

Kester Rattenbury

Output 2: Supercrits #3 - #7, 2008-2013 (2 books and a website)

Abstract

The Supercrit series aimed to combine lively and informative student events with international critical debate at the highest level. The series began with the selection and staging of public events. These brought some of the world's greatest architects back into a teaching environment to present one of their most influential projects to a panel of international critics and a studio audience, as though they were students presenting their work at a design crit. These events were recorded and published in carefully edited, illustrated and annotated formats, accompanied by critical essays. The first were published in book form, the latter on line. The project aimed to extend critical discussion of some of the seminal projects of recent architectural history, to question and explore the emerging history around them with the benefit of hindsight and to introduce a new generation of design students to them in a way that was both lively and rigorously academic. It took advantage of the presence of the designers of the buildings and some of

their most influential critics to generate a new forum for critical debate. The methodology fused several modes of architectural critique - the student crit, the critical journalistic review, the edited transcript. The material so produced was then treated as highly academic subject matter, with meticulous editing, extensive picture research, accompanying essays, bibliographies, appendices etc. to produce the books. The events were all run in collaboration with The Architecture Foundation, and Supercrit 7 with Tate Britain and the Canadian Centre for Architecture. Supercrits #1 - #4 are published as books by Routledge in a series designed by John Morgan Studio; Supercrits #5 - #7 are published online in a custom-built web format devised by EXP which now hosts the whole series.

Key Words

Public crit, critical debate, experimental projects, seminal buildings

Context and General Description

The Supercrit series grew out of the launch event for the Department of Architecture's Research Centre for Experimental Practice (EXP), which aimed to document, disseminate and support the experimental projects in which major shifts of design thinking are often incubated. The first Supercrit event (Supercrit #1 Cedric Price, Potteries Think Belt, November 2003) was so well received that it was developed and extended as the basis of a major critical series. The remit was to extend the critical discussion of some of the seminal projects of recent architectural history, to question and explore the emerging history around them with the benefit of hindsight and from the point of view of both the architects themselves and their critics. The series aimed to operate at the highest academic level and at the same time in a manner accessible to the newest students through a lively, explanatory and critical debate, which could then be edited, extended to provide further explanation, contextualise the debate or extend them further.

The series proved hugely successful, attracting some of the world's most famous architects as speakers, including Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Richard Rogers, Bernard Tschumi and Rem Koolhaas, and attracting collaboration and support from major institutions such as the Canadian Centre for Architecture, the RIBA, Tate Britain, and from the Architecture Foundation, which co-ran the events from Supercrit #3 onwards. All events were oversubscribed and the series was enthusiastically reviewed in the national and international press, and widely imitated, even to the use of the name 'Supercrit'.

Supercrits added to new knowledge by exploring, challenging and developing academic, journalistic and popular history as it grows around these significant recent projects, as well as opening up both project and debate to a new audience. This happened through the events themselves and the extended academic and visual format of the subsequent books and websites.

Supercrits included in the REF period are:

Supercrit #3:

Richard Rogers, The Pompidou Centre

Event date: 22 April 2005

Publication: Kester Rattenbury and Samantha Hardingham (eds.). Supercrit #3. Richard Rogers, The Pompidou Centre. London: Routledge 2011. ISBN 978-0-415-45786-6

Supercrit #4:

Bernard Tschumi, Parc de la Villette

Event date: 14 October 2005

Publication: Samantha Hardingham and Kester Rattenbury (eds.). Supercrit #4 Bernard Tschumi, Parc de la Villette. London: Routledge, 2011. ISBN 978-0-415-45788-0

Supercrit #5:

Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York

Event date: 5 May 2006

URL: <http://www.supercrits.com/5/>

Supercrit #6:

Leon Krier, Poundbury

Event date: 31 October 2008

URL: <http://www.supercrits.com/6/>

Supercrit #7:

James Stirling & Michael Wilford, Neue Staatsgalerie

Event date: 8 April 2011

URL: <http://www.supercrits.com/7/>

Research Questions

- 1) How can popular 'events' such as architectural lectures develop and extend as both an academic and teaching resource?
- 2) How can the teaching 'crit' style of confrontational debate be used to explore academic and professional and experimental ideas?
- 3) What are the key criticisms that have emerged of some of the most significant architectural projects, and how do their architects respond to and challenge these?
- 4) How is such criticism formed, and how is it challenged?

Aims and Objectives

1) To extend and develop critical debate about some of the major architectural projects of our time through use of one of architecture's own pedagogical formats

The series is an intentional crossover between academic research, student teaching and journalistic criticism. It aims to extend and develop the debate of some of the major architectural projects of our time in a way that is at once lively, highly informed, operating at the highest critical level, and is remains accessible to the newest design student. It does this by adapting one of architecture's popular teaching methods, the 'crit for international and critical purposes, with international academic critics, working journalists and major practitioners forming the crit panel, but also by ensuring a largely student audience so that the discussion also includes the newest 'visitors' to the project.

2) To devise a format to engage eminent architects of major projects in critical, public debate

In devising this format, the series seeks firstly, to receive a first-hand account of the intentions behind the project, presented by the original architect as though for the first time, and then, their reflections on that project with the benefit of hindsight. Secondly, it selects critics to challenge and discuss that description, and in particular, to debate with the subjects the critical view of the project which arose at the time and has risen since. In maintaining the 'student crit' format, it allows for questions to be occasionally shocking, irreverent, or extremely simple and direct; of a kind which would not normally be asked of such an eminent architect in any forum, let alone a public one.

3) To record and expand the public event into a publishable format that extends critical debate about the projects and makes it accessible to a wider audience.

The book format seeks to combine and develop some of the established publishing conventions of architectural books: mixing the academic with the 'visual' book; the transcript with the edited collection book; the student textbook with the 'scrapbook'. It consists of a preliminary section with an introductory essay; the brief for the original project; and an 'illustrated section' including both key images and many little-known or unpublished images uncovered by the research. This section is followed by a full transcript of the debate itself, where scrupulous editing, extensive footnotes and inclusive picture research clarify, elaborate, explain, challenge and illustrate the debate itself. Finally there is a closing essay, a section for supplementary material such as facsimiles of key critical articles, or stop frames of relevant movies discussing the project; and a full index of further reading.

The website adapts the same basic material to an online structure, where a video of the whole talk is accompanied by a timeline of visual images and notes, (thus acting as the digital version of the main annotated transcript). Essays and supplementary material are available alongside this. The site further allows you to link through to samples of the books of the earlier events. The web format builds on the experience of the EXP team who also

devised the Archigram Archival Project and therefore opens the series up more genuinely to an online audience as a major public resource.

Research Methods

The series borrows a teaching and feedback mechanism from its own teaching methods - the crit and applies it to the most influential design projects and practitioners. It therefore sets a well-established but unpredictable critical framework - description/presentation, chaired critical discussion from specialist panel, audience questions - allowing both evolution of description from the designers, high level debate with eminent critic of very different kinds, while maintaining the need for clear description to newcomers to the field.

To this it then applies the highest standards of editorial input over the whole series, both in structuring the event and debate itself as far as possible, and in the subsequent publications through editing, annotating, illustrating and adding new critical and interpretative material to the transcripts of the events themselves. This resource was developed first in book form with John Morgan Studio designers and Routledge as publishers, and then in the design of a new,

custom-built web format, considering technical possibilities, visual appeal and broad usability at a number of levels. As with the Archigram Archival Project, the project attempts to make academic material available to a new audience while maintaining academic standards of rigour, clarity and intellectual content.

The EXP team (led by first Rattenbury and Hardingham and then Rattenbury with other members of the University) selected the projects, researched the key texts and criticisms on them, selected (and persuaded) the panel members; devised crib sheets for the audience giving the background to the project and identifying key debates which had arisen since; participated in the debates, recorded the events. They then reviewed and extended these for publication, researching and writing the footnotes, sourcing images, writing new accompanying texts and preparing an appendix and list of further reading.

This was a highly collaborative project. Rattenbury's roles were:

1) Co-curator of events #1 - #6

As collaborator, with Samantha Hardingham on Supercrits #1-6 and lead organiser on Supercrit #7, Rattenbury was involved in selecting subjects, arranging events, researching the critical background and preparing the materials (textual and visual) for events.

2) Co-author/editor of books with Samantha Hardingham

This involved detailed control or transcript editing throughout, picture research, research and writing notes, research of additional materials and writing introductory essay.

3) Website

Rattenbury devised and oversaw the project, edited the transcript (Supercrit #5) wrote the notes, selected pictures and wrote accompanying new texts. Website development design was by Filip Visnjic and Eduard Prats-Molner; production, management, video editing and picture research, additional notes and editing by Clare Hamman.

Dissemination / Impact

All events have been free and oversubscribed. From 2005, the Architecture Foundation joined EXP to run the series because of vast demand for places. Collaboration and support came from major institutions such as the Canadian Centre for Architecture, the RIBA and Tate Britain, and from the Architecture Foundation, who co-ran the events from Supercrit #3 onwards. Reviews have appeared in the national and international architectural press e.g. Building Design, AD, The Architect's Journal, The Architects Newspaper (New York) and others. Books have led to invitations to Rattenbury to speak on the project at events such as the AE foundation in Edinburgh, 2011 (<http://aefoundation.co.uk/pompidou-video-lecture-2-of-the-architect-in-public-life-series/>) and the Ecole Supérieure d'Art at de Technique, France, 2012 (publication in press). The series has been much imitated, even to the use of the name Supercrits, for instance at the Venice Biennale 2012. The website launches October 2013.

Evidence

"The Supercrit is now establishing itself as a highlight of the academic London year, creating a unique buzz with departure from the manner in which architecture is usually discussed." (Helen Castle, 2005, p. 22)

Events

- Fig.01 Supercrit #3 (L to R) Luigi Prestinzenza Puglisi, Mark Wigley?, Paul Finch, Kester Rattenbury, David Greene
- Fig.02 Supercrit #3 Richard Rogers
- Fig.03 Supercrit #3 (L to R) Mike Dowd, Gianfranco Franchini, Richard Rogers
- Fig.04 Supercrit #4 (L to R) Paul Finch, Peter Cook
- Fig.05 Supercrit #4 Bernard Tschumi
- Fig.06 Supercrit #4 (L to R) Peter Cook, Bernard Tschumi, Paul Finch
- Fig.07 Supercrit #5 Rem Koolhaas. In the background (L to R): Murray Fraser, Rowan Moore, Alejandro Zaero-Polo, Paul Finch, David Green, Mark Wigley
- Fig.08 Supercrit #5 (L to R): Rowan Moore (back of head), Madelon Vreisendorp, Rem Koolhaas, Alejandro Zaero-Polo, David Greene, Mark Wigley, [unknown], Kate Heron
- Fig.09 Supercrit #6 L to R): Kester, Charles Jencks, Leon Krier, Kate Heron (back of head)
- Fig.10 Supercrit #6 (L to R): Leon Krier (sat), Charles Jencks
- Fig.11 Supercrit #6 Leon Krier
- Fig.12 Supercrit #7 Michael Wilford

Books

- Fig.13 Supercrit #1 Cedric Price, Potteries Think Belt. Book Cover
- Fig.14 Supercrit #2 Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Learning from Las Vegas. Book Cover
- Fig.15 Supercrit #3 Richard Rogers, The Pompidou Centre. Book Cover
- Fig.16 Supercrit #4 Bernard Tschumi, Parc de la Villette. Book Cover
- Fig.17 Supercrit #4 Book Spread, Proof
- Fig.18 Supercrit #4 Book Spread, Proof
- Fig.19 Supercrit #4 Book Spread, Proof
- Fig.20 Supercrit #4 Book Spread, Proof

Website Screen Shots

Fig.21 Supercrit #5 Home Page
Fig.22 Supercrit #5 Presentation
Fig.23 Supercrit #5 Presentation
Fig.24 Supercrit #5 Presentation
Fig.25 Supercrit #5 Presentation
Fig.26 Supercrit #5 Presentation
Fig.27 Supercrit #5 Presentation
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Fig.29 Supercrit #5 Crit, Paul Finch
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Fig.32 Supercrit #5 Crit, Rowan Moore
Fig.33 Supercrit #5 Crit , Rem Koolhaas
Fig.34 Supercrit #7 Home Page
Fig.35 Supercrit #7 Presentation
Fig.36 Supercrit #7 Presentation
Fig.37 Supercrit #7 Presentation
Fig.38 Supercrit #7 Presentation
Fig.39 Supercrit #7 Crit, Piers Gough
Fig.40 Supercrit #7 Crit, Charles Jencks
Fig.41 Supercrit #7 Crit, John Tooney
Fig.42 Supercrit #7 Crit, John Tooney and
Louisa Button
Fig.43 Supercrit #7 Crit, Michael Wolford
Fig.44 Supercrit #7 Crit, Hugh Pearman
Fig.45 Supercrit #7 Crit, Louisa Button
Fig.46 Supercrit #7 Crit, Kieran Long

Press

Supercrit #3

P.01 Kerr, Jo. 'A Jury of his Peers'.

