

A files

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The Fourth Little Pig

Alex Schweder & Ward Shelley

The story of The Three Little Pigs is not so much about swine or their construction savvy as it is about the moral imperative of hard work. We are told that one little pig quickly builds his house out of straw and another hastily fabricates his out of sticks. They sing and dance and play all day while their eldest brother constructs his house from bricks. This house takes much longer to build, but it is the only one that withstands the huffs and puffs of the wicked wolf. Foregoing pleasure is the price of survival. The moral of the story, then, is that hard work (as opposed to singing and dancing) pays off in the end, or that an architecture of permanence and solidity is better than something fast and light.

But what if the three little pigs had been four? In this retelling perhaps the younger sibling would construct a dwelling that could move with the huffing and puffing, rather than resisting it. In the process, this tilting, spinning house might even transform an otherwise threatening lupine gust into a way of making the whole building dance. Their lives would be saved, and the morals – both porcine and architectural – would change too.

Since first collaborating in 2007 our efforts have been driven by similar investigations into somehow satisfying both morality *and* pleasure. And we have typically done this by building a house, moving in and then seeing what happens. For example, our 2011 project, *Counterweight Roommate*, consisted of a thin tower with rooms spread out over five storeys and us (the roommates) tethered to either end of a rope. Scaling the building to get to the kitchen, the bedroom or the lavatory was a balancing act that depended on the body mass of the other person. We needed each other to survive. Interestingly, though, the relationships we set out to visualise were different to what actually arose. Making these discoveries is the point of inhabiting the structures we build.

Drawing again on the idea of working together, *ReActor* is a 15m-long spinning and tilting house that moves with the wind and the shifting weight of its occupants. During the initial planning stages we speculated that the wind blowing across the Omi Arts Centre site in Ghent, New York, would be something we would have to work together to overcome – a common enemy that would strengthen our relationship. But the space between what artists intend and what actually happens is where meaningful innovation occurs, and so our rival became our muse – a gentle breeze that spins the house as it balances on top of a 5m-high concrete column.

ReActor also seeks horizontal equilibrium, see-sawing as the occupants move toward and away from its centre. During our first five-day inhabitation performance we discovered that intentionally tilting the house helps the wind catch the structure to make it rotate more. From inside we went about our days – reading, cooking and watching the vista change, slowly and quietly, from our porches. When visitors stopped to look, we chatted with them about what the work meant, how it was built and answered detailed questions about how the bathroom works. These conversations were similar to those of our previous projects, but one question changed: ‘How can you possibly live there?’ became ‘When can I move in?’



Contributors

Fabrizio Ballabio is an architect and writer, and currently teaches at the AA and at the RCA while undertaking independent research on late baroque architecture in southern Italy. He has recently lectured on this and other subjects at the AA, the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne, the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Barber Institute (University of Birmingham), the Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II and at the Bauhaus Kolloquium in Weimar (2016). He is the co-founder of *àyr*, a London-based art collective, and part of the online research platform on industrial architecture, *Factory Futures*.

Eva Branscome is an architectural historian and teaches at the Bartlett School of Architecture and UCL's department of art history. She has also recently completed a post-doctoral fellowship from the Gerda Henkel Foundation. She was co-editor of *The Post-Modern Reader* (2011), and her research has been published and exhibited worldwide.

Timothy Brittain-Catlin is researching the domestic architecture of Edwardian politicians but is otherwise interested in architects as losers and failures. He taught architectural history and theory at the AA from 2001–07 and is now at the Kent School of Architecture, University of Kent. He is also vice-chairman of the Twentieth Century Society.

Alessandro Conti (1986–2012) was an Italian architect, musician, Kung Fu black belt and connoisseur of architectural history. His published research included studies on the architecture of Castel del Monte, Flora Ruchat-Roncati, Ivo Trümpy and Aurelio Galfetti's Lido in Bellinzona and the baroque investigations of Roman architect Luigi Moretti.

Mike Dempsey is a graphic designer and founder of Studio Dempsey. He has created everything from stamps for Royal Mail and film title sequences for Ridley Scott, Louis Malle, Dennis Potter, David Hare and Bruce Beresford, to visual identities for English National Opera, the South Bank Centre, Design Museum, the London Chamber Orchestra, British Screen and the UK Film Council. He also writes, broadcasts and blogs regularly.

Hans Frei teaches at the ETH, Zurich and works as an architect, focusing largely on theoretical and conceptual issues. A graduate of the ETH and the University in Zurich, he wrote his PhD on the architecture of Max Bill. Together with Cornell Näf he was a founding member of the design collective m22, and from 1997 to 2003 he was professor of architectural theory and design at the University of Kassel.

Gabriela García de Cortázar is a PhD candidate at the AA, supported by a scholarship from the Chilean government. Her thesis, on the chorographies of the modern city, will be examined at the end of this year. She studied architecture in Chile where she is a registered architect, and in 2010 she obtained an MA in architectural history at the Bartlett, UCL. She has taught architectural design and history at the University of Chile and at the AA.

