

# CONSTRUCTIONS

An Experimental Approach to Intensely Local Architectures

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN March/April 2015 Profile No 234

Guest-Edited by MICHAEL HENSEL AND CHRISTIAN HERMANSEN CORDUA

**Editorial Offices** 

John Wiley & Sons 25 John Street London WC1N 2BS UK

T+44 (0)20 8326 3800

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Helen Castle

Managing Editor (Freelance)
Caroline Ellerby

**Production Editor** Elizabeth Gongde

Liizabetii Gorigo

Prepress Artmedia, London

Art Direction + Design CHK Design:

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Helen Castle

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Christian Hermansen Cordua, David Jolly Monge and Michael Hensel

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Rural Studio

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In the last decade, there has been a seismic shift in architecture. Whereas once architectural design centred, with very few exceptions, on drawing, design and representation, in the last decade making has become the main motor of innovation. Within the pages of  $\triangle$ , this has manifested itself in issues such as *Design* through Making (July/August 2005) and Protoarchitecture: Analogue and Digital Hybrids (July/August 2008) guest-edited by Bob Sheil; Made by Robots: Challenging Architecture at a Larger Scale (May/June 2014) guest-edited by Fabio Gramazio and Matthias Kohler; and the forthcoming Pavilions, Pop-ups and Parasols: The Impact of Social Media on Physical Space (May/ June 2015), guest-edited by Leon van Schaik and Fleur Watson. In schools internationally, this transference in emphasis towards fabrication has culminated in investment in large-scale workshops and machinery. Guest-Editors Michael Hensel and Christian Hermansen Cordua articulate clearly in their introduction how pivotal making has become a force for innovation, investigation and learning in architecture: 'The issue seeks to foreground the notion of "construction" because the schools and practices portrayed in this issue define their stance – perhaps even "research their positions" - through actual building. Building is, then, not just the implementation of represented conceptions, but rather seen as a process by which one discovers and explores.'

EDITORIAL

HELEN CASTLE

What differentiates this  $\triangle$  title from other publications on making is its emphasis on localness. For the guest-editors, a locally specific architecture provides a significant 'antidote to unchecked globalisation' and 'homogenisation'. Rather than prescribing a one-stock formal response or regional style, Hensel and Hermansen Cordua espouse a plurality of design solutions, as reflected in the diversity of contributions that are drawn from across continents: from Norway and Spain to Chile, Alabama and New York to India. Structures respond to distinct local conditions through a performative approach; the emphasis lies not in individual creativity or formal impact, but on interpreting data from local site and climatic conditions to best inform design decisions, often marrying up current technology with a local tectonic sensibility. As a project, Constructions with its emphasis on experimentation and localness remains a fecund work in progress, as suggested by the guest-editors' concluding article, 'Outlook: En Route to Intensely Local Architectures and Tectonics', in which they sum up and provide some pointers for further research. For the Counterpoint for this issue, author and sustainability expert Terri Peters was asked to step into this gap and explore further the sustainable potential for this type of work, highlighting how place-based projects, informed by a sense of locality, might from a sustainable point of view also help to privilege the quality of human experience.  $\triangle$ 

Michael Hensel

Performance-Oriented Architecture: Rethinking Architecture and the Built Environment

2013

Michael Hensel and Jeffrey P Turko

Grounds and Envelopes: Reshaping Architecture and the Built Environment

2015

top left and centre: The covers of Hensel's latest books that explore themes and examine projects en route to locally specific architectures.

Christian Hermansen Cordua

Manifestoes and Transformations in the Early Modernist City

2010

top right: Cover of Hermansen Cordua's edited book on Modernist conceptions of the city and large-scale urban transformations.

Christian Hermansen Cordua

Hospedería de las Alas, Open City, Ritoque, Chile

2012

2x2 Bathing Platform, Nusfjord, Lofoten, Norway

2013

Community Centre, Pumanque, Chile

2014

centre (all): Various projects utilising screen walls and surfaces. The projects illustrate Hermansen Cordua's interest in screen wall-like surfaces that provide transitional spaces and reduce climatic impact on interior spaces.

Michael Hensel and Defne Sunguroğlu Hensel

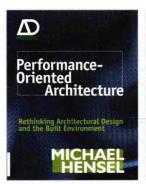
Membrane Spaces Workshop

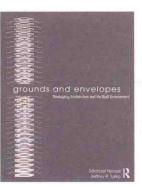
Izmir University of Economics

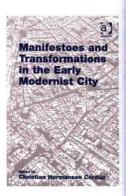
Izmir, Turkey

2009

bottom: The studies of arrayed membrane systems illustrate Michael Hensel's interest in textile auxiliary architectures.