Supercrit #4

P.02 Castle, Helen, 2005. 'Tschumi Faces
the Family.' Building Design 1695, 21
October, pp.22,23.

SuperCrit #5

P.03 Long, Kieran, 2006. 'Rem Koolhaas.'
Icon 37, July, p.15

Supercrit #6

P.04 Darly, Gillian, 2008. 'Poundbury
Unpicked.' Architects Journal 11
November, p. 41-43

P.05 Hobhouse, Naill, 2008. 'Code
remains Unbroken.' Building Design, 28
November.



Fig.01 Supercrit #3 (L to R) Luigi Prestinzenza Puglisi, Mark Wigley?, Paul Finch, Kester Rattenbury, David Greene



Fig.02 Supercrit #3 Richard Rogers



Fig.03 Supercrit #3 (L to R) Mike Dowd, Gianfranco Franchini, Richard Rogers



Fig.04 Supercrit #4 (L to R) Paul Finch, Peter Cook



Fig.05 Supercrit #4 Bernard Tschumi



Fig.06 Supercrit #4 (L to R) Peter Cook, Bernard Tschumi, Paul Finch



Fig.07 Supercrit #5 Rem Koolhaas. In the background (L to R): Murray Fraser, Rowan Moore, Alejandro Zaero-Polo, Paul Finch, David Green, Mark Wigley



Fig.08 Supercrit #5 (L to R): Rowan Moore (back of head), Madelon Vreindorp, Rem Koolhaas, Alejandro Zaero-Polo, David Greene, Mark Wigley, [unknown], Kate Heron



Fig.09 Supercrit #6 L to R): Kester, Charles Jencks, Leon Krier, Kate Heron (back of head)



Fig.10 Supercrit #6 (L to R): Leon Krier (sat), Charles Jencks



Fig.11 Supercrit #6 Leon Krier



Fig.12 Supercrit #7 Michael Wilford

'Cedric was involved in something better than building, because it involved challenging the idea of what it was you wanted to build, and what Paul Finch, editor of *Architectural Review*

'We should see Cedric's work as part of an opportunity to re-examine great aspects of Britain.' Jersey Melvin, architectural critic

'...what I am talking about in the Thinkbelt... [is] the capacity for activities to change as a result of thoughts changing. And the resulting architecture can last as long as these thoughts are current.' Cedric Price

The *Supercrit* series revisits some of the most influential architectural projects of the recent past and examines their impact on the way we think and design today. Based on live studio debates between protagonists and critics, the books describe, explore and critique these major projects. Supported by an extensive illustrated section of the projects themselves - including the architects' original drawings and photographs and a selection of illustrations describing the wider context of the debate - these books are aimed at both a new and an expert audience, while introducing the projects to newcomers with original descriptions and adding generous footnotes and sources to a full transcript of the debate, they are also an important contribution to the ongoing discussion which surrounds these seminal projects.

Supercrit #1 POTTERIES THINKBELT, Cedric Price examines Cedric Price's unsurpassed proposals for education, the Potteries Thinkbelt project from the 1960s. You can hear the architect's project definition, see the drawings and join in the crit. This innovative and compelling book is an invaluable resource for any architecture student.

KESTER RATTENBURY is Reader in Architecture at the University of Westminster, co-ordinator of The Research Centre for Experimental Practice (RCEP), teacher and architectural journalist.

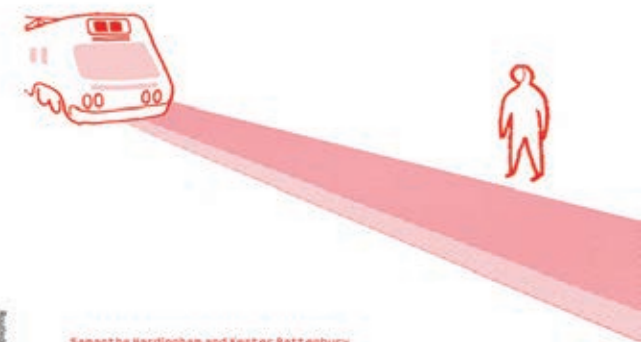
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Supercrit #1 Cedric Price's Potteries Thinkbelt

Supercrit #1
Cedric Price
POTTERIES THINKBELT



Samantha Hardingham and Kester Rattenbury

Fig. 13 Supercrit #1 Cedric Price, Potteries Think Belt. Book Cover

'...to Bob Rowland can I say one line only: I discovered the Duck!' Denise Scott Brown

'...allow them to answer the question is the National Gallery's Salisbury wing a monument to Mrs Thatcher?' Charles Saumarez Smith

'...be sure to recognise what turns you on naturally, and resist doing what you're supposed to do.' Robert Venturi

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In *Supercrit #2 LEARNING FROM LAS VEGAS*, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown the couple revisit their infamous book which overturned the barriers separating high architecture from the commercial architecture of the Strip. You can hear the couple's project description, see the drawings and join in the crit. This innovative and compelling book is an invaluable resource for any architecture student.

KESTER RATTENBURY is Reader in Architecture at the University of Westminster, co-ordinator of The Research Centre for Experimental Practice (RCEP), teacher and architectural journalist.

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Supercrit #2 Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's LEARNING FROM LAS VEGAS

Supercrit #2
Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown
Learning from Las Vegas



Kester Rattenbury and Samantha Hardingham

Fig. 14 Supercrit #2 Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Learning from Las Vegas. Book Cover



Fig. 15 Supercrit #3 Richard Rogers, The Pompidou Centre. Book Cover



Fig. 16 Supercrit #4 Bernard Tschumi, Parc de la Villette. Book Cover

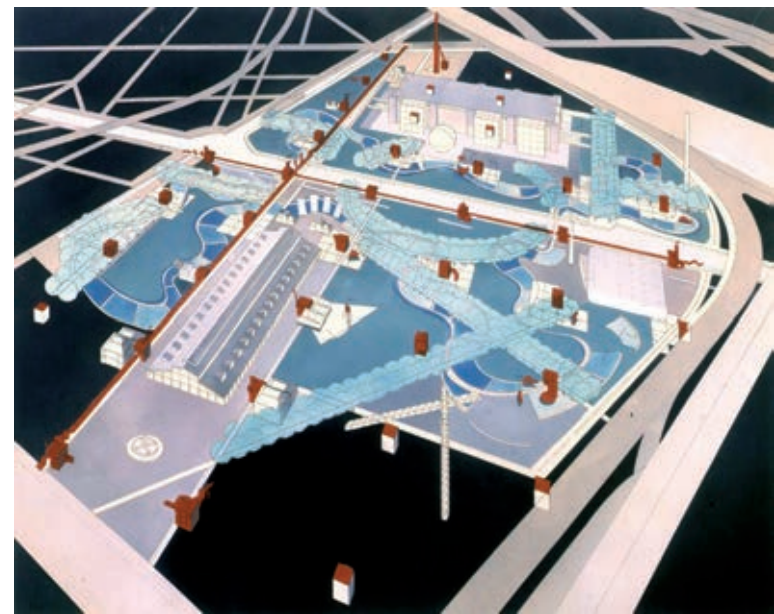
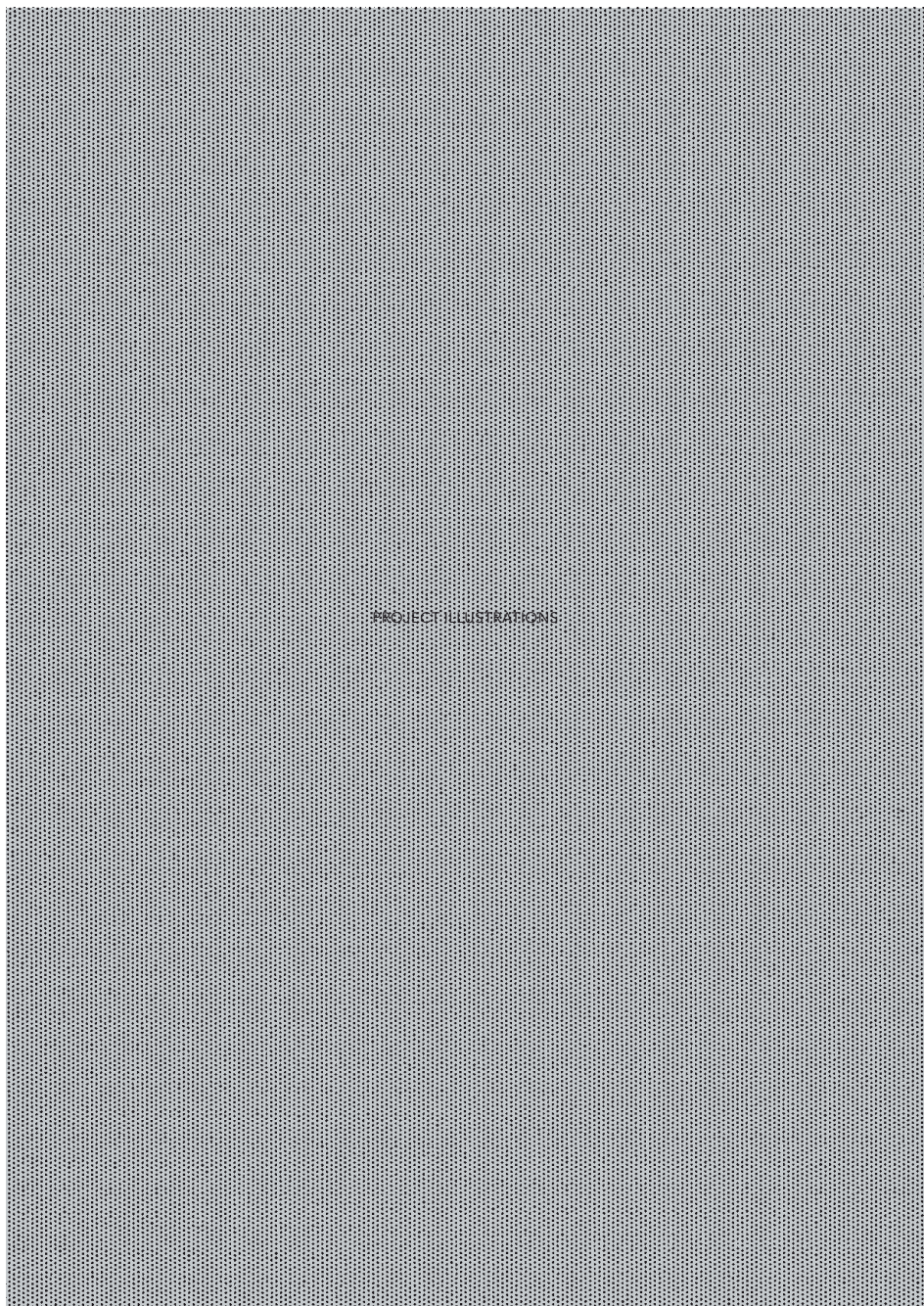


Fig.17 Supercrit #4 Book Spread, Proof

35. Frederick Law Olmstead (1822-1903), landscape architect. His most celebrated designs include Mont Royal in Montreal (1876), the landscaping around The United States Capitol Hill in Washington D.C (1874) and Central Park in New York (completed in 1873 with architect Calvert Vaux (shown here)). The latter was proposed as the 'Greensward Plan', a naturalistic design, a complete work of landscape art and notable as an early example of the park as a public institution that had previously not been a prerequisite of all urban green spaces



36. Stourhead, Wiltshire, U.K. The house, a Palladian mansion, designed by Colen Campbell (1720-24) and home of the Hoare family from 1717 (previously home of the Stourton family for 700 years). The gardens were designed by Henry Hoare II and laid out between 1741 and 1780 and are considered to be at the forefront of the 18th century English landscape movement that celebrated nature as inspired by the landscape painters of the 17th century such as Claude Lorrain (1600-82)



37. *Step Piece* (1970) by Vito Acconci. In this piece the artist "stepped on and off a stool in his apartment every morning at the rate of thirty steps a minute, continuing the effort for as long as possible; the results of his 'daily improvement' were distributed to the art public in the form of monthly progress reports. (Source: Kate Linker, *Vito Acconci*, Rizzoli, New York, 1994, p. 24.)



