Salford is another residential area near Manchester. The project is launched at present.
WIT AND WINE.

FOR APPTITUDE AND ARCHITECTURE

Will Alsop seen by Elisabeth Gschieder

You heard a bass grumble followed by the earnest comment, "Like that?" You saw him stroke back his pretty long hair? The man held a Benson & Hedges in one hand, his chin resting in the other, a glass of dark red wine in front of him? His dark eyes showed interest in what was said - no matter if the talk is about architecture, literature or food. No doubt - you met Will Alsop.

From the first talk with him in November 1997, what stroke me most, is his art of listening. He makes his vis a vis talk freely with only minor interruptions and questions, picks up details another would have easily let pass by. But yet, he is a great story teller himself. The enormous amounts of miles he travels from London each month to visit his offices in Toronto, Shanghai and Vienna, to spend time with his family in England and in fellow invitations in the U.S.A., Slovenia, Germany and India e.g. for one month, make him a big observer of people and different cultures all over the globe.

No wonder the most important elements in all his sketches and ideas spin round communication areas. Break it down to taste - food and drink - bars and restaurants etc. And yes, there has to be fun! Is there a single Alsop building without colours? But the process itself has to be fun. No fun at work, no good result. "Let's not make it a discussion - make it a party!" (Alsop lecture TU Vienna, 23.11.1997) And another important message, I heard from him right at the start: "There is nothing as doing things wrong, but not doing enough is wrong.

So meeting and working with Will Alsop means exchanging thoughts about travels, about books, about dreams and people one is meeting. There is a lot of laughter, delicious food, good wine and long working hours. There are always new interesting faces to exchange ideas with - no matter if friends of friends, students, artists, cocks or entrepreneurs from all over the world.

Email is good, exchanging sketches, pictures and words over the internet is also important, but once in a while sitting together on the same table, sitting next to each other in an airplane is vital. There are still many restaurants and bars to discover, there are still hundreds of miles to travel, there are still plenty of people to meet, ideas to be exchanged, buildings to be built and public spaces to be created.

MISSION STATEMENT

NOA2 stands for "no art, no architecture". It is a communication and design platform founded by Austrian artist Norbert Brunner and British architect Will Alsop. They unite their talents and combine their respective practices of art and architecture to design creative interventions in public space that focus on the needs and wishes of the public living and working in the surrounding area. These interventions rest on the pillars of observation, sensitivity and creativity. They intentionally aim at transcending traditional boundaries and restrictions of art and architecture today. NOA2 sees itself as visionary think tank and counterpoint to blind cultural politics.

Observation: In a first step, the environment of the planned intervention is examined at different levels. In phase, the local community - the people who will use and live with the intervention - are included to contribute their individual input to the creative process. Sensitivity: The local community is engaged in the ongoing work process to provide focus, filter and feedback. At this stage, promoting dialogue as well as confrontation and provocation allows NOA2 to unlock the needs and dreams of the people involved. This sensitivity to people's hidden desires is the foundation of the interventions planned by NOA2.

Creativity: NOA2 has a unique vision: the combination of two independent creative minds who think outside of the box. Inspired by the input received they enter an interactive production phase. As a result they create a blend which leaves them both distinctly recognisable yet in harmony with one another.

Imagine this as a delicious risotto where you can still taste all the different ingredients.

INTERVIEW WITH NOA2 FOUNDER

WILL ALSOP

OL: In a recent talk you said that - to sum it up - creativity is horseshit. Since you are involved with creative work on many levels, how does this compute? What are your views on creativity?

WILL: I have always worried about the word creativity. For some reason it has always been in the air. If you believe in it, creativity is the dominion of God. He really made something out of nothing so we are told, but I think that we as mere mortals are told not to. Creativity is not to be confused with just pure hard work, indulgence, love, joy and poring all of that into what you do. Without that, nothing happens.

OL: What is your relationship to spouses?

WILL: Spoons go in my mouth.

OL: They appear from time to time in concepts of yours; spouses and other cutlery, forks, knives. They seem to be important to you. How do they relate to NOA2 or your architecture?

WILL: None has ever asked me that question before. Therefore I have no answer.

OL: You could be spontaneous. Spontaneity is something we should not leave to God without a fight. I guess what I want to ask here is: are spoons a part of architecture or art?

WILL: Everything is. Then again, nothing is. NOA2.

OL: So then is NOA2 for you?

