



Are you freestyle swimming?

Squash by Anthea Hamilton, Tate Britain | photograph taken August 2018

bend
roll
contort
twist
stretch
squeeze
fold

join
pile
assemble
balance
paint
pull

fiddle
layer
tear

could I just have the instructions?

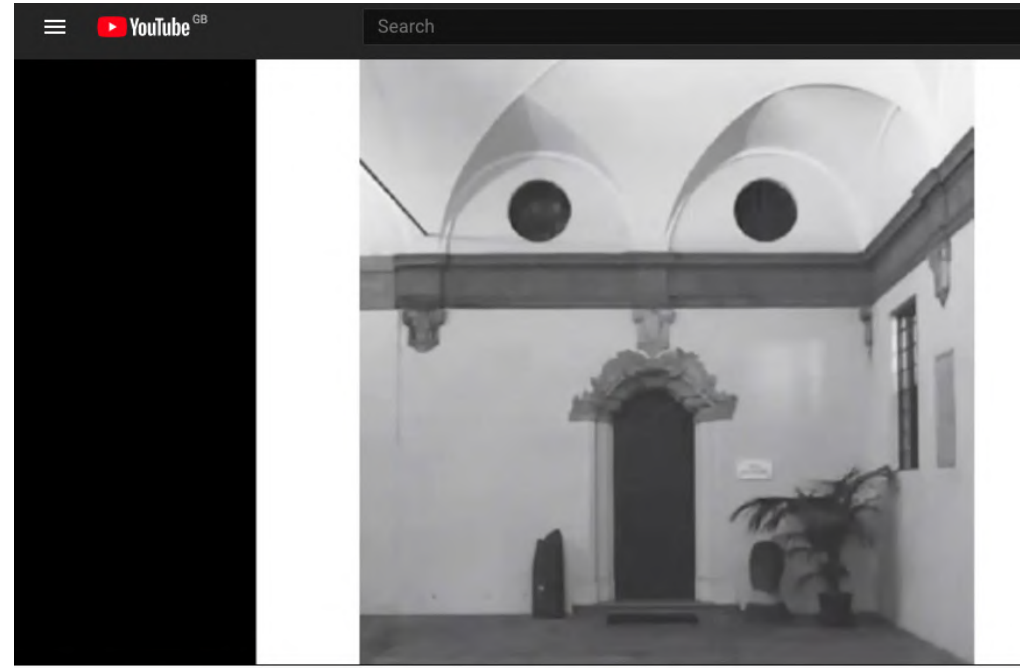
Tonic sets a challenge. We offer contributors a base to stimulate their thoughts and start a discussion on a particular theme. For each issue, a letter, an image, a quote or a box is delivered. Here, the responses are pieced together.

For this issue, a *house of cards* was reimagined for people to assemble.