38. Michael Foucault (1926-84). French philosopher, sociologist and historian. Published works include *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1961), *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966)



39. Jacques Derrida (1930 – 2004), French philosopher and founder of 'deconstruction'. Major formative texts include *Writing and Difference*, *Of Grammatology*, *Speech and Phenomena* all published in 1967



40. Sergei Eisenstein (1898 – 1948), Soviet Russian film director and film theorist notable for his silent films including *Battleship Potemkin*, *Strike* and *October* and his use of montage in film-making characterized by a 'collision' of shots denoting conflicts of social value, scale, volume, rhythm or speed



41. Still image from film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)

19. Sol LeWitt (1928-2007), American Minimalist and Conceptual artist, whose work focused on the cube and the square, working in series of permutations.

20. Richard Meier, b.1934. American architect, renowned for his pristine white modernist buildings, including the Smith House, Connecticut; The Getty Centre, Los Angeles; and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia. He was a central figure in the New York Five in the late 1960s (a group that also included Peter Eisenman, John Hejduk, Michael Graves, and Charles Gwathmey), also known as New York Whites for their pursuit of a purist Neo-Corbusian architecture. See, *Five Architects*, Oxford University Press Inc, USA, 1975.

For all their so-called "sculptural" quality, the *folies* are not abstract sculptures in the manner of a Sol LeWitt¹⁹ artwork or even a Richard Meier building.²⁰ They are about the dialogue between contemporary buildings and the reality of the city. This is most apparent in the drawing that shows the grid of *folies* extending out from the city of Paris as a repetitive and potentially unending succession of buildings. La Villette's explicit status as an "urban" park also contrasts with the paradigm of Olmsted³⁵ or of the English park³⁶ as a replica of nature. Despite their green grass and somewhat eccentrically planted gardens, the flat surfaces of the planes are not programmed; I didn't and do not design what happens on them. For example, during summer nights, the large green field at the centre of the park becomes a 3,000-seat outdoor cinema theatre. This is what I mean when I say that La Villette is a piece of the city, a variegated space of cultural places. It is a new type of park—a park of "culture," not "nature." But the park is also more broadly "cultural" in the sense that its design was informed by some of the ideas of the day. I mentioned earlier that I had been fascinated by the work of artists like Nice Style. I should also mention Vito Acconci and other American artists who were interested in the interaction of the body with space.³⁷ In the art field, but also in the literary world, I found others who were asking the same questions as I was, in totally different ways. At the time I knew as much about art, cinema, and literature as I did about architecture. I had read people like Foucault,³⁸ who discussed the circulation of power and the establishment of archetypes like prisons and hospitals, but also people who were asking questions about the notion of stability, the notion of "truth," and what were, at the time, very radical questions about our society.

One of them was Jacques Derrida.³⁹ We should get one thing straight here: the park was not at all inspired by his theories. I do not think you can "build" Deconstruction. Derrida was more of an ally, in the same sense that I was looking for people to support and confirm what I was doing in certain 1920s work, like the films of Sergei Eisenstein⁴⁰ such as *Battleship Potemkin*,⁴¹ and the work of the Dadaists,⁴² Surrealists,⁴³ and Constructivists.⁴⁴ I thought Derrida was asking many of the same questions about foundations and fundamental concepts in his field that I was asking myself in architecture. So I invited him to come and design a garden at La Villette, and I paired him with Peter Eisenman.⁴⁵ He had never been approached by an architect before. When I first asked Derrida to come to my office, he immediately asked me: "Why are you interested in Deconstruction? Because Deconstruction is anti-form, anti-hierarchy, and anti-structure." My answer was: "Precisely for those reasons!"

At the time, this pairing-up caught fire and everybody talked about it, but what was more important was that it demonstrated a wish not to accept all the received ideas about what architecture is. Architecture always needs to re-examine itself inventively. The La Villette project was not so much about how to condition design, but rather about how to design conditions, namely, to try to stage situations, specifically urban situations. Right now there is a lot of discussion about the idea of surfaces, and conditioning the package or packaging of architecture. But the intention of my project was much more about designing the conditions that can



65. Bernard Tschumi in a still from an untitled film by Robert Longo



66. High and Low, 1994 by David Salle



67. Untitled Film Still #17, 1978 (reprinted 1998) by Cindy Sherman

32. Michael Graves, b. 1934. American architect and one of the New York Five (see fn.28). His post-modern style is at its most playful and entertaining at the Swan and Dolphin Hotels, Disney, Florida and most sober at iconic The Portland Building, Portland, Oregon. Graves is also well known for his furniture and product designs.

33. Kate Linker, art critic and writer of books on art including *Love for Sale: The Words and Pictures of Barbara Kruger* (Harry N. Abrams Inc, 1990) and *Vito Acconci* (Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1994, among others).

Bernard Tschumi Well, the issue of “art and architecture” is actually rather painful, because why should those categories be so hard-edged? At the time when Bruce and I were playing with ideas and talking together, we referred to it as “the sensibility.” The relationship between the two terms was extremely close. There were not too many differences between the way Bruce McLean was thinking here in London, and the way friends of mine like Robert Longo,⁶⁵ David Salle,⁶⁶ or Cindy Sherman⁶⁷ were working in New York. But the funny thing is that you could produce work without caring whether it was called “art” or “architecture,” as part of a common exploration.

About four years before La Villette, people started to come to the New York loft where I lived and worked to see my work. Some of them invited me to exhibit in art galleries. Then I was formally asked by two galleries at the same time. One was called Metro Pictures, the other the Max Protetch Gallery. I had only admiration for the artists showing at Metro Pictures (who included Cindy Sherman and Longo, among others) and less interest for the work of Michael Graves³² and a few other architects at Max Protetch. By then I was very close to an art critic named Kate Linker,³³ and when I mentioned that I had been approached by Metro Pictures, she said, “No way! You’re not an artist, you’re an architect!” Psychoanalysis, right? So I exhibited at the architects’ gallery. The reason why I tell this story is that the social and professional pressures are such that, even if you want to fight against received ideas, you often end up caught up in them. If you always try to travel the road that accompanies freedom, then you are really stuck as an architect because your clients are banks, governments, and other establishment people. So we are caught in that strange situation where we have to manoeuvre in order to give the appearance of respectability. Therefore, we call ourselves architects.

Nigel Coates It is difficult to focus the La Villette design on the issue of movement because that can never be repeated. It is represented and frozen and in a sense conformed to all the freezing tendencies architecture has performed since time immemorial. But that means that the actual movement and the actual experiences which take place in the spaces you’ve created, is another step. How much do you think that you were able to anticipate what those occupations would be? Did you want to anticipate them, or did you want to cause the absolutely opposite, where nothing was determined about how the spaces would be used? Of course the cubes are the clearest example of that point. Where the cubes, as I understand it, have certain prescribed functions – whether it is a kindergarten or a club – but then they translate choreography into three dimensions. They are not just flat, not just a wall – they have a kind of balletic, sculptural engagement. So when they were built, were you surprised or disappointed by the way people used them – were ordinary people able to live up to what you expected them to do?

Bernard Tschumi YES! Before getting to people, I should touch on the issue of frozen movement. Maybe it goes back to the arts scene of the time, when a number of artists were interested in B-movies and had taken images and freeze-framed them, as one calls it. So sure, you could think that the movement that you have drawn on a piece of paper and eventually build



77. Questions from the audience

39. The *Event-Cities* series is published by MIT Press, Cambridge, MA and London. The first volume was published in 1994. *Event-Cities 2*, published in 2000, includes the Parc de la Villette on pp. 44-223.
40. See bibliography.

La Villette.³⁹ We have never done a big book on La Villette, though we might one day.⁴⁰ This was done on purpose: because of the scale of the project, it would swallow up everything else; after all, we worked on it for 15 years, right? So the issue—and now I am back to your other point about “strategies”—is that I really believe that architecture is made out of a number of concepts and ideas that can have an incredible effect on both the history or nature of the discipline, but also on the everyday life of people. If you go back to the three parks in Paris that have been built, people talked about them as the parks of the future, the present, and the past. People called La Villette the “park of the future,” which is nice. But what’s interesting is that it is the one where the activities are unpredictable—that it is the only one that has had a social impact.

Paul Finch Can I ask if there are any persons in the audience with a question? I’ll take a couple and then come back to Bernard for a response.

Unidentified Student⁷⁷ I’m particularly interested in how you managed to transform an abstract project like *The Manhattan Transcripts* into a reality at La Villette, and I want to ask you this: you say *The Manhattan Transcripts* derived from attempting to create your own vocabulary in architecture but that is 25 years old now. So if you had to do a student project for this time next week, say for another crit in a week’s time, and you had to redefine today’s rules, how would you go about it and what would you do differently in relation to *The Manhattan Transcripts*?

Unidentified Student 2 You mention about building this scheme as something that was built from your text, and you mention the words “practicing theory” and “theoretical practice.” So I am going to pick up on the ideas of practicing theory. Something that you mention as an intention would be event and the cinematic. How would you assess this project based on the scale of elements, say if the follies would be normal huts or the lines would be just normal promenades or the scale of the park in relation to the city? But, what is its success compared to Hyde Park in London, or maybe compared to Downsview in Toronto which is the inverse? How does practising theory become useful to you? Is it merely a tool for formal interpretation of the subjective judgement?

Paul Finch Nice simple questions, then.

