Graz University of Technology

NOVEMBER TALKS 2013

Go Hasegawa | Špela Videčnik | Jordi Badía | Felix Claus

PREFACE

Once again we were able to host the November Talks at Graz University of Technology. The list of our guests has grown in an impressive way. In 2011, we were able to welcome Boštjan Vuga from Ljubljana, Angela Paredes from Madrid, Xiaodu Liu from Shenzhen and David Adjaye from London. In 2012, we had the great honor to welcome Brigitte Shim and Howard Sutcliffe from Toronto, Jonathan Sergison from London, Dorte Mandrup from Copenhagen and Bernhard Khoury from Beirut. In 2013, Go Hasegawa from Tokyo, Jordi Badia from Barcelona, Špela Videcnik from Ljubljana and Felix Claus from Amsterdam accepted my invitation and took center stage in wonderful evenings documented in this brochure on hand.

Our guests are always committed to both practicing and teaching architecture. Herewith, we are able to cover a wide spectrum of an architect's life—from design work right up to academic commitments. We are able to get to the fundamentals by drawing our guests into a 45 minute conducted discussion after they have given a 45 minute lecture. Presenting selected projects from the lecture and transcribing the discussion, we try to grasp the individual position and develop a bottom line for every guest.

Go Hasegawa showed a selection of small projects with unbelievable intensity. We called it: "Pushing the Limits". Jordi Badia began his talk with the bold statement: "I don't want to be modern." We tried to capture his position with "Beyond Modernism". Špela Videcnik showed a selection of her impressive portfolio with a focus on the

specific Slovenian situation. We called it "Constraints and Potentials". Felix Claus surprised us by questioning many of the projects he had realized in the past. His "Elegant Rationality" was inspiring. We were able to witness his last lecture as a representative of Claus en Kaan Architecten. The long-lasting partnership split up shortly after.

Our guests presented a range of teaching approaches and positions in contemporary architecture which were elaborated upon in the discussions. The November Talks have therefore become a special asset in the educational program of our faculty. We captured these wonderful moments by producing this brochure.

Being given the possibility to invite these renowned guests, being able to entertain them and then to compile this brochure was only possible due to the generous financial support of the Sto Foundation—thank you very much! May I also express my gratitude to the staff members of my institute, especially to Sorana Radulescu, Žiga Kresevic, Marisol Vidal and Armin Stocker who were a fantastic support in organizing this event and conducting the discussions together with myself.

I hope we managed to capture not only the important contents of the four evenings, but also the very special atmosphere we were able to experience. And if you enjoy reading this brochure, then get ready for the next event— the November Talks 2014!

Roger Riewe

CONTENT

GO HASEGAWA

NOVEMBER 04, 2013

LECTURE_11

INTERVIEW_19

roof terrace

kitchen

living room

study room   table   closet

approach

parking

entrance   children's room 1

study room   table   closet

bed room   washing room   children's room 2
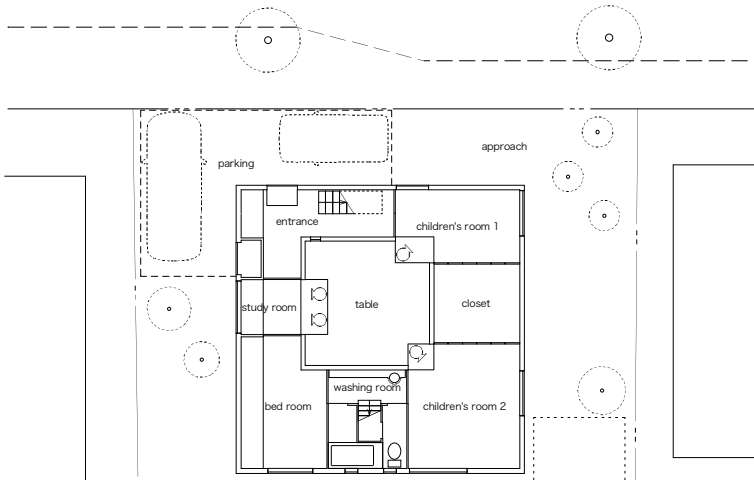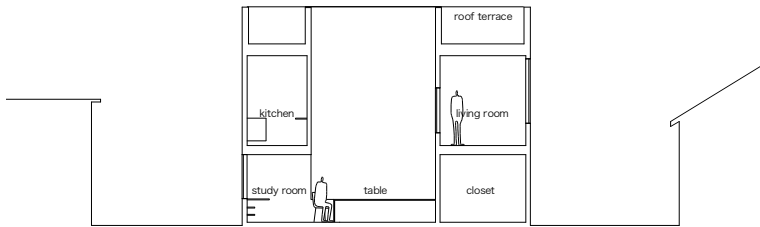
< I like this picture ... you can see all four family members, but from his [youngest son] point of view, you cannot see the whole family. If he crossed the space and came to the front, suddenly everyone would be connected. ... Actually, there are no walls or doors between them. I designed a kind of gradual relationship here. **>**
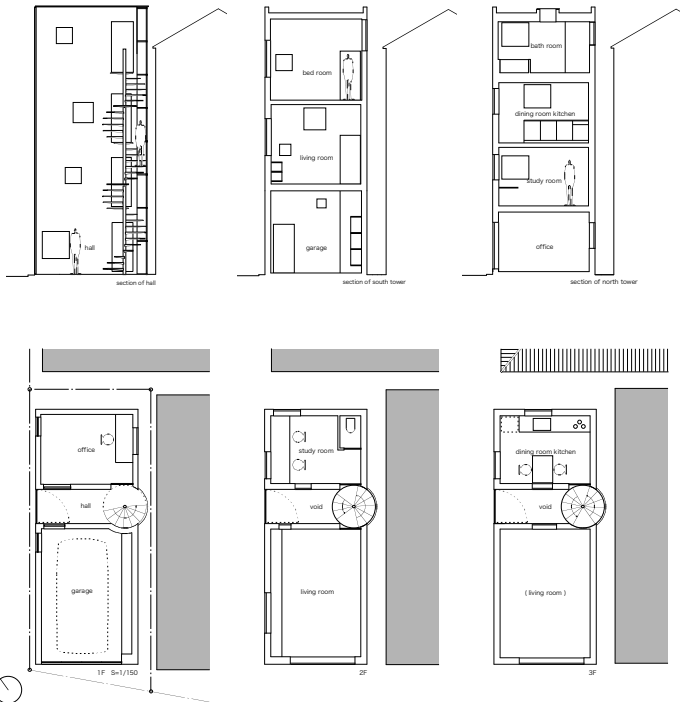
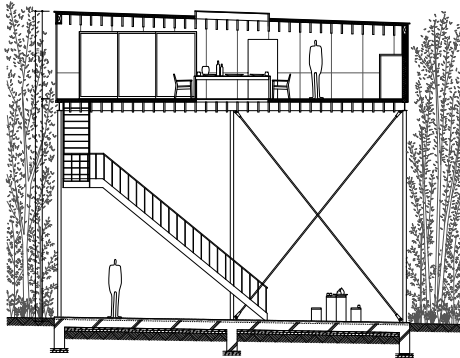Typology: Courtyard | **HOUSE IN SAKURADAI** | Sakuradai, Japan | 2006

<... the urban space in Tokyo: it's the gap between the buildings. We have a regulation that we can only build one building per plot. And we have to keep a distance from the boundary – at least 50 cm. So, you can see the gap between the two buildings of more than 1 meter.**>**

hall

section of hall

bed room

living room

garage

section of south tower

bath room

dining room kitchen

study room

office

section of north tower

office

hall

garage

1F S=1/150

study room

void

living room

2F

dining room kitchen

void

(living room)

3F

Typology: Gap | **HOUSE IN GOTANDA** | Kyodo, Japan | 2006

<For me, the height of this pilotis is super-important. It is 6.5 meters – almost a three-storey house ... If I made it higher – like 7 meters – suddenly it would look displaced, it would start to melt into the forest. And if I tried to make it lower – 6 meters – for me, it would look like this space becomes the interior. So, 6.5 meters is a kind of dimension, which has a sense of tension between the space and the nature or architecture and nature. >
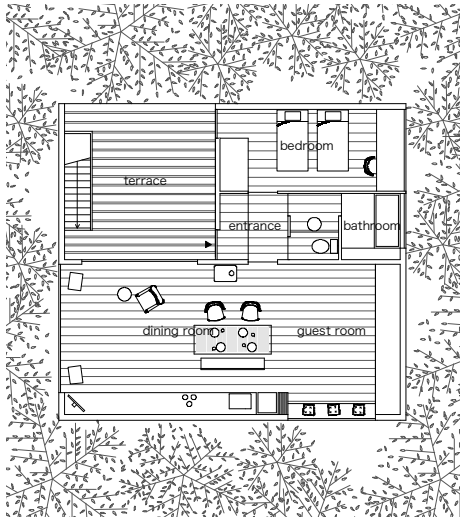
Typology: Pilotis | **PILOTIS IN A FOREST** | Tokyo, Japan | 2010
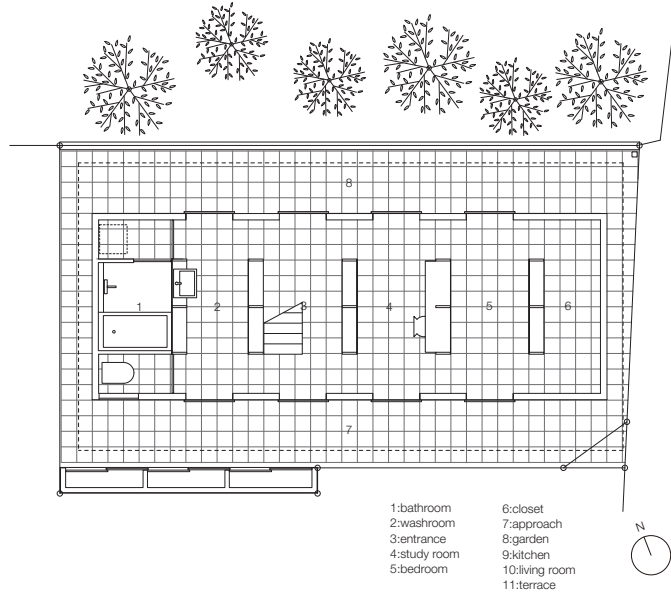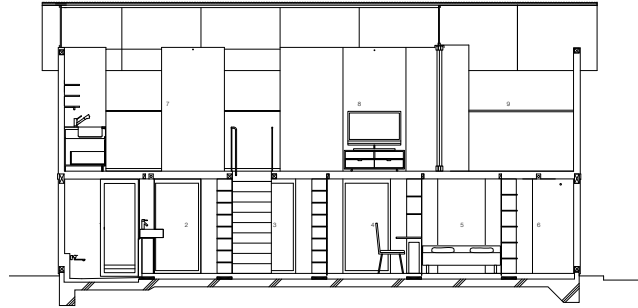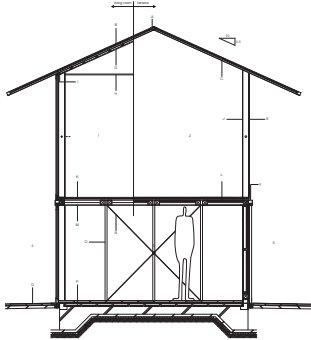
<Maybe for you, the image of Tokyo is Shinjuku or high-rise buildings, but actually, Tokyo is made of lots of two-storey houses. ... The wife is an editor of a newspaper, and the husband is the editor of manga comics. He has lots of manga - actually, 50% of the house became a kind of bookshelf. ... The ground floor is the space for the manga and the first floor is the space for the residents.>

1:bathroom
2:washroom
3:entrance
4:study room
5:bedroom

6:closet
7:approach
8:garden
9:kitchen
10:living room
11:terrace

Typology: Two-Storey House | **HOUSE IN KYODO** | Kyodo, Japan | 2011

GH_Go Hasegawa
RR_Roger Riewe
SR_Sorana Radulescu

RR_ Thank you, Go, for this intriguing lecture about incredibly small spaces full of great architecture.

GH_ Thank you.

RR_ Go, you have managed our tough timeframe of 45 minutes …

GH_ Because I am Japanese!

RR_ Yes! It was great to see these projects but now we have some questions concerning your small projects: how do you convince a client to go through this process and accept something you have been thinking of?

GH_ It's difficult to explain but basically I like to talk with clients. I really like to talk with them about my proposal but I don't have to keep my idea in the process. I like to change it; I like to break it. And for me—as you maybe understood already—the client and the site are always important. I never ask the client to understand or to accept my proposal. I am waiting until the project is finished. In the lecture I said 'I don't like to decide' and sometimes students ask me: 'But you are an architect, when do you decide? How do you decide?' It's a good question. But I never make a decision until the end. Of course, at some point I have to. But the client decides as well, the place decides, my coordinator decides, my structural engineer decides. The building is made by many small decisions of

lots of people. So, I would say I am waiting until the project is decided. [All laughing]

GH_ It's not a joke, that's how I explain the process! I never ask the client to accept. Actually the presentation to the client is completely the same to what you just saw in this lecture. I never use different concepts. I simply explain why there is an area for a 2-storey house. I don't like buildings that are too strange or special and don't fit into the area. Let's look at the 2-storey house: you—or everybody—can understand it naturally. I think it's completely the same to explain it to a client or an architecture student.

SR_I would like to ask you something related to this relationship to the client. You work a lot with pushing the limits, forcing proportions and discovering the potentials of materials … but by doing so you also impose new lifestyles on the users of the buildings.

GH_ Hmm … yes.

SR_ And then you get to see how these users, how the owners of each building, appropriate the spaces. Do you think your task as an architect is accomplished? Do you feel that they understand the spaces the way you designed them? Or do you learn something from them afterwards? Are there new uses that they might explore?