Patrick Hodgkinson (1930–2016) was educated at the AA and worked first with Alvar Aalto before securing a position with Leslie Martin, where he developed a housing proposal for St Pancras borough council, and designed Harvey Court for Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge and the Bodleian Law Library, Oxford. In 1959 he secured the commission for a large complex in Bloomsbury for housing and shops – later named the Brunswick Centre – a job which soon afterwards became the basis for the setting up of his own practice. After the completion of the Brunswick Centre in 1972 he moved into academia, teaching at the AA and Cornell, before finding a more permanent position at Bath University, where he worked from 1981 through to his retirement in 1995.

Ida Jager is the author of a number of books on Dutch architecture, including separate monographs on Willem Kromhout and P J H Cuypers & J Duiker; an analysis of Amsterdam's late nineteenth-century infrastructure, *Hoofdstad in Gebreke*; a survey of twentieth-century graphic design in Rotterdam; and, most recently, a volume dedicated to the work of the Kraaijvanger brothers, *Evert en Kraaijvanger, architectonische noblesse*.

Matthew Mullane is a PhD candidate at the Princeton University School of Architecture, where he is currently finishing a dissertation on the history of observation in Japanese architectural discourse of the Meiji period. This research is an outgrowth of his interest in the phenomenon of 'world' architecture history and theory in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He has recently published essays on these topics and their contemporary ramifications in *Architectural Theory Review* and *Art Papers*.

Nicholas Olsberg is a historian, archivist, curator and writer. His recent books include studies of Arthur Erickson (2006), John Lautner (2008), the California ranch house (2012) and the work of Ernest and Esther Born (2015). He is also a regular contributor to *The Architectural Review*. He went to Rugby School, where he swam in Butterfield's pool, filed into his chapel every morning, read books in his reading room, did woodworking and calisthenics in his workshop and gymnasium, drew in his art museum, played on his racquet courts and was taught in his three school buildings. He then lived for two years in Butterfield's Grove Building at Merton College, Oxford, where his rooms overlooked the porch and tower of Butterfield's reworked chapel.

Alberto Ponis is an Italian architect. Raised in Nervi, just outside Genoa, he trained in Florence under Ludovico Quaroni and Adalberto Libera before moving in 1969 to London, where he worked first with Ernő Goldfinger and then with Denys Lasdun. In 1963 he was commissioned to design a prototypical holiday home by a financier investing in Sardinia's then largely undeveloped Punta Sardegna. This commission eventually prompted his relocation to the island and the setting up of his architectural office. Over the next 40 years he designed and built more than 300 houses, all located on Sardinia's north coast. A selection of this work has recently been published in *The Inhabited Pathway: The Built Work of Alberto Ponis in Sardinia* (2014).

Alex Schweder is a New York-based artist who works with architecture and performance and whose projects have been exhibited internationally, including at Tate Britain, New York's SculptureCenter, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Magnus Müller gallery in Berlin. He has been an artist-in-residence at the Kohler Company, Chinati Foundation and American Academy in Rome, and has been guest professor at the Southern California Institute of Architecture, Pratt Institute and the Institute for Art and Architecture in Vienna.

Jonathan Sergison studied at the AA and worked for David Chipperfield and Tony Fretton before setting up Sergison Bates architects with his partner Stephen Bates. Their work includes the Ruthin Craft Centre, Blankenberge city library, Hult Business School campus in London and the Novartis Welcome Centre in Shanghai. He has taught at a number of schools of architecture, including the AA, ETH Zurich, EPF Lausanne, ESARQ Barcelona, AHO Oslo and Harvard GSD, and is currently professor of architectural design at the Accademia di Architettura, Mendrisio, Switzerland.

Ward Shelley is an artist based in Brooklyn, New York who specialises in large projects that freely mix sculpture and performance. His work is in a number of museum collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Art Museum and the Elizabeth A Sackler Centre for Feminist Art. In 2004 he lived and worked for five weeks inside the walls of the Pierogi Gallery, New York, for an exhibition called 'We Have Mice', and he previously collaborated with Alex Schweder on 'Flatland' at New York's SculptureCenter in 2007. Before and during his art career he has also worked in advertising, construction, teaching, special events, theatre, rock bands and built a 11m sailing sloop.

Mariana Siracusa is an Argentinian scholar based in Milan. Her current research focuses on the effects of energy infrastructure on remote non-urban landscapes. Prior to this she was a researcher at the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal.

Helen Thomas is an architect and writer who, with Adam Caruso, has jointly edited a series of books on the limits of modernism: *Rudolf Schwarz and the Monumental Order of Things* (2016) follows *Asnago Vender and the Making of Modern Milan* (2014) and *The Stones of Fernand Pouillon* (2013).

Marrikka Trotter teaches at Boston Architectural College and is a teaching fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where she is completing a PhD dissertation which examines the intersections between geology and architecture in Britain between 1750 and 1890. She is also editor of the contemporary architectural theory anthologies *Architecture at the Edge of Everything Else* (2010) and *Architecture is All Over* (2017).