ÁLVARO SIZA | FAUP, Porto

photograph taken July 2017



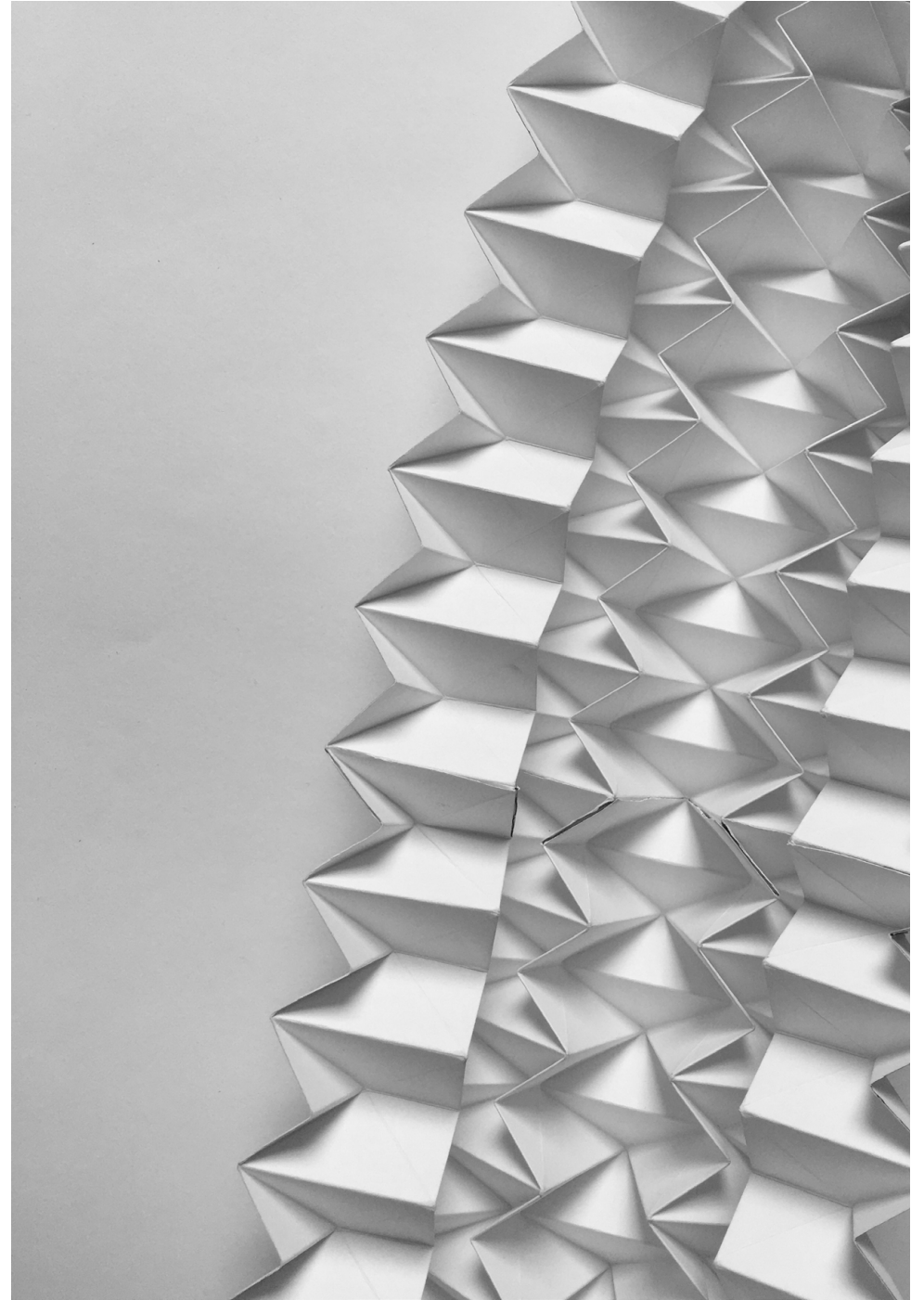
100 Day Studio: Éric Lapierre - 'Marvellous Architecture: Reason as Architectural LSD'

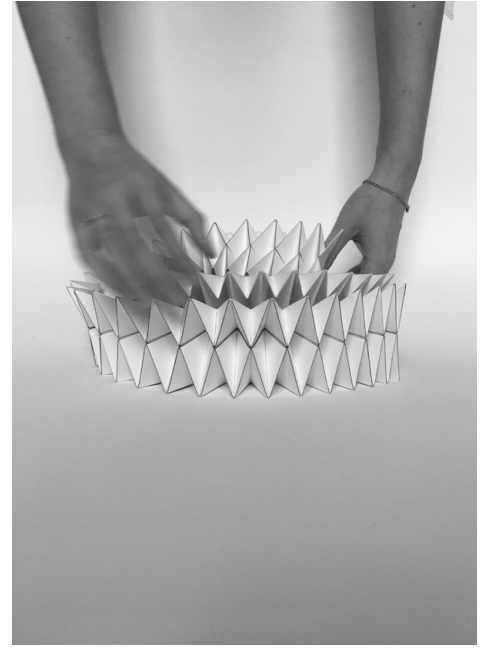
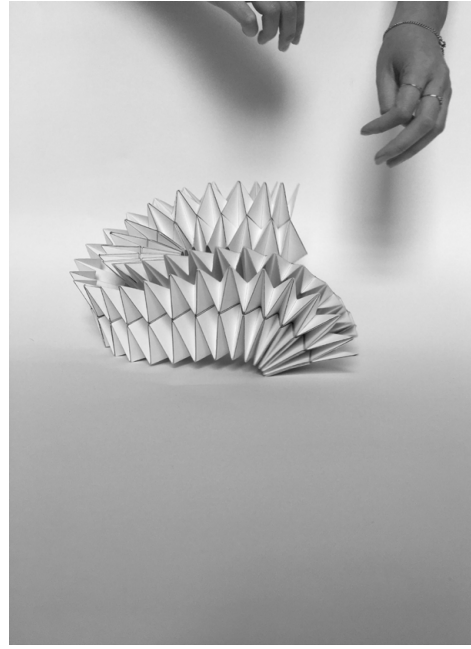
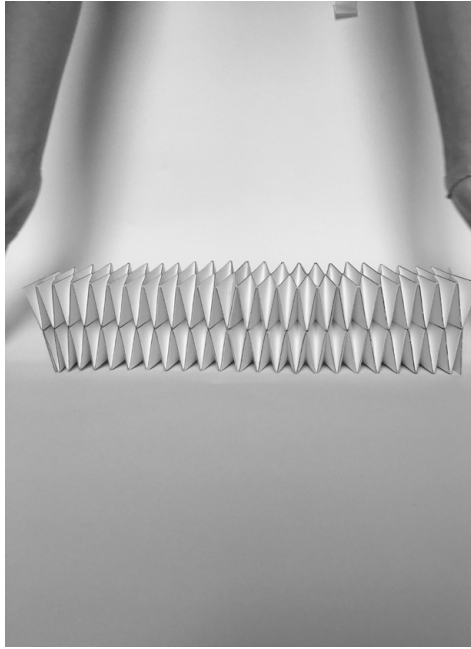
lecture by Eric Lapierre for AF 100 Day Studio, May 2020