GH_ Yes. For example, this is a good story ... I showed you the super-huge-table house of my sister—she is a very good person. One week after they started living in the new house, she called me and I was afraid: what's happening? But she was happy and said, 'When I retire'—so in 40 years—'I will change this big table to a community space for the children in our area.' So, after her sons have grown up and moved out, she could live on the upper floor. And she started to imagine using the ground floor as a public space. I was very impressed! I have never thought of such a thing. But it's the proportion and the scale that made her imagine, 'I want to use it as a public space for other people, to support the children.' I think it's nice to imagine life in 40 years just after the new house is completed. Of course, I know that my houses have strange proportions or dimensions, but the clients have always discovered the meaning of these spaces and a way of using them in the future. It's very fascinating!

RR_ There are quite a few examples of Japanese architects whose first project was to design a house for a family member. In a way, it may be easy to experiment but it is also tough because family members can be very demanding as well.

GH_ Super tough!

RR_ You know your sister and your family but what about other clients you get involved with. The traditional Japanese family structure may be a big issue when

designing a private house. If, for example, the grandfather moves in, he would be the head of the family. Are these issues which are relevant for you when you talk to the client or work on a design?

GH_ Yes … but actually I talk a lot with the client and I never feel that a client is a certain type. I cannot generalize people. In our conversations, I always find out their character or something special about them. And also, I must say, my clients are very nice. This house [pointing to a picture in the background] was for a good friend of my parents. And the second house was my sister's house. And the third house was my best friend's house. [laughing] So, I managed to survive in the beginning. After that, new clients saw these houses in the magazines and they understood, more or less, that I like to propose a new image of lifestyle. My clients never imagine a typical house. They always look for a proposal of a new life or a new feeling because they know my work.

SR_ You have this special relationship with clients. It's a privilege! And each building is built for its owner. They are practically custom-made houses that are celebrating special features or moments in the owners' lives. In a way, this is a short-term way of thinking. Do you also have a sense of permanence in your architecture? How do you see it projected in the further future?

GH_I don't imagine what happens after the clients die, how these spaces will be used or something like that. It's

boring to just predict the future. It's impossible, actually. That's why my starting point is the architectural element. Architectural elements have a lot of history and universality. I think that a certain typology or element makes me optimistic. And new typologies like the 2-storey house also leave possibilities for the future. So, maybe they will be thought or used in a different way. This is important for me.

RR_ Most of the projects we saw are part of a cityscape. I like the way you showed the environment around it, where the building is located—usually on a very small site. There is a very specific use of public and private space with a particular focus on the interface between the public and private. It is usually a very narrow space with highly specific use. These are characteristics that you pick up as we can see in the house with the balcony variations. This typology is something like the private-public interface but in a very, let's say, site specific interpretation. And then you take this idea of the balcony to the gap-house where you turn the interface into a building.

GH_ Yes, it's true.

RR_ But does it only work when the huge entrance door is open? The interface is usually facing the street separating public and private but here it is inside the building. When the door is open you can see inside, but the public cannot enter. It's no longer an interface between public and private, but between private and private. So you actually brought a neighbouring house into your house. When you

design such a project are you trying to show the client that something like this already exists, for example, in Tokyo, so they get an idea of what a space like the gap will be like and how to use this interface?

GH_ Actually, with that project—the house in Gotanda—I didn't imagine that space super positively. It's an in-between space, as you said. The size and the scale of the door are important, of course. In my opinion, the door belongs to the city and not the house. In the facade you can see two doors: one is the gap and one has got a very normal, human scale. It's for the residents, for the house. This is an important point of the facade. It has two different images—a building that exists for the city and a building that exists for the life of the people inside. The difference in height and size of the doors shows my understanding of the buffer space between the house and the city.

SR_ Tonight you have only shown housing typologies though I know you have worked with other typologies as well. A large part of your portfolio is based on private housing projects. Was housing a specialization you chose?

GH_I cannot answer this ... because the client asked me. [laughing] We cannot choose the direction. It's a boring answer, sorry, but hmm … we cannot choose the direction.

SR_ Would you like to switch to other typologies or to other scales?

GH_ Yes, I would like to try. But at the same time I would like to continue designing houses as well. In Japan, we have lots of opportunities to design detached houses because, as you saw, Tokyo or Japan is made of detached houses. Recently a few clients started to think … and to ask architects to design their house with a proposal of lifestyle, as I showed. This way, young Japanese architects can survive somehow. Yes, of course, Toyo Ito or Sejima do that as well but I'm a typical young Japanese architect, I think. In my generation, some architects start with designing buildings in China or public buildings in the countryside. Others design only installations in a museum in the beginning. There is a lot of variation. I think it's exciting to see different types of projects in the same generation. Before that—the Toyo Ito generation—it was simpler: from the small house to the commercial building, the public building ... and then the Pritzker Prize! [all laughing] It was simple. Today, it's more complicated and there are a lot of possibilities. I think this is nice and it's good to work in Japan.

RR_I introduced you as a very young architect—young in age. In Tokyo you belong to the new generation and architects like Yoshiharu Tsukamoto are already senior to you. But now that you mention Toyo Ito, there seems to be a continuous line of architects which might be like godfathers or who have a certain influence on you like Shinohara or Sakamoto? How far have they really influenced your work?

GH_ Sometimes students ask me 'Who are important architects for you?' For me Kazuo Shinohara, Sakamoto Kazunari and Yoshiharu Tsukamoto … hmm, everybody you mentioned [laughing]. They are very important and they have the kind of Tokyo Tech character to continue the line. Toyo Ito, on the other hand … I trust him but I don't like his way of explaining his career as a way of overcoming the older generation: overcoming Shinohara, overcoming his boss Kikutake, Arata Isozaki … He tries to deny their work. Yes, for the media it's easy to understand and it's a nice story, but I think it's unnatural to deny the older generation. ... This is a secret ... Sorry, Toyo Ito is a very good architect, yes, but this is the way I really feel. I respect these persons, of course, but there is a difference and I cannot feel complete sympathy. Yoshihara Tsukamoto, my professor, at Bow Wow, he sometimes says something like: 'A good architect should make a good building' or 'A good architect should make a good architect.' Do you understand? I mean, an architect has some responsibility and it's nice to form students and make them become good architects. This is my problem now: I don't know how to do it. But architects have to think about new architects. You do it, here! I think this is an important thing for architects.

SR_ In your lecture you haven't talked much about materiality, the choice of materials in your projects. Do you experiment with materiality? Do you like to push the limits of a certain material or do you even have a favourite one?

GH_I like materials and I don't like to make 'my style'. I don't like to limit my work to concrete buildings like Tadao Ando. I like Tadao Ando but I always try to use new materials. This is not always perfect for my work. For example, the house in Komazawa, it's a good project but I couldn't show it to you in this lecture. The client asked for a timber building. The exterior wall is made by eucalyptus, the tree of the koala. I like timber but it's not so interesting to do just the whole facade in timber. It's like a Soba restaurant in Tokyo. Maybe you cannot understand that but there is some traditional image of wood for us. I don't like it. So, I wasted a lot of work and finally we found eucalyptus in Australia. They use it for the railway everywhere in Australia which means that eucalyptus is very hard and strong. I think this works well because this area—Komazawa—is a kind of rich-people-area. It's very popular with a lot of gorgeous buildings made of marble

or other stone materials. I wanted to fight against these houses with a low budget. When I looked at the material of eucalyptus I saw, of course, timber but at the same time it looks like brick or stone. It's very hard and heavy. It looks like wood but strong at the same time. I like to overlay different images in one building. But I wouldn't be able to start this way without the requirement from the client. So I don't have a favourite material. Instead, I like to find new ways.

RR_ You showed an image of your office with a lot of models and variations. Obviously you need all these models to figure out the design you are working on. And then in the lecture, you focused on your sections, which I believe are very important as well. So how do you approach a project? We already spoke about the part where you talk to the client, but then you have to do the design work in the office. How do you go about doing that? Do you start with a model or do you start working on sections and then the model? When does the material come in?

GH_ Hmm, I didn't think about it but now I notice why I always use a very simple plan. My plan is always simple, no?

RR_ Yes, it is. But it's good!

GH_ Of course, good … but it's not so special. I mean it's ok … [all laughing]

GH_ Maybe I try to make the plan as simple as possible because I always think about a type or typology, because I am looking for a new image of a type. At the same time, I can communicate with the client through this type as I told you at the beginning. The simplicity of a plan is easier to communicate to the client. A section is difficult to understand for the client but in the modern day they are used to reading a plan. This is my reason, but I hadn't noticed ... so, thank you! And the second aspect is the section. For me, this is the result of working in Tokyo. More or less, my projects are always on a small site so it's difficult to do something special in plan. It's usually very small and variations are limited. Sometimes a new plan is too unnatural. This is why I like the two-storey house ... I love it! Sometimes students ask me 'We know you like this typology, but what's your favourite typology?' I always answer: 'The two-storey house.' Because I lived in it when I was a child. My house was very cheap, small and old—a very normal Japanese house. There was a living room on the ground floor and the kitchen was connected to the small garden. I felt a kind of openness. On the second floor there was my bedroom. It was very hot in summer, super-hot! But when I opened the window, suddenly, good wind came in. So the upper floor is nearer to the sky and the ground floor is connected to the ground, of course. The two-storey house is the simplest way to create two different worlds in a small house. That's why I'm so fascinated by it and … hmm … what was your question?

[all laughing]

RR_ It was about the process of designing—from model to plan and section … You actually build a lot of models in your design process.

GH_ How I use models, let's see ... it's a boring answer, sorry, but I like stacking up small discoveries rather than: 'This is a good idea, this is very new! Toyo Ito would be fascinated by this idea!' I don't like that. I like to figure out the very small things: 'Yes, I think it's better than yesterday.' My internship student explained my way of design—it was very funny. She is Italian and she said, 'Go Hasegawa, your way of working is very nice. It's super different from European architects. European architects are something like this: they decide this and that … and finally they have a good building.' I know, it's not completely like that. 'Go Hasegawa,' she said, 'is a kind of spiral.' Every time in each project we do three models and

compare them to each other. The next day we choose one of them and the day after we choose three variations from it. I would say, 'Perhaps it's good.' or 'Hmm, it's better than yesterday. It was very bad but it's getting better.' or 'I didn't notice, but yes, of course, it's good.' or something like that. So our spiral is getting bigger and bigger and we stack lots of small discoveries. So we need a lot of models for our comparisons to find that special idea. This is my way of working. I don't hurry to decide [laughing].

SR_ But still, after you decide …

GH_ No, everybody decides and every element decides. Yes, maybe I mark a kind of direction but I never say, 'Let's do this!' I always say, 'Maybe this, but hmm … I don't know. What do you think? Yes, this is good but at the same time …' until the end. Even on the construction site I always try to worry about something. I like to worry. So I never decide ... of course, I do.

SR_[laughing] Eventually you need to …

GH_ Yes, but I like to change the idea that architects decide everything. It's not true, actually.

SR_ So how far do you feel the need to control the details of your architecture? Since we are talking about small- and medium-scale buildings where you get to the finest level of detailing, do you leave room for accidents? Do you

decide on the last detail? Do you choose the furnishing, for example?

GH_ No, as for the details, I cannot control everything. Sometimes I'm in Europe. In the beginning I tried to think about every detail but maybe we must change that. Now I try to think about specific details or to find a small detailing challenge in every project.

RR_I actually liked what you said in the lecture: 'I like to make a mistake.' This is a …

GH_ Strange expression!

RR_ Yes! It's tricky, but it's also very important. When you teach students, let's say in a design studio, you set up a brief and they start designing. And then suddenly you say,

'It's important to make a mistake.' What kind of mistake can a student make, which would be ok?

GH_ Hmm, I don't know. I don't know the features of a good mistake or a bad mistake. Every time the decision or judgement in the project is changing, this is an interesting point in architecture. No situation is the same. Every time the client, the people and the place are changing. Every time there are bad features and better features. This is a difficult thing and an interesting thing. But as a teacher, hmm … I am still young. Actually this is also a secret from Mendrisio: I don't like to teach because I cannot teach. But I like to think together with the students. I never give orders to the students. It's the same as in my office. I would say, 'this is perhaps better than this, but I follow you' or something like that. This is my way of teaching, but I don't think it's the way of a teacher. [all laughing] I think we should not teach but jointly plan a project.

RR_ It's difficult to teach architecture.

GH_ No, it's impossible to teach architecture!

SR_ Regarding your academic activity in Mendrisio, you mentioned on other occasions that you appreciate the special sense of time that European students have. But you are also disappointed by the fact that they …

GH_ How do you know this?

SR_ Because I have done my homework ...

GH_ Super dangerous! Rumours from Mendrisio!

SR_ Let me finish the quote!

[all laughing]

SR_ You continued by saying that you are sort of disappointed by the fact that they had lost their belief of changing the world through architecture, changing realities through architecture. Can you image yourself practicing architecture in Europe? Do you think you could change something?

GH_ Yes, of course.

SR_ Like what?

GH_ Hmm, sometimes after a lecture young Erasmus students come and say, 'We are very impressed, Go Hasegawa, thank you! But we cannot do projects like that because we have this regulation or these customs. People are conservative ...' It's boring to say such a thing. Of course, I know there are differences but after a lecture or a discussion on architecture we should start looking for a similarity or a common issue. We should try to find out the common issue in architecture. When I give a lecture in a historical building, I try to figure out the possibilities, similarities or common issues that I can use as well. This is

one of the most important things in architecture. But some of the Europeans have this tendency to say, 'We cannot do it like this …'—it's boring, don't you think? It's not good to say such a thing in public, but at the same time, it's difficult to tell them that. So I decided to make a building in Europe. If I can do a good project here, I can say, 'Yes, you can do it like this!' Of course, this is not the main purpose for designing a building in Europe. It's a pity that sometimes there are very conservative people. Compared to Japan, I think European architects and students believe too much that architecture is this or should be that. I don't know if I can change it but hopefully I can shift this strict image of architecture a little bit.

