t that bad, a bit harsh toward the bird perhaps, but professional.
BR: Professional? Let me guess, she liked your puns and thought that you should write about her instead?
HB: As a matter of fact, I wasn’t sure we got off on the right foot when I made a comment about the bird’s noise, but afterwards it wasn’t squawkward at all.
He he.
BR: Oh please, you have to stop that. Can we start with the questions now?

Later on, I got the whole scoop from Zite, who had, in turn, heard everything from Caprice and Madre Pagani, during their daily chats at LA ZITTELLA’s. Zite invited me in for a coffee, when she saw me sitting alone on the terrace, once the pizza picnic began to wind down. (Ok, besides the coffee, we may have had a sip of grappa, too. It was, after all, Tenco’s birthday.)

Adelina’s story (according to Zite):

Zite, who was one of the original occupants of Case Unifamiliari, had lived in the row houses since 1979. She remembered when Adelina and Brandr moved in, about eighteen years ago.1 They were the perfect “designer couple,” just beginning their careers, each at an up and coming design firm in Bergamo. They met when Adelina went to study for a semester at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. Eventually, Brandr left his Scandinavian home behind and moved to Bergamo to start a new life with Adelina. Brandr was quick to learn Italian and supportive of Adelina’s professional aspirations, while Adelina’s obsessions alternated between work and planning their (her) next design acquisition.

Once their design collection began to take shape, Adelina marched reporters and important design enthusiasts through their home, to the showroom that occupied what would have been their master bedroom at least once a week, gaining some notability in the local press. Not only did Brandr accept their smaller bedroom without complaint, but he lived in a way that kept the rest of the house pristine at all times, in anticipation of one of these unexpected visits.

Brandr grew weary as time went on, feeling like a prop in Adelina’s design career ambitions. His suggestion that they start a family was somehow postponed, just until Adelina’s next deadline was over, but there was always a new important deadline to replace it. Brandr brought Hugo (the cockatoo) home one day, from the aviary at the Parco Faunistico just north of Mozzo, and quickly formed a strong bond with the small life he now had to care for. Hugo was indifferent toward Adelina, but she was keen on the exotic quality she felt this bird added to the experience of her showroom. The white cockatoo with a yellow accent was the finishing touch, just as long as Brandr kept the bird’s mess to a minimum.

Brandr made many excursions to the park where he had adopted Hugo, to ask for advice or pick up special food for his feathered friend. Sometimes Adelina would find Brandr staring for long periods of time at the bird in the cage, almost so that she felt jealous for his attention, but the feeling passed as quickly as it came. She was focused on a managerial position in her firm, and all of her energy was directed toward this promotion. This was her big chance. Finally, all of her hard work and sacrifice was going to pay off!

Desperate for this position, Adelina secretly visited Celadina, a province just outside of Bergamo city center, where the stone arch known as “Il Portone Del Diavolo” [The Devil’s Gate] was located. According to Bergamasche legend, in 1550 the architect Sandro de Sanga made a pact with the devil, to help him reconstruct the stone portal to his client’s villa, Count Gian Giacomo de ‘Tassis, who was unhappy with his work.4 The devil built a new portal over night, but the family was still dissatisfied. On the third night, during a lightening storm, the devil made another new portal that still stands today. The legend says that during lightning storms or whenever there is a family argument, one can detect a strong scent of sulfur, as a sign of the devil’s work. Adelina passed through this portal, now on the corner of a busy intersection, three consecutive times, as she asked for the promotion and promised never to look back no matter...
what the cost in her quest for recognition and fame. Unsure if she smelled a sulfur-like odor or just car exhaust from the traffic stop, Adelina became frightened and sped off in her car.

On the way home, she received a phone call from her office, informing her that a male colleague (one with less experience, but who played handball regularly with the boss) had gotten the position. Before she had a chance to tell Brandr of her disappointment, he announced his decision to leave her. He had met another man, the friendly ornithologist from the Parco Faunistico who had helped him adopt Hugo, and he was in love. Adelina never told anyone where she had been that day, but she told everyone that Brandr had left her for a younger woman. Of course, everyone knew what had happened long before she did, as it was a small town and secrets were scarce. To this day, Adelina blames the Devil for all of her misfortunes.

The divorce was vicious. Adelina showed no remorse and went after the one thing that she knew would hurt Brandr the most, sole custody of Hugo. Because of his infidelity, and illegal lack of acceptance (in Italy) for his new relationship, Brandr knew that the law was not on his side, so he said goodbye to Hugo.3 Since then, Hugo has been kept as a decoration in Adelina’s showroom. His behavior and appearance tell the story of a bird with a broken spirit. He routinely plucks his own feathers, makes an inordinate amount of noise, and escapes every chance he gets. Pond of Beda, he often flew over to the gallery of the next-door house.

On one of these occasions, Hugo was especially friendly with Beda until he suddenly bit her in the face, right in the middle of cuddling. She had to pry his beak from her right cheek, as blood streamed from the cut, leaving her with a scar just above the cheekbone. Adelina rushed over to retrieve the bird, only to accuse Beda of trying to steal him away from her, oblivious to the injury. Beda insisted that it was only a “love bite” and didn’t place any blame on Hugo, but rather on the crudeness of his owner who denied him the love and affection of his true companion, Brandr. Following this incident, Beda printed “Free Hugo” t-shirts, with the silhouette of a cockatoo behind bars, and distributed them to all of the neighborhood kids, just to annoy Adelina.

Zite confided in me that around this time, she began delivering one of the local Bergamo specialties, Polenta e Ösei— a sweet filled sponge cake, masked in a layer of polenta, with tiny marzipan birds on top, once a week to Adelina. It was meant as a reminder and condemnation of her treatment of Hugo and as an act of solidarity with Beda, in a “killing them with kindness” kind of way. Adelina never dared to confront her about it, but was suspicious. (Zite had overheard Caprice, her regular customer, who was also Adelina’s Aunt, tell Madre Pagani, that she never really cared for her niece and that it was a good thing she had the excuse of the evil spirits next door, so as not to feel obliged to visit so often. They both made the sign of the cross.)

Adelina was on the board and the spokeswoman for The Bergamasche Women’s House and Interiors Taste Educating Council, formed during the early 90s, “The Bergamasche WHITE Council” for short, or what Adelina unproblematically referred to as her “WHITE Group.” Their mission was to educate “the average person” to become a better design consumer and client, while encouraging and supporting its female members in their individual design endeavors. Membership was, of course, by recommendation only and subject to approval by the members of the board. They organized various events, exhibits, and discussion panels, with the intention of informing and/or debating current design issues with “non-professionals” and the general public in the Bergamo community, although on most occasions, those attending were a small group of designers who already knew each other and were in complete consensus.

Beda and her new friend Bernice Bayoude, a visiting scholar from Yorkshire on a research fellowship at the University of Bergamo (also mother to 10-year-old Brooke, who sometimes hung out with Beda and asked lots of questions during her lunch breaks), attended one of the WHITE events, advertised as a “Symposium on Women in the Design Profession.” Beda had heard several courses on gender and architecture with her colleague Brady Burroughs, at KTH in Stockholm, and Bernice was a political anthropologist, specializing in the study of gender and sexuality in the African diaspora at the Center for Gender Research at The University of Sheffield.

Even though neither of them worked specifically in the interior design profession, they both had an interest in gender-related issues within teaching, research, and practice. Bernice visited Beda and asked lots of questions during her lunch breaks), attended one of the WHITE events, advertised as a “Symposium on Women in the Design Profession,” Beda had heard several courses on gender and architecture with her colleague Brady Burroughs, at KTH in Stockholm, and Bernice was a political anthropologist, specializing in the study of gender and sexuality in the African diaspora at the Center for Gender Research at The University of Sheffield.

Things spiraled out of control that evening when Beda raised her hand to suggest that even “women’s groups” like this one, can sometimes fall into habitual assumptions of relational or gender norms that exclude queer, single, and “child-free” women in the profession. Up to that point, the discussion had focused on ways to improve equality between professional women with their male colleagues, especially in the areas of responsibility and promotion, and how these issues were related to- or affected by other roles women often occupy privately, such as “wife” and “mother.”

Beda argued that although these remained important feminist issues, and while recent political advances in some parts of the world had opened up the roles of “wife” and “mother” to queer women, groups that identified neither as heterosexual or coupled, still encountered situations in the workplace where these expectations put them at a disadvantage, not only in relation to their male co-workers, but also to some of their female ones. Not to mention the added obstacles experienced by trans women. Beda’s
question was dismissed, as one of the panel members suggested that it was a “special interest” issue and might be better suited for another group.

Bernice followed with a question about whether they had considered the problem of double oppression facing women of color in the area of promotion, as well as recruitment within their field? Adelina responded that she didn’t understand why Bernice and Beda were attacking their group, when they were working for the good of ALL women. Bernice calmly explained, again in perfect Italian, that as a gender scholar, she was interested in how they dealt with certain privileges they held as heterosexual, middle-class, white women, in relation to the women designers that didn’t fall into those categories. To which, Ade denied having any position of “privilege,” since she had gotten where she was all on her own, through confidence and hard work! Although she wasn’t to blame for the problems of those who just didn’t apply themselves, they would certainly bring these issues up at their next internal meeting and perhaps appoint a committee to look into it. Bernice and Beda understood that they had come up against an “invisible wall” with this group, so they stood up, left in the middle of the panel discussion, and went to get a beer instead.

Conversation with Beda (after the Open House):

HB: Beda, I heard you were heading into Bergamo to eat out with your friends tonight?
BR: Yes, would you like to join us? I was so busy making pizzas for the Open House guests that I didn’t have a chance to eat any myself. We’re going to my favorite Neapolitan pizzeria in cittá bassa.
HB: Oh thanks, but no, I ate plenty of pizza at the picnic. I think I’d like to stay in and get some writing done this evening. Before you go though, I was wondering if you could tell me a little about the detail upstairs in the guest room?
BR: Ah, you mean The Birdbath. It’s based on the idea of acoustic mirrors or “whisper dishes” that reflect and concentrate sound.
HB: What is it supposed to do?
BR: Well, it has two functions; one is to attract local birds by collecting rainwater, giving them a place to perch, bathe and drink, and the second is to reflect and concentrate their chirping, peeping, whistling, and chattering sounds in the direction of my “neighbor from hell’s” showroom, in order to give Hugo some company in that lonely white room of his.
HB: Ah, the cockatoo. Yes, I wondered about that. So, the detail is for Hugo then?
BR: Well, the real reason I built it is that Hugo is much quieter whenever the birds gather. I prefer the bird chirping to Hugo’s racket. Of course, Ade has filed a complaint against me, about violating building codes.
82.

The Birdbath

Detail Two

Acoustic mirror or “whisper dish”

Abstract hand of the saint (San Carlone) in perforated sheet metal with acoustic mirror inset into the palm. Attached to an existing window opening in Beda’s guest room, it swings on a hinged metal arm outside of Ade’s showroom window for local birds to perch. Functioning as a ‘reversed’ satellite dish, it provides a small bath and reflects the chirping noises to cheer up Hugo in his cage.

“La finestra del poeta a N Y”
Aldo Rossi, 1978

83. Garage doors and stone stairs,
Case Unifamiliare, Mozzo, IT

DRAWING: HENRI T. BEALL (NOT TO SCALE)
Description of Detail Two, The Birdbath:

Based on the principle of an acoustic mirror or “whisper dish,” a satellite dish is inset into the palm of an abstract hand made of perforated sheet metal, in the shape of ‘the hand of the saint’ from the San Carlone in Arona. Attached to an existing window opening in Beda’s guest room with an industrial u-shaped bracket, it swings on a hinged metal arm outside of Adelina’s showroom window for local birds to perch. Functioning as a ‘reversed’ satellite dish, it provides a small bath and reflects the chirping noises to cheer up Hugo in his cage.