Bernard Tschumi To the first question: if I had to do another project in one week and present it here, forget it! What I found out is that it’s very quick to come to a form; it’s very slow to arrive at a concept. So things just don’t happen in a week. In the case of *The Manhattan Transcripts*, perhaps the major lesson that I learned from it and that still occasionally comes back in my work today, is the notion of independent and autonomous systems that work without any reference to one another and are superimposed on one other. Also, it was very useful to have explored a specific series of devices in *The Manhattan Transcripts*. I was not bound by the usual architectural clichés of architectural representation because I was inventing the rules as I went along. Maybe that was the closest I got to behave like an artist. The question about practicing theory and theory preceding practice or practice preceding theory—well, I have always hated the idea of a clear “outcome”

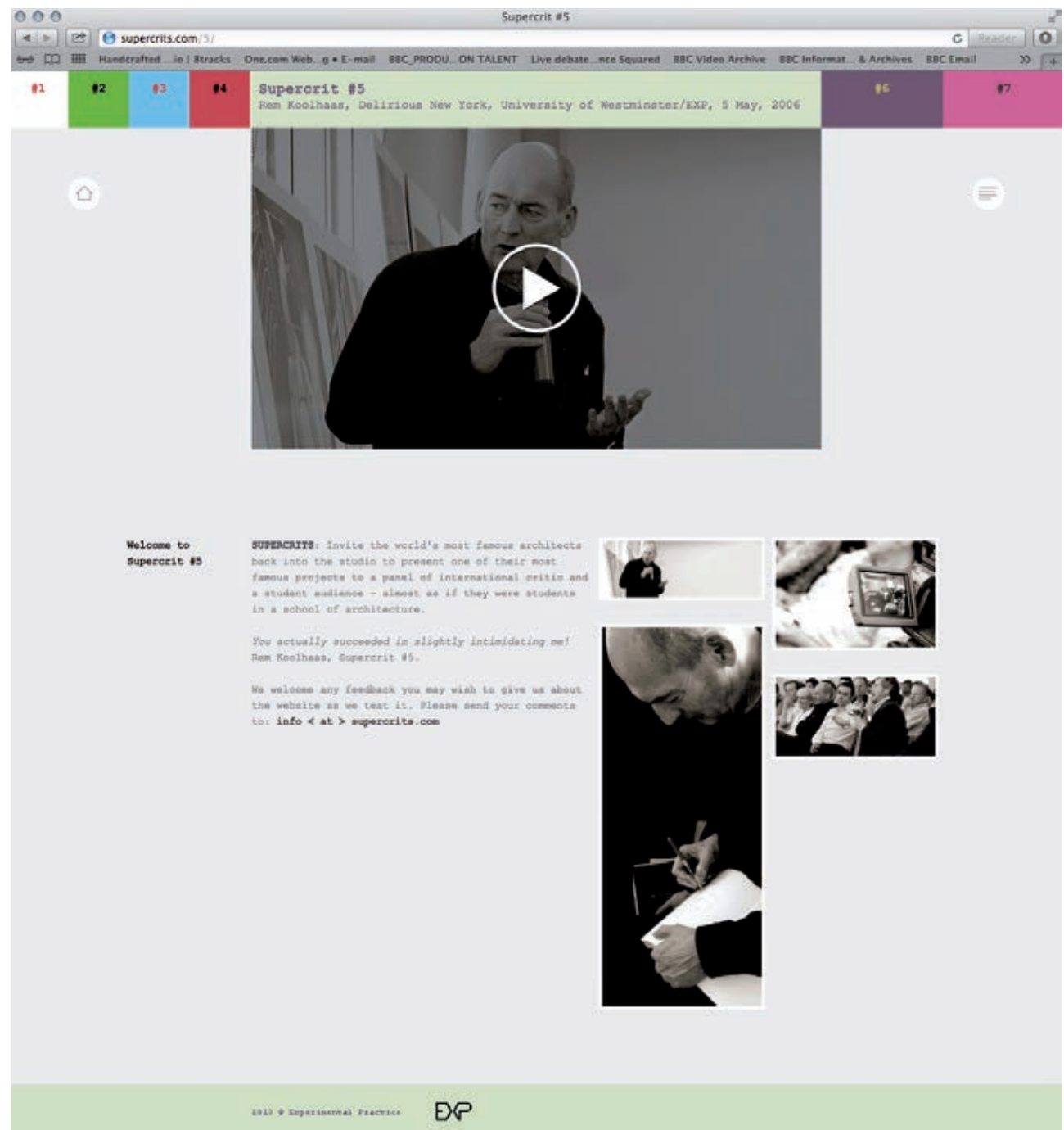


Fig.21 Supercrit #5 Home Page

#1 #2 #3 #4 **Supercrit #5** #6 #7
 Ben Koolhaas, Delirious New York, University of Westminster/EXP, 5 May, 2006

Ahd, I think, what all those events implied together was that somehow, as Kester already suggested, the age of manifestos seemed to be over.

Ben Koolhaas presents Supercrit #5

World Trade Centre.¹ Manhattan's twin towers, designed by Minoru Yamasaki (1912-84, also designed the notorious Pruitt-Igoe housing 1955, demolished 1972) with Every Ruth and Jane. Completed 1972-3, while Koolhaas was writing *Delirious New York*, they were the tallest buildings in the world, using "sky lobbies" to group lifts so as to allow greater height within a small floor plate. Destroyed on 9/11/01 by terrorist attack when two hijacked planes flew into the towers killing almost 3,000 people. *Delirious New York*, in which the Twin Towers play a celebrity role and Koolhaas speculates on Manhattan's predilection for disaster, now seems eerily prescient of their destruction.

Learning from Las Vegas.² Provocative and hugely influential book (1972, revised 1977) by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, which radically proposed the Las Vegas 'Strip' of car parks, casinos and neon signs as a valid urban and architectural model for contemporary architecture and urban design. See [summit.12](#).

Arrival of the Floating Pool, featured in *Delirious New York*, p.309

World Trade Center towers under construction 1970. (IMAGE: Olivier Saubon)

¹*Learning from Las Vegas*

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Fig.22 Supercrit #5 Presentation

#1 #2 #3 #4 **Supercrit #5** #6 #7
 Ben Koolhaas, Delirious New York, University of Westminster/EXP, 5 May, 2006

In a way, this was perhaps a quote that is very important to the entire book – and also, perhaps, a quote which is a key to all our later work.

Ben Koolhaas presents Supercrit #5

Delirious New York, p.13.¹ "But the time was near at hand when these domains of the savage were to be invaded by strangers who would lay the humble foundations of a mighty state, and scatter everywhere in their path exterminating principles which, with constantly supplanting force, would never cease to eat until the whole aboriginal game should be extirpated and their memory – be almost blotted out from under heaven. Civilization, originating in the east, had reached the western confines of the old world. It was now to cross the barrier that had arrested its progress, and penetrate the 'Forest' of a continent that had just appeared to the astonished gaze of the williams of Christendom."

Annotated *Delirious New York*, pp.10-11

Annotated *Delirious New York*, p.11

Annotated *Delirious New York*, p.13

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Fig.23 Supercrit #5 Presentation

#1 #2 #3 #4 **Supercrit #5** #6 #7
 Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York, University of Westminster/EXU, 5 May, 2006

Perhaps another ingenious thing of the book was to look at Coney Island - this is Manhattan, this is Coney Island - as a precursor to Manhattan.

Rem Koolhaas presents Supercrit #5

Coney Island: Peninsula attached to Brooklyn by landfill. Includes large residential area but most famous for its beach and amusement parks. In *Delirious New York*, Koolhaas argues that this experimental playground/theme park was used as a model for the 'real' skyscraper buildings in Manhattan, retaining their populist fairytale character and easy programming, and therefore not traditionally seen as 'serious' architecture.



Delirious New York, p. 28

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Fig.24 Supercrit #5 Presentation

#1 #2 #3 #4 **Supercrit #5** #6 #7
 Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York, University of Westminster/EXU, 5 May, 2006

where you see that vast amounts of the surface of the city were turned into a continuous tapestry of events and facilities.

Rem Koolhaas presents Supercrit #5

Dreamland: The most extraordinary of the Coney Island amusement parks, Dreamland, included Swiss alpine landscapes, Venetian canals, a Lilliputian Village staffed and occupied by hundreds of dwarf inhabitants, a display-ambulator where premature babies were exhibited and cared for, boat rides, railways, lions and more. It was completely destroyed by fire in 1911.



Delirious New York, pp. 64-65: Plan of Coney Island's middle zone, 1907

The plan of Coney Island's middle zone, 1907, on pp. 64-65 of *Delirious New York* shows: Dreamland (lower left), Luna Park (upper right) and Dreamland (lower right). Each rectangle represents a different pleasure-generating unit; entire system of mass recreational is structured by island's grid.

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Fig.25 Supercrit #5 Presentation


#1 #2 #3 #4 **Supercrit #5** #6 #7
 Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York, University of Westminster/EXX, 5 May, 2006

and was actually deeply inspired by a sequence of French intellectuals and the most important one at the time was Roland Barthes.

Rem Koolhaas presents Supercrit #5

Roland Barthes: (1915-1980) Influential and very readable French writer exploring semiotics, popular culture, anthropology and literary theory (among many other fields). Mythologies was published in 1957.

People Magazine: Vastly popular US weekly celebrity magazine, launched in 1974.



Mythologies by Roland Barthes, original 1957 edition

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Fig.26 Supercrit #5 Presentation

#1 #2 #3 #4 **Supercrit #5** #6 #7
 Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York, University of Westminster/EXX, 5 May, 2006

And here perhaps the strongest contrast, the bodies of the men in their incubator, and here in a kind of costume party in New York in 1929,

Rem Koolhaas presents Supercrit #5

Delirious New York, p.131 & p.159: Miss Edna Coover as the Basin Girl; and the Downtown Athletic Club: a machine for metropolitan bashfulness, eating systems with boxing gloves, naked, on the 6th floor.



Delirious New York, p.131 & p.159: The Basin Girl; and the oyster-eating Bosses

2012 # Experimental Practice DP

Fig.27 Supercrit #5 Presentation

#1 #2 #3 #4 **Supercrit #5** #6 #7
 Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York, University of Westminster/EXF, 5 May, 2004

So: what's Paranoid Critical? This is a diagram, by Dali; what it consists of is to establish a Cartesian armature

00:27:24

Rem Koolhaas presents Supercrit #5

Paranoid Critical Method.⁴ Developed in the early 1930's by Salvador Dali, the "Paranoid-Critical" method describes a Surrealist method used to help an artist tap into their subconscious through systematic irrational thought and a self-induced paranoid state. By inducing this paranoid state one can foresee one's previous actions, thoughts, and understanding of the world and reality in order to see the world in new, different and more unique ways.

"Delirious" Delirious 1998 psychological thriller directed by Alfred Hitchcock with a twist in the tail, which we won't spoil by describing.

⁴Delirious New York, p.248, Salvador Dali's diagram of the Paranoid-Critical Method at work doubles as diagram of reinforced-concrete construction

Alfred Hitchcock, 1958 [IMAGE: Eric Salmons]

"The Persistence of Memory", 1931 by Salvador Dali [IMAGE: NCHS]

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Fig.28 Supercrit #5 Presentation

#1 #2 #3 #4 **Supercrit #5** #6 #7
 Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York, University of Westminster/EXF, 5 May, 2004

And not by chance, of course, the cover image of the book is precisely a surveillance image of the couple.

00:44:01

Supercrit debate: Mark Wigley speaking

The Kinsey Report.⁵ Research done in the 1940s and '50s at the University of Indiana, led by sociologist Alfred Kinsey et al, on "normal" human sexual activities. The research was very widely published and debated, causing both scandal and relief, and is credited with promoting major changes in attitude to, and openness about, sex.

⁵Kinsey Report [IMAGE: Brian Slinn]

Kinsey Report Advertisement. Featured in Action magazine, October 1954 [IMAGE: Klicke]

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Fig.29 Supercrit #5 Crit, Paul Finch



Fig.30 Supercrit #5 Crit, David Green

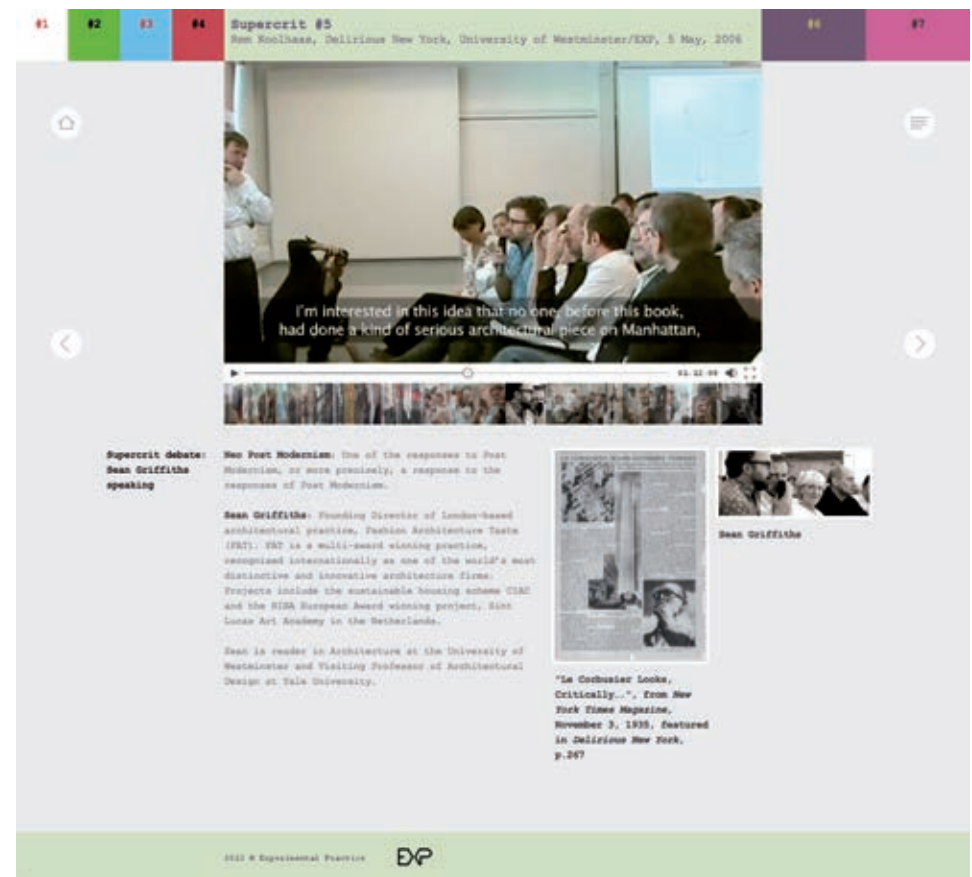


Fig.32 Supercrit #5 Crit, Rowan Moore

#1 #2 #3 #4 **Supercrit #5** #6 #7
 Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York, University of Westminster/EXF, 5 May, 2006

Well firstly, I just have to observe that the division of bodies in the book has replicated itself in this room.