RR_ Is there a specific theme or topic you think architects should tackle? Is there something architects should really put forward and say, this is an issue we have to address?

GH_ What contemporary architecture should do?

RR_ Yes.

GH_ Maybe it's connected to the last question, why I want to do a project in Europe. I like Europe, I like the history of Europe. And also I am jealous of this history. Sometimes I am surprised when talking to my students. They are very young and they don't know much about architecture, but they have this long sense of history because they live in Rome or some other old city. They have such a long sense of time and history and at the same time they try to think

about contemporary architecture. In Japan, we also have customs, traditions and a sense of history, but I must say, contemporary Japanese architecture has no conscious connection to traditional architecture. We never mention the differences but in a lecture in Europe, architects would sometimes mention a very old building by Alberti. So what architects could address is how can we open architecture to the past and the future at the same time? I would like to connect the history of architecture with the possibility of architecture. I don't know how yet, but I would like to make it possible. I think this is an important thing in the 21st century.

RR_ If you follow up the exhibitions and shows Japanese architects have been involved in during the last two years— the Venice Biennale or right now in Berlin—there is a specific focus on the tsunami-stricken areas. These exhibitions often show the voluntary work of Japanese architects. The theme is kind of 'back to the roots' or back to the basic elements of what architecture should be able to offer society. How would you see your own position regarding the communication of the basic elements of architecture in this respect?

GH_ It's a pity, I have only one project for the tsunami area but I think it was a very nice project. I did an exhibition in the Toto Gallery—maybe the most important architecture gallery in Tokyo. The sponsor is Toto, the toilet company. It's a very big company, so they always give us a good budget for the exhibition. But I had to

consider the earthquake and the tsunami, I couldn't show a 'Go Hasegawa Style' exhibition in such a terrible situation in Japan. So, using the budget of the exhibition, I designed a very small building for the tsunami area. During the exhibition period, I had to construct the building in the exhibition space and afterwards we moved it to the tsunami area. It now functions as a bell tower. It was actually nice for me to discuss the purpose of the building. Usually, when I'm commissioned by clients, they have already decided on a small house or an apartment. An architect is always invited after the decision on the purpose of architecture is made. He then has to find out how to make the building. Of course, it's interesting. It's a good job but only once, with this project, I had the chance to discuss what was really needed. It was nice to start from the actual purpose of architecture.

RR_I think this was a great closing remark for our talk. Go, thank you very much for being our guest this evening.
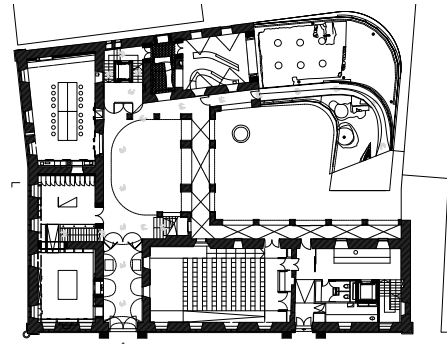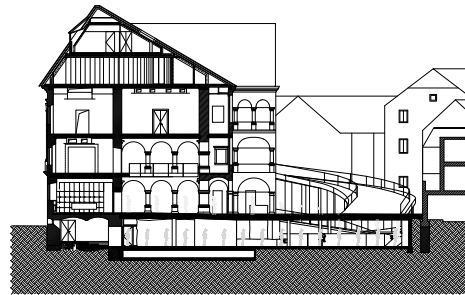
ŠPELA VIDEČNIK

NOVEMBER 11, 2013

< When we started the project, we sketched how
the archaeology is going to be intervened inside the
project. We wanted to form a courtyard and a ramp
and to show the archaeology in situ. That means that
each level finds its own height. ... The museum shows
this idea of the path that rises from below up to the old
palace which we also renovated. >

THE CITY MUSEUM EXTENSION | Ljubljana, Slovenia | 2004
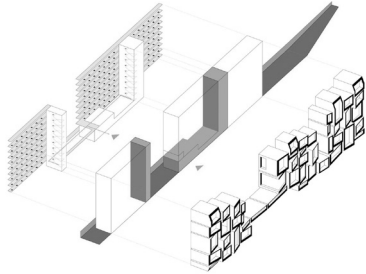
<Actually, it is a Farewell Chapel but in a way, it is also a very simple concrete wall which supports the hill.>
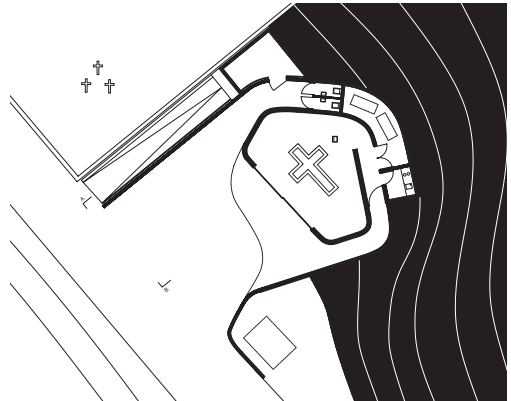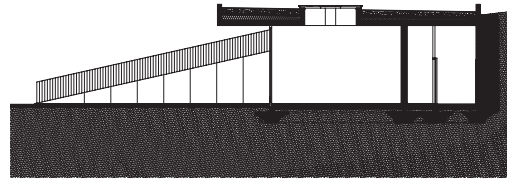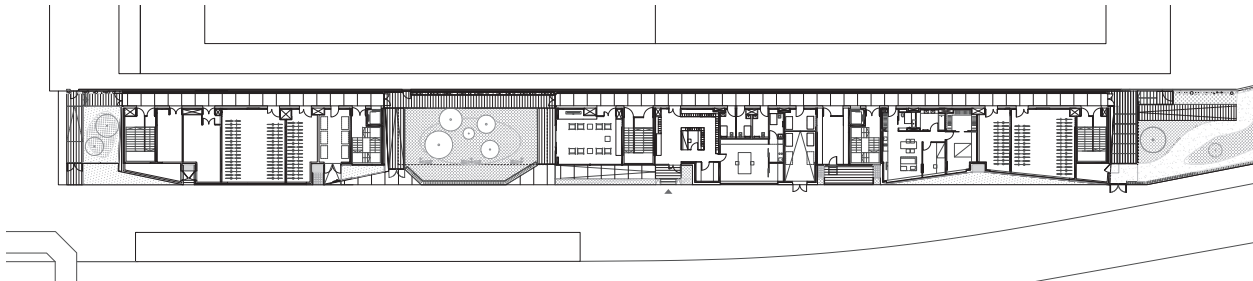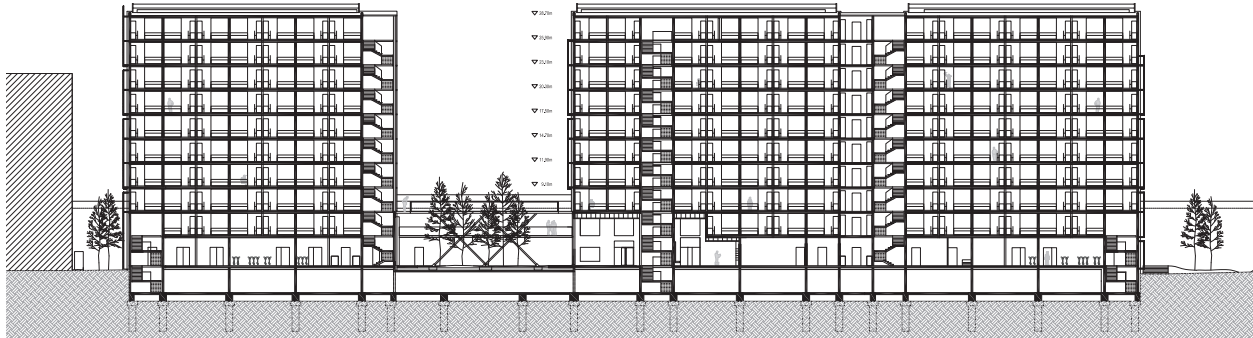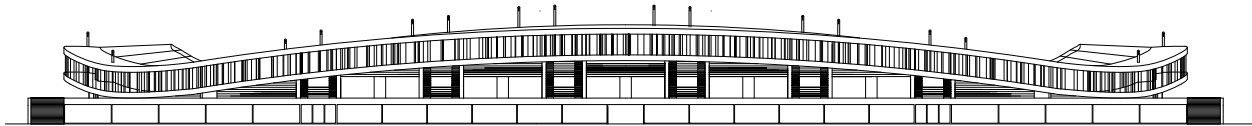
FAREWELL CHAPEL | Krasnja, Slovenia | 2009

< Our field of expression or research were the loggias. We wanted to give each student an intimate, external space towards the East that is their own. On the opposite side, there are balconies that function as entrances to the apartments and are shared by everyone. >

BASKET APARTMENTS | Paris, France | 2013

<This project also shows the idea of rising ... It ascends where the visibility to the site is best, and then descends where the visibility is bad.The building is symmetrical, but it never appears symmetrical because of the landscape.>
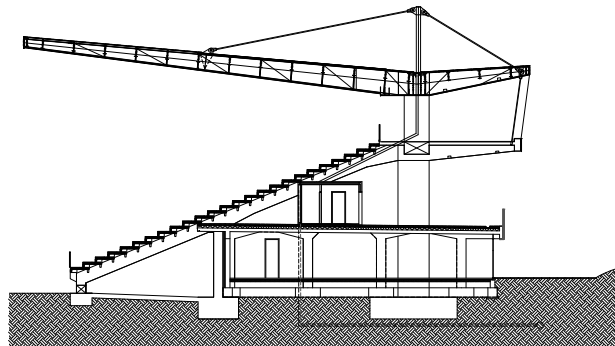
FOOTBALL STADIUM MB | Maribor, Slovenia | 2008

ŠV_Špela Videčnik
RR_ Roger Riewe
ŽK_Žiga Kreševič

RR_Špela, thank you for this wonderful lecture. It's incredible how much you can show in 45 minutes and how exciting this can be. You set up three chapters, always in reference to a specific context. You were educated in Ljubljana but you also spent two years at the AA in London. How far has the additional experience in London influenced your work?

ŠV_ Well, I think what influenced me the most is actually leaving our small country and not so much the school itself. My partner Rok and I, we both finished our studies in Ljubljana. The first three years after that we were super successful. We either won or got second prizes in all major competitions. It just seemed so simple! Then we were challenged by the idea to leave. If you live in a small

country like Slovenia, you have to step outside at a certain moment. Well, I got funding and we said, 'OK, we must go together. If we don't go now, we never will!' So in a way, we put OFIS on standby and went to London. We studied in a program called Design Research Laboratory, which was completely based on computers. Actually Patrick Schumacher, the partner of Zaha Hadid, was our mentor. We didn't get along so well—we do now—because we didn't really fit into the program. It had to be the same for everyone: uniform. But we got along well with Zaha Hadid and we kept in touch ever since. She came to the juries very often and she was important for us because she was the most down to earth. This was in 1999 and 2000, 3D software wasn't as broadly used as it is today. And from all those guys at the school who were completely

into computers, Zaha was the most down to earth with simple questions and always very straight in the juries. So basically, we worked there but we kept a distance. In a way, we always keep a distance, even in Ljubljana. We learned about their way to think and do architecture but we were trying to find our own approach. Rok spent half his time in London and the other half in Ljubljana because our projects were ongoing. The city museum was going slowly, so was the Maribor stadium. When we both returned to Ljubljana, it was quite a shock: for several years we didn't win any competition! Nevertheless, it was an incredible experience to go. I believe it was really important for us.

RR_ There are three different lines of work in your portfolio: the organic context, the AA context, and the last chapter you showed, the regional context, the one you were educated in in Ljubljana. Do you keep these lines as strictly separated as they appeared in your lecture?

ŠV_ No, not at all! Each project, whether it's cubic, organic, smooth or regional, derives from the same starting point. We always start our work in a very traditional way. The site—the context of the site—is very important in all our projects and competitions. We research what is specific about the site and in terms of the program, we look at how to connect different functions so that they work most efficiently. Then we put that into 3D and we hope that something interesting is going to come out of it—boring start … [laughing] This is the way we do every project: from a very small chapel to big competitions.

RR_ Now Žiga will enter the discussion. Coming also from Slovenia, from a similar background, we can look forward to another critical point of view.

ŽK_Špela, looking at your portfolio, I noticed that you managed to keep all your projects really site-specific yet they also remain recognizable. When I see a building designed by your office, the name OFIS comes to mind. Would you say that you developed a characteristic architectural language that manages to address the site and your style at the same time?

ŠV_I don't know. I would prefer if you find the answer. [laughing] Like I explained, of course we try to be different. We seek something different, especially these days where everything is so uniform. How we achieve that, how our projects may be different from others, that's difficult for me to say.

ŽK_ As you mentioned, you founded your office at a very comfortable time for architects in Slovenia.

ŠV_ Yes.

ŽK_ Now things have changed and some of your latest projects are abroad. You've built student housing in Paris and you are currently working on a stadium in Belarus. Did you think that the Slovenian market was too small for your office or is it a survival strategy trying to find work outside of Slovenia?