When not in use, it folds flat against the façade with the dish just above Beda’s entrance portico. Swung in the other direction, from inside Adelina’s showroom, it enacts Aldo Rossi’s sketch “La finestra del poeta a N Y” from 1978 in full scale.

21 March 2013, Mozzo (early evening)

The Open House event went well, I think. Beda seemed satisfied. I didn’t want to tell her that I was a bit tipsy from the grappa I drank at Zite’s. It might seem unprofessional, although she doesn’t seem to care much about that sort of thing. It is very quiet here now that everyone has gone. (Besides the Italian ballads, of course!)

Apparently, one of Beda’s colleagues, who came all the way from Brussels, was locked out during the entire event. Ha! I guess he didn’t know the key was unlocking the door? Oh, I’m on a roll lately, too bad you aren’t here to enjoy (tolerate) it. When Beda told me that his last name was Desjardins, French for ‘from the gardens,’ I burst out laughing. And no one else thought it was funny that Mr. Desjardins got stuck out in the garden!

I think I’ll step out for a breath of fresh air, while there is still a little daylight left. I didn’t really get a good look at the façade on the way in. Besides, Adelina uses the gallery to smoke, so the air there is not so fresh. Luigi Tenco is still at it on Zite’s side, and the songs are getting more depressing as the day goes on.

I just realized that I was so busy that I hardly thought of you today. The chatty starlings reminded me of our sunsets to the buzz of the cicadas. Whew, it feels really warm in here right now. Must be the heat from the pizza oven chimney running through my room. One minute it’s drafty, and the next I’m breaking out into a sweat! I’ll go home with pneumonia at this rate!

Interlude:

Iphis detested the sound of birds, all birds, as she still blamed the seagull for landing her in her current predicament in the first place. Every day at four in the morning, Hugo made incessant whirring, clanking, drumming, pounding sounds, like a ceaseless screeching jackhammer. It was unclear just how he managed it, but every neighbor within a 30-meter radius heard it. (Adelina slept with earplugs.)

Hugo’s sounds, along with the early morning chirping from the new detail, drove Iphis as far away from that corner of the house as possible, leading this Mediterranean ghost to the south facing facade along the gallery. Whenever Iphis moved to the gallery side to enjoy the direct rays of sunlight, her feeling of bliss resulted in uncontrolled blushing for the more sensitive humans in the vicinity. Beda, who was now past the 45-year mark, even felt hot flashes on occasion.
The ping-pong guy’s cordial falsetto
“He turned his eyes- and straight she slipped away.”
–Ovid, X. Orpheus and Eurydice

21 March 2013, Mozzo (evening)

Just got back. It’s getting chilly outside, maybe a storm on the way.

I had heard Beda mention the neighbor on the end, closest to the street, or as she refers to him ‘the ping-pong guy.’ He was the first neighbor to allow Beda a peek inside one of the row houses, before she chose this project as her site. She said that he had made lots of changes to the entrance level of his house and that the design decisions appeared to be more practical than aesthetic, which was her way of saying that she thought it was ugly.

He had removed the walls of the entry and opened up the stairway, built a guest bathroom where Beda’s fika/changing area was located, and replaced all of the floor tiles with a shiny, orange-colored ceramic tile in a diagonal pattern. The most outward change was the replacement of part of the exterior façade with a glass wall, to allow more light into the basement level, where he kept his ping-pong table.

Beda just shook her head as she described it, yet she spoke approvingly of Zite’s niece, an architecture student, who had designed and built in the loft below the main roof, as an extra guest room at Zite’s for whenever she came to visit. I asked Beda how she saw her own renovation in relation to Camp as a design principle? Wasn’t what Sontag indicated at least partly true? “Camp taste is by its nature possible only in affluent societies… and the history of Camp taste is part of the history of snob taste.”

In other words, “bad taste” was ok, as long as it was “the right” bad taste. She said it wasn’t that simple. The renovation still reminds me of a contemporary example of the (affluent) queer spaces Betaky describes, with its disco library, interior pool, and pink second floor; like the aristocratic salons, the homes of Oscar Wilde or Charles Moore, or even Studio 54. I ran into ‘the ping-pong guy’ while I was outside. Odd fellow. He was in his yard along the gable façade, putting out some dog food next to an empty doghouse.

Conversation with ‘the ping-pong guy’(PPG):

PPG: Are you a guest of ‘the pizza lady’s’?
HB: Uh, yes, I suppose I am.
connection to an architect that they admire that makes it so thrilling. Some treat it like a tourist attraction, others almost like a religious pilgrimage.

HB: Yeah, sometimes the seriousness of the discipline begins to resemble an architectural cult, rather than an architectural culture. Learning from example is an effective pedagogical method, which is why we take students on study trips to see built works in person. But I’ll admit that the focus on objects can become a form of adoration that comes dangerously close to worship (and leads to architectural apotheosis – “elevation to divine status: deification”).

PPG: Speaking of the divine... If anything, I think that’s where your colleague might have stirred things up around here. People in this area take religion pretty seriously, and the church has a strong presence. The rumor about the skeletons in the basement and the second floor being haunted caused some local unrest.

HB: Rumor? So, there aren’t actually any skeletons?

PPG: Well, I haven’t been down there myself, but I doubt it. It’s just that in the past, the discovery of bones or a burial site was considered bad luck, and in the present these superstitions still linger, so after that rumor any future market for that property was doubtful.

HB: Past, present, and future, huh? Sounds tense! Sorry, a habit of mine. It makes me think of a friend who would have enjoyed the drama of it all. I would have liked to tell her about the skeletons discovered in the basement, but unfortunately she passed about a year ago.

PPG: Maybe it’s her spirit haunting the upstairs!

HB: Ha! Now that would be something, but believe me, you’d know it if it was her!

PPG: I guess you already know the story about how your colleague got the row house in the first place?

HB: No, I’ve heard conflicting stories about an “occupation”?

PPG: Well, I guess since you’re a colleague, there’s no harm in me telling you what I’ve heard.

Beda’s story (according to ‘the ping-pong guy’):
Beda had done some quick online research around real estate laws for so-called “stigmatized property.” She found an academic law paper that described the disclosure requirement found in the Codice Civile Italiano of 1865, requiring the seller to either guarantee the property was free of hauntings or to disclose that there were ghosts on the premises. Failure to disclose made the seller liable for all fees and damages. Later, the Codice Civile Italiano of 1942, not only maintained but also enhanced these rules. This gave Beda an idea.

Besides a few specific precedents, in most modern day real estate cases, the principle of Caveat Emptor applied. “Latin for ‘let the buyer beware.’ A doctrine that often places on buyers the burden to reasonably examine property before purchase and take responsibility for its condition.” In other words, the sale was “as is,” regardless of any discoveries later on, ghosts or no ghosts. Beda had heard that the previous owners of the row house had decided to sell, but she didn’t have that kind of money, so she began thinking up a plan to buy her a little time. She knew the power of a rumor, especially rumors that had to do with the dead. In this region that was anything but secular, skeletons were not something you wanted in your basement!

However, Beda faced a dilemma. It, of course, wasn’t ethical to start a false rumor, in order to gain access to the object of her architectural research. She had nothing against the family, but she did hold a strong and open contempt for real estate companies. As she looked further into current legal issues around real estate laws, Beda discovered that although most legislatures protected nondisclosure of stigmatizing information, there were still cases where buyers claimed that property was devalued on the basis of “psychological impact,” upon learning that the previous owner had died of AIDS. In the U.S., an amendment to The Fair Housing Act, part of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, classes HIV/AIDS as a disability, to protect the LGBT community who is disproportionally affected by this disease, making unsolicited disclosures by real estate agents in connection to a property illegal.

Beda also came across a paper that outlined the education for
broker anticipated complaints from some of the other residents (Adelina), they had to be “delicate” with how all this came about. Beda suggested that she make it look like an occupation or squatting situation, so that any blame would be directed towards her. (It was the least she could do.)

In the end, Beda's renovation project ended up helping the real estate agency, with all of the good publicity that increased their business. The local businesses made profits from art tourism, and Ade was furious over all of the visitors. When Beda moved in and realized that the upstairs really was haunted, she figured it was karma, but it was something that she could live with. The ping-pong guy had taken over the responsibility for the economy of the shared expenses for the row houses and general upkeep of the exterior and grounds, so he knew what was going on behind the scenes. However, he kept this information to himself, as he didn't see any harm in it and didn't want to get involved.

Interlude:
Iphis was used to being at the center of attention and the primary focus of her friend’s thoughts. She could feel Henri slipping away with the excitement of this project and this budding new romance. The more Henri went on and on about her work (or Ela), the more jealous Iphis felt. And whenever Iphis felt jealous, it caused people in the house to sneeze.
Ela’s amorous libretto

“And she, dying again, made no complaint (For what complaint had she save she was loved?)”

–Ovid, X. Orpheus and Eurydice

21 March 2013, Mozzo (late evening)

Beda still isn’t back yet, and Zite just put on another album. Eh! Enough of that sad sack Tenco! I’m going out to hear something else!!! I wonder what Mozzo nightlife has to offer?

22 March 2013, Mozzo (after midnight)

I just got back. What an evening!

It had just started raining, more of a slow drizzle, and I walked toward the center of Mozzo. I came upon a hole in the wall bar, with a broken neon sign that was supposed to say: DISCOVER MOZZO ARTIGINAL GELATO. Instead, with the missing letters, it read: DISCO_ _ _ MOZZO A_ _ _ _ N_ _ _ _ GEL_ _ _

Inside, the volume was moderate and out of the speakers came a familiar voice from 1978. Gloria Gaynor sang: “At first I was afraid. I was petrified.” Surprised to hear disco, I scanned the room looking for the indicative rainbow flag, but saw only what looked like a few locals having a beer and chatting with the bartender. Then she walked in! In a bright orange raincoat, her hair wild from the humidity, the same woman from LA ZITELLA’s came in with her dog. Those eyes! Aaaaachoo!

“No, not I, I will survive
Long as I know how to love
I know I’ll stay alive
I’ve got all my life to live
And all my love to give and I’ll survive
I, I, I will survive”

She came up to the bar and took the stool next to mine, as she told her dog to sit and ordered a ginger ale.

Conversation with Ela Tora (ET):

HB:  What a well-behaved dog. I saw you both at the shop earlier today.

ET:  He is a rescue from Lesvos. I’m Ela. Ela Tora.
I woke up early today, feeling energized. I feel so awake! I wonder what time Ela arrives? Aaaahchoo! Damn pollen.

It’s been good for my article to get to see all four of the row houses and how each resident has inhabited their individual house. First there’s Zite, with the bohemian, yet cozy interior of her music room. All of the artifacts and layers of colorful memorabilia work as an artsy compliment to the strict modernist spaces. Then there’s Adelina’s Nordic design showroom, where the minimal white interior almost competes with these same spaces. It’s funny that it takes a designer to push the already sparse room into something so sterile and lifeless. I don’t think she realizes that it’s the life of the cockatoo, not its colors, that she felt was so badly needed in there.

And then there was the ping-pong room of the guy on the end. What can I say? Some might call it “popular,” others “bad taste.” I’ll just say that he must have some internal filter that allows him to only see function. I just hope his stylist partner is more successful with his/her clients! Oh, and of course, there’s Beda’s Campy renovation, but here I’m most interested in the details.

It all sort of came together for me last night, as I was falling asleep, humming Gaynor’s song, “I will survive.” I wonder if Beda’s intentions with the details are much less carefree (and ghost-related) than she lets on? The disco last night reminded me of an article I read on Rossi’s work, to prepare just before I came here, Peter Eisenman’s “The House of the Dead as the City of Survival.”