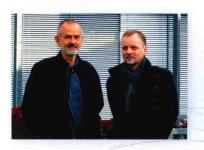






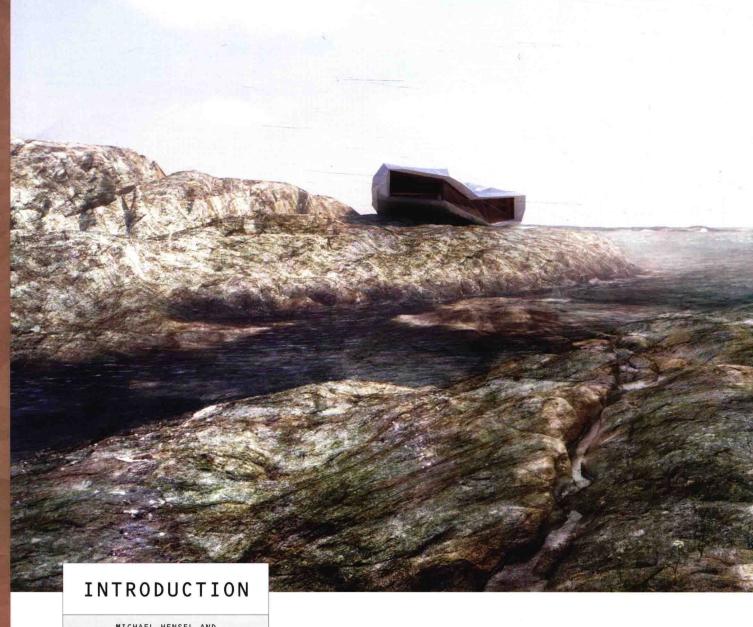
ABOUT THE
GUEST-EDITORS

MICHAEL HENSEL AND
CHRISTIAN HERMANSEN CORDUA



Michael Hensel is an architect, researcher, writer and tenured professor at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO) where he directs the Research Center for Architecture and Tectonics and co-directs the Scarcity and Creativity Studio (SCL). In his academic work he integrates research and education along a researchby-design trajectory with a strong emphasis on the development of non-discrete, performance-oriented and intensely local architectures, design-and-build efforts, and critical and projective capacities. He is a founding member of OCEAN and founding and current chairman of the OCEAN Design Research Association and the Sustainable Environment Association (SEA). He has authored and edited books and journals that relate to the themes pursued in this issue, most notably the  $\triangle$ Primer Performance-Oriented Architecture: Rethinking Architectural Design and the Built Environment (John Wiley & Sons, 2013) and, with Jeffrey P Turko, Grounds and Envelopes: Reshaping Architecture and the Built Environment (Routledge, 2015).

Christian Hermansen Cordua is an architect and tenured professor at AHO. He has studied and practised architecture in Chile, the US and the UK. From 1984 to 2002 he worked with both the Mackintosh School of Architecture at the Glasgow School of Art, where he was Director of Postgraduate Studies, and with Elder and Cannon Architects. In 2002 he moved to Oslo, where he was appointed Professor and Head of AHO's Institute of Architecture, a position he held until 2009. His most recent book is Manifestoes and Transformations in the Early Modernist City (Ashgate, 2010). He has contributed to journals, books and exhibitions in Europe and the US, and has recently held several European Union-funded research projects. During his career he has found the practice and teaching of architecture are a mutually enriching combination. The belief that architecture is only fully realised in buildings, along with an invitation to build at the Open City in Ritoque, Chile, made it possible to form the design/build Scarcity and Creativity Studio (SCL), which in turn motivated the research into the mode of didactic practice that is the origin of \( \D \) Constructions. \( \D \)



MICHAEL HENSEL AND CHRISTIAN HERMANSEN CORDUA

# Relating. Perceptions of Constructions, Experimental and Local



Joakim Hoen, Seaside Second Home, south and west coast, Norway, 2012-

View of a locally specific design iteration of the system that underlies the project.

This title of △ highlights two key notions of the proposed notion of 'constructions': the 'experimental' and the 'local'. While the experimental indicates the means by which projects might be conceived, the local constitutes the stated objective: the intensive search for contemporary locally specific architectures. The need for this arises from the ceaseless homogenisation of the built environment against a backdrop of global urbanisation, in which nondescript or generic architecture is all too often combined with individualism manifesting itself in highly idiosyncratic or 'sensational' designs; the upshot being a ubiquitous and indifferent mélange.

Architecture, like most spheres of life, is comprehensively affected by globalisation. This is borne out by the profusion and worldwide circulation of publications and online media that report on every major building; the fact that all large architecture firms engage in international practice; the worldwide standardisation of industrial building components and materials; and the standardisation of software as the dominant means to develop and represent architectural design. These are all factors that conspire against the possibility of developing an architecture that is first and foremost born out of distinct local conditions. This inevitably leads to

an increasing homogeneity in urban form. Have we not all felt, with some disappointment, that after travelling long distances to a foreign city we could be 'anywhere' or 'everywhere' in terms of the character of the built environment? It is for this reason that this issue of  $\triangle$  seeks to highlight directions taken by various schools and practices that could be seen as an antidote to unchecked globalisation.

