PAVILIONS, POP-UPS
AND PARASOLS
THE IMPACT OF REAL AND VIRTUAL MEETING ON PHYSICAL SPACE

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Guest-Edited by LEON VAN SCHAIK AND FLEUR WATSON
A Sketchbook for the City to Come
The Pop-Up as R&D
Dan Hill

100 Year City (Maribor)
The Virtual Concourse Reframed
Fleur Watson

Not To Be Taken Seriously
Kiosks, Roadside Joys and Other Things That are Beneath Architectural Contempt
Peter Cook

Introduction
Pavilions, Pop-Ups and Parasols
Are They Platforms for Change?
Leon van Schaik

In the Pursuit of Pleasure
The Not So Fleeting Life of the Pavilion and its Ilk
Robert Bevan

Castles and Pavilions
Creating New Hybrid Places of Exchange
Tom Holbrook

10 Folly Variations
The Time-Specific Architecture of Mass Studies
Minsuk Cho

Barcelona Reset
Circuit of Ephemeral Architecture
Benedetta Tagliabue

Yael Reisner with Peter Cook and Straddle 3, Take My Hand, Plaça de la Mercè, Barcelona, June-September 2014

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Building Community
Andrea Kahn

Global Village Media
Coming Together in the Early 1970s at Whiz Bang Quick City
Felicity D Scott

Indeterminacy and Contingency
The Seroussi Pavilion and Bloom by Alisa Andrasek
Alisa Andrasek

The Affirmative Qualities of a Temporal Architecture
Martyn Hook

Entrepreneur Makers
Digitally Crafted, Crowdfunded Pavilions
Arthur Mamou-Mani and Toby Burgess

Urban Phenomenon
Guerilla Architecture in Taipei
Roan Ching-Yueh

When a Tree House No Longer Says ‘House’, Are We Virtually There?
Akira Suzuki

Agents for Urban Food Education and Security
CJ Lim

Architecture of the Occasion
Pia Ednie-Brown

Lasting Impressions
Pop-Up Culture by HWKN
Matthias Hollwich

Counterpoint From the Subversive to the Serious
Temporary Urbanism as a Positive Force
Peter Bishop

Contributors
Nothing works in isolation: the virtual world has an integral connection and special rapport with the palpable, physical world of people and places. Social media feeds off the corporal world. It also demands more of us through perpetual engagement: as individuals the pressure is on to experience more and to attend and consume more of the right things – whether food, culture or entertainment. For architecture, it often requires being more novel and eye-catching; being a mini-spectacle or event in itself, the more ephemeral or transient the better. No kind of structure is better suited to this phenomenon than pavilions, pop-ups and parasols. Built with the intention of being fleeting fly-by-nights, contemporary follies are here to demand our momentary attention. This is not, however, to cast them aside as facile objects. For architects, small-scale temporary structures offer essential opportunities for research and experimentation – for testing and prototyping – and to get their work built and known by a wider public. Though impermanent, the majority of structures are still realised with a function or purpose, whether cultural, commercial or social. These can even go so far as to be catalysts for positive change, as described by Dan Hill (‘A Sketchbook for the City to Come: The Pop-Up as R&D’, pp 32–9) and Andrea Kahn (‘Building Community’, pp 72– 9) at a local level, and Martyn Hook (‘The Affirmative Qualities of a Temporal Architecture’, pp 118–23) at the international scale. Interceding even with a provisional structure with social purpose offers the opportunity to provide and to act where it may not be possible or relevant to do so permanently.

The ideas behind this issue gelled organically over time through correspondence and direct face-to-face discussions with the guest-editors, Leon van Schaik and Fleur Watson. For the final line-up, Leon and Fleur pooled their distinct knowledge bases and extensive international networks to come up with a cast of contributors that is as far reaching as it is exciting. It is apparent that there is almost no part of the world where a temporary structure is not popping up: from Scandinavia to Spain; and across to Korea and China, Australia and North America. Leon somewhat modestly describes the publication’s contents in his introduction as ‘a fairground assemblage’, highlighting both the wonder and the novelty of this constellation of ‘new forms’ emerging as part of ‘an ancient lineage’. Like ancient fairs, these temporary structures are no sooner drawing us in with their flamboyant originality as they are disbanding. It is perhaps this that keeps us most enwrapped by them; you are never quite sure when they will be gone. ☪
The book explores the role of spatial intelligence – the capability that underpins the spatial thinking that is architecture’s unique knowledge base – in architecture and design.