ŠV_Yes, we were very lucky! I really have bad sympathy for all young architects. It's not a great time to start an office in Europe right now. When we started, there were so many competitions going on. It was a special time in our country with the collapse of the political system, the war, the independence. There were no big private offices. So as a student, you could do a competition just from scratch. For example, you could enter and didn't need to prove what kind of insurance you have. You didn't need to present bank guarantees which sometimes today in big projects you must do. So we were young students full of energy, at the end of our studies. We just entered all competitions and we were lucky to win some of them. Today, it's not so easy. For my colleagues who studied in London, it's more difficult to be a young architect and start building in London. We were luckier than them! But now times have changed completely. In the last two years in Slovenia, the crisis is huge. I believe it's like Spain or Italy—or it's even worse. We don't see any improvement for the next five years, so we are putting a lot of energy into working abroad. We say, 'Ok, this is a new challenge for us.' We try to see it this way and lately, we do many competitions abroad. Luckily we won this one in Paris. It was actually the first one we did in France and we won it. [laughing] But it's not easy at all. The situation in France is also difficult. You enter competitions and maybe you get selected out of 300 offices. It's a tough job and you need a lot of luck. The Belarus stadium I showed you before was a nice experience in that sense. A football team from Belarus played in Maribor and they liked the stadium we built there. They said, 'Even if it's a small stadium, it has very good acoustics.' Which is true. In a way, we were lucky. If you build an arena, it gives the place good acoustics and it forms a space that—even with only 12.000 seats— appears bigger than it actually is. I go very often and talk to football players who play there: they enjoy it. So we were lucky to get the commission in Belarus because this team played in Maribor. But in Belarus it's a completely different situation. The environment was difficult for us: they think differently, they don't respect architects very much. To do a building is an extremely tough job. But still, it's a challenge.

RR_Were acoustics an issue when you worked on the design for the Maribor stadium?

ŠV_No, it was the visibility from the seats. We calculated how much you pay for a ticket and which tickets are the most expensive. We wanted to get the maximum of seats. This was our issue and luckily the acoustics worked out as well. [Laughing]

RR_That's good! [laughing] Coming to the methodology of your design work in the office, it always seems to be a direct reaction to a certain context that you are working in. But how does the design process really come along in the office? Do you work with models? Is there a particular way of thinking or discussing the design? How does a project evolve?

ŠV_ It's a combination. Like most offices, we work in a team. We don't sketch something and then give it to our staff to draw. We really start as a team. For eight or ten years, we have taken a lot of young architects or students coming to Slovenia through Erasmus programs. They are mostly involved in our competitions and stay for six or nine months, depending on the contract. In competitions, we sometimes develop three or four different proposals at the beginning. Then we focus on one or two and make the final selection at the end. We start working in 3D early in the process. We work with SketchUp—the free software—it's just one of the best tools for us because you can do things very quickly. It's so simple! Lately we develop our projects in parallel, with SketchUp and physical models. So, first we look at the site, then it's the program—we make a catalogue in a very traditional way in 2D, then we connect the spaces, give them heights to create cubes

and groups and then we put it in 3D. Then we might start on four or five computers simultaneously with different variations or proposals. We just play around and when we see that something might happen, we go for it. [Laughing]

ŽK_ Your portfolio is very diverse, from small-scale apartment renovations, to single-family houses, to bigger urban scale projects and football stadiums. How do you manage the different scales in order to get those big projects done in time and within budget, but at the same time, to keep the tactile architectural element that I find very interesting in your smaller projects?

ŠV_ We are interested in all sorts of programs. As architects we don't say no to strange projects that might appear on the table. The more diverse the program or context, the more challenging and interesting it is for us. With regards to scale, we were even working with theatre and scenography when we were students. Jumping from this really small scale to big competitions—which we already did back then—it was always the same for us. It's the same approach, the same story, just a different scale. In each project we also try to work on the construction details but unfortunately, a lot of our clients were construction companies. I think they are the most difficult to work with. They are constructing the buildings but at the same time, they are our clients. They always try to save money on details. They tend to change materials or elements during construction. And you have no one to call and say, 'Oh, but look, in the plan it was like that. In

the specification it was this material.' They can change a lot and in many of our housing projects we struggled because the client didn't construct the building to each detail we drew.

RR_ In your second chapter—the geometrical context— you showed a few housing projects and you used the words, 'We unfortunately did a few housing projects.' That sounded a bit negative but actually I was intrigued knowing that housing is a really hard thing to do. You showed these add-on balcony variations in the facade to create a sense of differentiation, something that makes the individual unit special. And with the student housing project in Paris, the geometrical context is not the add-on in the facade, but rather the building itself: the stacked boxes. There seems to be a basic shift in your design work. Could you have done that in your Slovenian projects as well? Not only working with the facade but rather modifying the whole building, or was it too expensive?

ŠV_ No, what I meant with unfortunately—maybe I didn't express myself well enough—unfortunately, in almost all of our housing projects in Slovenia, the urbanism was very predefined. I believe in Austria it's similar. In Slovenia, if urbanistic rules for certain areas are set, it takes years to change them. It's a really long and complicated process because of all these institutions and regulations: what needs to be changed, how can it be changed, etc. No client ever wants to change urbanistic rules even if they are not so profitable. So basically, in our housing projects, the

height, the number of floors, the length, the width … it was always exactly defined. There was not much we could do, except to work inside the predefined volume. This is what I meant by unfortunately and that's why we tried to find this expression in the layer between the building and the balconies. In Slovenia, sometimes this layer is not defined in the urbanistic rules. Whether you can do balconies or not is open to interpretation. We did that. And since it was not written that you cannot go beyond the area of the footprint, we got the construction permit. This way we also gained more square meters and maybe that's why we won the competition. Not because of our architecture, unfortunately. [laughing] Paris, of course, is a very special city with very tall buildings. Yet, I'm always surprised by the boulevards. When you stand on the boulevards in Paris, you don't have the feeling that the buildings are as high as they really are. In reality, there are about 11 or 12 stories! In some projects, we played a lot with these scales: either connecting two floors or separating them, just to break the scale of these 12 repetitive levels. The regulations in Paris mostly just define the height of the building in relation to the width of the street, and at some point it needs to be cut on top. That's the rule you must obey. They don't determine the exact height, width and length like in Slovenia. So that's why we had more space to play with in Paris.

ŽK_ Do you think you've developed all the possible variations for the add-on balconies of the housing project?

ŠV_ A few years ago, we had so much work and my partner said, 'If we get another housing like this, we will not do it anymore! I don't know what else to do with this!' [laughing] Now he wouldn't say that anymore, but back then we were doing like three big buildings every year. I don't know, maybe we could still find some more balcony shapes … [laughing]

RR_ Are competitions the main source for you to find your work or are there other possibilities as well?

ŠV_ Yes, unfortunately. Even with private houses, it's competitions. A client invites three, four or five offices. We do many competitions and we lose many. But sometimes we win. It takes a lot of hard work and long nights.

RR_ Do you use these competitions to develop your own way of thinking in the office?

ŠV_ Yes, of course! A competition keeps your brain occupied. It keeps you in touch with what others are doing. You start and then at the end of each competition when you are so tired, you didn't sleep for the last two nights and everything goes wrong, you say, 'Oh my God, after all these years, I'm still doing the same as when I was a student!' But it's actually what keeps you going and it generates ideas, even if you lose. Of course, you are very disappointed for a few days but sometimes, in good projects, we keep those ideas and we use them somewhere else.

ŽK_ So you can also recycle ideas?

ŠV_ Yes!

RR_ For the Space Wheel project you teamed up with three other Slovenian offices. How did that work?

ŠV_ It actually worked very well! We are friends. I mean we are also competitors but we know each other because Slovenia is so small.

RR_ And you are still friends today? [laughing]

ŠV_ Yes, for sure! Oh, I didn't mention them. It was Sadar+Vuga, Bevk+Perovič, Dekleva+Gregorič and us. Boštjan Vuga was here at your talk a few years ago, right? And you might know Bevk+Perovič from the New National

Library in Ljubljana, which they won. They are very successful now. We are from a similar generation. On the other hand, we are also very different and this is exactly how we split the work. For example, Sadar+Vuga and us, we did more in the first part of the project—the concept. And we got the construction permit. Bevk+Perovič are very good with details, so they did the detailing part of the project, while Dekleva+Gregorič went to the construction site very often. This is the way we split the work, but of course we all knew what was going on. We met at least once a week—depending on the dynamics—and exchanged all the info.

RR_ So Bevk+Perovič and Dekleva+Gregorič were never part of the design team?

ŠV_ No, they were! But, let's say, the first part of the project was in our computers although we were all involved in the workshops. We met and put ideas on the table: simple sketches, someone cut something out of cardboard and we agreed on the idea. So, we did the concept together in these workshops, but it was drawn in our office. Then we would meet again the week after to further develop the idea. It was the same with the details: they were drawn on their computers, but we printed them out and sat down to talk about it. All of us—it worked very well. Ok, I mean, the project was a financial loss, because we split a very low fee into four parts. But it was fun! I would do another one like that. I think all of us would. [laughing]

ŽK_ You've been a visiting professor at the Harvard School of Design for a few years now. Which courses are you teaching there?

ŠV_ Well I'm teaching the 4th semester, so the students are actually quite young. It's the first time they learn about urbanism, a mixture of architecture and urbanism. This jump in scale is actually quite challenging for them. In three and a half months they have to develop their own project. We are 6 professors with 12 students each. We share the same site and the same overall brief, but we do it all in our own way. It's challenging because students in Harvard are very demanding—they pay a lot of money for the school. [laughing] They expect a lot. But they also work a lot and they are constantly challenging us. It's a good training for us to be there!

RR_ You've got quite a lot of experience in teaching, also in Europe. Is there a difference in how students work in America compared to the ones in Europe? Or aren't there any American students at GSD?

ŠV_ Yes, it's different. I mean the whole way the practice is organized in America is quite different from Europe and also students work quite differently. The GSD is international: it has a lot of American students but also people who come from either Asia or Europe. They already did one part of the course in America, so they are 'americanized' or educated in an 'American way.' This means they are presenting really well. I was always very

impressed: even if the project wasn't any good in the last night before the critics, they just made a big deal out of it in the presentation! [laughing] The process is to do presentations every two weeks and there are maybe 20 to 30 presentations at the same time in different corners of the school or in different rooms. The school is so alive. Everyone is presenting and slowly the projects evolve in this process. They pin up their sketches and they make up their concept during the presentation. In a way, the projects change and develop constantly. The approach in Europe is a bit different. Many students have a previous education in history, art, physics, ... They are quite mature when they start architecture. For example, I had one student who was really into literature. He questioned the concept a lot. Students in Europe question a lot, all the time. It's a different way to develop projects.

ŽK_ Do you think there is a lack of presentational techniques in Europe?

ŠV_ Well, in my school in Ljubljana we definitely lacked that! Presentations are important for every architect. In the end, this is how competitions are won and jobs are secured. On the other hand, the initial research is maybe not as deep in America. It has pluses and minuses. Teamwork is developed much more in America. If I compare it to my university, we only learned how to work in a bigger team when starting the office. We didn't learn it at university. It was mainly individual work or maybe projects with 2 people. In America, it's really about teamwork: four,

five, six people start from scratch. It's hard for a professor to say who developed which idea, who is a better student, who gets a better grade. Everything is team-made.

RR_ You've got one office in Ljubljana, another one in Paris and you teach in Boston. How do you keep yourself organized?

ŠV_ Well, Skype! [laughing] It's computers and, of course, I have a partner. We met at university and have worked together since ... 1991! Since 1991 we have been together almost every day, unless one of us is away from the office. Someone is always there—if I'm not in the office, he is there … A good partner is actually a very nice thing that can happen to you in your life! [laughing] I think it works because we are two.

ŽK_ Is there a separation between your private and your office life, or is architecture constantly involved in it?

ŠV_ No, it is. But I have three kids so I'm a little different from other women architects. In Harvard, I was very different, I didn't even dare to say it. [laughing] They would probably think, 'Three kids! What is this, a hippie woman?' [laughing] I mean, no one has kids in America. It's hard to have even one. But yes, my kids are part of the office. When you have a child, after two weeks, you are already back in the office and you bring it with you. Actually for each building we did I ask myself, 'Which child did I have then?' I always went to construction sites

with the pushchair. So each one or two buildings bring back memories of a baby sleeping somewhere during my meetings. [laughing] It works very well and I don't think that my kids hate the office. They like to come by but I don't know what it will be like when they are teenagers. I also take them to America!

RR_ Well, actually the best playground for kids is the construction site, isn't it?

ŠV_ Exactly! [laughing]

RR_ You said you do a lot of skyping, there always has to be a method of communication in order to make decisions, even just on an informal level by talking about the projects. But what about the crucial decisions like materiality or color? What defines the choice of a specific material for a project?

ŠV_ Well, it depends a lot on the budget. Like I explained, many of our projects had a contract saying that we have to stay within a certain budget. And then there are questions of how light a material is, or it has to be fireproof. In the alpine environment, we tried to use wood. In another context we tried to use some material that still fitted into the budget yet gave the expression we wanted. We try to be really diverse. Lately, we do many competitions in France. We'll have to wait and see if we win the one where we used stone. In Belarus, it was actually the 3D shape of the building that decided the material. It was difficult to find

one that would fit. But we found these silver shingles—a kind of fish skin that adapts to the 3D form. The whole thing is made of shingle. We seek the material within the budget that allows us to achieve what we set as our goal.

RR_ Do you have a specific material you like most?

ŠV_ No. For example about the colorful facade claddings, at one point we said, 'Oh my God, we don't want any more buildings with this material.' We don't necessarily like it, it just often fitted into the budget. And it's also fireproof and all this stuff … [laughing]

RR_ We all know that social housing is supposed to be a low-budget project, but looking at your housing projects, they somehow escape the appearance of a low-budget project!

ŠV_ Well yes, but they are! [laughing] That's why we got the commissions. We won those competitions because we managed to design plans that are efficient. We even gained extra square meters for the client, but remained within the given budget. Of course, it's a tough job, but it works.

RR_ But isn't it also a challenge to work on a low-budget project in comparison to when there is a lot of money available?