DONATO BRAMANTE | Cloisters of Sant' Ambrogio, Milan



contribution by Sandy Vile







Tonic,

I thought that since you kindly sent me something to play with, I would also send you something playful.

Rather than telling you what it is, I leave it to you to explore with, bend, roll, contort, twist, stretch, squeeze and fold.

Also, to reduce postage, I wanted to make something as big as possible as small as possible.

From Sandy

W Considering playful instinct and natural curiosity affords an interesting way of looking at spaces we make with enough ambiguity, we can dream about how they are perceived in a different way. And I guess I'm drawn to this thinking about Dutch structuralism and the likes of Van Eyck and others, who make marks in a landscape which offer quite a physical form but also enough ambiguity to the purpose in which they have been built, so that someone can play with them in a different way every time.

M Isn't that the goal of any great building? That it can be reused. In a way, it has to be specific to respond to what it is doing, but has to be general enough that it can be repurposed in the future.

J Yes I agree, but I think these are very specific examples. In the case of Van Eyck - the motif surrounding his architecture is this notion of play. So, he is obviously interested in the idea of humanity and architecture as a catalyst towards some of these playful experiences. So yes, to a certain extent I would agree.

W I've probably jumped deliberately in to a playground, or a form of playground, to try and stitch together two very different things, which are: the process of actually bringing ideas together and the process of discovering what an idea or learning in general might be through creative activity.

J Sure. My question on that has to do with how much justification you may or may not need before engaging in any form of design process. What I am interested in is if there is a need to propose a rational thought process behind a design; or do you discover that more as you do it? There's a quote by Denise Scott Brown, which I'm not sure entirely I agree with but have found myself relating to in the past.

I learnt from a young age to follow the 'just take it' principle. Act quickly! If you stop to ask yourself why you want it, it'll disappear before you reach it, and just as you realise why you wanted it.

Do you need to know why you are doing something, or do you do something in the trust and hopefulness that the reasons will come by just doing it?

M Well, yes and no. It's a balance between the two. I think you can't just do something without any reasoning and I think it's far more interesting when you do explain things in a way, but I'm not sure whether you are totally aware of why you are doing something all the time.

J I think most things, if you do them with a certain level of purpose, you can explain in various ways, but it's more about what it is you are explaining those things in relation to, and

that's where I think something which is a little bit harder to explain can enter the design process.

M Which has to do with intuition and spontaneity...

J A personal response which is fundamentally irrational, which is not grounded in this idea of reason.

M Well, but again, I think you balance that out by dealing in reason. You have impulses, but then you sort of work with them and rationalise them through the design process.