Practical Poetics reveals how architects, drawing on the whole of their experience, prepare the platforms from which they launch their designing.

The Composite Wing was designed by Studio Roland Snooks and commissioned for RMIT Design Hub as part of the ‘The Future is Here’ exhibition (co-curated by Fleur Watson and Kate Rhodes with Alex Newson from the Design Museum, London). The design acts as full-scale architectural ‘test’ for a research project in development and also as a ‘parasol’ and ‘plinth’ within the gallery space for the objects on display.

Curated by Fleur Watson, the Melbourne iteration of this touring exhibition included a site-specific exhibition design by Searle X Waldron Architecture. The design acted as a ‘prosthetic’ to the host exhibition to display objects and ephemera collected from significant local architects that trace the impact of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown’s influence on the development of Melbourne’s architectural culture and ideology.

The Pin-up Architecture and Design Project Space is an independent warehouse in Collingwood, Melbourne, curated by Fleur Watson, and intended as a robust space for curatorial experimentation. For the launch of Pin-up Roaming, Searle X Waldron Architecture was commissioned to design an installation as a ‘reflective curatorial map’. Over one night, Pin-up was suffused in a pink electro-luminescent glow with retrospective images forming a new horizon line and illuminated wire suspended in mid-air.
Focused on the emergence of a new relationship between architecture and the way in which people meet, connect and ‘share’ using extended networks through social media and contact digital connectivity, this issue amplifies and develops the Guest-Editors’ initial wonderment at the emergence of seemingly new physical forms extending out of an ancient lineage of temporary structures. For Leon van Schaik and Fleur Watson, it represents a convergence of their diverse research interests within architecture: van Schaik as a highly esteemed educator and thought leader and Watson as a curator and editor. This they have brought together in Pavilions, Pop-Ups and Parasols through their preliminary research on this apparent phenomenon, and with the collaboration of their contributors a swarming of minds and creative practice around the idea of how the virtual becomes physically manifest and how the temporal holds significance within the contemporary condition.

Through these reflections, it is clear that something new is emerging. New manifestations of these (conventionally) un-programmed pieces of architecture are not the picturesque instrument of the folly or the brave new world of the 1960s, which van Schaik experienced first hand as a student of the Archigram protagonists at the Architectural Association (AA) in London. Looking back we can see that the past yearning for the global village ideal of connected experiencing is now a reality using previously unimagined technologies – now we share by pushing buttons or the swipe of a fingertip. Something is stirring between the real and the virtual; a desire to make the virtual more tangible, more spatial, more informative, in a way that is in tune with van Schaik’s thinking about ‘spatial intelligence’ and ‘practical poetics’, while speaking to Watson’s preoccupation with current shifts in contemporary design culture.

Leon van Schaik AO is Professor of Architecture with an Innovation Chair in Design Practice Research at RMIT University in Melbourne. A writer and academic with research interests focusing on spatial thinking, the poetics of architecture, and procuring innovative architecture, he has been responsible for promoting a dynamic culture of architectural innovation through practice-based research. His support of local and international architectural culture and significantly his leadership in the procurement of exemplary architecture through his role at RMIT have resulted in some of Melbourne’s most distinguished contemporary buildings that have had a profound impact on architectural discourse and practice in the city over the past two decades. His Architecture and Design Practice PhD programme at RMIT has become an important template for institutions worldwide; it has recently been awarded a several million euros grant by the EU Marie Curie Actions Fund to extend its activities internationally by partnering with institutions in Europe. Van Schaik became a Life Fellow of the (then) Royal Australian Institute of Architects (2009), was named Officer (AO) in the General Division of the Order of Australia (2006) and was the recipient of the Neville Quarry RAIA Education Prize (2005).