ŠV_ Yes, of course it is! Now we are doing a competition in France. We'll deliver it in two weeks, but already in the first weeks, we started the calculations in parallel. We calculate how much the building will cost so that we can change things during the design process. For example, how many windows we will have. What we can change, we change in order to remain within the budget. We always work simultaneously—in a competition, after the first two weeks of conception, we already start calculating the costs.

RR_ That sounds very Dutch.

ŠV_ Yeah, could be. [laughing]

RR_ Your portfolio is very broad. It ranges from the small chapel to housing projects with 650 apartments, the stadium and so on. You have built a lot. Is there a project or program that you haven't done yet and that you would really like to do?

ŠV_ Oh, yes! A library, a kindergarten or a school— because I like kids, a swimming pool … I still have many things I would like to do! [laughing] My partner really wants to do a ski-jump, because he was a ski-jumper. We did several competitions, but we never won … so there are many ideas! [laughing]

RR_ So there are a lot of different projects we can expect from OFIS in the future?

ŠV_ I hope so, we'll see. I hope we get lucky with the 'going international'. We'll do our best.

RR_ We are looking forward to that. Špela, thanks a lot for this wonderful evening. I think we got a good insight into the great quality of your projects. Thank you very much!
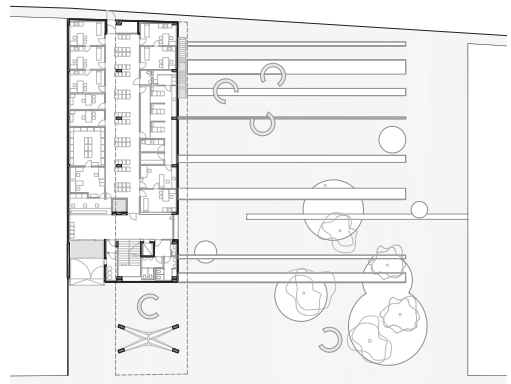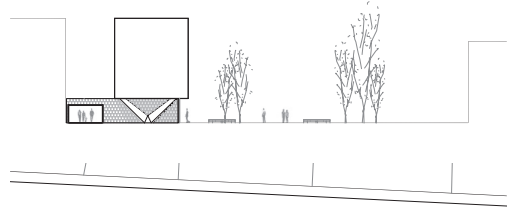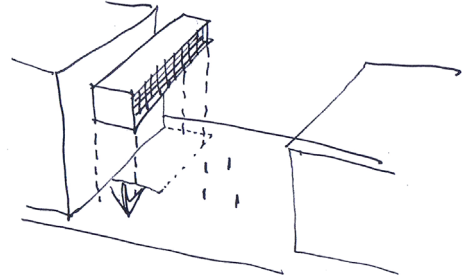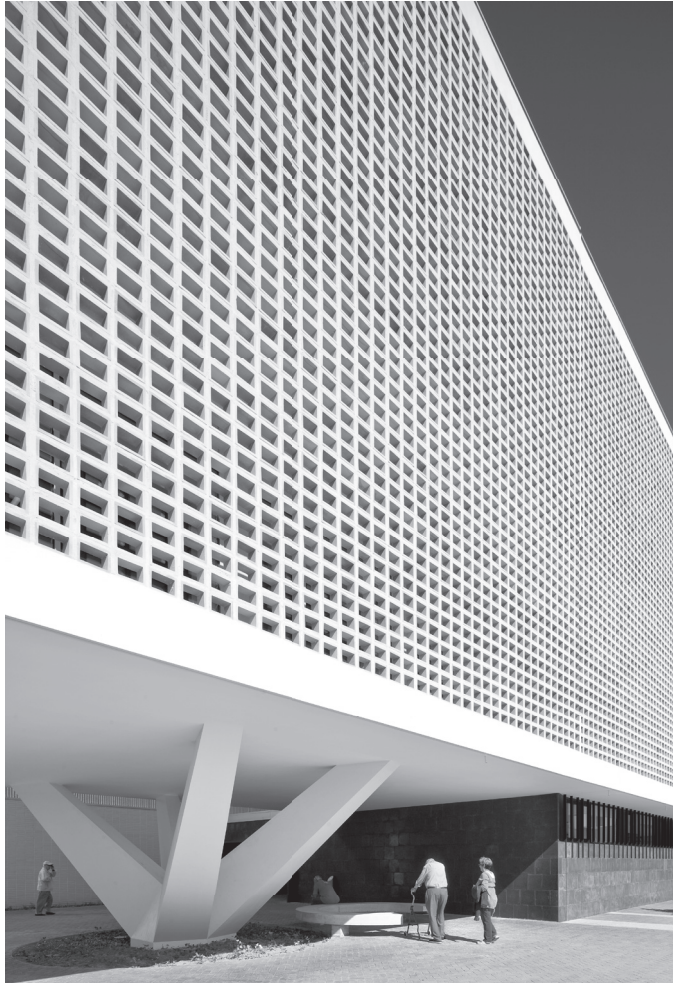
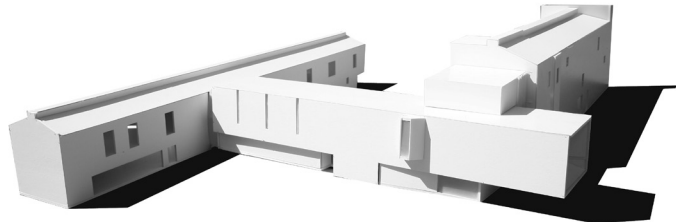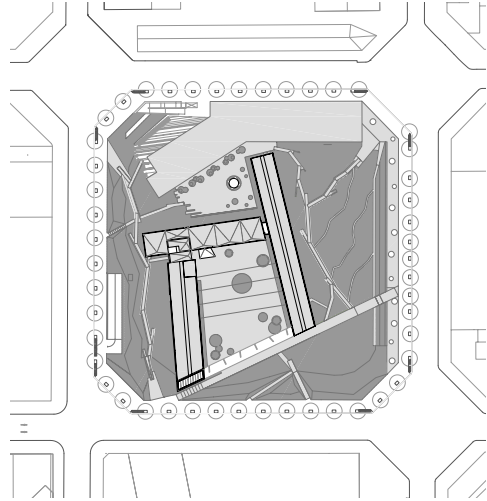JORDI BADIA

NOVEMBER 18, 2013

LECTURE
PROGRÉS-RAVAL HEALTH CENTER | Badalona, Spain | 2010

<There was a big factory and the city council decided to demolish the old building in favor of a public space, a new square. ... The strategy is to hide the program behind this abstract façade which is able to assist the new public space. The big pillar is filtering the entrance of the building. And we designed the square with some materials that are related to the building.**>**

< These two existing naves didn't have any architectural value. But this is a thing that is changing right now: people are demanding to keep buildings, not because of their beauty, but because they have been there for ages. **>**
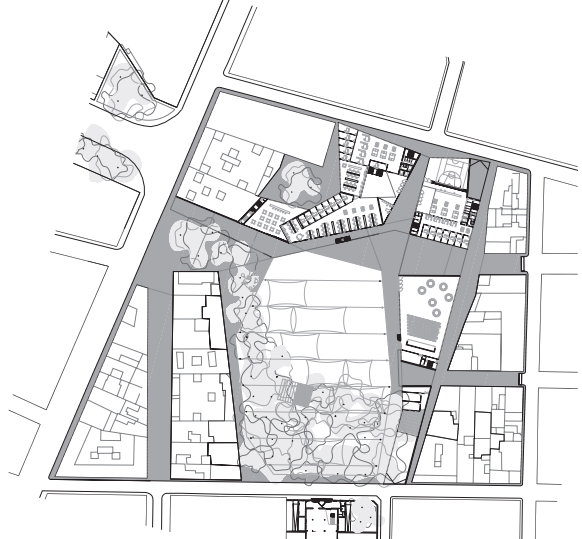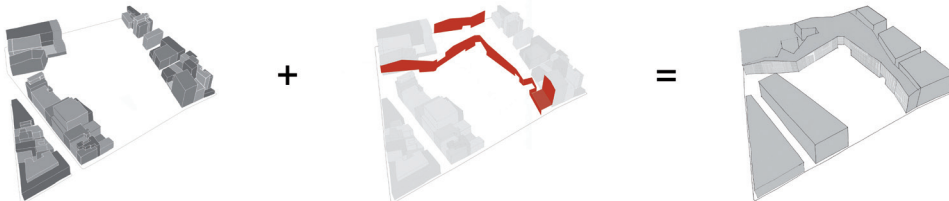
CAN FRAMIS MUSEUM | Barcelona, Spain | 2009

<We were worried about these buildings and didn't know how to work with them. Their value was that they are really old so we decided to show their wrinkles and real texture.**>**

<The site was a football field and now it is a kind of parking lot. We decided to work with the strategy of shaping the public space. ... This is the line of the new façade. The façade belongs to the public space, not the building.**>**

CITIZENSHIP BUILDING | Palamos, Spain | 2010

< The building and its shape makes no sense without the surroundings. It tries to adapt to the rest of the volumes that are there. ... And the facades: they don't want to be modern, they only want to adapt to the rural morphology of the place. **>**
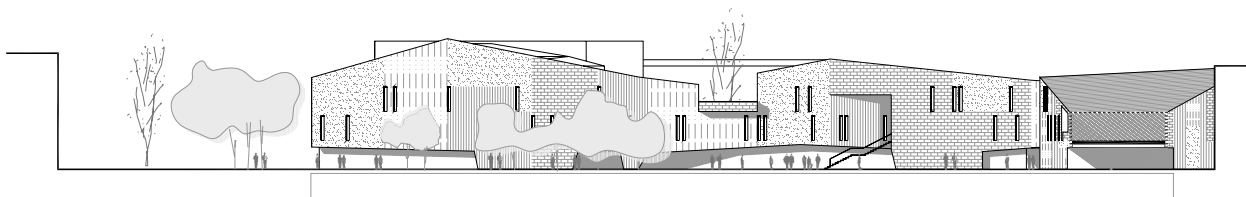
<It is a simple strategy: to position a bar facing the street and an adjacent low volume [West] shaping two courtyards - the courtyard for the kindergarten and the sports courtyard. We redefine the line between the two cities.>
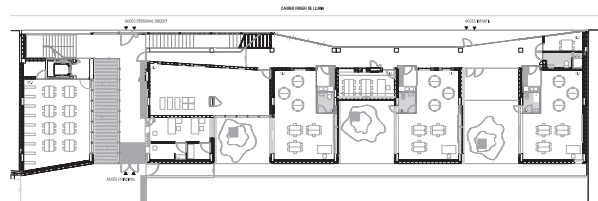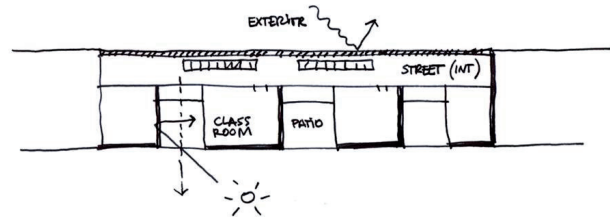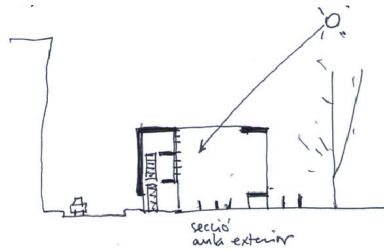
FERRERI GUARDIA SCHOOL | Granollers, Spain | 2007

JB_Jordi Badia
RR_Roger Riewe
MV_Marisol Vidal

RR_ Jordi Badia, thank you for this interesting lecture. It was very modest, yet sophisticated at the same time. You started off by saying, 'I don't want to be modern.' What does it really mean? You don't want to be a modern architect? You don't go for modern architecture? Is Modernism an issue?

JB_ Well, maybe it's difficult to explain. I think, nowadays, nobody needs to show their modernity. In the past, architects needed to show that they were modern in contrast to classical architecture. But not anymore. And it seems that the new generation of architects in Catalonia thinks that way. They are not interested in being modern. They are not interested in building shiny, brilliant buildings. This new way to see architecture reveals an interest in

working with a continuity of history and traditions, with the city and the people. I agree with this new generation. And for that reason, I thought that this kind of manifesto would be a good beginning for the lecture. I want to say that we need to play as a team. We are building cities—not architecture. What is collective is more important than what is private. And I think that we, as architects, are not only working to accomplish the needs of our clients, but we also try to build something that is more important— the city. Trying to build the city is more important than constructing a building. We need to understand that we are only one grain of sand in the process. There are some rules we need to comply with because if we don't, we will break the city. The city has been constructed by many people—not only architects—over a long period of time. It

is not fair to disrupt this process only because we want to show that we are modern.

RR_A lot of your projects are based in and around Barcelona. Rem Koolhaas once said that the European city is dead … except for Barcelona, which can survive, because it has the potential to reinvent itself again and again. Is that a position you try to explore with your contemporary approach of fitting your projects into the city?

JB_I don't know. Barcelona is always an example of urban planning, but I think a lot of architects in our city use architecture as an excuse to build the city. We are not the only city in Europe which is working in that direction. I feel that there is something which all these cities have in common. For example, yesterday, I was walking through your city of Graz. There are a lot of values in public space, in the streets and squares. But in some places, these values are broken because there is an architect—who may or may not be a good architect—who designed a building which completely breaks with the rules of the city. We are simply trying not to do that, not to create a lot of noise.

MV_ You said, when you plan a building within the city, you try to be the last piece of the jigsaw that fits into the context. At the same time, your projects seem to hover over the site. In many cases, the ground floor is set back or has a different materiality than the upper part of the

building so that it doesn't touch the ground. What are the thoughts behind that?