Eisenman calls into question the relationship of “man” (we’ll say person of any gender, race, sexuality) and things, due to what he suggests is a shift in “man” (person o. a. g. r. s.) post 1945, with the knowledge of the Holocaust and the threat of nuclear war, from hero (or heroine) to survivor. He argues that since our relationship to death is altered by these events, our relation to the physical symbols of life, which include architecture, shift as well.

Within this context, Eisenman suggests that Rossi’s work, specifically his analogous drawings, such as L’ Architecture Assassinée from 1975, also the cover of Manfredo Tafuri’s book Progetto e Utopia, is a proposition of architecture as “survivor.” He writes: “To live life merely as a potential survivor poses a new set of conditions for an architecture caught between the memory of a not forgotten past, and an unwanted present that promises nothing for the future.” This sounds eerily suited for the status of the world today. But let’s not forget, according to Gloria Gaynor in 1978, one year before Eisenman’s article, “Long as I know how to love, I know I’ll stay alive.” So, love and survival are inextricably bound, at least in disco.

I wonder if Beda has read this article and based the three details upstairs on what Eisenman calls Rossi’s “three symbolic ‘houses’ from three different histories” that mediate the intersection of life and death? The first one he mentions is “the religious house,” where “each time there is a small square window with cruciform Mullions; often the shadowy head of the humanist poet is at the window.” The Birdbath recreates this image in Rossi’s sketch La Finestra del poeta a N.Y. (1978), with the saint’s hand outside of Adelina’s window, referring to the religious symbol of the San Carlone. Adelina becomes the imprisoned poet!

The second one Eisenman names is “the Sanctuary of the Modena Cemetery,” as “the collective monument, which represents the relationship between the institution of the city and death.” It is “a monument… to the abandoned dead and the abandoned living.” The Tencophone plays with the scale of the empty “housing block” (ossuary) of the Modena project on one side, where Beda’s “ghost” becomes the abandoned dead, while it becomes a monument to the memory of the dead in Zite’s (the abandoned living) own personal sanctuary, her music room.

The third “house” is the “Segrate monument,” with “the triangle as pediment, as extrusion, and as pitched roof… a series of life and death transpositions: a monument – death, a fountain – life, a coffin – death, a primitive hut – life.” But I haven’t found the third detail yet.

That must be where Beda gets the whole “ghost” thing! It’s an artistic interpretation of the theme of death in Rossi’s work. The details aren’t wooing a ghost, they’re flirting with death!

I smell coffee.

Conversation with Beda (at breakfast):
BR: Good morning. The coffee is piping hot. You can still see the steam coming off of it.
HB: I tried to catch some fog the other day. I mist. Morning!
BR: Would you like some coffee, or not?
HB: Yes please.
BR: I have another visitor coming by today, so I hope it won’t
HB: Oh no, not at all! When exactly is she… I mean the visitor, arriving? Aaah ahoo!
BR: In about an hour. Are you catching a cold?
HB: No. It’s just pollen allergies. Would it be ok if I tag along?
Are you speaking about something specific in the house?
BR: Eh! I don’t think you’d be interested. It has to do with the basement and you’re writing about the second floor.
HB: To be honest, I wouldn’t mind taking this meeting on my own. I’ve Googled her, and she seems like an intelligent, good-looking Greek woman. Who knows, we might hit it off?
BR: So, now you’re using your project to solicit dates?
HB: Can you think of a better use for a “love storey”? Why do you care anyway?
HB: It’s… it’s unprofessional! Unethical even!
BR: Relax! We’re just having coffee.
HB: Right, of course! Uh, weren’t there supposed to be three details upstairs? I can’t find the third one, and I should really document it before my flight leaves later this evening.
BR: Oh sorry! I was so busy with the Open House yesterday that I forgot to tell you about The Lovebug.
HB: The Lovebug?
BR: It’s a secret room built into the space above the ceiling over my bed. It’s just a tiny room, kind of like what I imagine it might feel like to inhabit one of those coffeepot houses in Aldo Rossi’s sketches.
BR: C’mon, I’ll show you. It’s based on the principles of an acoustic telephone, more commonly known as the “tin can telephone.”
HB: I used to make those when I was a kid!
BR: Exactly! It works as a non-electrical, speech-transmitting (and listening) device, where sound waves travel as mechanical vibrations through the tension of a taught string or wire.
HB: But who are you talking to?
BR: The room is a cupola or “cup” where a wire is attached to the top and runs through the length of the extruded triangular volume of the roof (Ade doesn’t know about it), and makes a 90 degree angle around a central point to a second “cup” located in the roof of the doghouse, outside of the gable façade.
HB: The third “house,” with the extruded triangular roof, like the Segrate monument!
BR: What?
HB: Oh nothing, I was just thinking out loud. So, does this detail have anything to do with your “ghost”?
BR: Not that ghost, but it does connect directly to the bull terrier ghost who lives outside in the ‘ping-pong guy’s’ yard. You know, Aldo Rossi’s dog?
The Lovebug
Detail Three

Acoustic telephone
or “tin can telephone”

La cupola stands with the bed as its base and is topped with a golden dome inside the outer roof, above a semi-circular opening in the ceiling slab. A fan closure along the semi-circular track is driven manually with the handle and lever. A fold-out attic ladder permits cat (and occasional human) access to the room above. The acoustic telephone transmits snoring sounds along a taught wire between Beda’s bedroom and the doghouse along the gable facade, to keep the (ghost) bull terrier company at night.
Description of Detail Three, The Lovebug:
Based on the principle of the acoustic telephone or “tin can telephone,” La cupola stands with the bed as its base and is topped with a golden dome inside the outer roof, above a semi-circular opening in the ceiling slab. A fan closure along the semi-circular track is driven manually with the handle and lever. A fold-out attic ladder permits cat (and occasional human) access to the room above. A taught wire runs from the end of the dome, around a cylindrical point, along the length of the roof, and out the circular ventilation opening on the end, down to a cup placed inside the roof of the doghouse in front of the gable façade.

The acoustic telephone transmits snoring sounds along this wire, between Beda Ring’s bedroom and the doghouse, to keep the (ghost) bull terrier company at night. Besides the obvious inspiration from Aldo Rossi’s sketch I love this dog (1990), in section, the detail creates a house-size version of Rossi’s La cupola coffee maker for Alessi from 1987.

22 March 2013, Mozzo (morning, two hours later)
I saw Ela arrive, from the bathroom window upstairs. Henri met her at the gate and asked her to leave Sirius in the fenced-in yard, where the supposed “ghost dog” lives. She looked radiant. Aaaaachoo!
I know what I did is questionable, in terms of professional intentions, but this is the architecture of love and survival, right? And I figured... let’s see how this thing works.

Into the open Lovebug:
“Siiiirius! Hey boy! Thaaat’s a good boy. Where’s mommy? Where’s mommy? Are you a good boy? Ela! Ela!”

Conversation with Beda and Ela (ET)(after Ela’s dog began barking uncontrollably outside):
HB: I heard the dog barking, so I thought I’d just come down and check if everything is ok.
BR: Mmmhm. You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that would you?
HB: Nope.
BR: Ela, this is my colleague, Henri Beall. Henri, this is Ela Tora.
ET: Henri, a pleasure to meet you, again. We start to know each other. Slowly, slowly.
BR: Again?
HB: This is becoming a habit, running into each other. (ignoring Beda)
ET: Yes, a good one. (wink)
HB: It’s a shame my flight leaves for Stockholm today.
ET: Kalo taxidi. Who knows, maybe we run into each other in Greece? Do you swim?
HB: Do I swim? (to the familiar tune by Dean Martin) When you swim in the sea. And an eel bites your knee. That’s a moray!
BR: Uh! Are you serious?
ET: No, he is. (pointing to the dog)

Finale: Released by Henri, Iphis could move on. The headaches, goose bumps, hot flashes, blushing, and sneezes ceased, while life continued as usual in Case Unifamiliari.
ROUND TABLE

A conversation between the authors:

Beda Ring (br)
Brady Burroughs (bb)
Henri T. Beall (hb)
It's late September in Skala Eressos, Lesvos, and the evening breeze has a chill, as the warmth of the setting sun disappears in its descent behind the ridge with Sappho's silhouette. The authors sit down at a table on the beachfront deck at Zorba the Buddha Café, over some warm Rakomelo and a big piece of Dharma's orange cake (Beda opts for the chocolate peanut butter pie), to reflect over their finished manuscript to the accompaniment of the susurrus of the sea. The following is a written account of their conversation:

HB: Maybe we should ask for some of their mint tea before we begin, just for a little encourage mint?
BR: Ugh! I see you found some room in your suitcase for your puns.
HB: Ha ha, sorry, I can't help myself. Donut pay attention to me. He he. But speaking of donuts, the loukoumades Dharma made for the swimmers yesterday were amazing!
BB: Yeah, I ate three of them, just to give the extra PhD pounds a little company! (to Henri) Stop fidgeting.
HB: Ok you two, why don’t we get started. I’ll begin with the question many people have asked: How would we describe this project in just a few words? Anyone?
BR: Well, as we indicate in the title, it’s a love storey! Or rather, many “storeys” of love. Just as you (BB) explained in the introduction to the Second Storey, I think a love ethic pervades throughout the work. There’s love for literature, language, and poetry, even nerdy wordplay; for difficulties, failures and impossible human quirkiness; for everyday hopes, disappointments, and missed connections; for good Italian pizza; for architects, animals, ghosts, and drama queens; for experimentation, playfulness, and impropriety; for learning, making, and ritual; for architecture, community, and disco; for Camping it up, humor, and undermining power; and for me personally, the warmth and spirit of generosity I’ve found in Greece, especially here on Lesvos! There’s even a little love there for the critics, if they’re not too “paranoid” to accept it.
HB: Yeah, except the “kissing” part with SL didn’t go so well for me in Chapter One. But overall, this project sure was a love storey!

BB: You often hear that love is dangerous or risky, because it makes you vulnerable. What about the idea of risk then? What exactly do we mean by risk, or encouraging what bell hooks calls “situations of risk” for a more conducive learning environment? And what risks, if any, have we taken in doing this work?
BR: For me, risk depends a lot on what you care about. I think it’s different for different people, and it also has to do with which systems of oppression affect each person the most. For instance, persistence in pointing out racial issues might be most risky for a person of color, whereas open support for LGBTQ issues might hit closer to home for a queer person, in terms of both internalized feelings and a possible backlash. Of course, this is a very simplified explanation that doesn’t begin to take into account intersecting systems or how different contexts affect what becomes risky. In terms of my own work with the idea of flirtation, a risk might be that I take things a little too far in testing certain boundaries, and as a result someone else gets hurt.

As I explain in Chapter Two, since I work in-between architecture and notions of gender, race, and sexuality – areas that are very close to us personally, and therefore sensitive issues, there’s always the possibility that you forget your own particular position (and the privileges that come with it), and end up saying or doing something that is experienced as hurtful or uncomfortable to someone else. It requires this strange combination of fearlessness and humility to be able to enjoy the suspense of not knowing how the flirtation will turn out, but also to be accountable and ready to admit when you’ve made a mistake.

This is what makes it so exciting and fun (and sometimes dangerous). Much in the same way that you can be flirting with
another person and you think it’s going really well, and then you suddenly miss each other and there’s a misunderstanding. You might end up hurt, disappointed, or it just fizzles out! I tried to work with this idea of miscommunication in Renovating Rossi. What about you Brady? What risks have you taken?

BB: Well, you both know that I’m not a so-called “theater person,” and a lot of theater, as well as performance art and other work that goes under the heading performative, makes me cringe. I think the actual, physical discomfort I feel has something to do with those performances that take themselves too seriously. It almost feels self-indulgent, and I get embarrassed for the performer, for myself, and for everyone in the room witnessing the performance.