Fleur Watson is Curator at RMIT University’s Design Hub, a building designed by Sean Godsell Architects in association with Peddle Thorp that is dedicated to cross-disciplinary design research. Since its opening in early 2013, Watson has overseen the delivery of the international exhibition ‘Walter van Beirendonck: Dream the World Awake’ and co-curated ‘Las Vegas Studio’ and ‘The Future Is Here’ for the Design Hub spaces, the latter in collaboration with the Design Museum in London. In late 2013, she was the invited architecture curator for the installation ‘Sampling the City: Architecture in Melbourne Now’ as part of the National Gallery of Victoria’s large-scale exhibition ‘Melbourne Now’. She is the co-founder of the Pin-up Architecture and Design Project Space, an independent gallery in the vibrant precinct of Collingwood in Melbourne, and writes regularly on design for The Saturday Paper, a quality weekly newspaper dedicated to narrative journalism. She is the former editor of the Australian architecture journal Monument magazine (2001–7), and editor of the Thames & Hudson publication Cities of Hope: Remembered/Rehearsed (2012), a monograph on the Melbourne-based practice Edmond & Corrigan. She is also co-author, with architect Yael Reisner, of Architecture and Beauty: Conversations with Architects about a Troubled Relationship (John Wiley & Sons, 2010).

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Note

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Pavilions, Pop-Ups and Parasols
Are They Platforms for Change?
Lurking behind every pavilion, pop-up and parasol is the dream of an escape. A removal from everyday routines, the notion of being a nomad, but not alone, moving with a mob, pitching tents, hitching caravans, new dawns over the horizon, greener grass in other fields beckoning. Buildings set concepts of living in stone, concrete and glass. They become like your parents’ furniture, outmoded before quaint; irritating in their dumb insistence on past values and fashions long before they become collectibles. Pavilions, pop-ups and parasols in a reverie are instant and ephemeral reflections of our enterprises, our moods and our hopes (see Peter Cook’s article ‘Not to be Taken Seriously’ on pp 56–63 of this issue).

The travelling fair once punctuated the calendar of every market city in Europe. In England they began with King’s Lynn Fair in February and progressed with fairs in other cities every month, a large cluster at Easter and Whitsun, midsummer fairs in Newcastle on Tyne (the Hoppings) and Cambridge, and so on across the country until they ended in the Norwich Christmas fair. They could be huge assemblages of tents in every conceivable form, sometimes mimicking the grids of cities, sometimes taking on a concentricity prompted by the field boundary of their setting. They brought together in different places and in differing assemblages thousands of independent and itinerant attractions, crafted by their individual owners in an evolving competition for generating thrills. Usually they included a circus, a persistent focus of the dreams of children and teenagers wanting to run away from the staid and regulated life of school and homework.

Memories of these constellations of tented offerings surely informed Archigram’s Instant City (1969), and there was a hint of them in Strawberry Fields (John Lennon, 1967), the song everyone was humming at the time of the Woodstock Music and Art Fair (Bethel, New York, 1969) and its predecessors (see Felicity D Scott’s ‘Global Village Media’, pp 78–85)? Looking back, various yearnings for a future that has now become a reality, using then-unimagined technologies, are visible. The global village ideal of connected experiencing in the 1960s relied on physical mailings of films. Now we share by pushing buttons. What future yearning are we manifesting now? Something is stirring in the ‘real and virtual’ pavilions of Tom Kovac; a desire to make virtual space
more tangible, more informative (see Fleur Watson, ‘100 Year City (Maribor): The Virtual Concourse Reframed’, pp 48–55). Thus far, virtual space seems trapped as every pavilion contains a virtual space that is a torus through which our minds endlessly coil – maybe some pavilion, pop-up and parasol forms will provide the means to resist this boundlessness.

The Hopes that Haunt the Imagination

Pavilions, pop-ups and parasols come first into mind in the carefree context of travelling circuses. This issue of 2 is somewhat a fairground assemblage, impelled by an initial wonderment at the emergence of seemingly new forms in an ancient lineage, forms that can be seen to be set in train by the ways in which people currently connect with other people. Brought together here are reflections on this apparent phenomenon, a small swarming of minds and creative practice around the idea. And indeed, within this collection it is clear that something new is afoot. These manifestations of un-programmed architecture are not the picturesque instrument that is the folly (see Robert Bevan, ‘In Pursuit of Pleasure: The Not So Fleeting Life of the Pavilion and its Ilk’, pp 16–25 and Akira Suzuki, ‘When a Tree House No Longer Says “House”, Are We Virtually There?’, pp 86–91).

Designers who make temporary follies in cities are not intent on presaging a built architecture, as they were with the ‘Osaka Follies’ (April to July 1990), but seek to make visible the ritual life of citizens, crystallising it in theatrical freeze frames (see Benedetta Tagliabue, ‘Barcelona Reset’, pp 64–71). In other developments, new ways for people to take part in the forming of spaces using readily assembled components are invented and offered up in public places (see Alisa Andrasek, ‘Indeterminacy + Contingency: the Seroussi Pavilion and Bloom’, pp 106–11).