JB_ It's true. I think our buildings try to establish a continuity with the rules of the city, but they also try to be independent objects that you can add as the last piece of the jigsaw. Take for example the garden of the Can Framis Museum: it tries to be an old garden. It's funny, when I show the building, a lot of people say, 'And this garden was there for ages?' No, it's new. You have seen the images of the building without the garden. But I show it within the limits of the garden because you can see that the surface of the greenery is introduced with a kind of void, a shadow line. So, when I'm talking about the continuity of the city, I'm talking about this old garden and I show that it's a trick.

RR_ The design strategy you showed here was very clear: first creating the void—the site or the public realm—then setting up the facade as a kind of three-dimensional boundary, and then defining the structure and the internal program. This interface between the void, the public realm and the non-public realm is especially interesting. There is an emphasis on shaping the void on the one hand and hiding what's behind it on the other.

JB_I think the facades of buildings belong to the public space, not the buildings. They define cities. If you consider that it's more important to design a street or a square than to design the individual building, then you will understand

that this facade belongs to the public space. I prefer that a facade is not related to the use of a building because the truth is, the use of the building will change for sure. The majority of buildings—at least the ones that we have built—have changed their use. I think this is not so important. For me, I imagine these buildings to last for centuries and then to belong to the city: the same building with different uses.

MV_ When you plan a building and its facade—or as you said, its limit to the public realm—materiality seems very important. At what time does material come into play in the design process?

JB_ At the first drawing! For me, I cannot draw a line without knowing which material will build this line. When we analyze a place and try to understand the order of this place, we are not only talking about the geometry. We are talking about people and materials. In that moment, we figure out which material will build our building. In the office, we always say that we as architects must not decide materials and colors. We are only trying to discover which material or which color suits the place.

MV_ When you talk about the materials in your projects, you often use the word texture.

JB_ I think this is related to comfort. For example, this space we are in right now, is very comfortable, in my opinion, because it has a lot of textures, a lot of different layers, a lot of shadows. I think it was Jørn Utzon who said that the comfort of a place is directly related to the number of joints of the walls. It's true! When you are in a white space without joints, without textures—you feel uncomfortable. And here, we feel good. We try to do the same with the city: if the public space is a space for living and for people, we try to give texture to this space.

RR_ Referring to your interior spaces, you can't really call them private because I think they are thought in a public way. As a design process, or as a methodology, this is very interesting. You create the void, you keep it as a void and then you let the public realm take possession of it. Usually architects would say, 'there is a void so I can build something there, because it's empty.' But a void is never empty. It's always full of something and it's up to us to find out what this is. As a next step, you introduce your program behind this interface of the void. For example, you showed the plans of the former stables for the military and the kindergarten, which are very rich. But also other plans that you developed have these abstract connotations: representations of the public realm inside the private house. Is this a strategy of yours, to say 'there's nothing like private' or 'nothing like non-public'?

JB_ No, I think there are a lot of places that will be private but maybe they are less important to me. And one thing is crucial: not to finish the project, to understand that the task of an architect is to get to a certain point. Then people will come and continue designing the place and

arrange it for their lives. So we stop the project in order to allow the users to finish it. This is important for me because if we don't allow this to happen, the space will not be comfortable for them. They need to adapt the place to their needs. For that reason, you can see that the majority of the images of my buildings are full of people. A space makes sense when it is used. It is not only an aesthetic thing—it's more than that. We are trying to make architecture not only with the help of aesthetics but also with economic and social charcateristics.

MV_ What does the everyday life in your office look like? I suppose you work in teams because you are always talking about 'we.' How do you develop a project? Is there a kind of recurring Leitmotiv? Do you have certain architectural topics or concepts for each project? Can you describe the process of how it develops from the first concept to the stage when people can finish it individually?

JB_I think we are like a lot of practices. We work in different teams and each team tries to develop a project in all its phases. So if we are doing a competition, the team that wins the competition will continue working on the same project and later on the construction site. It's like many small offices in a big office. I try to work in all the phases of the project, but of course I work more in the first phases, in the competitions. I try to work without any particular idea. I always say the same to my students, 'Please, don't have ideas!' Usually bad architects have a lot of good ideas. I try to simply understand the place, to

work as a detective and to discover the hidden order of this place. I design buildings without any previous idea or style.

RR_ So obviously the first site visit is important when starting a project …

JB_ Not really.

RR_ Not really?

JB_ No, I know that's strange. It's bizarre but I don't want to visit the place before I draw something. It's difficult to explain but if you visit the place you are not able to see a lot of things that are in the blueprint. I prefer to work with images and blueprints first in order to see the lines, and the geometry of the site. Then I build a first project in my mind. Once I have this project in my mind, I visit the place and I can see that what I have in my mind is not the reality. So I start comparing. If I have a project in my mind, I am able to see the real scale of the place; if not, it's very difficult to understand. This is the truth.

RR_ So, when you crosscheck your idea or your first sketches ...

JB_ The first idea is always a bad idea! It is necessary to think about the second idea.

RR_ And then when you create this void as a kind of stage for the public realm, you need to figure out how the public realm actually works. Isn't that different in Barcelona, Katowice or other cities?

JB_I don't think so. There are a lot of people in the streets of Barcelona, maybe not here or in Katowice, but I think the use of public space is the same in all the European cities. And we know what is important. For example, we need density for a public space, for a street, for a square. We know that if the street is narrow, if the square or the piazza is small, this will work better because of the density. We also know that if we have a lot of shops, restaurants and bars in one street, this street will be a good street. Barcelona has the Cerdá grid, as you know, and all the streets have the same width and the same facades. But they are all different because the use of the streets, the shops or the restaurants is different. People decide which is the best path because of the shops. This is quite interesting for me. We might have more activity in Barcelona, but it's the same here in Graz. In the center of your city, you have a lot of streets with the same morphology and the same facades, yet all of the streets are different. Some are good and some are bad. We, as architects, can influence the quality of public space.

MV_ You said that one of the jobs of an architect is to choose the right colors and the right materials. Yet, you showed a lot of white buildings …

JB_ Not to choose, to discover! That's different.

MV_ To discover, exactly! You showed a lot of white buildings but also buildings where the use of color was very distinct. How do you discover these colors? This is something we don't really learn nowadays, after Modernism and its white hegemony.

JB_ Well, in some places, we feel that white is the correct color. Some places require a strong building with a strong color—white is a strong color—in order to structure the place. So architects need to understand whether a place has a certain level of harmony and then simply to not break this harmony, or whether a place needs your building in order to achieve this level of harmony. So sometimes we use a white color and sometimes we only try to implement the texture or the color of the material that

will hide the building. I love these buildings where you look at an image and say, 'where is the building?' I think this is good for the city.

RR_ Yet, in more than fifty percent of your lecture, the images were in black and white. Why is that?

JB_ Good question. I think this is related to Barcelona. In Barcelona, the majority of architects try to only draw in black and white. Enric Miralles, for example, one of the best architects in Catalonia. Miralles used color in buildings and in some collages, but the blueprints, the floor plans, were only in black and white. I think it's easier for me to understand the form of a building without cheating myself. Color changes the reality of the geometry of blueprints so we usually don't use colors in our drawings.

MV_ Your drawings and floor plans reveal that there is a logic behind the program—how the program is injected into the building—and this logic is also related to the construction logic.

JB_ Yes, for me, it's related. We are not making drawings, we are making architecture. I haven't talked about the floor plans, but obviously there is a strategy in these plans. It's related to the way we will build the building. It's related to the techniques and to the materials.

MV_I think this logic becomes very clear. But again, your buildings are also quite emotional in some way … they are moving. How do you create this mixture of logical emotion, or emotional logic?

JB_ If you think about it, all buildings—all traditional buildings—are moving. But they are made for structural reasons or because of their materiality. A lot of traditional, old buildings are created from this point of view ... to be easy to build. Here in Graz, you have a lot of those buildings, yet at least one which is not related: because of its material, color, structure …

MV_ You mean a blue one? [laughing]

JB_ Yes, a blue one! It's not logical. Nowadays, we have all these big problems that completely change the world.

I think we need to work with common sense and we need to build buildings in an easy way. People who are not architects prefer to use common sense.

RR_ The buildings you design and realize have a strong relation to the context: the site, the neighbourhood, and so on. When you showed the project in Katowice, even the facade is related to the neighbouring facade in its shape. But as you said, buildings should never be finished; they should always be in progress. So what if the neighbouring building was demolished and yours would remain? How would you deal with that?

JB_ Good question, I think a lot about that. But if we are continuing the rules, maybe the next grain of sand, the next architect, will understand that you made an effort to adapt. I hope that they will continue with this attitude.

RR_ And adapt your building …

JB_ If not, it's a pity. But it would be their fault, not mine.

MV_ You said one shouldn't finish the building. You want to stop at one point and let it be finished. During the construction process—when visiting one of your projects—you can see there is a lot of love in the details and in the control of the building process. When do you stop? When working with the building company, how much influence do you want to have? And in turn, how much freedom do they have?

JB_ Details are quite important for me. But in the past, this meant sophisticated details and right now it means something else. I pay attention to the details, but I don't want them to get the attention of people. I prefer to use natural details. I think this is important, because it's our profession. We are architects and people hire us because we are professionals. We know things that they don't know. We know how to finish a building.

RR_ Coming back to the issue of materials. You said, when you start with the first mental sketches of a project, materiality is already there. Is there a specific relation of the material to its color, or can color be added later so that you have a new level of decision-making in your project?

JB_ In fact, I prefer to not use colors at all. I prefer to use natural materials with their own colors. The only project I showed today where we used colors was this low-budget school where we used green. When working on the plot, before making the first ideas, we try to discover the material and the color that has to be there in order to not destroy this part of the city.

RR_ This makes the project highly sophisticated. If you don't use colors and use specific materials instead, you have to tell the construction company how to do it. You need well-trained craftsmen who are able to realize the project.

JB_ Yes.

RR_ So do you have these craftsmen or is it still an option to say, 'ok, we don't …'

JB_ It's an open option. You will probably need to change something on the construction site and we try to adapt to that. We were using these traditional techniques in the last projects for many reasons, but one of them is the big economic crisis. We are trying to spend less money on materials and more money on people. We do projects that will require a lot of people to build them. For us, this is an issue of ethics.

RR_ What do you tell your students when you teach architecture? Do you tell them, 'don't be modern', 'don't be loud'?

JB_ Yes!

RR_ And they accept it?

JB_ No, never! I can understand it because when you are young and studying architecture, you probably want to change the world and make great projects. But for me, it's essential to make them understand that the city is more important than their architecture.

RR_ How do you teach them to read the city?

JB_ Well, we spend a lot of time working without a project. For example, in the first few weeks, students might not even know where they will build the building and what the use of the building will be. We tell them that we will work in this part of the city and then we spend two weeks analyzing the place. They draw the site, they interview the locals, they make movies, they take images ... we work without the plot, without the program. I would ask them, 'what would your building be like?' Students need to define the feeling of the building, the materials and the color before they know the location and the use. This is nice! When students understand the rules of the place, the needs of the people, the materials, the morphology … they can start the project with a different spirit.

MV_ How important are materialization and construction detailing in a university project if it's not going to be built?

JB_I think this is the main issue. Our university in Barcelona is probably different from a lot of universities

in Europe. We pay attention to construction techniques, structures, facilities ... We are projecting when we are defining the techniques and the materials. The materiality of the building is the most important thing—not the concept or the idea.

RR_ How important is it for you to work with the young generation, for example, in the context of your curatorship for the Pavilion of Catalonia at the Venice Biennale 2012? You presented very young architects though usually we want to show how good or special the architecture of a country is: the show of the show. You were introducing these young architects nobody had heard of—just a few, well-kept secrets—and you said, 'Well, this is Catalonia today.'

JB_ But that's logical! If you want to talk about the future, you need to talk about the young generation. They will define the future of architecture. If the Biennale is for knowing what the architecture of the future will be, you need to ask the young people. And of course, the young ones are looking at architecture in a different way, at least in my country. They are approaching it without style, working side by side with the people that will use this architecture. They let them participate in the design and use materials that people like. The majority of people prefer to use timber or ceramics. This young generation tries to make architecture for the people—only for the people. This is quite interesting for me.

MV_ Similar to your role as curator of this exhibition is your role in the social media. You have a blog about architecture: about books, interviews, project—old and new. You are very present. How important is it to communicate and think about architecture?

JB_ If you understand that my goal is to build the city, the more direct way to build a better city is to influence people. This is the reason why I'm teaching at the university, for example. This is the reason why we are managing this online blog. We want to influence the new generation of architects and, by doing so, continue the tradition of building a better city. So for me, it's all connected: to work in my studio, to teach at the university, to write articles, to manage a blog, or to be the curator of an exhibition.

RR_ In terms of your strong focus on the context of the city and the city scale, what do you think will be the important challenges for the future?

JB_ Difficult to answer. I'm sure that we are in the middle of a big change. You know that Modernism was born because there was a big change in society: the industrial revolution. I think everybody here would agree that the changes we are facing right now are more powerful than the industrial revolution. Think about things like the influence of social networks in different issues such as politics or the things that are happening in China right now. A lot of things are changing so, for sure, the architecture that we were doing ten years ago is not the architecture

people are demanding right now. I'm not sure what they are demanding, probably more efficient architecture, a more efficient use of energy and cheaper architecture. They are probably demanding an architecture that is kind to the people. I don't know. But for sure, a lot of practices in Europe are trying to figure out a new architecture that will be the architecture of the future. We will have a different architecture in the future and it will be defined by the young generation.

RR_ Architecture is always related to the development and the changes of society. So architects will never run out of work?

JB_ Well, I'm not so sure right now. At this moment, ...

RR_ There is a very specific Southern European situation, but it is as you said, in context with the development of society. Society continues to develop and there will always be new challenges for architecture.

JB_ For sure. I'm convinced that we are useful to society.