WILL: In the physical world, NOA2 is the collaboration of art and architecture - and in the future maybe other people - to actually do all those things that make life really worthwhile. So it is not architecture, not art, it is all those things in-between, of which of course in the end are exactly what architecture and art is all about. It defines itself as something that cannot be classified. So it is not landscape architecture, it is not public realm; on the other hand it is all those things at the same time. We bring imagination to public indulgence and couple it with experience.

OL: Who is Norbert Brunner?

WILL: Norbert Brunner is first and most importantly a friend. Secondly, not less importantly, he is an artist and what I would like to call a real artist. By that I mean he is not fiddling around with some idea what the art world is, he is the art world.

OL: I would like to apologize in advance for my next question. Architecture - what's it to you?

WILL: Ah (Takes a big sip of red wine).

OL: Sorry once again for the question.

WILL: (laughs) That's OK. But it is a good question. Architecture for me is everyday life, it's what I live, it's what I think about most of the time. Well, I have a little mental holiday now and again. Nonetheless architecture encompasses all the things that people are engaged in an urban environment, in a suburban environment and even in a rural environment. Our job as architects is very simple - to make life better. We can indeed make life better by using our imagination, by using technology, by using the public imagination. By doing this we broaden the question and we bring to the world new possible horizons.

OL: You - I think it was you once said that architecture is too important to be left to architects. How does this relate to your work as an architect or to NOA2?

WILL: I think one of the problems with all sorts of consultants is that they begin to believe in their own importance.

OL: Ah, but NOA2 is a consultant in a way.

WILL: In a way, yes, but it is a new way, a different way. What I am saying is that many consultants and architects, not all of them, but very many believe in themselves too much. Also many architects. They put on a false facade, they care more about being an artist and less about what they do. Landscape architects always behave like landscape architects.

OL: Is there anything else you would like to say about NOA2?

WILL: Yes there is. Fundamentally enough.

OL: What a surprise.

WILL: I think that first and foremost NOA2 is not afraid. It is essentially composed of a group of people who are very honest. We are not afraid to say what we think. We are beyond categorisations, we are beyond health and safety and we are beyond globalisations. These are very important concepts that sound difficult. And I would like a Creme Caramel and he would like the Eisteddfod. An equally important part of NOA2s appreciation is what you have for pudding.

OL: So basically NOA2 is about everything.

WILL: I think NOA2 is about not making any categorisations and rationalisations about what they do. If you start to define a thing you do or a role you play then you also start to behave like that. What I am interested in and what NOA2s interested in is not to have any preconceptions about how to behave, about how to go forward. It is about examining a situation and responding to it in an interesting way.

Chips is again a residential project, which is currently on site; its in Manchester, UK. http://www.chipsforsale.co.uk
instance, the engine 'Epice 21', which in Germany is considered by experts to be the star of the art for the building of locomotive engines between 1920 and 1935, is of no interest to me. I excluded any form of surrounding area and topography. I was only interested in roles for the locomotive and the highways for the automobile.

What interested me were structures which can reproduce an isolated system and which run in a consistent manner. What interested me was a closed system which moves without arriving at a limit, or not unlike the flow of blood insofar as it is continuous and without limits. What interested me was a system delimited as a structural concept, which is intertwined and does not appear to be straight. I built a model to reduce conscious classification. I tried to understand how things in familiar surroundings and to identify and categorize them. I sought disorientation in relation to time and space. I wished for the observer of the films or the pictures to lose the feeling of time and place and replace it with the feeling of speed. The point being to reduce the indifference of the view

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t and to diminish the widely held practice of categorizing everything.

Do you think that the process of creating an artificial space is able to discuss mobility in art in general? What does this mean to you in the context of self-reference?

When I am creating a State for my own, I have a complete process of information, communication and understanding from the conscious perspective of one side to the selected perspective of the other. This information is the selection of data from a background of possibilities (options). Finally, when both sides are connected, the information is formed. This is the process of creating a categorized form in the hope that the other side understands the contents of this communication and can process the differences between communication and information. In art it is exactly the same way and particularly in my case. I constructed a system consisting of a grammar of movement, lines and highways. I called this system a picture-machine, a picture-machine because this system generates an infinite number of possibilities and can be documented through film and photography. For example, as I decided to use different styles and optical effects for the film and photography, this work underlines other possibilities. What the observer of the film sees is the result of an intentional selection. From the two combined art, the decision for or against something. The purpose of the system is communication and the result of this communication is art.