On the other hand, I love a Campy performance that is bad, and knows that it’s bad. It has the opposite effect, and for me, the space feels more open, allowing, and forgiving. Maybe it’s connected to what you’d describe as a heightened self-awareness that I appreciate? But I think it’s also about the purposeful undermining of the serious, and the shift we talk about with architectural flirtations, to offer an alternative mode of criticality that works in the uncertain space of vulnerability, rather than a habitual or knowing place of judgement.

So, the whole costume and performance thing that I bring into the spaces of pedagogy, in Open House for instance, feels risky and makes me uncomfortable, although I’ve gotten used to it by now. It forces me (and whoever else is participating) out of my nerdy, precise, controlled mindset. This is partly why I do it, to enact that feeling of disorientation that has a leveling effect, when people are pushed outside of their “normal” state or comfort zone. I think it makes for a better conversation.

BR: Yes, but don’t you also have to be careful about assuming and overstepping other people’s boundaries?

BB: Of course! When I pass out armbands with bells on them at academic conference presentations, it’s like I’m saying: “Ok, for the next 20 minutes, I’m going to poke a little fun at this stiff academic atmosphere. Are you with me?” It’s an invitation to have fun with and test that environment together, nothing deeper than that. It’s a purposeful failing of the serious illusion, and we are all in on it. But I also try to be careful not to force anyone to do anything they aren’t ok with, because that can also ruin a conversation and impede learning.

Henri jumps up and begins scratching the backs of her thighs furiously. Despite warnings, she has developed a bad case of what the Rock Group swimmers call “Rockass,” an allergic reaction to the specific algae growing on The Rock that results in a contagious rash from sitting directly on The Rock with bare skin, often requiring antibiotics.

BR: I told you not to sit on it.

HB: Thanks, that’s really helpful now! And I warned you about questioning the role of the critic in your PhD and then inviting a bunch of them to evaluate your work. We’ll see how that goes for you! Ever heard of the expression “putting your head on the block”?

BB: Ok, ok, you two. Henri, when you’re ready, do you have anything to add about risk?

HB: Yes, I do! I think that pedagogical “situations of risk,” at least the ones that bell hooks refers to in Teaching Critical Thinking, have a slightly different meaning than what both of you have been referring to. In this case, I understand “situations of risk” as spaces that make it possible for risk to occur, while still maintaining a safe and respectful environment. Or, in other words, spaces that allow for different positions on meaningful issues, and the conflicts that must occur in the process of working through them, where everyone is vulnerable together and therefore undertaking “risk” collectively. It’s like Phillips says of the risk involved with the mutual uncertainty of flirtation “flirtation puts in disarray our sense of an ending... But from a pragmatic point of view one could say that a space is being created in which aims or ends can be
worked out… Flirtation, if it can be sustained, is a way of cultivating wishes, of playing for time. Deferral can make room.”

It’s about making that room.

**BB:** That’s a good point!

**HB:** And let’s not forget the risk involved with any project that claims feminist, queer, or critical race positions. There’s always the chance of dismissal, or a backlash. Not to mention the risk involved in work that challenges academic norms… I mean, there’s always the risk that other academics won’t understand what we’re trying to do, or that the ideas get lost, just because it doesn’t follow the familiar styles, language and formats of academic writing.

Beda, as you mentioned in the introduction to the First Storey, an evaluation committee could even be skeptical about whether your work fulfills the research requirements for a PhD, if they aren’t sure how to evaluate it. And Brady, you described a similar reaction in *Open House*, when the course you presented at a symposium didn’t *look* like what academics were used to.⁶ In my case, there are the habits of the profession, where research alone can sometimes be provocative for practitioners, but the suggestion that fiction might be useful for practice? *Flirting with Death* is definitely the right title.⁹ (And no, I’m not being dramatic. Beda, I can see you rolling your eyes.)

**BR:** I didn’t say anything.

**BB:** Hm, I like that you both bring up the connection between risk and flirtation. In our case, I would say that suggesting *architectural flirtation* as a “risky” pedagogical approach is strongly dependent on the idea of stewardship, in order to make that “room for risk” you are speaking of Henri. In *Open House*, I define pedagogical stewardship as the art of staging critical positions in an architectural conversation.¹⁰

It’s very much a staging exercise in setting-up the space and taking care of the people in that space, ultimately the responsibility of the pedagogue, together with the students, of course. Beda, all of your PhD seminars, and most importantly, the Open House event itself are examples of this.¹²

**BR:** Yes, that’s true.

**BB:** I’ve been thinking recently about the relationship between this idea of stewardship and our overall theme of love, and what they might have in common. Especially sitting here at Zorba the Buddha Café, where a “love ethic” – practices of generosity from Dharma and her staff or “reparative acts” in The Skala Women’s Rock Group happen all the time, in settings that one could say are staged, as Beda has captured so wonderfully in the *Meditations* text for the Interlude.¹²

As if on cue, the “Greek captain” comes speeding across the horizon behind the Rock, spewing a wake of seawater and showing off as she returns to anchor in the harbor for the evening.

**BR:** Fantastic! What a show!

**BB:** Anyway, I was thinking that there might also be a spiritual connection.

**HB:** Oh no, here we go again!

**BB:** Just let me explain… In Chapter One, I mention George Takei, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and bell hooks as key examples or references.¹³ All three write explicitly about spirituality, thoughts on Buddhist philosophy, and practices that emulate healing or “loving kindness,” whether you call it *reparative acts* or an *ethics of love*. And Isabelle Stengers, who I refer to in *Open House*, writes about ritual, gathering, and magic in relation to “an ecology of practices.”¹⁴ I think this is also part of stewardship, how we treat others, our surroundings, our connections with everyone and everything, even the language we use, and the atmosphere it creates. This type of connection begins with an acceptance of vulnerability and a kind of mutual love (even if the Camp influence can misbehave and give it a more playful, exaggerated form).

**HB:** Yeah, just beware that some of those “spiritual” figures
have been known to take advantage of others’ weaknesses and make a lucrative industry out of it to boot. How many Rolls-Royces did our millionaire spiritual leader “friend” Osho (from your Meditations text Beda) have in his collection? Almost one hundred? I don’t know much about spirituality, but that sounds like exploitation and capitalism to me!

BR: Henri, for someone so closed to the idea of anything unknown, you do realize that you wrote your entire chapter as journal entries to someone who does... (Brady cuts her off mid-sentence)

BB: But I thought we agreed on souvlaki in the middle of the village for dinner tonight?

BR: Yes, of course, you’re right. It slipped my mind. Where were we, oh yes... As Henri points out, a healthy dose of skepticism, or not taking it too seriously, is valuable in any area lacking self-reflection or criticality, where a certain dogma tends toward indoctrination; whether it be religion, education, or even feminism. In the case of... (Henri interrupts)

HB: I’d say that, as architects, we also use the center because it’s a more spatial term, which makes it work well with Ahmed’s theoretical ideas of turning toward or away from a given orientation. I understand it as denoting a concentration, rather than a distinct entity with a set boundary or outer limit. As Irit Rogoff says, “Boundaries, small or large, limited or expanded, are in the end just that, setting the limits of the possibilities.” This is easier to envision as something tangible that can be physically moved, stretched or transformed, while it takes into consideration that the edges of the center are diffuse and constantly changing. I think this term has more architectural possibilities.

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Fofo turns up to deliver an icepack from the bar, to help soothe Henri’s burning skin.

HB: Ah! Thank you!

BR: Henri, what you just said about boundaries and the center, brings up a question I struggled with in the renovation project and in some of my seminar experiments. I’m thinking of the “women only” bathing spaces I wrote about in Meditations and the idea of separatism. If separatist spaces are a reaction to the centers that possess a certain degree of power, is it ok to support exclusionary practices? And if so, what function does separatism fill, besides resistance? Most importantly, when does it stop functioning as politi-
HB: Well, first I would say yes, I think separatist spaces are valid and necessary, especially in the case of any group that isn’t already in the center. Separatist spaces, or “women only” spaces are a response to gender oppression and for that reason, part of feminist history. Movements like Black Lives Matter, Pride, and Occupy are all contemporary examples of separatist spaces in response to inequalities, due to oppression on the grounds of race, gender, sexuality and class. I would call these spaces strategically separatist, in the sense of the feminist concept “strategic essentialism,” where collective groups are formed temporarily on the grounds of identity for political purposes.

A recent example of a separatist space in architectural theory is an anthology like Lori A. Brown’s Feminist Practices, with all female authors. Although I’m not keen on using this as the first criteria for selection, as it tends toward a binary (often heterosexual) understanding of gender, I understand the reaction to what most architectural anthologies look like (or lecture series for that matter, or Pritzker Prize winners, or professorships, etc., as Brady pointed out in Chapter One).

BB: I agree. I think separatist spaces also function much like what we were speaking of earlier, as spaces that enable risk, or breathing spaces, where reparative acts can take place in a supportive environment. I’d like to think that we are experimenting with these types of spaces in our work, and in your case Beda, it’s clear that you play with this idea in Renovating Rossi. However, there is also a danger that the “strategic” exclusionary constraints become habitual and unreflected. I think we see this in many long-standing feminist institutions that began as “women only” spaces during the second-wave of feminism, where the strategic essentialism then became permanent, making the institution obsolete under new conditions with the next generation in third-wave feminism. In other words, the politics of a radical feminism stagnated,
and failed to consider the ideas of queer feminism in relation to a new time with new challenges, which put into question the original boundaries and definition of who is included in the category “women.” Likewise, queer feminism has its own blind spots, with its strong connection to an academic class and attention to issues along a “whiter” spectrum.

So, in response to your last question Beda, I’d say it’s important to be mindful that the political impetus behind the exclusionary criteria doesn’t shift into a form of discrimination. With individual states in the U.S. introducing and passing legislation on issues like bathroom use, we see the detrimental effects of this kind of thinking, where current transpolitics meets architectural space. The right to define and enforce gender-specific boundaries continues to create sites of struggle today. Shame on you North Carolina! And Mississippi, and Tennessee.

The local fish truck, with its loudspeaker repeating the day’s catch in a monotone Greek voice, pulls up in the cul-de-sac parking lot beside Zorba. As the seagulls circle, the dogs from the non-profit animal rescue (GaGa Animal Care) looking for a “forever home” among the guests at Zorba begin barking, making it difficult to hear.

HB: The dogs agree! I had an experience with exclusion from what I consider to be the center of academic journals, in relation to the conscious citing of sources and references we use in this project. I submitted one of the very first articles I’d ever written to a well-known academic architectural journal, and it was rejected.

BR: What does that have to do with the center? Maybe it was just a bad article?

HB: It wasn’t my best work. I was just learning, but that’s not the point. Along with the rejection, I received two anonymous peer reviews. One was critical, yet pedagogical, and made some good points that would later help me to develop the piece. The other was a dismissive critique. Similar to this project, my article was based in queer feminist theory and written in an experimental way. The reaction to the fictional form: “It just is not clear what is going on and the standard falls far short of what good academic writing ought to be about.” I thought, okay, not everyone’s a fan of fiction and some are quite set in what they believe “good academic writing” should look like. Fair enough.

But the interesting part was the reaction to my use of theoretical references, almost entirely from queer and feminist theory: “This is classic Bourdieu but he is not mentioned or acknowledged.” I had never read Bourdieu (more than to know a little bit about the concept of “cultural capital” and the idea of “habitus”), which makes it difficult to cite him.

I wondered if “my feminists” really posed such a threat to the theoretical canon? I was working from another theoretical position, but it felt like the center wouldn’t budge. It made me think of the distinction you (BB) make in Chapter One, between critique and criticality. The first reviewer went critically into conversation with my article, and wrote of being “unsettled” and intrigued, so we both got something out of it. While the second, who delivered a critique, most likely came out of the experience irritated, as did I when receiving the review.