RR_I think this is a very good remark to close this interesting discussion. We will all go home thinking about what the future is going to be like for us and what we can expect. Jordi Badia, thank you very much.
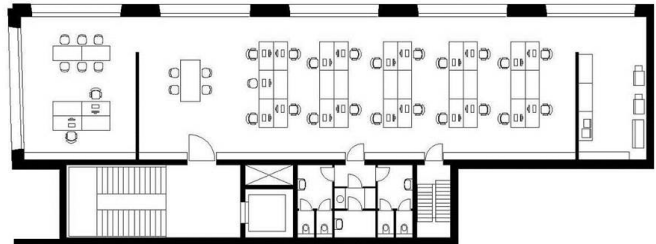
FELIX CLAUS

DECEMBER 09, 2013

LECTURE_77

INTERVIEW_85

< We designed this project for ourselves so this was much more difficult. We tried to do everything here to make an interesting project and show people that we really are good architects. An advisor told us: 'Your genius is that you are so simple, so make something very simple'. And that was exactly what we did. **>**
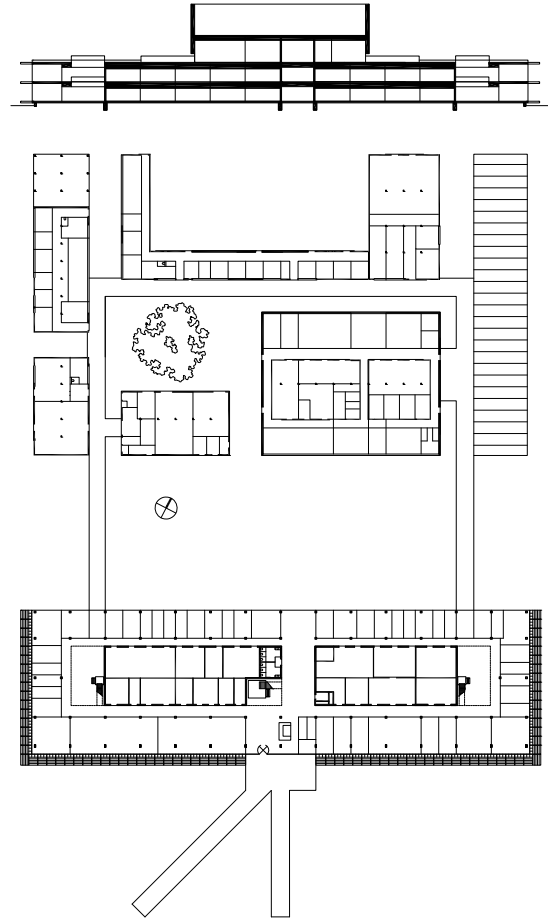
CLAUS EN KAAN OFFICE | Amsterdam, The Netherlands | 2007

< ... it is so small that it was a great pleasure to design this house - it really is like a caravan. You have no reference about this kind of space. I mean, you can imagine 4, 6, or 8 meters - but what is 2.10 or 2.20? How can you decide? **>**
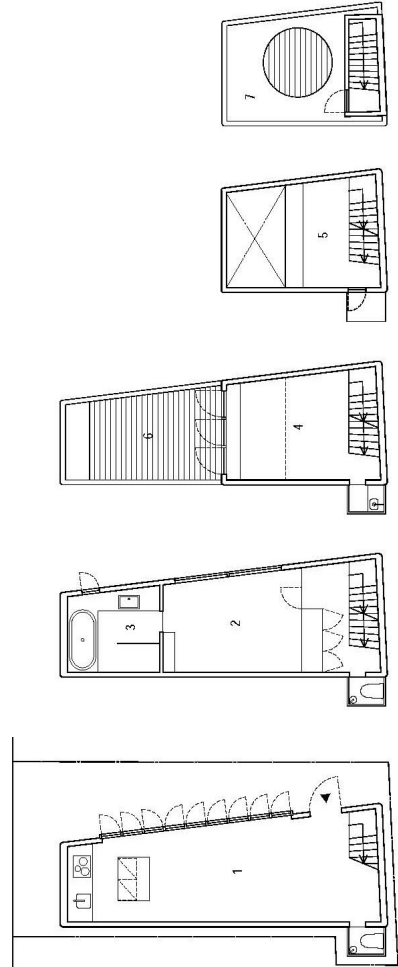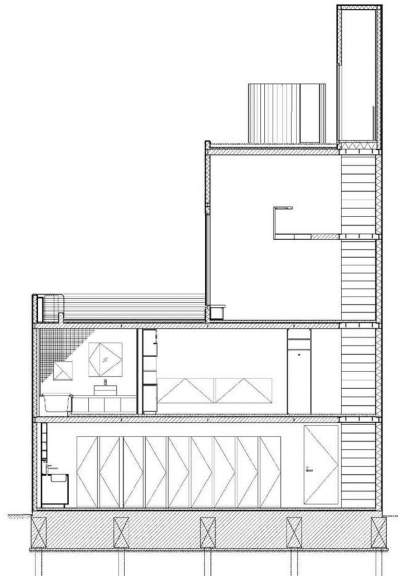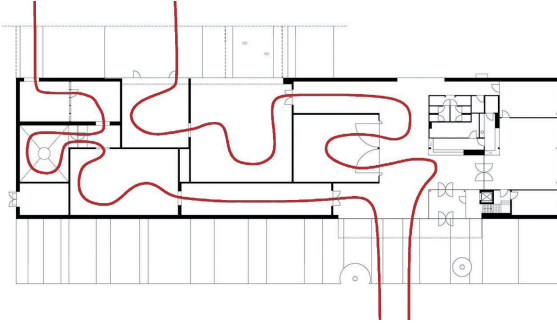
**HOUSE IN JINGU MAE** | Tokyo, Japan | 2007

NETHERLANDS INSTITUTE FOR ECOLOGY NIOO-KNAW | Wageningen, The Netherlands | 2011

< What I like very much in this project is the effect that
- again for Austrians this must be very obvious but for
a Dutch funcionalist thinker it was great to discover
- that the plan can be a sequence of rooms, and it
doesn't have to be a corridor with aligned rooms. >
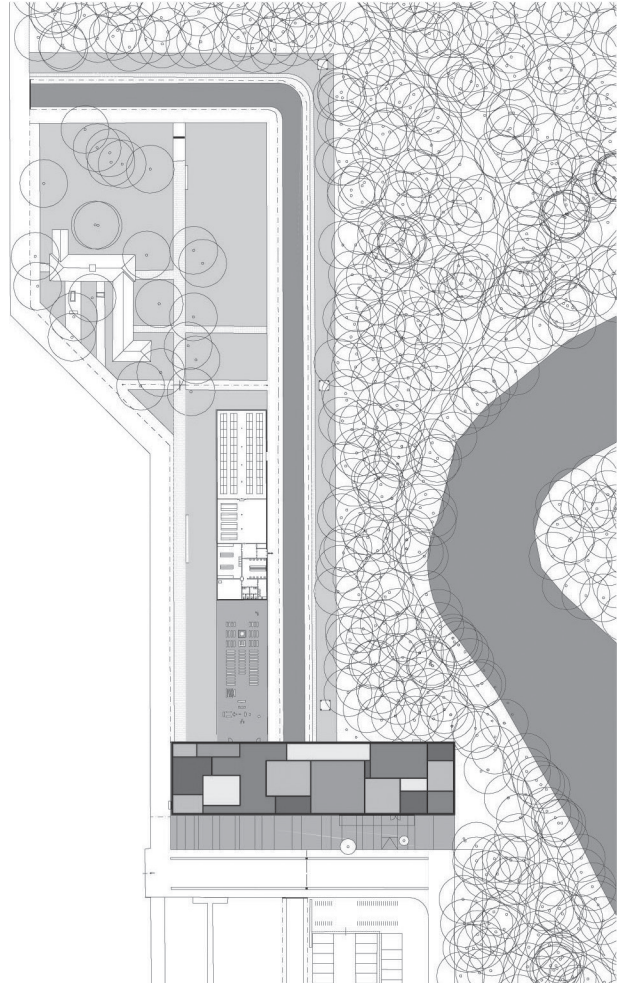
MUSEUM NATIONAL MONUMENT CAMP VUGHT | Vught, The Netherlands | 2002

FC_Felix Claus
RR_Roger Riewe
AS_Armin Stocker

RR_ Felix, your lecture was a great review of your work but it was also like trying to find your way around. There are two terms which you used quite often: one is 'simple' and the other is 'elegant'. Are these terms of any specific importance when you design a project? Is that the image you are constructing—trying to be both elegant and simple? Isn't that a play with words though because what seems simple is actually much more complicated.

FC_ Of course, that is true! This is something that architects know: to make a facade with only a few lines is immensely difficult. So simple is a very dangerous notion to work with. On the other hand, elegance is more a notion for the one who is looking at the building, for the one who is reflecting. As a maker—I don't use the word creator—

you cannot think about something elegant. You can make something simple, of course, but you never set out to do something elegant. Until today, it is still a struggle in which you try to work very broad. And then you realize: Jesus, if I had tried this before, it would have saved me a lot of time. And often that is the simplest approach. So, simple is something that you can work with but elegant is not.

RR_ But isn't the simple also the minimal?

FC_ Ah, well … this housing block on the corner that I showed earlier, a lot of people have asked themselves: 'What is this?' And the mayor of the city said, it is a building with curved lines because I had a new girlfriend at the time. But in fact, the detailing is very abstract: all

the surfaces are flush and everything is perfectly simply detailed, just like in a project with straight lines. It only has this exuberance because the site asked for it.

AS_ Is the materialization part of what constitutes simplicity in your projects? When do you start with the materialization in your projects?

FC_ That's a good question! I introduced myself by saying that I am currently in a period of looking back and trying to organize the past. Looking back, I realize that, in a lot of cases, the question of material comes into the project naturally. I think every country or every climate zone has its specific material. Then again, there is also a joy in exploring new things.

AS_ Does the choice of material also depend on the scale of the project? You showed us a great variety of projects— from small to very big. How do you work with scale?

FC_ Well, you must consider that most of the projects are in an urban context. And in the urban context of the Netherlands there are many institutions above you. There is an architect's committee, often there is a supervisor and there are also political bodies. It is common to have some sort of aesthetic requirements that demand a certain material. So the choice of materials can be very limited.

RR_ That is an interesting aspect: most of the projects you showed were realized in the Netherlands, they fall under very specific building constraints. Building in the Netherlands, as you put forward, has to be cost efficient. The rational voice comes in and is always in the back of your mind. You know that you have to hit certain targets otherwise you just cannot make a project. Once you have understood these rules, doesn't it also become really tiring?

FC_ Of course, but it is also a natural development like the one our economy has seen. It had to come to a stop because there were so many automatisms. There were so many empty projects being produced and I am not saying that we did not take part in it as well. You are part of a certain momentum and you only realize that afterwards. I know that this sounds very pessimistic but this is the state of mind that we are in right now. A lot of my colleagues are trying to escape by going abroad and saying to themselves, 'Oh, we are doing great!' but I think it is something that belongs to the cultural development. It is an essential part of architecture. Architecture has always been like this: it has golden times and it has less interesting times. And in the less interesting times, there are more thoughts developed than in the productive times.

RR_ Well, there are good examples for that as well. But do you think that this turning point for your office is caused by the Dutch economic crisis or by having delivered so many projects?

FC_I think it also has to do with your own development, for example, in relation to challenges of the commissions. If you do a challenging project of a certain scale or complexity—like this big justice complex or this big museum—you ask yourself, 'Should I now go back to smaller projects and compete with young architects?' It doesn't seem fair to me. I was very lucky to start practice in a time when architecture really took off in our country. We grew and we made a profit from it. And I refuse to go back, so to say.

AS_ You are teaching in Tokyo. Do you use this work with students for reflection?

FC_ Hmm, no. I teach because I like it. I myself was a late student. I always wanted to study architecture but I never wanted to go to Delft. It's just a small city. And when I finally went—at the age of 25—one of my teachers was Herman Hertzberger. I hated what he did but he was such a great teacher, full of enthusiasm. To get home, I had to be in the car for an hour but when I came home I still felt this great energy. This is what I feel when I am teaching. It is so nice if you can achieve that with your students when you are working and traveling together. So no, teaching is not a laboratory for me. It's more like this other energy.

AS_ Okay, I see. And how do you manage that: teaching in Tokyo, having offices in the Netherlands and projects in various locations?

FC_ Well, we have a very experienced office and I concentrate on projects in the vicinity of my Amsterdam house. I want to do everything on a bicycle. I like to travel to work, but not for work. Imagine you come to Graz to do a project. There you have to go to meeting after meeting and then you go back and … what do you have? It is much more interesting to go somewhere and to profit from it by discovering other ways of doing or thinking. In architecture, those things are very helpful. Everyone in our profession has the same problems: there is the wind, the builder, the client and gravity. So to look at how other people deal with this is very interesting. And I think that the conditions for work, in your own environment—political, sociological, cultural—are always best. There are so many examples of foreign architects doing stupid projects.

RR_ There are certain topics which always come up in your projects. One is the topic of repetition which maybe is also related to your Dutch background. The interesting thing is how this way or this methodology of using repetition forces the project to become abstract, to be (de)utilized by whomever or whatever. The first project you showed was student housing and you made a joke about it being like a prison. The prison could be considered the most abstract structure we have. So it becomes a matter of convincing the client how to utilize it. Is this the meeting you are going for?

FC_I think so, but as you say, it is very much facilitated by common understanding that repetition is good. That

is a cultural starting point, or used to be because this is also changing now. We used to not have a problem with repetition whatsoever because it also gives you the possibility to make small individual adaptations to express your individuality. For instance, English terrace houses: you can paint them. They are all the same but one is pink and the other one is … in this sense, equality is a very important aspect. Equality as repetition. All men are equal. All men are the same. No one sticks out. This is very accepted in our culture. You also have to consider the communal element of public space that is very important in the renaissance in the south of Europe. In northern countries, public space was never very important. It is just a street, a functional space.