J Just on the notion of play: this is something we were reminded of when reading Rob's text in the *Process* issue of *Tonic*, where he describes the first step in the design process as the most important and daunting moment because everything which ensues is placed in the context of that first step. He talks about reasonable doubt and what I understand is an idea of layering decisions - but you are always questioning that first impulse which might be described as a playful impulse, you are applying reason and, in applying reason, you are fortifying ideas and shaking away uncertainties; but I would say play comes first and then something which might be described as reason or rigour comes after.

M I don't think the play disappears when you start applying reason to it. You are just playing with other tools, you are adding to it. It's still playing but it's not as intuitive I suppose, maybe less spontaneous.

W I think that the process, in terms of a cognitive journey, where fun, learning and

discovery are part of an experimental route, is an ongoing pathway. I think being playful is both measurable and immeasurable: Why would you choose to analyse the efficiencies and qualities of each experiment? I never really understand that. I see each playful endeavour as one which if something has been learnt, no matter how small or how great, it's a success. You've actually learnt the lesson for future application.

J You're talking about not necessarily understanding the need to justify. From any useful experimentation with play, you can gain a lot of potential insights.

W I think something is learnt through most playful interactions.

M But, when you think of it in the context of designing something, you analyse things and you interpret with reason. I mean what you call playful or not is also a very personal thing.

J Play, to me, has something to do with the unexpected. It's got something to do with that original idea, where you're not necessarily sure of the outcome, but you engage in the process and you understand something new as a result of that very same process. I think there are limited opportunities to do that in an architectural project and I suggest that the most fruitful opportunity is at the very beginning, when the parameters are being defined and the general architectural ambition is being fleshed out as well. So, on that note maybe we can discuss something from Souto de Moura:

To be a good architect you can't be very intelligent because that atrophies the practice of architecture - it needs a certain levity, it needs

a certain lack of rigour. You can't have all the information... Lots of knowledge leads to an Olympian vision that then doesn't work.

My question is: do you think that too much knowledge can impede the design process?

M In an interview with Orson Welles about Citizen Kane, the interviewer says 'Oh, you were only 25 when you did it, how did you do all of this', Orson Welles responds immediately:

Ignorance, sheer ignorance, there's no confidence to equal it. It's only when you know something about a profession that you're timid or careful...Explaining he thought he could create anything his imagination could do.

J Maybe there is a slight contradiction because, in theory, an architect only gets better with time. The more you know, the better equipped you are to respond to complex situations and in the case of Lewerentz for example, and many other architects I am sure, his best buildings are the last ones and they embody all the lessons of his previous buildings.

M This is the same with everything, not just architecture, it's the same in life. You grow and you learn but you still have to keep, I don't want to call it naivety, but you have to keep something. It is a balance.

W There's another contrast there as well, in terms of your intuition being that driving for something which you perceive or that you can convey, and your intuition being supported by a wealth of knowledge and experience. The way in which that unfolds is really different in each context.

M You may know the tools but because you are applying them in different circumstances, you don't know what the outcome is going to be.

W You might well know that something feels right, it is what you perceive or want, but you may not know how to execute it.

J It's true.

W Both are very playful endeavours. Both require a level of discovery to try and navigate a way.

J Does the architectural discipline lend itself to such naivety? I imagine in the case of other art forms, lack of knowledge and ignorance can be a good thing because you cannot know the limits and therefore your ambitions can be far greater. In the context of architecture, is it possible to have that maintained in ignorance and still continue to practice successfully and be a good architect? Because I would argue that you have a lot of training to be at a point where you can maybe make a good building, and there isn't really a period where you can approach architecture with blind ignorance and create a masterpiece.

M But then again, in architecture you do discover a lot from what you know that you don't know. So if you know your limitations then you know what to look for to overcome them. You don't know how to do it, but you know what you have to solve. In a way it is ignorance based upon knowledge.

W I wonder if naivety is the correct word to use or if this is a process of working out what the best game to play or the best way in which you can

try to discover what you are going to achieve. The experiments are somewhat undefined: the creative process is not a scientific methodology, is it?

M But there is some factual knowledge you have to know if you want to build a building. That doesn't mean in the discipline of architecture you don't play in that way - you do.

W There is possibly another question there in terms of play as a form of outcome, rather than a form of discovery. If you are trying to design space between space, or you are trying to think about something in an unconventional manner, or you are striving for the heterogeneous space: Are these things ever planned? Can you work that domain, or is it purely the manner of interpretation of other people after it has been formed? Can you ever really truly predict how people will play with the idea you are presenting, if you want it to be reinterpreted? As you mentioned earlier you perceive good architecture as that which can be reused and rediscovered - to that extent, how will you ever know?