BR: Yes, I have colleagues with similar experiences, when using “non-Western” theoretical references that the reviewers aren’t familiar with. Well, my feelings are this: We’re working from a place that interests us, and most importantly, that includes us! If someone else wants to identify all of the so-called “classic” theoretical sources that lack any kind of gender analysis, then be my guest. Just as Brady says in Chapter One, gender it and intersectionalize it, then we can talk! Besides, all of the authors of our references build on previous theoretical work, just like everyone else (including these “classics”) who came before them. I reject this hysteria over locating the “original” when all ideas are copies. It’s simply a manifestation of power.
Both Judith Butler and Sara Ahmed’s work develops from the writings of Michel Foucault with his critique of power, discipline and ideas on sexuality, Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction, and even the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, to name a few. Rosi Braidotti, Irit Rogoff and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick all refer to Gilles Deleuze’s concept of a complex system of interconnections and “becomings.” And bell hooks is very clear about the influence of Paolo Freire, author of “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (1970), on her pedagogical thinking, and so forth. And yes, Pierre Bourdieu (along with many other European white men) is within their frames of reference, as well.

The difference is that these feminist writers and thinkers have brought a feminist critique to the “original” ideas, making them more relevant for the work that we’re doing. Who and how one references is also political! As Sara Ahmed writes in one of her blog posts (in this particular instance, about choosing not to engage with voices that are transphobic or racist): “For me, being a feminist at work is also about what or who we do not cite, recite or incite. No citation can be a feminist policy!”

It just doesn’t seem so productive in pedagogical situations. I see parallels between Black Lives Matter, where activists campaign against police brutality toward African Americans, and the many post-Stonewall gay rights activists from the 70s and 80s, who chose a more confrontational approach, in response to the violence and discrimination they experienced and endured. So, I understand when José Esteban Muñoz writes: “At times, resistance needs to be pronounced and direct.”

It just doesn’t seem so productive in pedagogical situations. The post-Stonewall activists rejected Camp tactics as self-deprecating and cowardly, but I think repetitive acts of performative resistance to the status quo, as well as the formation of a community, can be empowering. Does it topple “the system of imperialist white supremacist (heterosexist) capitalist patriarchy”? No, of course not. But everyone has a different part to play, right? And repetitive misperformativity is just one of them.

Anyway, Brady, I’d like to hear your thoughts on a question we’ve gotten during the development of this work, from what you might call “supporters” of critique and criticism, since I think you also touch upon it in Chapter One. How might we describe the “system” of flirtation?

**BB:** Ah, that one! I’ve avoided answering that on certain occasions, because it felt like someone was asking the chefs for their “secret ingredient.” But it’s actually not much more complicated than stating that there is no “system” with flirtation. It doesn’t follow a set of predetermined analytical steps, such as critique’s identify-deconstruct-reveal, and this is probably what irritates die-hard critics the most. Flirtation is based on uncertainty, and uncertainty can be uncomfortable. In Adam Phillips’ book On Flirtation, he writes about the relationship of flirtation to Freud, Sigmund Freud that is. Without going too deeply into psychoanalysis, which I know very little about, basically Phillips makes the claim that Freud (and psychoanalysis in general) works very hard to explain away any occurrence of chance or coincidence. In other words, everything that happens to an individual by chance, according to Freud, is somehow willed (consciously or unconsciously) by suppressed histories of that individual’s own past, and therefore can be explained, analyzed and resolved. Things don’t just happen! Phillips contends that psychoanalysis, based on Freud, is uncomfortable with the idea of contingency, and in turn, the perceived frivolity and lack of commitment (i.e. seriousness) that flirtation entails. Without the security of a “system” of analysis and judgement, the contingency of flirtation is experienced as unruly, unserious and most importantly, out of our hands.
As you know, Freud’s work on psychoanalysis was influential in The Frankfurt School that has, in turn, influenced the formation of critical theory in architecture. If we connect this idea of the fear of contingency to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s suggestion, also relying on concepts from psychoanalysis, that paranoia has become the operational mode of current scholarly critical practice, we find the routine and serious practitioners of critique and criticism suspicious of any other method that leaves them with none of their usual habits to rely on.33 Understandably terrifying!

As Phillips notes: “...we are all beginners at contingency because it is the only thing we can be.”34 So, although we can’t provide a “system” or a “how to guide” to flirtation, we can suggest three important elements from Chapter One that make up the architectural flirtation: misperformativity, recentring through disorientation, and willfulness in the form of persistent vulnerability.35

**HB:** That answer deserves a cocktail. I’ll try to get someone’s attention.

**BR:** This discomfort with uncertainty that you (BB) describe ties into something I talk about in Chapter Two, that is Butler’s ideas of the difficulty of “giving an account of oneself” and how acknowledging this is a matter of ethics.36 These ideas can extend to the figure of the critic and the ethical responsibility to acknowledge that the positions we speak from are always partial, unstable, reconstructions, and that knowing this is a vulnerability and failure, both the judge and the judged share. The desire to judge, to know for certain, maintaining control and “power over,” rather than sustaining the moment of contingency, essentially ends any reciprocal relationship, and any possibilities of knowledge that might come from it. As Butler states: “...recognition must be sustained for ethical judgement to work productively.”37 For Butler, recognition is inherently a reciprocal act, dependent on an exchange much like flirtation. By satisfying one’s impossible desire to know the Other and imparting judgement, one can “kill” the life of reciprocal recognition, just like commitment can “kill” flirtation.

**HB:** As they say: *It’s all pun and games, until someone loses an “I”!*  
**BR:** Oh, that’s so bad! Where was I? Reluctance to acknowledge this vulnerable position and insistence on acting as judge can result in what Butler calls an ethics of violence, rather than hooks’ ethics of love, which is what we propose for a more vital and just architectural culture.38

**BB:** Yes, exactly! I, for one, am never quite sure who I am. Sometimes it almost feels as if I’m several people at once! While you were talking about flirtation as something different than judgement, it occurred to me that we should probably clarify that we are not categorically against making judgements, and we are fully aware that judgements are a necessary and inevitable part of almost any action we take in life.

**HB:** Our Australian colleagues also tried to shift the definition of critique away from judgement by pointing out: “As Brian Massumi argues, ‘critique is not an opinion or a judgment but a dynamic “evaluation” that is lived out in situation’, which is to say, critique should not be about imposing preconceived attitudes, opinions or judgements, but needs to respond immediately to the problem at hand.”39

**BR:** Yeah, well, I can sympathize with what Massumi describes in that same article as Isabelle Stengers’ “aversion to usual academic practices,” as I think I must suffer from the same affliction, but what exactly does he mean by dynamic evaluation?40 At first, I was going to argue that Massumi’s theory about critique is just that, a theory, while in practice it comes closer to wishful thinking. As Helena Webster shows, in her work around the practices of the design jury, critique is experienced, more often than not, as judgement.41 This sentiment about the element of judgement in design juries is echoed by another Australian colleague, Naomi Stead, in her article about producing critical thinkers in architectural education.42 However, upon further reflection, once you get through all
of that Deleuzian stuff, he writes about a critique that is performing as a “co-creative factor,” and that it is “specific to those situated co-expressions.” This, to me, sounds similar to the simultaneous, mutual vulnerability we call for in architectural flirtations. Perhaps Massumi is reluctant to let go of the word critique, since it is bound up in the theory he relies on, that of Deleuze?

I did appreciate his description of this event as “structured improvisation,” and his intention to “contribute, in some small way, to a change in the culture of intellectual and artistic ‘exchange’.” It sounds like we are interested in similar cultural shifts, within our respective disciplines, but I suspect that the asymmetrical power relations in the case of design juries, makes for a different situation than that of academic conferences or events.

**BB:** Agree! What we are questioning here is the act of critique as an intentional mode of judgement, and more often than not, an unreflected one (similar to what Massumi calls “a war of position”), where the judge or the critic forgets to ask the question (in relation to Butler’s discussion) “Who are you?” and to remember their own inability to fully answer the question “Who am I?” out of fear for their own limitations, inconsistencies, and unwillingness to take a risk.

**BR:** Or a fear of being queer? Let’s not forget all of the hegemonic “straight” lines running through the discipline! We still haven’t mentioned Gavin Butt, one of our favorite queer scholars and his notion of scholarly flirtations, who inspired this work to begin with. He began questioning the seriousness of critical scholarship, and in our love storeys, we’re not only flirting with the critic, but with academic culture, as well, in terms of research intentions, the valuation of academic results, and knowledge production. In fact, I think Adam Phillips’ question about the assumed complementary relationship of love to knowledge is relevant here. That is, the notion that falling in love with someone, necessarily entails getting to know them better.

Similar to Butler’s suggestion that we can never really know the Other, or ourselves, Phillips writes: “But what would falling in love look like if knowledge of oneself or another, of oneself as another, was not the aim or the result? What would we be doing together if we were not getting to know each other? Another way of saying this might be to imagine a meeting or a relationship without (answerable) questions.” I would argue that architectural flirtations, based on an ethics of love, whether in the space of the studio, the design critique, or in our own research and publications, are interested in enacting these kinds of (unanswerable) questions and activities.

**BB:** You mean, what would academic research look like, if knowledge production and its assessment and measuring, were not the aim or result? Or, what would architectural practice entail, if representations of built objects in the design studio, were not the (only) aim or result?

**BR:** Exactly! The paradox is that we cannot know, until we try not knowing ahead of time!

**HB:** Perhaps this is where the relation of our work to “design practice research” comes in, because it was necessary for us to propose something that didn’t exist before (and that we couldn’t know), in order to find out! You write about this in Chapter Two, Beda. Although, in the end, you can’t really escape knowledge production or the desire to compare and measure it, can you?

As we’ve learned, according to Freud and Greek mythology, the only certain escape is DEATH, but I’m not so sure any academic work will ever have that kind of pathos! Like the ending of the 1955 Greek film Stella by Mihalis Kakogiannis, where at the end the character Miltos kills Stella with a dagger in the middle of the street, with the whole town watching, for her refusal to marry him. Besides the obvious patriarchal problems of this plot, I asked a Greek friend once, why did he have to kill her, wasn’t it a bit unnecessary? This
friend answered “Pathos!” Only the death of a character the audience had grown to like during the film, could solicit these strong emotions.

Mary appears with a tray holding three shots of golden tequila and thin slices of orange, compliments of Dharma, and kisses Brady on the forehead as she places the last one in front of her. “Getting too serious here girls!”

HB: Ok, I agree with Mary. Let’s talk about the fun stuff!
BB: And by “fun stuff,” you mean?
BR: What are you implying? Yes, I like the drama for its literary qualities and, as I mentioned, for the pathos it adds to the writing.
HB: Literary qualities? Really? Com’on, we all know which of us is the comma, I mean, drama queen in this group.
BB: It’s very mature to insult my grammar competences, but I realize that you may have some trouble understanding the literary qualities I’m referring to, since “pathos” is a Greek word. If I recall, didn’t you have some trouble picking up that language, even though you studied it for a whole year?

Beda gets up from the table flustered and walks into the blue stucco building, where the bar and restrooms are located.

HB: Who’s the drama queen now?
BB: What’s going on between the two of you? This wouldn’t have anything to do with Ela, would it?
HB: Haven’t the faintest idea. Anyway, as I was saying, I think the figure of “the willful subject,” which we borrow from Ahmed, is crucial for the drama in each of the love storeys. We have several characters that fit this description. Come to think of it, most of our characters are quite strong willed in some way, but there are a few that stand out in the sense of being persistently and politically willful. Beda’s resistance through the “occupation,” renovation, and even her lifestyle in Renovating Rossi, causes her neighbors to deem her willful. Also in this storey, Brooke is the epitome of the willful child, through her cleverness and persistence in questioning Jo’s research and political motivations, while Jo discounts and dismisses her because of her age. Jo even becomes a reluctant willful subject himself, in relation to the good ol’ boys he meets camped out in the garden, although it’s mostly by accident.