The issue seeks to foreground the notion of 'construction' because the schools and practices that are portraved define their stance perhaps even 'research their positions' - through actual building. Building is, then, not just the implementation of represented conceptions, but rather seen as a process by which one discovers and explores. If construction is conceived as the mere implementation of a representation, any deviation from that representation becomes somewhat of an 'error'. In the case of the practices included in this issue of D, an attitude can be detected in which construction is part of the process of conceiving architecture in an experimental manner. Experimentation allows design decisions to be made during the construction process. Another factor that aids experimentation in the case of the practices featured is that operating as small teams of often mixed expertise, and frequently dealing with unconventional clients, opens up possibilities not usually available in large institutional commissions.

We are of course not alone in sensing that architecture should move away from some of the excesses brought about by globalisation, as was implied by the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale, entilted 'Fundamentals'. This exhibition, although not quite a 'radar' of changing sensibilities in architecture, may at least be seen as a 'seal of approval' of up and coming directions. The theme, which proposed an investigation into the basic constituents of buildings, which it called 'Elements', was a confirmation of a move away from 'signature' architecture and the 'star' architects who produce it, the memory of which

was shouted out through itheir total absence. That the individual exhibitions of each of the 'elements' displayed no more than a pedestrian catalogue of known facts and missed an opportunity to reinforce the theme of the Biennale as a whole does not take away from the perception of its curator, Rem Koolhaas, that the excesses of the last decades are, hopefully, coming to an end.

It is the notion of the 'local', then, that requires brief examination. This came forcefully to the fore in 1748 when the French political philosopher Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755) argued in his massively influential treatise 'The Spirit of the Laws' that locally specific environmental conditions - geography and climate - interact with local cultures and, in so doing, influence their inclination towards particular social arrangements and institutions. Montesquieu's understanding had considerable impact on the theory of the arts and architecture, where it was posited in similar terms that environmental conditions acted as particularising factors.1 Gottfried Semper (1803-79), for instance, based his elaboration of the historical development of tectonics and stereotomics - and the associated crafts - precisely on the differences in local climate and available material conditions. More recently, Kenneth Frampton rearticulated this as 'two fundamental procedures: the tectonics of the frame, in which lightweight, linear components are assembled so as to encompass a spatial matrix, and the stereotomics of the earthwork, wherein mass and volume are conjointly formed through the repetitious piling up of heavy elements', and 'according to climate, custom, and available material the respective roles played by tectonics and stereotomics vary considerably'.2 Modern architecture was frequently criticised for relinquishing local differences, although there exist numerous works that render such a comprehensive generalisation misconstrued. Nevertheless, this critical stance developed in the post-Second World War era into a distinct discourse that came to be known as regionalism. Alan Colquhoun has pointed out that regionalism from its origin in the

Walter Gropius, Masters' Houses, Dessau, Germany, 1929

top left: The pioneering designs for the Masters' Houses in Dessau constituted a remarkable peak in the Bauhaus agenda of implementing works.

Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia (IAAC), Endesa Pavilion, Barcelona, 2011

top right: The southwest facade showing the location-specific positioning of solar panels.

Hulvägen Bridges, Atlantic Road National Tourist Route, Møre og Romsdal, Norway

View of two of the eight bridges that connect the small islands along the route, the most prominent of which is the Storseisundet Bridge – which can be seen in the background.

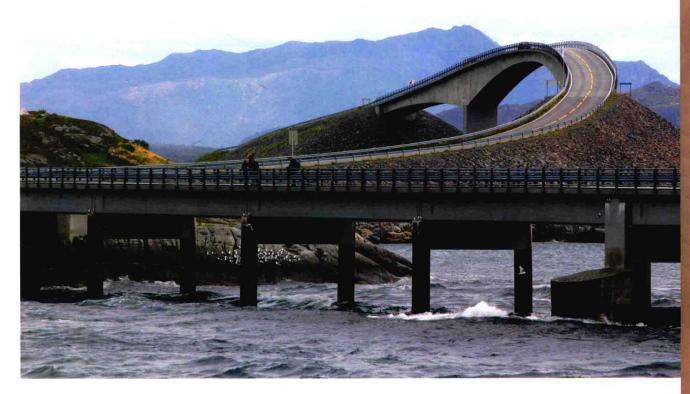
Rural Studio, 20K Houses, Greensboro, Hale County, Alabama, 2008

The Pattern Book House, Loft House and Roundwood House demonstrate the diversity of designs within Rural Studio's 20K Houses research programme.











Shin Egashira/ Koshirakura Landscape Workshop, Bus shelter, Koshirakura, Tökamachi, Niigata, Japan, 1997

The bus shelter in summer.

Scarcity and Creativity Studio (SCL), Las Piedras del Cielo, Open City, Ritoque, Chile, 2012

Experimental landform structures and canopies are recurrent themes in projects by the Scarcity and Creativity Studio at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO).

Studio Mumbai workshop, Mumbai, 2012

The workshop courtyard where material samples, models and mockups are displayed.

Open City, Ritoque, Chile, 2012

View of the lowerlying areas of the Open City in the coastal dune landscape of the Pacific.