Supercrit Debate: Rowan Moore speaking

Rowan Moore: Architecture critic for The Observer and previously for the London Evening Standard. He is also a trained architect, and between 2002 and 2009 was the Director of the Architecture Foundation.

Peter Rayner Nathan: (1922-1996) An English architectural critic and prolific writer best known for his theoretical treatise *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* and for his 1971 book, *The Republic: The Architecture of Post-Modernism*.

New York: The east coast US city has been transformed since the 1970s, when the city had become notorious for its high crime rates and dysfunction. An advertising campaign, commissioned by deputy commissioner of the New York State Department of Commerce, William S. Doyle, was designed to encourage tourism and formed part of a wider move to try and turn the city around. The logo - 'I heart NY' - was designed by Milton Glaser and is still used today.

The image became especially prominent following the September 11 terrorist attacks on the city, which created a sense of unity among the populace. Glaser created a modified version to commemorate the attacks, reading "I Love NY More Than Ever", with a little black spot on the heart symbolising the World Trade Centre site. The black spot approximates the site's location on Manhattan Island.

I 'heart' New York logo, designed by Milton Glaser @ NY Dept. of Economic Development (MOMA)

2006 # Experimental Practice **EXF**

Fig.31 Supercrit #5 Crit, Sean Griffiths

#1 #2 #3 #4 **Supercrit #5** #6 #7
 Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York, University of Westminster/EXF, 5 May, 2006

and we were collecting postcards together, and what this book mentioned, one of the most important postcards was the World Tower in Coney Island.

Supercrit debate: Madelon Vriesendorp speaking

Madelon Vriesendorp: (1945-) Artist who co-founded OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture) with husband Rem Koolhaas and Elia and Sam Soueidan. *Delirious New York* includes many of her paintings, including 'The Story of the Pool' and 'Flagrant Delit', the cover image. The book's exhibits and published widely, including collaborations with Charles Jencks. Her fantastic installations can be found in *The World of Madelon Vriesendorp*.

Globe Tower, second version, with exploded exterior. Featured in *Delirious New York*, p.72
 From the top: Roof Gardens; layer of theatres; revolving restaurant; ballroom; chamber; *apartheid*; Africa, one of the omnibus/airruses; jubilee; entrance; etc. Special gravity elevator connects interior with underground metropolitan arteries.

2006 # Experimental Practice **EXF**

Fig.33 Supercrit #5 Crit, Rem Koolhaas

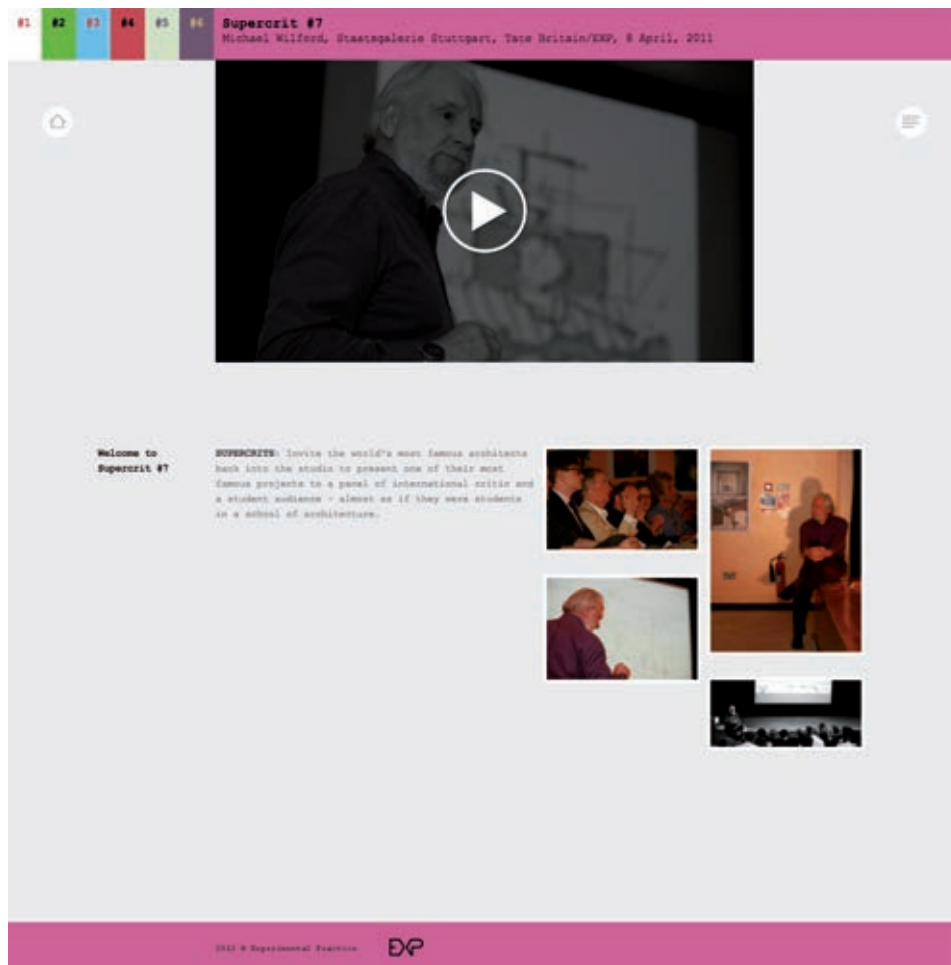


Fig.34 Supercrit #7 Home Page

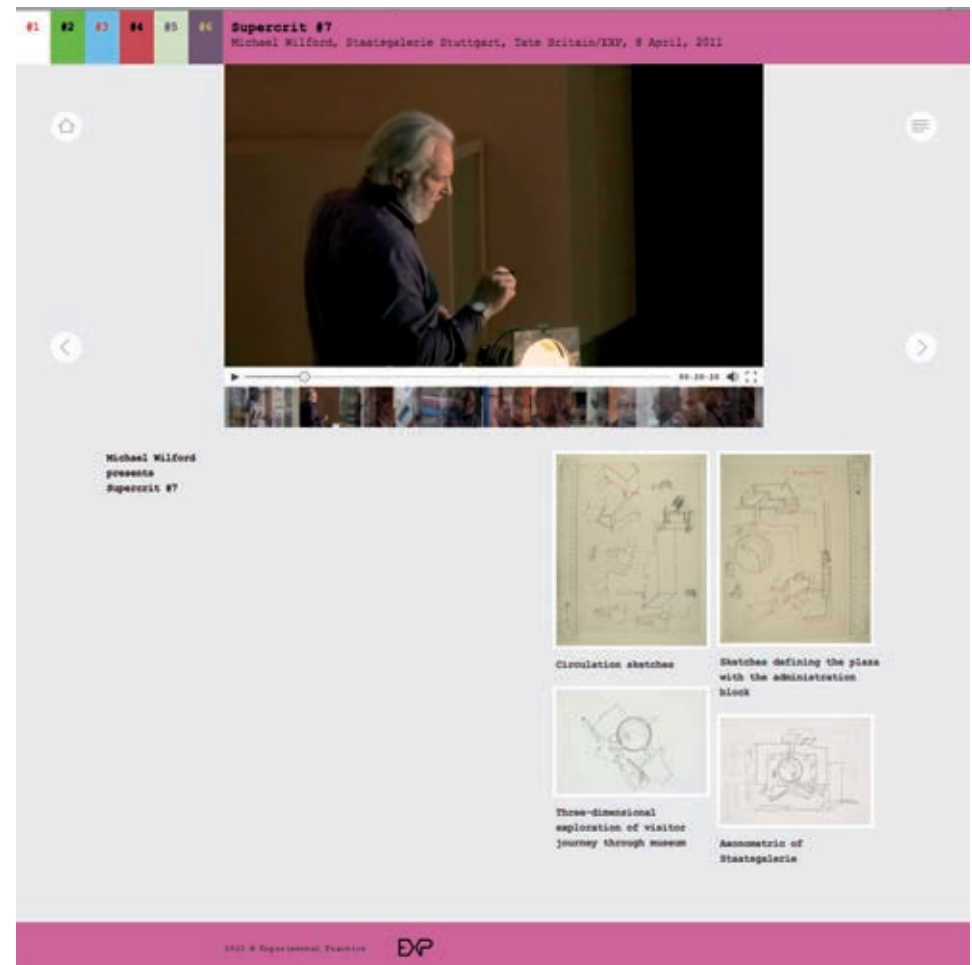


Fig.36 Supercrit #7 Presentation

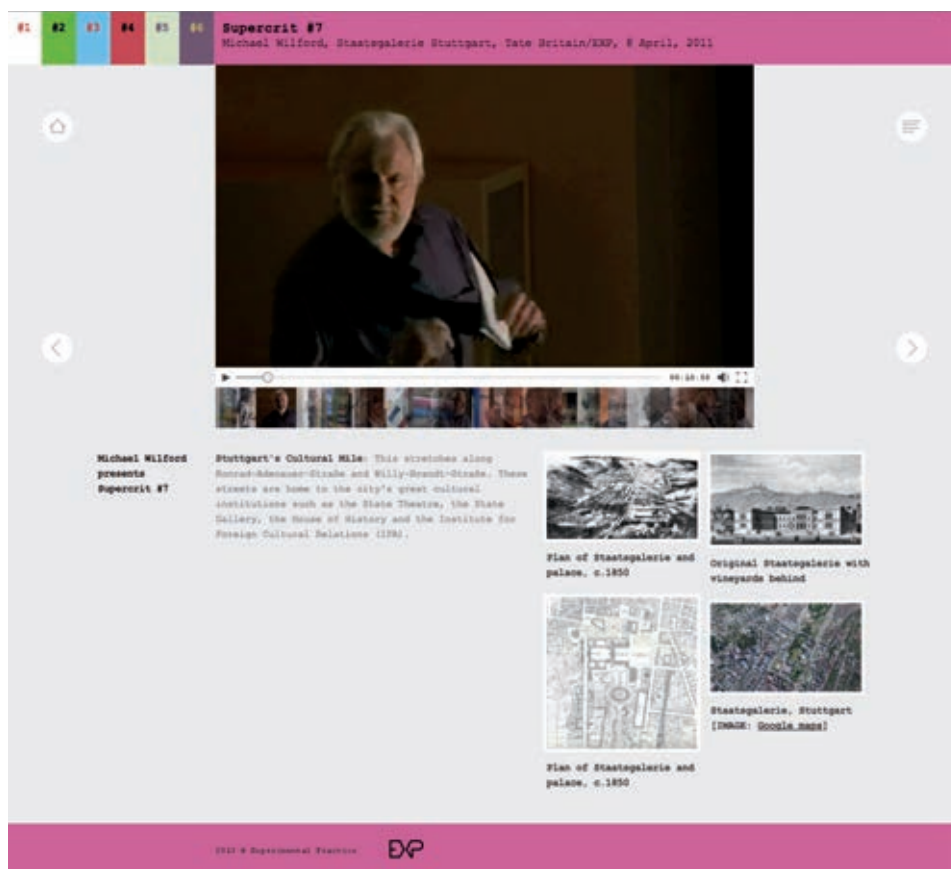


Fig.35 Supercrit #7 Presentation

#1 #2 #3 #4 #5 #6 **Supercrit #7**
Michael Wilford, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Tate Britain/EXF, 8 April, 2011



Michael Wilford presents Supercrit #7

Uprview or Worm's eye: Characteristic and peculiar drawing used by Stirling. The form is an axonometric or a three dimensional projection from the plan, giving a 3d version of the building in which all lines are in the same scale, without perspective. This form is now more familiar to the non-architectural viewer because of its use in computer modelling. The "worm's eye" or uprview is a peculiar version of this - rather than seeing the building from high level, looking down, a "bird's eye" view; you see it as though looking up from underground, a "worm's eye".