Zahra, the queer, naked, apron-wearing activist from Open House, literally puts her body in the way of the general will. This causes a stir in both the neighborhood and the internal picnic group. In Flirting with Death, Zite not only willfully embraces her life as a “spinster,” through the naming and reclaiming of this term in her delicatessen, but also through her solidarity with Beda, and what can be seen as subversive acts of kindness toward her neighbor Adelina. Iphis, the moody ghost, has “spirited” tantrums when things don’t go her way, but I would call this ego more than willfulness. And then there’s Hugo, who willfully disturbs the order of things, with his noise and attempts to escape the confines of his cage, in resistance to a life of objectification and oppression. The part where he bites Beda is just for fun, to get her attention.

BB: Good idea! Well, in our project, “the serious” represents a normative value system that holds everything that is serious, committed, proper, strong, etc., as better than everything else that is considered frivolous, flirtatious, improper and vulnerable. This value system extends over everything from the

BR: (Now back at the table.) Thanks! I can assure you that the actual bite was anything but fun and caused very real blood, lots of it. Imagine going to the emergency room and explaining that a cockatoo has bitten you in the face. The (young) doctor who examined me said “Uh, I think I have to Google that.” I still have the scar! But seriously, we really should clarify what we mean by “the serious” and how it is represented within the storeys.
A love ethic as a daily practice at Zorba The Buddha Café
strict modernist architectural interior of Case Unifamiliari, to the “family values” of the Roman Catholic Church, to a male dominated canon in Architecture and the Arts, to the privileging of white male voices over women and people of color, to the power of dominant languages, to the critic’s judgement, to neoliberal capitalist institutions of education, to inherited “systems of imperialist white supremacist [heterosexist] capitalist patriarchy.”

You get the picture. Camp, with its humorous exaggerations and contradictions, is our weapon of choice to undermine “the serious.”

The music selection pumping out of the loudspeakers at Zorba switches from the meditative Gayatri mantra to a discordant jazz track, and Henri unconsciously begins to itch again.

HB: Brady, one of your students asked us an interesting question about the temporality of flirtation. This person wondered when it becomes “too much”? When does it end? In other words, what is lost in the perpetuation of the flirt and deferring the moment of serious commitment?

BB: Yeah, I couldn’t really answer it then, and I’m not sure I can answer it now. I do know that it takes energy to sustain the flirt, and this could be one of the drawbacks. Lazy flirts are usually not so successful. I didn’t mention this in Open House, but the seminar course required an enormous effort from all of us. It’s not something I could maintain on a regular basis, over a long period of time. So, there’s something to be said for the routine and familiar.

Beda, speaking of my students... they had a chance to ask questions, but I wanted to ask you something myself. Can you describe your initial intentions with the renovations, specifically in regards to the Room Specifications document? What were you after?

BR: That’s an important question. You know, I hesitated to include drawings at first, because it really was an exercise in brainstorming a design with words, of letting the imagination run free. As I said, “an answer back.” I was interested in how one might materialize theory, or if it was even possible. And then I wondered what might happen if I tried using the form of a very practical architectural construction document as the vehicle. So, I set it up as a challenge to myself.

HB: Can you talk a little bit about the difficulty of moving from words to lines drawn on a page? As most architects know, as soon as you go from idea to making something material, all kinds of new decisions arise.

BR: Absolutely, that’s why I was so hesitant with the drawings, but I wouldn’t say that I moved from words to lines on a page, in a linear process. Even though it was a really quick project that I built as I went along, the “lines on a page” definitely affected the words, and vice versa, for the very reason you mention; materials, thicknesses, etc. make other demands on the design decisions.

BB: Ok, so if your intention with the document was to visualize theory through architectural means, what would you say that you wanted to achieve with the resulting renovated row house, as a built work?

BR: Uh, let me see, how can I explain it... My sister sent me photos recently of my nephews in Disneyland, in rooms with giant octopus tentacles moving in the ceiling etc., and that’s not what I was after. I wasn’t trying to make a museum, a theme park, or a funhouse, where the intent is to make an illusion, without any practical considerations. Theme park designers and special effects people are much more qualified for that anyway. I guess you could say that it was important for me to try to achieve the sense of that Ali Smith quote I always refer to, “a work of the imagination that is simultaneously rigorously true,” not only in the writing, but also in the built work. So, there was a constant negotiation over when to think of budget constraints or more practical aspects, and when to let loose. I wanted to make something that was imaginative, and highly
unlikely, but still believable. Does that make sense?

HB:  Ok, but back to the Room Specifications. You are only loosely following a standard contractual document, in that you don’t refer to any existing standard codes, and you skip over a whole section that describes typical construction requirements for standard elements etc., which I understand can be monotonous and perhaps not suited for a chapter in a book. Is this correct?

BR:  Yes, you’re correct. It’s a Room Specifications ‘light,’ to a practicing architect like yourself. I figured, since it was an ad-hoc renovation and friends and acquaintances did most of the work anyway, this document was less legally binding and more about visualizing a materialization in words, to give a sense of what the interior could be. Similar to Katie Lloyd Thomas’ research that I refer to in Chapter Two, it’s a shift or re-orientation in relation to these documents that architects usually work with. It’s about taking something we usually do as architects, and doing it in a slightly different way. But I want to stress that it’s not about throwing out everything we already know, along with specific architectural skills and practices, and starting over from scratch. I don’t think that would make much sense.

HB:  No, and that’s an important point. Especially since at the first mention of a feminist project in architecture, people seem to assume that it has to be something curvy, organic, chaotic, and temporary (or poorly built), with inexpensive materials. This is just reproducing essentialist views of feminine qualities. Feminist architects are just that: architects!

BR:  By the way Henri, on a completely different topic, I’m curious about why you placed the initial story of Iphis, in Flirting with Death, here on Lesvos? If I’m not mistaken, you had never been here before. Correct?

HB:  Well, of course, I lost my friend in another place and under completely different circumstances, although just as dramatically. What can I say? It’s fiction. But I was inspired by your (BR) text from the island and found that it helped me to misplace and imagine the events someplace else, as I wrote and worked through them. I also liked the idea of rewriting a Greek myth, and it had ties to Lesvos.

BB:  The weaving together of the overlapping stories in this chapter is quite complex. Can you briefly try to sort it all out for us?

HB:  Ah, yes, I can try. Let’s see. Well, there is Ovid’s tale of Iphis, who is born female and then transforms into a male body, so this is where we get the gender complex character for the ghost. Now, this ghost (who is standing-in for my friend that I lost), also goes by the stage name DJ Orfeus, and in the story, plays the part of Orpheus from the next tale in Ovid’s Metamorphoses. But in this rewritten version, Orpheus switches roles in his own fable. So, rather than his love Eurydice, he (or in this case Iphis) gets bitten by the viper and dies, sending him/her directly to the Underworld, where he/she resides between Hades and Persephone, represented by the two neighbors in Case Unifamiliari.

With Orpheus (Iphis) stuck in purgatory and silent, Eurydice (who I come to represent) is left to mourn. However, instead of wallowing in her sorrow like Orpheus did, Eurydice gains a voice and slowly begins to “see” her love, Orpheus (Iphis), for who he really is. In other words, Orpheus (Iphis) is taken down from the pedestal and is no longer the ideal Eurydice needs her/him to be. In this moment of clarity, as in Ovid’s tale when Orpheus looks back before they are out of the Underworld, she loses her love (or finally lets go), and is able to find a new beginning — with Ela. So, it’s about healing, gaining voice, empowerment, liberation... and crushing the patriarchy!

BB:  Thank you. That’s helpful. I’m also interested in the method you used for developing this text, which I think could be used in pedagogical situations. Can you say a few words about it?

HB:  Sure. In the more practical area of design work, I wanted to experiment with a reciprocal flirtation between literature and architecture, using fiction as a means of design and the
architectural detail as a tool for writing. So, together with Beda, we located and programmed unusual construction details, while the design of the details in turn, informed and adjusted the fiction. The writing, drawing and modeling are performative, as the details and fiction are contingent upon each other, unsettling the otherwise “serious” business of construction detail design.

BB: I can already begin to imagine a design task for students, to develop a detail and a story simultaneously!

BR: One of our architect colleagues asked me why the last neighbor never gets a name in the story, if the project is “supposed to be about equity.” He also wondered what “this nameless character’s” role is in the narrative? He seemed a bit disgruntled. Maybe you can answer that?

HB: Right. In the Third Storey, I raise the idea of signature architecture, its limitations, and the way different positions relate to this idea. After visiting the house on the end, I became curious as to why someone who wasn’t interested in design would want to live there, and in turn, how they might approach or relate to inhabiting this space. This “ping-pong guy” character could be more ruthless in the renovation, whereas Beda’s respect for the original design, as an architect, may have limited what she was willing to do. And since he remains neutral with respect to his neighbors’ conflicts, I allow him anonymity in the story, which is also why we never get his story. But let’s be clear, there’s plenty of history already! Of course, there’s a feminist intention behind only telling the stories of female/gender queer characters.

An impromptu concert by a guy with a hang drum, similar to a steelpan instrument played with the hands, steals the attention of those seated close enough to hear its melodic, meditative sounds.

BB: I can tell that we’re all beginning to get tired (and hungry), but we haven’t spoken about the graphic expression and production of our book.

BR: Oh, and the collaboration with our graphic designer/typographer Andrejs Ljunggren! It wasn’t just his meticulous attention to detail, but the fact that he treated our material so lovingly that made working together so much fun.

HB: Yes, and the fact that he asked questions and really wanted to understand the work, rather than making assumptions and telling us how it should be. It’s not easy to hand over something you’ve been working on for so many years and trust someone else to have a go at it!

BR: Yeah, but I’m sure working with all three of us can probably be a bit overwhelming. It’s not like we don’t have strong opinions. Brady, didn’t you even say that you once considered pursuing a career in graphic design, instead of architecture? So there’s a real interest there. No wonder you couldn’t keep your nose out of it!

BB: Yes, you’re right. I did try my best, but it was too exciting.

HB: Mm, I thought it was interesting to see how his position as graphic designer, with knowledge of the printing and binding process, seemed to place priority on the space of the page, on the inside, while my position as architect was adamant about the proportions of the finished book as object, from the outside. Much like a built project, it was a negotiation.

BB: My heart almost melted when he explained that the selection of certain fonts, like the flirty typeface “bb-book” by French graphic designer Benoît Bodhuin, came out of an interest in the histories behind the font and the sense that they carried with them...

BR: (interrupting) And the fact that he wanted the colors we used on the cover to mean something as well, like the connection between the “Barbie pink,” the pink second floor, and Architect Barbie!

BB: Yes, that too! As I was saying, Andrejs explained that the typeface breaks typographical conventions, and in a way
flirts with typography. It was a whole lot of material to handle, but I hope it was also fun for him to have a chance to play with the typography, in the way it was fun for us to play with the words and drawings.

HB: Oh! And let’s not forget Andrejs’ partner Iwa Herdensjö’s patience with us, in developing the beautiful chapter title illustrations and the seagulls for the cover...

BR: Yeah, it sure made all of the hard work applying for extra funding, in order to be able to afford the help of a graphic designer and a slightly more expensive, but crucial, concept for the book, worth it.64

HB: I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again: Thank goodness for the Italians!

BR: Yes, they really came through for us with the grant from the C.M. Lerici Foundation!

HB: Brady, before we wrap things up, I have one last tough one for you. Do you really believe that Camp and queer practices are readily available for “anyone”? I mean, come on! That’s a disaster waiting to happen, isn’t it?