RR_ With regards to public space, there is the topic of the facade as the interface between the public and the private. This seems to be a very small niche you are using to develop certain ideas, also making use of 'the fake' like when you imply something to be loadbearing when it is not. Is the facade the only niche you have in the Netherlands where you can show your creativity?

FC_ Yes, I think so. The interior is totally dominated by the structural typology, which is always the 'tunnel' in housing. There is no freedom. There was a time of interesting typological renewal but the architects were so irresponsible that they came up with all kinds of strange typologies that nobody could use. The reaction of the market was that they only ask for standard typologies now. So the interior is very simple and the outside is limited by budget restraints. It is exactly like you said, this niche is very, very small.

RR_ But this 'tunnel', as you call it, is that due to the formwork the construction companies are using? This would mean the construction companies are supervising the typology of housing.

FC_ Of course. If I go to France, I have a beautiful lecture about the tunnel system which was a French invention. In France, if you do housing, each project has its own construction system. And they make fair-faced concrete in all kinds of complicated forms. There is no level of sustainability, there is no insulation. There is no quality of detail either because every project has another standard of detailing. The good thing about the Dutch housing

production is that it is very low-cost. The quality is perhaps not very high but it is guaranteed. So that is something. It's not a lot but it's something.

RR_ But when pushing something to the extreme, finally there will be a breaking point. So in the Dutch architecture scene, if everybody has been pushed towards the rational and cost efficiency, one of these days—maybe now— everybody will be fed up with it and there might be a revolution.

FC_ Maybe. Well, there was a revolution, of course. If you look at the typical Dutch architecture of fifteen years ago, it was already an expression of poverty. Like MVRDV and all this kind of volumetric expressionism—very poor in architectural quality. I think we have always been more aware of our position as both architects and professionals. So like any professional, we want to be responsible in the sense that we deliver a service which requires knowledge. Our profession is also a profession of knowledge. You must know how high a table or a toilet is. If you don't know those things and you just talk about intellectual concepts—like students of architecture in the United States—you cannot deliver as an architect. So I always enjoyed—and I still do—having all these responsibilities in the public life and to ensure that this aspect of the discipline is being taken seriously instead of just taking things to the extreme in a formal sense.

AS_ How do your clients handle the aspect of going to the extreme and testing things?

FC_ You know in all the projects we did, we only had very few private clients. Our way of working is very much determined by working for professional clients. So you are always talking to a professional counterpart who knows what his responsibility is. One is looking for a program, the other one is checking the planning, the third one is checking the budget and no one is saying, 'I would like another kitchen.' I could not do that.

RR_ Talking about the clients, there seems to be something like a hidden code, especially with public clients. The Netherlands can be considered a wealthy country, there is no real poverty. So there shouldn't be any reason to build in the way that it is done. You don't really spend a lot of money. Everything is really efficient. Is this a protestant approach?

FC_ Of course! When I was working in Switzerland I discovered how similar we are to the Swiss way of thinking. We are so contrary to the Catholic approach because in Protestantism everything is abstract. We are very good at abstractions. Money is an abstraction! We are very rational. We can count and this is the only thing that matters. In France, people only want to talk. They are intellectual and want to talk about real things like food, or material in Italy. This is so alien to our way of thinking. We have no time for that. We must earn money. Yes, that is

really true and it is very sad that these cultural issues are never addressed. It would be so nice because this would explain a lot of the great opportunities that you are passed. We are one entity but we have so many cultural variations.

RR_ How would you categorize the strange developments going on in the Netherlands like say Prince-Charles-Architecture? Is that Catholic?

FC_ It is the end of an era and it also has to do with populism. I am not a Marxist anymore but I used to be. I know what great analytical power this historical materialists' way of analysing things has. When we had this real estate economy, it was one—everybody was working together. The big banks, the development company, the construction company but also the urban planners, the politicians and the architects. Everybody was producing, producing, producing! And they produced something that normal people, at a certain stage, were told or had the impression that they did not want anymore. They wanted something else. And then, the same group of people, same industrial complex said, 'Okay, I know what you mean. You want this!' So this is a simulacrum, it is a panache for something else. There is no real freedom. This Rob Krier thing … they are products from the same industry, in the same scale, with the same repetition behind the door, but branded in a different way.

RR_ So Japan would be very similar. A society which is working day and night. Yet you come along and say, you

suddenly had the 'freedom' of working on a very small, tight site in Tokyo.

FC_ Well, the great thing about Japan, apart from a lot of not so great things, is that there is no aesthetical control. That was very new to me. Everything is determined by the plan. They envelop the maximum floor area, the angle in which the light has to reach the street and that's it. If you stay within those parameters you can do whatever you like. It is a strange kind of freedom.

AS_ Do you also do bigger projects in Japan?

FC_A few years ago I had the idea to establish an office there and I got some very interesting clients out of the mainstream. As a foreigner you would never get large-scale projects in Japan and there is nothing comparable to a European tender system where you could compete. But I had some interesting clients and I thought it could be possible. But then the crisis hit and all those guys went bankrupt. Now I just like to be there without this restraint of having to comply with something.

RR_ How do you run your everyday life, jetting between Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Tokyo, the office in Paris and tonight here in Graz—jumping between very different societies?

FC_ But in some way, they complement each other. We talked about Dutch society being very abstract but the

good thing about the Netherlands or Anglo-Saxon culture is that you don't have to waste time. You can be very direct and say what you want without any fuss. The French quality of life is obviously much higher, no discussion about that. What is also interesting about France—and this may sound a little bourgeois—I very much appreciate the way people act in the public space: with respect and certain codes. I found this very comfortable since in our culture it is totally non-existent. Well, and Tokyo … I have to tell you that I have a Japanese wife. So that's a very important reason I can be there at all. For me, it is great to be somewhere where you can be totally free of any visual or acoustic impact. I don't know about you but a lot of architects are very visual so your eye gets always lost. For me, being in Japan is like being under water. It is extremely good for my concentration.

AS_ Also in Tokyo?

FC_ Yes.

RR_ Apart from Tokyo, you have also been teaching in Zurich, Lausanne and at the Berlage. You always have to do with young people, different kinds of students. You said the Swiss society is very similar to the Dutch. I would agree, but then you have the ETH Zurich students and the Lausanne students which I assume to be different … and then you jump across to Tokyo. Which differences do you experience in that respect?

FC_ Well, I could make general remarks about cultural differences but it is also important to point at the fact that a school has to be organized in a good way. The ETH has a great working atmosphere with the dean changing every three years, with the commitment of the professors and with the financial possibilities. At Lausanne, I found this atmosphere much more difficult because of a strange rector and unfortunate spatial conditions where one professor is here, one professor is there. Also in Japan where I worked in different universities, the conclusive element is how the school is managed and who is creating possibilities for you or for the students so that they can express their ambitions. If that is possible, it is a great luxury. That is more important than any cultural differences because teaching is always about working with young and ambitious students.

RR_ You started off by saying that one of your mentors was Herman Hertzberger and you hated his architecture but you appreciated the energy he put into teaching and the energy you got from him. Do you see yourself in a similar way?

FC_ Yes, I think so.

RR_ Do your students then have to hate your architecture? [laughing]

FC_ Oh, they may. If we are in school we are all equal. And I'm not like Hans Kollhoff trying to create followers in an aesthetical way. I want to discuss things in an equal manner so I want students to be independent in the sense that they can decide for themselves.

RR_ Is this easy with the Japanese students?

FC_ Well, a big problem with Japanese students—apart from the language—is the fact that they lack the common reference of public space we have in Europe. That is comparable to the United States. American children come from big villas in the suburbs, they have no idea what a city centre is. And this is the same in China or Japan. It is a great problem if you try to educate them in architecture because for me architecture without a city is the loss of the political society.

RR_ So when you teach in Japan, what are the topics? What are the briefs you give your students?

FC_I always teach housing. Because in housing it gives me a level playing field in the sense that I don't have to talk about what I think. You can really say, 'This bedroom is not a good bedroom because you need space for a bed, a wardrobe, a small desk …' This gives you all kinds of rational stuff to talk about.

RR_ But the Japanese are lucky because they don't have a bed.

FC_ Oh well, nowadays they have beds. [laughing] No, you know what I mean. It gives you a point of reference that makes it possible to have an unheated discussion. I remember myself being a student having discussions

with teachers about, 'I think this is okay' and the teacher said, 'No, this is not okay'. It ends in frustration. I like housing very much for its typological aspects. You can just measure and if it works it is very nice.

RR_ But are these housing projects for the Japanese students based in Japan or somewhere else?

FC_ Yes, they are always in the neighbourhood of the school so that we can go there …

AS_… by bicycle.

FC_ In Zurich, it was very nice because each semester every professor had to organize a tour. You could combine traveling with the design project. And there was funding. It is a great system.

RR_ Where did you go?

FC_ Paris, London, Ljubljana, Zagreb, Tokyo, Chicago, Amsterdam …

RR_ Yes, the Swiss have got a lot of money. [laughing]

FC_ They have money!

RR_ Tonight, you began your lecture as if you were going into your archives, picking out certain projects, not always in a chronological order. Are we experiencing something like a turning point this evening? If so, are there specific projects or other things you would really like to do in the future?

FC_ That is a good question! I am very ambivalent about it because if I look back, we did more or less everything that I would feel like doing. At the same time, I also come to a conclusion. Seeing a lot of new commercial buildings being demolished after 20 years of existence, seeing cities transformed from normal, equal cities into places of tourism and residences for rich people, I think in present day architecture there are some issues of higher importance than producing yet another building. How to deal with that is interesting to me. Given the fact that I know my limitation. I am not a politician. I am not a writer. I am an architect. I want to make something but there are some big questions I ask myself along the way.

RR_ As a very generalised question: do you think we have built enough in Europe?

FC_ Of course! Our demography is not developing and in our buildings, we are not addressing the real issues. There is still a lack of housing for poor or young people. There are still big problems in care and education, in research and development. I think that the focus is not right. These issues should be addressed and I think it is our profession that should start. I notice that, today, students are much more interested in these kinds of issues—practical issues, political issues—than in the latest SANAA project. I am

very happy that the culture of the image is coming to an end. When I talk to young people they don't care about that. That's very good.

AS_ Is this an effect of the crisis?

FC_ While we, as more or less established architects, were making projects and enjoying the fruits of the land, a lot of young people were thinking about other things and looking for a different meaning in architecture. If you look back in the history of architecture, this is only normal. When I was a student we read books. There were no colour images. There was no colour copier. We read books and then we started to work on the section and the plan. It is only recent that our architecture became so … perverted.

RR_ Felix, I think this is a very nice closing sentence. Something we should all take home and think about.

FC_ You made me say it!

RR_ What are we as architects heading for and heading to? What are the young ones going to do? What will the future of architecture be like? It was a very nice talk and thoughtful evening with you. Thank you very much.

Go Hasegawa_Tokyo

Go Hasegawa (1977) is a young architect based in Tokyo. He graduated the Master course of Tokyo Institute of Technology in 2002, and after working at Taira Nishizawa Architects, established Go Hasegawa & Associates in 2005. He won several prizes such as the Kajima prize for SD (2005), the Gold prize in residential architecture award in Tokyo (2007) and the 24th Shinkenchiku prize. His article 'Thinking, Making Architecture, Living' (LIXIL, 2011), and his first monograph 'Go Hasegawa Works' (TOTO, 2012) were published with his first exhibition at TOTO Gallery MA in Tokyo. He has been teaching at Tokyo Institute of Technology since 2009 and, since 2012 at Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio, Switzerland.

www.hsgwg.com

Špela Videčnik_Ljbljana

Špela Videčnik (1971) graduated from the Ljubljana School of Architecture (October 1998) and London's Architectural Association (MA January 2000). She established OFIS arhitekti with Rok Oman in 1996 after winning several prominent competitions, such as Maribor Football Stadium and Ljubljana City Museum. Many of their projects have been nominated for awards including the Mies van der Rohe award. In 2000 they won the prestigious 'Young Architect of the Year' award in London, UK. Their work includes many social housing projects and public projects such as the Farewell Chapel and the Space Wheel Museum. Špela is currently a visiting professor at Harvard Graduate School of Design.

www.ofis-a.si

Jordi Badia_Barcelona

Jordi Badia (Barcelona, 1961) graduated in architecture from the ETSAB (Barcelona School of Architecture) in 1989. Founder and director of the BAAS architecture studio, Jordi Badia combines the professional task of an architect with that of a professor at the Department of Architectural Projects at ETSAB (2001-present) and at ESARQ-UIC (2009-present). He also contributes to the ARA newspaper (2010-present) and has been the editor of the architecture blog www.hicarquitectura.com since 2009. Along with Félix Arranz, he was the curator of the Catalan and Balearic pavillion at the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale in 2012.

www.baas.cat

Felix Claus_ Amsterdam

Felix Claus is an Architect from Delft University of Technology. He founded, together with Kees Kaan, the office 'Claus en Kaan Architecten' that provides architecture, interior design, restoration and urban design in both national and international projects. Between the numerous awards that Claus en Kaan Architecten have achieved, it is worth highlighting the following: Winner of the Betonprijs 2009 (Concrete Award 2009), the AAP (Amsterdam Architecture Award, 2009) and the DAC-pan 2008: the best municipality in Drenthe (2008). Formerly guest professor of Architecture at the RWTH Aachen, ETH Zurich and EPF Lausanne, Felix Claus presently teaches at Meiji University, Tokyo. In 2014, he founded, together with Dick van Wageningen, the office 'Felix Claus Dick van Wageningen Architecten'.

www.clausenkaan.nl

Image references ©

IMPRESSUM

Sto IIII Stiftung

TU Graz

IAT | Institute of
Architecture Technology