Design development: studies of display cabinets

Design development: alternative floor surfaces

Design development: studies of trilogy of canopies over entrances - Theatre entrance canopy

Design development: studies of entrance foyer desk

Design development: studies of trilogy of canopies over entrances - Gallery entrance canopy

Design development: studies of trilogy of canopies over entrances - Administration entrance canopy

Design development: An uprview study of entry sequence

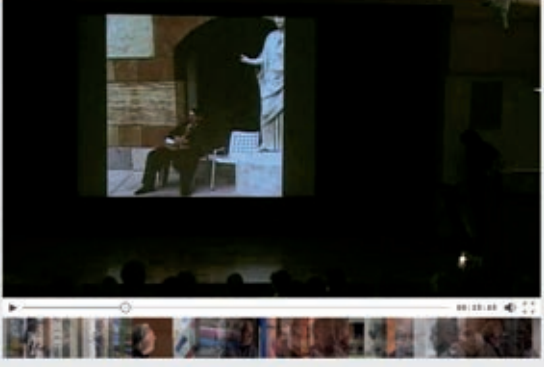
Design development: Study of entry sequence

Design development: Study of entry sequence from above the street

0111 © Experimental Practice DFP

Fig.37 Supercrit #7 Presentation

#1 #2 #3 #4 #5 #6 **Supercrit #7**
Michael Wilford, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Tate Britain/EXF, 8 April, 2011



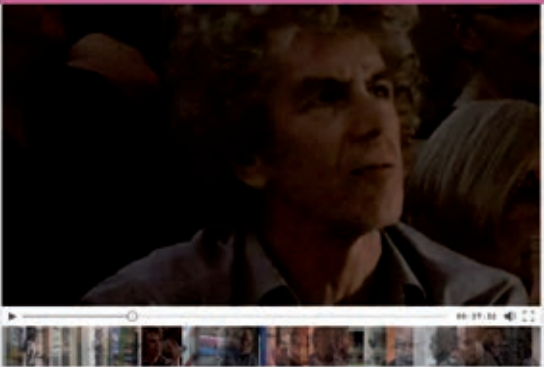
Michael Wilford presents Supercrit #7

Person dressed as Hitler, sat within the Staatsgalerie courtyard

0111 © Experimental Practice DFP

Fig.38 Supercrit #7 Presentation

#1 #2 #3 #4 #5 #6 **Supercrit #7**
Michael Wilford, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Tate Britain/EXF, 8 April, 2011



Piers Gough chairs Supercrit #7

Piers Gough:¹ (1946-) Architect. Studied at the AA and joined his co-students Nicholas Cusbell, Ben Wilkinson and Roger Englevisch in 1970 to form CSM. Buildings include Javel Street Porter House, China Wharf, Canada and (Gough says most famously) the public toilets in Northcote Park. CSM commissions and CSM.

Supercrit #7: Siaran Long speaking

Siaran Long:² Journalist and curator, Architectural Correspondent, the London Evening Standard, 2010-; Editor-in-Chief, "Architects" Journal and Architectural Review, 2007-2009; Assistant Director, Venice Architecture Biennale, 2011; Senior Director, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 2010-.

Piers Gough

Supercrit #7 panel: Right to left: Piers Gough, Louise Hutton, John Tunney, Charles Jencks, Siaran Long


"The way you presented the project.": Wilford's presentation, rather like Stirling's, is simple but given the extreme and highly charged representativeness of the architect, and how controversial it was at the time, this can come across as almost disingenuous. The elephant in the room here is the extremely controversial nature of the building in the architectural culture of the time.

Siaran Long

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Fig.39 Supercrit #7 Crit, Piers Gough

#1 #2 #3 #4 #5 #6 **Supercrit #7**
Michael Wilford, Staatgalerie Stuttgart, Tate Britain/EKV, 8 April, 2011



Supercrit #7: Charles Jencks speaking

Charles Jencks¹ Prolific theorist, author, landscape architect and artist, probably most famous for *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*. He and his wife established Neppie's Design Centre, where he designed the gardens at the centre in Glasgow. The buildings of the ten relating centres, as well as those in planning, have been designed by many of the world's greatest and most famous architects.

'A bit like Jim's'. Stirling was indeed the master of simple and direct descriptions of an architecture which was itself richly and controversially expressive. See for instance these two descriptions of the Leicester Engineering Building:²


From Stirling and Wilford:

'The Engineering Building comprises large ground-level workshops (heavy machinery), covering most of the available site, and a vertical assembly, consisting of office and laboratory towers, lecture theatres and lift and staircase shafts'


From a critic:

'The work of James Stirling is permeated by a Romantic taste for historicism and paradox, especially at the Engineering School in Leicester... where the diversity of forms, expressive of the internal functions of the building, is a pretext for the liveliest interplay of masses'.

(Mitchell Donnelly, *The World Atlas of Architecture*, p. 389)



Charles Jencks



'Engineering building, University of Leicester [IMAGE: Steve Colman]

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Fig.40 Supercrit #7 Crit, Charles Jencks

#1 #2 #3 #4 #5 #6 **Supercrit #7**
Michael Wilford, Staatgalerie Stuttgart, Tate Britain/EKV, 8 April, 2011



Supercrit #7: John Tooney speaking

John Tooney (1934-) Architect studied at University College Dublin, worked for Stirling Wilford 1976-80. Set up in practice with Sheila O'Donnell as O'Donnell and Tooney in 1988. Buildings include the Irish Pavilion, 1991; the Gallery of Photography, Dublin, 1994; the Dulson House, 1996; Letterfrack Furniture College, 2001; the Lyric Theatre Belfast, 2011; Clontarf Gallery, Cork, 2004; Sean O'Casey Community Centre, 2008.

Schinkel and the rotunda: The reference here is to Carl Friedrich Schinkel's seminal neoclassical Altes Museum in Berlin, 1823-28. The building is a highly composed and symmetrical form, with colonnaded front and stairs, galleries around courtyards, ceremonial staircase and a central drum and dome. The Staatgalerie wraps, re-orders and turns inside out many of the same elements.

Critic Alan Colquhoun, reviewing the building in 1984, said:

'The rotunda, instead of being the primary space of the building, becomes an event along a promenade architectural - part of a temporal and picturesque sequence, which one "discovers" as one might the central core of a labyrinth. The geometrical centre of the building has become a kind of negation - an absence rather than a presence. The rotunda is a solid which loses an abstraction to the circumplex. This has all the elements of a scandal, given the building's overall Classical parts.'

'It is clear that one is confronted here with a complicated reinterpretation of a Classical paradigm in terms of another paradigm - the Octobusian free plan - and that an extreme state of tension exists between the two. And there is no doubt that the rotunda, in the "domestic" interpretation given it by Stirling, is a wonderfully effective space, marginal precisely to the extent that its relation to the building as a whole is unexpected and enigmatic.'

(*'Domestic Monument'* by Alan Colquhoun, *The Architectural Review*, December 1984)



John Tooney



Leola Gluckman Photography Gallery, Cork (O'Donnell Tooney, 2004) [IMAGE: Klitzke]



Altes Museum, Berlin: Plan and Section




[IMAGE: Great Buildings]

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Fig.41 Supercrit #7 Crit, John Tooney

#1 #2 #3 #4 #5 #6 **Supercrit #7**
Michael Wilford, Staatgalerie Stuttgart, Tate Britain/EXF, 9 April, 2011




Supercrit #7:
John Toomey speaking


Ships' railings: This is effectively Stirling's comic reworking of Le Corbusier's use of white, tubular handrails, borrowed from the great ocean liners of the day - but much bigger (to make sure the spaces between them comply with German building regulations) in pink and blue on an overtly stone-clad building rather than one which seems to be pure white concrete.



Ships' railings (IMAGE: Tom Bradock)



'Ships' railings' made popular in architecture by Le Corbusier (IMAGE: Jan Fabozzini)




The brightly coloured 'ships' railings' at Neue Staatgalerie, magnified to accommodate the German construction regulations, set against the building's stone-cladding (IMAGE: Alexander Johnson)

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Fig.42 Supercrit #7 Crit, John Toomey and Louisa Button

#1 #2 #3 #4 #5 #6 **Supercrit #7**
Michael Wilford, Staatgalerie Stuttgart, Tate Britain/EXF, 9 April, 2011




Supercrit #7:
Michael Wolford speaking


Richard Serra: American sculptor, known for his minimalist work using large freestanding sheets of metal. The **Torqued Ellipses** series 'take the shaping of space rather than material as their primary subject', says the Dia Art Foundation, where the pieces went on show in 1998. Serra says the idea came from a visit to Bramante's astonishing San Carlo alla Quattro Fontane in Rome (initially 1639-41), where a baroque church and monastery are squeezed into a tiny, awkward site, and a desire to recreate the misrepresentation of space he experienced from Bramante's ellipses. See interview with Serra in *The Economist* and a video of Serra's work by *NASA*.




Richard Serra, Torqued Ellipse (IMAGE: Rob Cooke)




[IMAGE: Holly Sobel]



Bramante's astonishing San Carlo alla Quattro Fontane in Rome (IMAGE: ERAGLIA.MA)



Chapel within Bramante's San Carlo alla Quattro Fontane in Rome (IMAGE: ERAGLIA.MA)



The ellipse on the ceiling of Bramante's San Carlo inspired Richard Serra (IMAGE: Greg Riech)

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Fig.43 Supercrit #7 Crit, Michael Wolford