BR: Hmm, yeah ok, speaking of the importance of graphic expression, I have to admit that I did have serious doubts the other day, when I happened upon an online article by Dezeen magazine, about a public event at the ETH School of Architecture in Zurich. They had produced graphic posters for a series of talks on gender parity, depicting portraits of well-known male architects in “drag.” (At least, that was the intention.) In the article, one of the initiators behind the event, Charlotte Malterre Barthes, claims “The message was one: provocative, and two: to attract attention on the gender imbalance in our profession.”65 Unfortunately, a good intention and a bad idea sometimes go hand in hand. There is a fine line between what is understood as “provocative” for some and “offensive” for others, as you mention Beda, in your discussion on working with humor in Chapter Two.66 The second part of Barthes’ statement reveals why I found it to be the latter. “Shameless misuse of famous architects in drag” implies that to be in drag, or for these respected male architects to be feminized, is somehow a cheap laugh, an attention grabber, perhaps insulting, and most definitely shameful. So, in one fell swoop, these posters risk promoting misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia, the opposite message of what I assume was intended for talks on gender parity.

HB: I’ve seen it time and again, with all of my years as an activist within the “women’s movement.” Lots of talk of “sisterhood” but they’re always quick to throw us queers under the bus for their own causes (i.e. “parity” of straight women with straight men). Let me guess, the appropriation of queer culture at the expense of queer identities?

BR: Yeah, I see, unlike the humor in the FYNCT blog that Naomi Stead talks about, the queer community wasn’t in on the joke.67 We were the joke. If they were interested in drag culture, they could have easily found the documentary film Paris is Burning or watched a few episodes of RuPaul’s Drag Race online.68

BB: To tell you the truth, I’m not sure if they are even aware that drag culture is part of queer culture, which is part of the problem. It doesn’t make the posters any less offensive, but they might not even know that it isn’t “theirs” to take, without considering the connection to the queer identities they are parodying or perhaps soliciting the help of someone with experience or knowledge of the queer community, in order to frame their graphic campaign within queer performativity. Another possibility is that they are well situated within queer feminist culture, and have overlooked the possibility that they might be able to oppress another marginalized group, in the belief that their position gives them some kind of immunity. This is what Ahmed talks about when she writes: “the self-perception of freedom from norms can quickly translate into a freedom to exploit others.”69

In any case, the posters by graphic design firm Völlm+Walth-
ert reduced a rich subculture (that is a matter of life and death to some drag artists) to banal preconceived notions of drag, as bad wigs and make-up on men, essentially making drag a joke. Again, probably not their intention, but it was a cheap shot. How many digital ‘memes’ have we seen online with current harsh, unpopular political leaders (Putin, Erdoğan, Trump) in bad make-up, in order to feminize and shame them?

BR: That’s too bad. Drag is absolutely suited for raising complex issues of gender parity. I wonder what the queer and trans students and teachers at the school felt when seeing these posters? Maybe this kind of discussion about cultural appropriation doesn’t really exist within that context?

BB: True, which makes it even more important to discuss. I began to think that I might have to take back everything I wrote in Chapter One. Maybe Moe Meyer and the rest of the queer essentialists were right, in limiting Camp practices to queer subjects only? Although, as I mentioned before, this could have just as easily been the work of queer subjects too, so what would this limitation preclude? Then I thought, of course, there will be “failed” examples along the way (and this is definitely one of them). I’m almost certain it was a well intentioned “miss,” but I do think it’s important to talk about these “failures,” when they occur, since I believe that what’s at stake is more about an awareness than a queerness.

With a critical sensitivity and reflection toward the culture they were drawing on, ETH and the graphic designers could have produced a graphic representation that was not only relevant, but one that may have even helped further develop the content of the series of these talks. So, I stand by my belief that it is still possible for non-queer subjects to make use of queer Campy practices, but this requires an approach with not only a curiosity toward another culture, but an awareness of the risks of appropriation and a critical reflection over the use of this culture.

HB: Ok, I guess I’m convinced by your reasoning, but you have to agree that there will always be a gap! I think of bell hooks’ essay “Essentialism and Experience,” where she says: “Though opposed to any essentialist practice that constructs identity in a monolithic, exclusionary way, I do not want to relinquish the power of experience as a standpoint on which to base analysis or formulate theory. For example, I am disturbed when all the courses on black history or literature at some colleges and universities are taught solely by white people, not because I think that they cannot know these realities but that they know them differently.” Straight subjects will always do Camp differently than queer ones.

BB: Of course, and let’s not forget that skinny, white, gay boys, (or seagulls) often appropriate the language and expressions of women of color for their drag personas, and will always use them differently. So the drag community as a group is not immune either. But I don’t think borrowing practices has to be wrong or bad, if it’s done with respect and an ethics of love. And if you make a mistake, apologize and do better next time.

BR: When asked about straight pop culture stealing from gay drag culture, RuPaul said: “Have at it. We’ve got plenty. You could try to come for us and try to do it. You could never do it the way we do it.”

BB: Ha! Yeah, but as the representative pedagogue of the group, I don’t think I could necessarily adopt RuPaul’s attitude toward educating youth. And I quote: “I don’t really care about them… There’s nothing we can do to force them to say, ‘Look, this is important.’ Humans don’t learn that way. I think about New York, and I had such a fucking great time there. Do I wish young people could experience that? Yes! Yes, I do. Am I going to work it out for them? No, bitch, you’re fucking on your own. Work it out for yourself.” Entertaining, but not exactly teacher of the year!

HB: Or feminist of the year, for that matter!

BR: Maybe this is just a sassy way to say: make room for independent critical thinking? There are many instances during
RuPaul’s Drag Race, where RuPaul pedagogically points out connections to drag ‘herstory’ and the importance of learning about what has come before us, as a queer community.75

HB: Beda, I still don’t understand your obsession with that drag version of America’s Next Top Model reality show. It’s ironically one of the judgiest shows on TV. The drag queens are encouraged to insult each other, and the elimination of participants isn’t even a democratic decision. RuPaul isn’t just a figurehead; she wields all of the power at her whim.

BR: The drag queens do become cheeky with each other at times (pun intended). But “reading” isn’t a regular insult, it’s a part of drag performativity, and just like criticality it’s fundamental! As for the critique and elimination round at the end of each show, I still say that the campiness and performativity of both the drag queens and the judges, includes a self-awareness and self-critique that traditional architectural critique sometimes lacks. In the Drag Race, everyone is in on it together.

HB: The one time you embrace the pun, and you turn it into a lewd innuendo? Your wordplay is deplorable!

BB: Uh, maybe we should...

BR: Oh, so you think my Campy renovation is “part of the history of snob taste,” but it’s ok for you to decide which puns are in good taste and which offend your delicate ears?26 You’re just upset because you feel threatened by the queerness of drag culture, while you’re still stuck in second-wave “lesbian feminism.”

HB: Without the second-wave, there would have been no third-wave. You’re just jealous over Ela and me! And by the way, regardless of what your sassy drag-seagull might say, we don’t all wear ugly shoes, and so what if we do?27 They’re practical and resist submission to patriarchal values of beauty.

BR: Yeah, you can say that again!

The conversation deteriorates and we end there, as the bickering culminates with Beda throwing Henri into the sea. (One of the quickest ways to cool tempers and turn conflict into play.) Fortunately, it’s the evening of the moonlight swim to the Rock, so we all earn our “Wild, Wet, Women Award,” compliments of The Skala Women’s Rock Group.

2 See Chapter One: Conversation Three.

3 see Chapter One: Introductory essay.


7 Hooks, bell. 2010, 87. 


13 Black Lives Matter is a new civil rights movement that began in 2011 to fight police brutality toward African Americans. It is an international social movement that started after the police murder of George Floyd, a black man, on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

14 For more on “strategic essentialism” see Diana Fuss (Essentially Speaking. 1989). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (in Other Words, 1988) and Judith Butler (chapter 8 “Critically Queer” in Bodies That Matter, 1993).

15 See Chapter One: Conversation Two. Clearing Ground.


18 Black Lives Matter is a new civil rights movement that began in 2011 to fight police brutality toward African Americans. It is an international social movement that started after the police murder of George Floyd, a black man, on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

19 For more on “strategic essentialism” see Diana Fuss (Essentially Speaking. 1989). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (in Other Words, 1988) and Judith Butler (chapter 8 “Critically Queer” in Bodies That Matter, 1993).

20 Queer” in Fuss (1989).

21 For more on “strategic essentialism” see Diana Fuss (Essentially Speaking. 1989). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (in Other Words, 1988) and Judith Butler (chapter 8 “Critically Queer” in Bodies That Matter, 1993).


discovered are represented as “what ifs” leaving you, the reader, to grapple with ideas and come up with your own questions, rather than simply digesting answers.

Another concern, was the underlying idea in this work that form and content are inseparable. In order to fully understand the ideas presented, you must read them in the language and form in which they were developed. In other words, a major part of the whole project is the way it is written, not to mention the style in its graphic and typographic expression. Although we know it is common practice, the academic tendency to flip to the end of a book and only read the concluding remarks, in this case, is akin to trying to learn how to swim by reading a manual without ever getting into the water. So, we decided to end simply by sharing some of our own learning moments during this project, in relation to the four areas of interest mentioned in the introduction, with an indication of possible contributions to these areas. We’ve broken a couple of them down even further to address specific issues, resulting in six distinct sections.

We are all in agreement that “a work of the imagination that’s simultaneously rigorously true,” a quote from Ali Smith’s fictional novel There but for the, continues to be the best and most succinct description of our research on architectural flirtations. In line with design practice research, rather than talking about “world making,” we figured we would go ahead and make a world of our own, with the glowing green row house Case Unifamiliari in Mozzo as its center. Although we don’t share, or advocate,

AFTERWORD

“She means she wants a work of the imagination that’s simultaneously rigorously true...”

-Bernice Bayoude
(There but for the, 2011, Ali Smith, 352)

At the end of a compilation, authors may make some concluding remarks, indicating the main ideas that have come out of undertaking that particular body of work. Faced with this task, just when we thought we had exhausted every aspect, we wondered what more could we say about architectural flirtations? And in extension, were concluding statements too close to final commitments, precluding more interesting flirtatious possibilities? Remaining true to the pedagogical spirit of this work, we didn’t want to tell you what to think, but rather allow you to figure it out on your own. Any discoveries we may have made during the writing process have been turned around and reintroduced as a proposal for a new question. Therefore,
Peter Eisenman’s description of Aldo Rossi’s analogical work as “a purely architectural universe... detached from its cultural context,” we do believe that there remains a kinship between our work with this architectural pulp fiction and what Eisenman calls Rossi’s “vision of a potential ‘other’ reality.”

As for our queer feminist position, with its roots in post-structural, critical theory, we believe that it’s fine “to fly off into pure fantasyland, where we are allowed to think of ourselves as fairies,” one of two possible paths Aaron Betsky lists for queer postmodern architects who found careers designing Disney theme parks. However, our queering of modernism, along with a vivid imagination, doesn’t lead to Disney, but rather on an oblique path to a Campy renovation in Mozzo, Italy.

One of our first discoveries was that we each had different but related mantras, to help us get through the toughest parts of the writing process. Brady turned to Maya Angelou’s tough love: “Nothing will work, unless you do.” Beda called on RuPaul’s sassy encouragement: “You betta make it werk!” And Henri recited the poetic and material idea of gentle persistence as a means for change, from a Greek proverb loosely translated as “The soft rope corrodes the dry stone.” And when that didn’t work: “If at first you don’t succeed, try two more times and write about the repetitive performativity of failure.” A (bad) academic joke we used amongst ourselves, whenever an atmosphere of despair and exhaustion over insurmountable work set in.