Communication stands for how you perceive your surroundings, your environment, and in the end, your perception of yourself. Luhmann finds self-reflection (also known as self-referentiality or auto-referentiality) in the feedback system analogous for the phenomenon of autopoi
des. This describes closely the phenomenon that I portray in the picture-machine. The system after all, becomes a feedback system. Which reproduces a film. Which I can use and which can be used by other people.

An isolated example is A Study: a work by Will Alsop, which was created in 1974. A Study is a film of a mean, a mean, and the whole idea of the film is to conquer the distance between a and b. The vehicle used to this end appears in very different forms from railways, boats and airplanes to automobiles and bicycles.

Isolation. As the machine was ready, I began to show it to more and more people and received much encouragement. The reaction was very posi
tive. I then began filming the model and tried different camera angles and lighting. I photographed the model and took them back by the flood of pictures. This motivated me to isolate particular film sequences and particular pictures for me to print. What is so fantastic is that there are an infinite number of pictures and you always have the feeling that one cannot capture them all. What is interesting is that one can observe the model and also can observe and select the pictures presented. And then, paint the observed as a picture and so the observation of the observer can be observed. The observation, and that was my goal, is no longer the observation of society, objective of truth, but rather a self-reflecting system of observation.

At the beginning this theory had to be understood in the past, but rather was the 'difference' between observer and observed. The only is the process of observation that ends as commu
nication. Observation is a process that is always internal to the system, therefore the construction of a system. Observation is also tied to 'difference', you cannot see what you do not see. This blind spot can only be observed by Observers of the Second Order (Second Order Cybernetics, Second Semiotics), but because of their blind spot they can only see what they can see. My pictures are Observations of the Second Order and can only be viewed as such by an observer.

Your films, paintings or photographs which derive from the model show an astounding potential of upola. Why is an upola space so important to your work?

I do not think that the pictures I have created from the model are utopian. In fact I find them the opposite. I find an intimate, slightly morbid, rather sick reality which is not without a certain charm and beauty. Today when we think of the high-speed rails such as those in Shanghai, it appears that the utopian character of a film like 'Blade Runner' is already an established part of reality, with those trains flowing by blue neon lights which curl between the skyscrapers and under each other and coming together in the heart of the city. When you travel by train on a weekend, you see new perspectives, new high rise buildings and even more traffic.

The realities of cities such as Shanghai are far from their European counterparts, which we have already seen. My model is not a reflection of Utopia in this sense, rather a real mental picture.

Do you consciously deal with cultural definitions in your work or are they merely implicit?

I think that artistic work in one way is always marginal, what else would push somebody to invest his energy in something that is unsure and with a high risk of failure and unemployment. Art tries to immortalize and spread the scope of its own communica
tion. It tries to manifest its own wishes for communication and bring them to the public. The manifestation of communica
tion without the direct involvement of the artist is one of the great qualities of art. Communication even when the artist prefers to stay in the background. I am not a manic-depressive. I wish for a normal existence in terms of my work and my life. I wish to be able to live with my work as with other creative artists, with family, children, and all the things that are commonly described as middle class. I have not addiction to mania. I have often experienced in others that the consequences of a mania are an awful mixed state of feelings and depression, which is fundamentally caused by over-exer
cition of the brain. In addition to being predisposed, lack of sleep, an irregular lifestyle, stress and drugs are the main contributions to mania. What I do have some hyper-
morphic phases in which I try to be more self-asserted and to cultivate more pleasure in taking risks so as to take up new challenges.

The exhibition the solo exhibition in the Kulturmuseum for Modern Art in Shanghai is a great challenge and requires a hyper

manic approach. In this state productivity is at its highest and creativity in such phases is very important for the artist.

What do you think will survive in your work?

Let me quote a text that Wolf-Guenter Thiel wrote about me. This could provide an insight into your thoughts on this question. In his book, Thiel is talking about the book’s approach: "Nothing more than a collection of new and old photographs of Shanghai’s skyline and its surrounding areas, all of which have been cropped into square formats, with a space for a text. What is the point of this book?"

Jura von Doesch at his work, your models represent the shadow of the real description you pretend to disagree with the shadow, the models, even form a richer and more fascinating reality than that which creates the shadow in the first place.

The things we humans create have at least a minimal subjective reality and we could never build new reality without the old. So, the truth is always determined by what we have learned, lived and faced. Must truth: what has cast a shadow, always be more exciting? How do you think of your work's future?

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