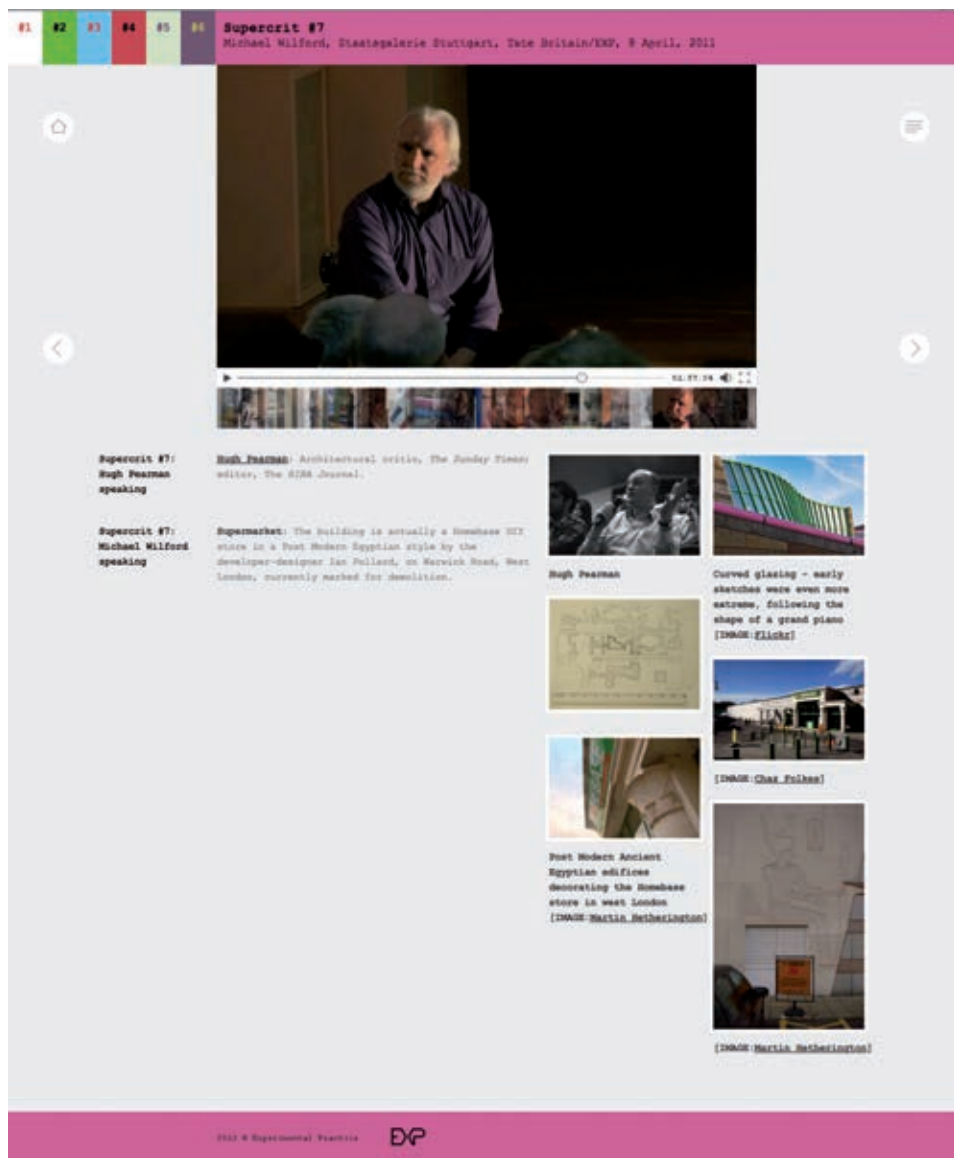



Fig.44 Supercrit #7 Crit, Hugh Pearman




Fig.45 Supercrit #7 Crit, Louisa Button

#1 #2 #3 #4 #5 #6 **Supercrit #7**
 Michael Wilford, Staatgalerie Stuttgart, Tate Britain/EKP, 8 April, 2011



Supercrit #7:
 Kieran Long speaking

Mercedes Benz Headquarters building, Stuttgart: The city's latest piece of ironic architecture is the out-of-town car museum building, based on a very different use of geometries, and with a very different relationship to say Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum in New York. Designed by **UH Studio** (Oen van Berckel and Caroline Bos).



UH Studio's Mercedes Benz Headquarters, Stuttgart
 [IMAGE: Tobias Demaria]

[IMAGE: Patrick Thiner]

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Fig.46 Supercrit #7 Crit, Kieran Long

A Jury of His Peers

SuperCrit #3: Centre Pompidou
Research Centre for Experimental Practice,
University of Westminster,
35 Marylebone Road, London, April 22



Left to right: Original team members Mike Dowd, Gianfranco Franchini, Richard Rogers.

We talk about architecture being ageless, but it certainly has the ability to age us: There is something truly dispiriting about realizing that the buildings that inspired us when we were younger are now themselves old enough to be treated as historical artifacts. When the passion and arrogance of youth—and the callow belief that we might just change things for the better—mellows into a benign acceptance of the world as it is, the awkward and original buildings that once threatened to change the world forever now just seem to fit snugly into the environment, as if they'd always been there.

Thus it was with some trepidation that I went along to hear Richard Rogers and other members of the original design and engineering team of the Pompidou Center in Paris talk about the project, now old enough to have had several facelifts and even major reconstructive surgery. (Renzo Piano did not attend due to a scheduling conflict.)

Thirty years ago, the Pompidou offered (at least to this angry young man) a dream of a previously unimaginable future, the stuff of science fiction miraculously manifested in the here and now. I really wasn't sure I wanted to hear the object of my youthful passion being solemnly discussed as if it were a corpse at an autopsy.

I am mightily relieved to report that this marvelously entertaining event wasn't grim at all. This was partly to do with the character of the key players, and particularly Rogers himself, who was able to effortlessly conjure up all the commitment and idealism of his younger self. But the nature of the occasion itself contributed to the entertainment: This was the third and latest in an inspired series of events at the University of Westminster, known as SuperCrits. The idea is that the originators of a seminal architectural work are invited in to defend their work in front of a distinguished jury, much in the way that a

student has to in a school crit.

The day's proceedings did not start out auspiciously. Despite a pithy introduction by jury chairman Paul Finch, the ever-eloquent editor of the *Architectural Review*, when Rogers was given the floor, the audience subsided into a hushed and reverential silence, and the event threatened to be rather respectful and decorous. However, things came to life when another juror, the legendary David Green of Archigram, decided to enter wholly into the spirit of things. To the sounds of audible gasping and uncomfortable shifting from the audience, he launched into a no-nonsense critique of the project itself. In the time-honored tradition of the studio tutor, Green complained of the lack of a site plan and declared that the whole thing seemed over-engineered. It quickly became obvious that Rogers was happy to defend his corner, and did so creditably, to sustained laughter and applause. I wondered whether some of his illustrious contemporaries would have proved so ready to slug it out face to face with a combative jury.

The most interesting debate of the day centered on whether the building itself reflected a post-'68 spirit of radicalism or whether it was a cynical palliative by an entrenched and conservative establish-

ment. Opinions remained divided on that one but Rogers was quick to point out that, at the very least, former President Georges Pompidou refrained from interfering with the competition, and the anonymous nature of the competition allowed a surprising and adventurous winner—something jury chair Philip Johnson must be given credit for. Perhaps the most obvious proof that this building was conceived in another, more generous era was Rogers' admission that they weren't even told what the budget was until a year into the project, lest it curb their imagination, and yes, of course, they then found they were well over budget!

In retrospect, the ambitions and spirit of the original Pompidou design have survived the passage of years well, even though it was compromised in execution—then-President Giscard D'Estaing was unenthusiastic about a project that carried his predecessor's name—and subsequent modifications have severely compromised the democratic ideals of openness that it once embodied. For those present this was a unique opportunity to reassess one of the major architectural works of the late 20th century. The idea of the SuperCrit reanimates architectural history in a very compelling fashion, and I for one can't wait for the next one.

JOE KERR HEADS THE CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT AT THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART IN LONDON.

Helen Castle watched Parc de la Villette receive the Supercrit treatment Tschumi faces the family

The Supercrit is now establishing itself as a highlight of the academic London year, creating a unique buzz with a departure from the manner in which architecture is usually discussed.

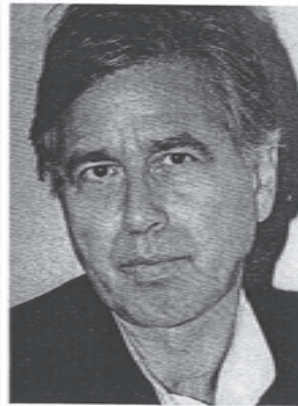
Organised by the Research Centre for Experimental Practice at the University of Westminster, it has transformed "the crit" into a masterclass format with the potential mischief, as regular chair Paul Finch observed, of "a whole load of impertinent questions".

Following Richard Rogers' presentation of the Pompidou Centre last April, Bernard Tschumi's Parc de la Villette in north-east Paris was the subject of last week's event. Tschumi won the project by competition in 1982, transforming the former

meat market and slaughterhouse into Paris's largest park, populated with bright red structures for a variety of uses.

Tschumi embraced the Supercrit experience with all the diligence of a final-year student, arriving half an hour early and rearranging drawings for the jury's and audience's scrutiny at the front of the room. He was dressed for the occasion in dark trousers, white shirt and a fire-engine red scarf. The red may match his constructivist follies at la Villette, but it was a predilection — as we found out from Peter Cook — that was already established in his Architectural Association days with his red pullovers.

Standing with his back to the window, Tschumi was faced with a jury that was dominated by

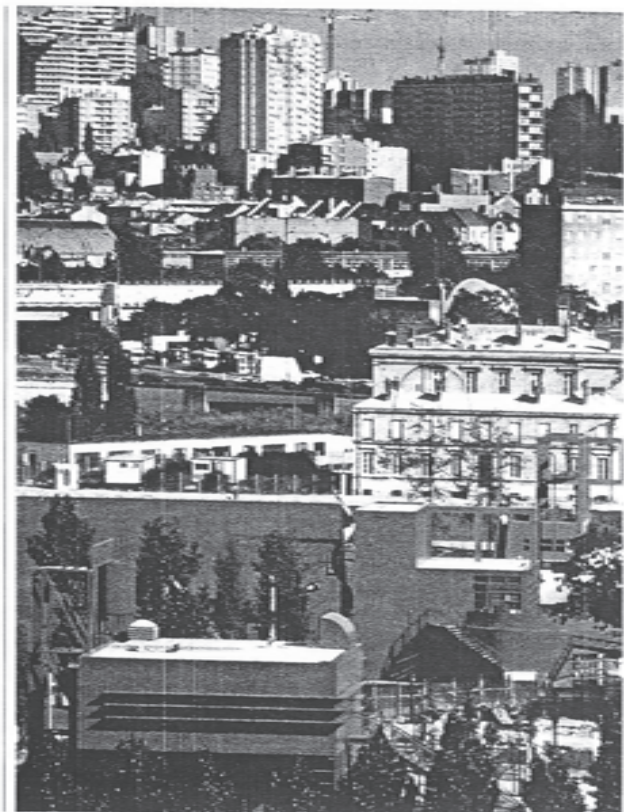


Tschumi (above) gave a stunning presentation on Parc de la Villette (right).

what he jested were his "AA family": Peter Cook "father"; Nigel Coates, "brother", and Carlos Villaneuva Brandt

"illegitimate son". Artist Bruce McLean and architectural historian Murray Fraser had also been thrown in for some semblance of balance. Such a regrouping always runs the risk of backslapping and out and out cosiness, but Cook, Coates and Villaneuva Brandt not only represent different generations at the AA, but very different preoccupations.

Tschumi's presentation was a tour de force. It is very rare to see a student audience totally enraptured, the nonchalance knocked out of them by a single speaker. The experience was one of reading a virtuoso novelist when the possibility of ever writing like that yourself is moved even further away from you. Cook praised Tschumi for his unswerving "clarity" and it





rem koolhaas

The fifth in the University of Westminster's Supercrit series had Koolhaas in a gracious and confessional mode, found Kieran Long

"You've actually succeeded in slightly intimidating me," said Rem Koolhaas as he kicked off the latest talk in the priceless Supercrit series at the University of Westminster.

The series invites big-name, grown-up architects to present, as if it were a student crit, their most canonical projects to a jury of distinguished critics and 300 or so students. Koolhaas was here to present *Delirious New York*, the book that boldly announced his presence on the architecture scene in 1978.

Architectural Review editor Paul Finch made a rather intrusive comper, but the jury was pretty good, and not all were sympathetic with the Dutchman. Marc Wigley (dean of Columbia University architecture school), Alejandro Zaera Polo (FOA) and David Greene (ex-Archigram) were the main critics.

Koolhaas pulled out themes that demonstrated the book's continuing relevance. Some were very personal, like his fascination with "the aspects of modernisation that were precise, brutal," including the ruthlessness of the settlers, and the grid, which he describes as a "courageous act of prediction".

The most striking observations were about the scale and complexity of Manhattan's buildings, a trend he felt would become more prevalent. He saw the book as the start of an awareness that "the cities of the future would not be coherent, but would consist of huge and single architectural complexes ... that could exist anywhere," pointing to Shenzhen and Dubai. This critique is

now so orthodox it's easy to forget

that Koolhaas originated it.

The presentation also aimed to dispel a few myths about the book and his own reputation. "There is a paradox," said Koolhaas, "that a book which I think has real idealism should launch the author's reputation for cynicism. And that a book about bodies should establish the author's reputation for inhumanity."