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Aldo Rossi - architectural design and discourse

Our engagement with Aldo Rossi’s *A Scientific Autobiography* is not a close reading or an in-depth study, but rather a conversation (or flirt) with his ideas. We take parts and place them into a new context, lending to rereadings and reinterpretations. In the same manner that we discuss displacing the centers of architectural culture by scooting them around, in this case architectural discourse, central themes in Rossi’s text are stretched, pushed, and pulled, in relation to an idea of flirtation and its intersection with gender, race, and sexuality. Similarly, through the renovation, the built work as a stand-in for architectural design, undergoes changes in style, function, accessibility, and meaning, shifting this seemingly undetermined, but clearly standard nuclear family house, into a less serious, more fluid space that makes room for beings, species, and specters that don’t conform.

What we were perhaps most surprised to discover, is how much overlap was already there in thought and in design, “hidden in plain sight,” between our Campy intentions and this small part of Rossi’s oeuvre. Take a close look at the original drawings for *Case Unifamiliari*. Several companion *species* have been pasted onto the mylar with transparent film, picturing several horse and carts, along with a lounging horse, to create a fiction of that place. We do not mean to suggest that Aldo Rossi was a feminist architect in secret, or that he didn’t benefit from the “familial” lines of (white) patriarchal power present in the architectural discipline. But we do believe that the combination of his position as

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an anomaly among his peers, along with his theatrical interests, critical values, poetic playfulness, and political convictions, not to mention his concern for pedagogy, provide a base with which it is not difficult to find some common ground. This we see as hopeful.

**Feminist architectural theory**

Our project asks that we, as architects, as critics, as academics, and as feminists not take everything (or ourselves) so seriously. Whether it’s the way we do things, the language we use, or the positions we occupy, it is easy to fall into habits of critique and to forget to ask ourselves what risks are we taking? It has been a constant struggle to do work that is both feminist and flirtatious; with the challenge of balancing the political with the playful, resistance with openness, and empowerment with uncertainty.

Likewise, the tenacity (and sometimes discomfort) to uncover our own assumptions and oppressions, even when firmly located within a critical position such as feminist, or even queer feminist, has brought new insights on ideas of architectural taste, professional identities, and pedagogical models. For example: Camp can be experienced as trashy and exclusive; the academic researcher, architectural pedagogue and practicing architect would do well to flirt more with each other, exchanging competences rather than reinforcing old preconceptions; and history tells us that many of the radical pedagogical practices we admired and were influenced by had complicated relationships with gender, politics, religion and each other, so not all radical pedagogies are created “equal.”

Something that we have worked with consciously throughout this project is to construct an analysis where gender intersects with race and sexuality, in order to address not only issues of gender inequality that perpetuate what Garry Stevens calls “the favored circle” (white, male, middle-class), but also to look closely at our own situation as white, female, middle-class, feminist architects and to question a dominant form of feminism.

**Queer feminist theory/critical theory**

In terms of queer feminist or critical theory, we aren’t certain that our project directly develops these theories, as much as it develops practices for working with these theories. As the humanities and social sciences in general, and gender studies in particular, have been under scrutiny for so long by the “hard sciences,” to prove themselves as legitimate areas of scientific study, this scholarship, from our experience, tends to be quite serious. On the one hand, Beda credits her theoretical understanding, craft in scholarly writing, and academic rigor to her time spent in gender studies. On the other, we agree with Gavin Butt, who asks if “acts of scholarly flirtation may offer up a more activated model of scholarship”?  

In other words, perhaps queer feminist scholarship could be a little more queer and a little less serious? We found that practices such as Campy humor and critical fictions could be equally, if not more effective than serious critiques, in their ability to disarm and critically
examine power, with the additional speculative capability of reimagining and proposing another alternative. In the same way, our performative writing and pedagogical practices have put Sara Ahmed’s theories of *orientation* and *willfulness* into action, while the renovation of the row house has enacted a direct application in the world of things. We’ve learned that (queer) feminist gatherings around tables, as an intentional practice, can be an act of generosity and community building, but we would add that the flirtatious importance of the refreshments on those tables are not to be underestimated.

*Critical architectural pedagogies*

In our call for a shift in the architectural culture of critique, we suggest *architectural flirtations* as another generous and reciprocal alternative, reorientated in a different direction and mode from judgement and alienation. Pedagogical stewardship involves staging critically engaged architectural conversations, or as bell hooks describes, spaces that “know how to cope in situations of risk,” where learning and risk-taking aren’t activities undertaken by students alone. Through the unserious impropriety and humor of *misperformativity*, and the disarming willfulness of *persistent vulnerability*, a *recentering* occurs, where the habitual performativity of the critic or the architect fails.

While our focus has been on the intentional re-orientation of the critique, as an act of assessment and valuing, in extension, we see possibilities for flirtatious pedagogical practices in the studio, academic research, and even professional practice. Likewise, we are inspired by FKAA’s (Fake Industries Architectural Agonism) agonistic approach, where the traditional architectural valuing of “originality” takes a back seat to posing “an answer back to power.” Although we don’t expect the practice of critique, so deeply rooted in the culture of architecture, to magically cease, we do offer a queer mode of scholarship and pedagogy, in the speculative proposals of critical fictions, that values connection and promotes an “ethics of love” through *architectural flirtations*.

*Experimental/performative writing practices*

Our first and foremost teacher of literary style, Ali Smith, wrote: “But everything written has style... Style is never not content.” If we list the different literary forms or styles the text takes on in the book: *Chapter One* begins with an academic essay, followed by three Conversations; then there’s the Manifesto; *Chapter Two* explores the form of the letter and the autobiography; the *Interlude* tests the idea of the meditation; *The First Storey* develops through narrative fiction and dialogue; in-between the *First and Second Storey*, the Room Specification Document and the documentation of prepared questions introduce formats from architectural practice and pedagogy; *The Second Storey* contains a dreamy fiction coupled with an academic analysis; *The Third Storey* is comprised of journal entries and annotated dialogue from casual conversations and gossip; and finally, the
In order to position our work within the field, we discovered a conflicted relationship to both artists and professionals that we weren’t even aware we had. It seems that the pragmatic or “useful” aspect of architecture, in relation to creative expression, was more a part of our identity than we previously realized. Likewise, the commercial interests, or rather the demands of conformity to market forces in the profession, made it clear that we situate our work within an academic context. Our work engages with the overlap between the centers of research, pedagogy and the profession, from an academic position, where the culture of architecture is fostered, along with its sense of social and ethical responsibility. This research and its practices are an effort of political displacement, to relocate and reimagine a serious and privileged discipline.

Here, at the end, you may be wondering whatever happened to the poodle? And how does the poodle, as a representation of architectural flirtations and “significant otherness,” with its queer Campy theatricality and humor, pose any real resistance to the habits of critique, and the reproduction and perpetuation of power in a serious culture of architecture? Our answer is that “puppy love” matters. Seriously!

Beda Ring,
Brady Burroughs,
Henri T. Beall
12 September 2016, Stockholm
Endnotes

FOR FULL REFERENCES WITH ACCESS DATES, SEE BIBLIOGRAPHY.


3 In Greek: Το ποικίλον μας λέει την πέτρα την ξερή, Thank you to Marie-Louise Richards for the formulation “hidden in plain sight.”


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Abstract in Italiano:

Concepito come progetto femminista e scritto in forma di romanzo pulp, Architectural Flirtations: A Love Storey [Amoreggiamenti architettonici: Un piano d’amore] parte dal nostro asserto che l’architettura come disciplina sia organizzata attorno a una cultura di critica, fondata a sua volta su quello che bell hooks chiama <<un sistema di imperialisti, fautori della supremazia bianca, eterosessisti, capitalisti, patriarcato >> – e che i suoi valori non solo provengano ma anzi vengano rafforzati e riprodotti dall’educazione dei giovani architetti.

Una cosa seria. O no?

Per avvicinarsi ad una cultura d’architettura più vulnerabile, etica ed empowering, lo scopo di questo progetto è di dislocare la cultura di critica mettendo in questione e indebolendo le relazioni di potere e privilegio attraverso delle pratiche esplicitamente critiche, queer femministe, e Camp. In altre parole, prende sul serio – in modo incerto, impertinente e brioso, tutto ciò che l’architettura come disciplina solitamente ritiene inopportuno al fine di indebolire il solito ordine.

Tutte le storie (amorose) si svolgono il giorno del 21 marzo – equinozio di primavera – all’interno e nei dintorni delle Case unifamiliari a Mozzo (Italia), progettate da Aldo Rossi e Attilio Pizzigoni nel 1977. La dottoranda Beda Ring si occupa una ristrutturazione di una delle case in maniera Camp, cioè ricca di teatralità, di umorismo e di significant otherness; mentre Brady Burroughs, pedagoga dell’architettura, fa da guida a un gruppo di studenti di un corso di Architettura e Genere preso l’università di Stoccolma (KTH); e l’architetta, Henri T. Beall, bada ai dettagli al piano superiore.

Parole chiave: pedagogia dell’architettura, teoria queer femminista, critica sull’architettura, Camp, amoreggiamenti flirtation, performatività, ricerca design, scrittura sperimentale, narrativa critica (critical fiction), teoria critica sull’architettura, Aldo Rossi, ‘significant otherness’

Translation: Justina Bartoli (in consultation with Laura Macchi)

Abstract på Svenska:


Detta låter seriöst. Eller hur?


Nyckelord: arkitekturpedagogik, queerfeministisk teori, arkitekturkritik, Camp, flirt, designforskning, performativitet, experimentell skrivpraktiker, kritisk fiktion, kritisk arkitekturteori, Aldo Rossi, ‘significant otherness’

Translation: Ulrika Nilsson
This dissertation is written under the guise of three authors, Brady Burroughs and two of my pseudonymous selves, Beda Ring and Henri T. Beall. I have 12+ years experience teaching in design studio, 6-7 years practicing architecture, and 5 years researching toward my PhD. I split myself into three distinct positions that, of course, overlap, in order to have a more situated place to write from.

Each of these personas represent slightly different types of queer feminisms, with different gender expressions, personalities, interests, and experiences, allowing me to explore various voices and even, at times, to contradict myself. Writing from specific personas can be limiting in the attempt to remain true to a particular character and that character's vulnerabilities; however, it is also an invaluable generative tool for reflection and self-critique.

And finally, did you really think that I would let you, the reader, off the hook, without trying on at least one silly disguise? In this case, you get to be "Gavin," as you situate yourself to read this disclosure. As we end this book, it's a last Campy reminder not to take yourself so seriously!
Formulated as a feminist project, written as a pulp fiction, *Architectural Flirtations: A Love Storey* begins with our claim that the architectural discipline is centered around a culture of critique, which is based in what bell hooks calls “a system of imperialist, white supremacist, heterosexist, capitalist, patriarchy,” and that the values instilled by this culture not only begin with, but are reinforced and reproduced by, the education of young architects.

Sounds *serious*. Right?

In a move toward a more vulnerable, ethical and empowering culture of architecture, the project aims to displace the culture of critique, by questioning and undermining relationships of power and privilege through practices that are explicitly critical, queer feminist, and Campy. In other words, it takes *seriously*, in an uncertain, improper and playful way, what is usually deemed unserious within the architectural discipline, in order to undermine the *usual* order of things.

All of the (love) storeys take place on March 21st, the spring equinox, in and around a 1977 collaborative row house project called *Case Unifamiliari* in Mozzo, Italy, designed by Aldo Rossi and Attilio Pizzigoni. Beda Ring, PhD researcher, constructs a Campy renovation of one of these row houses, full of theatricality, humor, and *significant otherness*; while architectural pedagogue, Brady Burroughs, guides a student group from KTH in an Architecture and Gender course; and Henri T. Beall, practicing architect, attends to the details upstairs.