Pursuant of a more inclusive economy, there are attempts to foster unpredicted associations between people. These falter when not matched with ‘soft’ management paradigms (see Tom Holbrook, ‘Castles and Pavilions: Creating New Hybrid Places of Exchange’, pp 26–31 and Andrea Kahn, ‘Building Community’, pp 72–6). Old norms thwart emergent interactivity. In Taipei, illegal expansions and enclosures prompted by the population influx when the nationalist government arrived (1928) took the form of pavilions, pop-ups and parasols. Recently architects have been curated into making these illicit moves explicit and public, therefore challenging the existing governance of development (see Roan Ching-Yueh, ‘Urban Phenomenon: Guerilla Architecture in Taipei’, pp 112–23). These challenges are appropriate to all cities. The latest understandings of the ethics of life, explored through small ephemeral works thus far, impel a future architecture that directly involves living organisms (see Pia Ednie-Brown, ‘Architecture of the Occasion’, pp 100–5). There are very real shifts in tectonics.

Where in discussing the internal organisation of buildings Robin Evans documented the way in which the corridor supplanted the medieval enfiladed halls with the discrete rooms characteristic of Modernism, internal landscapes on uninterrupted inclined planes are the spin-off from pavilions,
pop-ups and parasols freely distributed in urban space. Inventive architectural ways of making the engines of our existence visible are foreshadowed, reversing the tendency for children today to be unaware that milk comes from cows, chickens from eggs (see CJ Lim, ‘Agents for Urban Food Education and Security’, pp 92–9).

A Freer, More Spontaneous Architecture?
But do these changes in any real way deliver an escape to a freer, more spontaneous way of being together with other people? Is there an algorithm operating faster than the tenth of a second that is the smallest time interval we can perceive covertly governing our desires? We are told that search engines and social media incorporate algorithms that record our desires and serve them up to us, for sale. Corporations are well aware of this, using pop-ups to invade public and private space; and just as there is a strong trade in flagship shop design for international branded goods, practices have evolved to design pavilions, pop-ups and parasols that serve the advertising and public relations needs of big business. Arthur Mamou-Mani and Toby Burgess, ‘Entrepreneur Makers: Digitally Crafted, Crowdfunded Pavilions’ (pp 130–5) explore a countervailing digital self-sufficiency.

So is it the case that always lurking behind these longings for personal yet communal freedom from constraints of place, of rooms and corridors, lies the unseen hand of that which really controls our destinies? Are we – however free we feel ourselves to be – pawns in a game that is in part genetic (half of us it seems are programmed to be conservative, half of us radical), in part high-frequency nudging? And even if this is so, can we appropriate what is given by corporations and, jujitsu-like, turn it to other ends (see Matthias Hollwich, ‘Lasting Impressions: Pop-Up Culture by HWKN’, pp 124–9)? Or is this only an accidental outcome when pavilions, pop-ups and parasols provided for temporary shelter after disasters are given a continuing life in the aftermath (see Martyn Hook, ‘The Affirmative Qualities of a Temporal Architecture’, pp 118–23)?

Social Purposes of New Architectures
Perhaps, when looked at in the full awareness of how pavilions, pop-ups and parasols are intended – as stepping stones to gentrifications that displace populations for example (see Dan Hill, ‘A Sketchbook for the City to Come: The Pop-up as R&D’, pp 32–9) – they can be used as ‘platforms for change’,9 engines of social purpose. Not in the patronising manner in which solutions are so often delivered to communities by those intent on aiding them, but as facilitators of the inherent knowledge of people, so often – as has been documented by the more thoughtful in the field – much more sophisticated than the thinking of those who design deliverance. That is the hope of those who observe the plethora of informal pop-ups and parasols. It is also the hope of curators and designers who seek ways to involve communities in the making of facilities (see Minsuk Cho, ‘10 Folly Variations: the Time-Specific Architecture of Mass Studies’, pp 40–47). And
This pop-up restaurant, part of the London Design Festival, served only canned fish, elevating the humble tin to an object of desire.

Martínez Lapeña – Torres Arquitectos
Folly 7 Expo 90, ‘Osaka Follies’ exhibition
Osaka
Japan
1990

opposite: The folly forecasts possible civic architecture at a larger scale.