The necessity for these explanations was revealed by Wigley and Greene's admissions that they had not read the book at the time of its publication, but both felt "as if they knew it" from the many conversations they'd had.

Greene in particular was punchy, clearly still smarting from Koolhaas' rejection of Archigram's machinic optimism in 1970s London. Koolhaas was gracious in the face of Greene's floundering. You got the impression that he still hadn't really read it. Wigley, though, was compelling, presenting a reading of the book as akin to the Kinsey report, a work of surveillance trained on the fertility of a particular place and time.

Koolhaas seemed to warm to the Supercrit format, at times taking on a confessional tone: "I've always thought of myself as a continental, and I was very inspired by a sequence of French intellectuals that ended with Roland Barthes," he said. "Barthes' *Mythologies* was the first thing to really take seriously the unserious." It's revealing that Koolhaas sees himself as the successor to French philosophers of language rather than architects.

Find out about future Supercrits at

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Poundbury unpicked

Krier excels in the Supercrit format, but his work fares less well, says Gillian Darley

Supercrit #6: Leon Krier presents Poundbury. 31 October. Room M421, University of Westminster, 35 Marylebone Road, London NW 1 5LS

Who'd have thought that last Friday's Supercrit #6, Leon Krier's discussion of his Poundbury masterplan, would prove the most Popular of the series? The man behind the Dorset 'urban village' masterplan - now Approaching adulthood - beat previous Participants such as Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Cedric Price and Rem Koolhaas, and filled a studio up on the fourth Floor at the University of Westminster. The Organisers, Kester Rattenbury and Samantha Hardingham of the university's Research Centre for Experimental Practice (EXP), chose a topic with surprisingly broad appeal in this ongoing series that places key international projects under renewed and expert scrutiny.

Krier is a natural at this kind of disquisition. An easy polemicist with a well-honed presentation who is quick to show off his skills as a draughtsman. Charles Jencks, who chaired the event, praised Krier as a master of the dialectical method, the lecture as thinking process, and so it was - even if it was all too familiar in the pegs for its arguments. If the audience is to take away one message, Krier said, it is the philosophical error of distinguishing between high and low tech. There is, he holds, 'only one technology'. His objective is to clarify planning issues and to strip away the Modernist agenda. 'Vast repetitions don't make real societies,' said Krier, after laying in to high rise ('vertical cul-de-sac') and insisting that Poundbury's prime objective was to produce a 'network of towns which can survive the loss of fossil fuels', cutting back on car use. In Dorset, it is simple: for the Poundbury masterplanner, 'length of legs' determines the scale.

In the audience, forced to crane our necks sharp right to see the screens, we listened

as Krier expounded the masterplan for Poundbury, the four concentric urban villages (with no acknowledgement made to Ebenezer Howard's garden cities), the taming of the car, a design code (backed, at every turn, by 'solid drawings') and the wholesale rejection of Modernism - the message as delivered for almost 20 years. But Poundbury is atypical, an estate town with an unusually high-profile lord of the manor. Resolute anti-Modernist Prince Charles, who, as the Duke of Cornwall, owns the land on which Poundbury sits, has shown great fortitude, says Krier. So, it must be said, has Krier.

Now, however, the theory of Poundbury has to be measured against reality: two phases are complete, a third is about to start on site. Krier sees the plan as a 60 per cent success, let down by intransigent local authorities, the British construction industry and, he implied, by the growing imbalance (and resulting tensions) between the established outer areas of Dorchester and the new extension. He is bullish about the next phase. It will be better built and finally includes a feature for the skyline which is, to my eyes, strangely reminiscent of mud-brick towers in sub-saharan Africa. With Krier's alarm about the pending resource crisis, the towers at Poundbury might contain water tanks similar to those at Thorpeness on the Suffolk coast.

Poundbury is a highly planned, coded environment. Krier varied its plot sizes and mixed uses in civility and the hope that a coherent community would emerge. Yet attempts to create social diversity were less than successful, even before the current downturn. A bit of reflection, even a sense of history, might have helped - it was a century ago that Dame Henrietta Barnett had the same

difficulty with her 'workmen's cottages' at Hampstead Garden Suburb. Nor can Krier (or his client) grapple with the radical ideas that lay behind the garden cities and copartnership estates; experiments with tenure and the wider benefits of sharing rising land values are not for the Duchy of Cornwall. From the start, Poundbury was simply an attempt to better the quality of a development that was already on the cards.

Krier faced not only a full audience, but a five-strong panel of critics. Sean Griffiths of FAT confined himself to enjoying the strangeness of Poundbury while questioning its wider application. Jules Lubbock was Prince Charles' architectural adviser when Krier was chosen to mastermind the Duchy of Cornwall venture. Architect Michael Wilford, formerly of James Stirling Michael Wilford & Associates has, oddly enough, never been tempted to visit Poundbury despite often driving by. He questioned the relationship of the sectors to the historic town centre and the lack of topographical information.

Krier worked in the Stirling Wilford office until epic battles with Stirling - exacerbated by the Prince of Wales, as Jencks reminded us - brought that phase of his career to a close. Panelist James Woudhuysen detected a misanthropic note in the scheme, or at least, a detachment from reality leavened by privilege. As the panelists asked, if Poundbury aspired to self-sufficiency, where was the hospital and where was the power, plant?

But until a spirited intervention by panellist Sarah Wigglesworth the elephant in the room - style - was not acknowledged. Where was, she asked, the 'readily available ordinariness' of the vernacular? The architecture under discussion was, by definition, expensive,

and Wigglesworth questioned the references to authenticity. Krier was rattled; he found it 'touching' that Poundbury isn't seen as looking contemporary enough. Wigglesworth pursued the point, though, taking issue with Krier's emphasis on form and suggesting that suitable ingredients for a contemporary vernacular might include 'history, memory, making and aesthetics'. Krier admitted that, thus far, Poundbury was more 'cottagey' than he wanted, his own image of the town having been rather closer to Georgian urbanism. He is less worried by accusations of cultural kitsch' than by the loss of control over the skyline and the shoddy quality of the construction - at least when builders have been required to return to traditional materials and forms.

The results, Krier admitted, have all too often been achieved 'with glue'. He originally wanted towers, and described making a presentation to district councillors in which he showed them familiar Dorset villages with the towers and spires photos hopped out. They were unable to identify even one.

Venerable housing consultant Stephen Mullin took issue with Krier's postulations: the vast majority were, for him, so nonspecific that they could result in anything at all - from Cedric Price to the town of Carmel in California. Mullin was unconvinced about what he saw as Krier's overly prescriptive ways of creating a 'balanced community'. Then, from the back of the room, came the voice of a Poundbury resident: for him, the theory was compelling but the reality was a form of banishment. Enough said. Resume: Krier fails to convince as a Poundbury resident gets the last word



Code remains unbroken

In the latest Supercrit, Leon Krier explained why his masterplan for neo-traditionalist village Poundbury was meant to be boring. **Niall Hobhouse** was there

LECTURE

SUPERCRIPT 6: POUNDBURY
Leon Krier masterplan,
University of Westminster
October 31
★★★★☆

In the Supercrit, as devised by Cedric Price and others shortly before his death, the design practitioner is required to re-present an old idea that was, in its day, important principally for its timeliness. For the attentive audience, the reward lies in the knowledge that any managed outcome will be flawed and uncertain.

And so it was, magnificently, last Friday at Westminster University, where Leon Krier presented his Poundbury masterplan to a panel of critics including Michael Wilford, Jules Lubbock, Sarah Wiggelsworth, Sean Griffiths and James Woudhuysen.

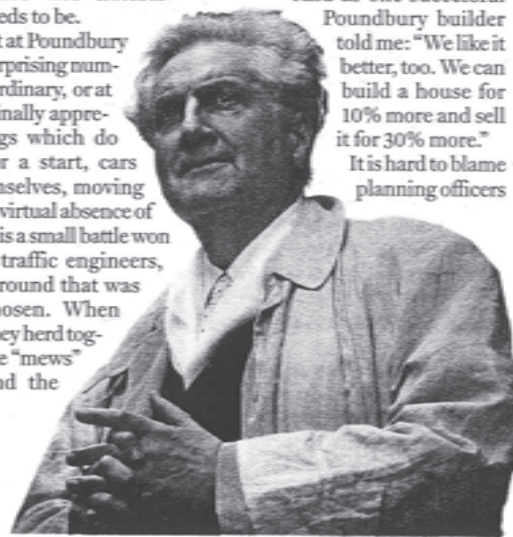
Poundbury sits on an unstable hill, tirelessly constructed over the years by an army of critics, apologists, historians, historiographers, revisionists — with the help of politicians, princes and social-planners. The test of any great manifesto is that no thoughtful reader can remain neutral for long.

The proper lesson of Supercrit 6 is that the reality of Poundbury will remain elusive because each of us feels so strongly about it.

Poundbury is most of all memorable for a slightly banal ordinariness. Krier, who has an answer for almost everything, tells us that this is just the point: Poundbury was meant to be boring, as any urgent expedient for solving a world crisis in housing, building skills and natural resources needs to be.

And in fact at Poundbury there are a surprising number of quite ordinary, or at least subliminally appreciated, things which do succeed. For a start, cars behave themselves, moving slowly in the virtual absence of signage; this is a small battle won against the traffic engineers, even if on ground that was carefully chosen. When stationary, they herd together into the “mews” space behind the houses.

**Krier:
generator
of design
codes.**



People also seem to be behaving better, even if at times they look a little hunted. In addition, they seem happy to live — in expensive housing — at relatively high densities, and are quick to defend mixed-income occupation.

Above all, Poundbury has become the successful model for suburban development, not for the Duchy of Cornwall alone but for much of the south of England.

And as one successful Poundbury builder told me: “We like it better, too. We can build a house for 10% more and sell it for 30% more.”

It is hard to blame planning officers

or committees, under huge pressure to support housing development, for embracing a model that is generally popular with their constituents, but success has brought some new categories of problem. As Poundbury expands — and the model is replicated in almost every town and village — so also the rigour of the original design code is diluted. Krier's own rules are at best misunderstood, and at worst observed in the breach: the massing of the buildings, use of materials and the quality of the streetscape become less convincing.

The other problem of success is that nothing like “trickle-down” gentrification can occur where gentrification is itself instant and all-embracing. There was never much at Poundbury for the entry-level buyer, but phase II now owes more to Regency Cheltenham than to Tolpuddle or Cerne Abbas.

Speaking at the Supercrit, Charles Jencks said memorably that, by the end of the 1970s, “Leon had become the most important communicator of architecture in the world”. Perhaps we need to remember that being able to draw so wonderfully or with such purpose did not itself

make him a good designer. Krier has never claimed for himself much of an architectural role beyond the generation of the design codes.

At Poundbury, the codes do seem to have made bad architecture a bit less casually easy. The problem is that there is, equally, almost nothing that is very good. Probably the mistakes of detail and execution will come to be seen as a patination of Krier's overarching idea, as he claims they will.

His comment, towards the end of the morning, that “...I could have designed a marvellous modernist town; but I didn't have time for this; things are too serious,” may have been disingenuous, not least because there was never a question of the client or the Dorset planners embracing the idea; but getting worked up about the look

‘I could have designed a marvellous modernist town; but I didn't have time’

of the architecture was really never the point. After 20 years, what seems more interesting is the question the project raises about the real limits of the architect as auteur of social change.

It is worth pausing to acknowledge that younger practices in the UK are at last producing housing propositions that convince by their studied ordinariness and by the studied reticence of their designers. To a remarkable degree, these new schemes rely on what Krier himself describes as the rediscovery of the “tectonic logic of materials” — and increasingly the new materials deployed go well beyond his limited palate of clay, stone and stucco. They also rely on an understanding of space as a resource to be consumed frugally. Of course, we can recognise something of the same at Poundbury, but it was achieved there with Krier's book of rules for planning the picturesque, and it alienates as many people as it persuades.

This is perhaps a moment to acknowledge graciously that Poundbury has won all the battles it possibly could have, then to reapply the most useful of its lessons outside middle England.

AERIAL PHOTO: COMMISSION AIR; PORTRAIT: ED TYLER