J What comes to mind to me are these videos about film that capture how various users interact with buildings in completely different ways, and how you can unravel all sorts of different narratives depending on the way you look at things...

W An interesting point that you're making - the fact that the theatrical quality of architecture lends itself to be interpreted in many different ways. And yet the theatrical approach to design as a product is actually quite seductive and the impression and expression of material forming a connection is a playful endeavour in itself. But

when you shine a spotlight on it in an abstract capacity, it has a theatre about the production which is equally as playful. I'm probably thinking this as more of a performance now. Does the conductor know that something is a great performance before or even during the act?

M They can anticipate because they've planned for it. In the same way that if you design what you believe is a really good building, then you hope that it's going to make for a great stage. I guess you can't know that for sure until the performance is on or over. In the same way that as an architect, can you go back years later and understand if your building is good? Some architects must take a lot of joy in that while others don't.

J I'm interested in what you described as the theatre of process. There is a certain element of theatricality in the sense that you are playing a game with yourself and eventual collaborators. You're all playing a game in the hope that things will eventually make sense and at the end, hopefully those things do make sense; but there is a level of risk taking, blind faith and strong will that is required in order for something close to a scientific truth about the value and strength of a design to become clear. You can never be sure of that value of something, especially at the beginning, maybe even at the end. You can only be closer to it.

W Within Tschumi's list of Questions of Space:

If a space is a representation of an idea or a thought that is signified, does a space achieve its meaning through its relation to all the other spaces in a context, or through all the spaces for which this space has become metaphorical?



photograph taken at Pezo von Ellrichshausen's Vara Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, July 2016

Does the game that you're playing also rely on you understanding the other games that are currently underway?

M Yes! That's basically your understanding as an architect that your building will be the stage of someone else and you have to consider that.

J Being involved so intimately in the making process, whether that's a director behind the scenes or an architect doing all of the detailing elements: are you able to view the final product with the same level of playfulness and magic that you might do if you were not so heavily involved in the making process? Is a director able to watch his or her movie and see it with fresh eyes? Is an architect able to experience his or her building with some form of naivety?

W I think naivety is a hard thing to strive towards when you are so ingrained in an idea or a set of principles that are being executed. But you can certainly put yourself in the shoes of others and try and understand how that works for them.

J That comes back to this idea of theatre, where the person who has never seen the building will interact with it in a way which is inevitably quite superficial, but that's not to say unmeaningful. There's only a certain level of information which is accessible to that person. This version of the building only reveals so much.

W The visitor or the audience or the fellow creative is intrinsically curious. The majority of games and playful activities that we undertake, isn't that an instinctive drive to understand, to be inquisitive and learn? I guess that doesn't really stop. Even when we collectively visit places and spaces, our observations and our comments

all stem from a playful curiosity in the first instance.

J Ultimately, the joy that we, as architects, get when visiting a building is as if we were detectives trying to uncover all of the decisions that will have led up to the building of a certain detail or the orchestration of a sequence of spaces. So, in designing your own building, you might get more of that joy because you can see other people interacting with these very personal moments of architecture in ways that are unexpected.

W The unexpected interaction is probably the most playful.

J Maybe there is a form of playfulness you can experience by observing the acts of other people. For instance, inviting a director to make a movie or a photographer to photograph your building can be a very exciting moment for an architect because you're asking someone else to look at your building in a way that you've never seen before.

W If you build a building and you spend an immense amount of time intensely working up a design and an idea for a space and place, you're never going to know what the feeling is like to walk through the door for the first time. You can only anticipate...

M My summary: architecture is made of everything around you and the process itself. The act of playing is influenced by you, everyone you meet and everything around you. Architecture and making is very much about living... and living involves playing.

[...]



Big man in a small world

photograph taken inside Switzerland's Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, July 2018



photograph taken at Junya Ishigami's *Freeing Architecture* exhibition, September 2018

Small men in a big world

WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT THE JOYSTICK? [...] THIS IS NOT A KEY. MADAME CALLS IT A JOYSTICK. IT COMBINES TWO FUNCTIONS - IT'S A LIGHTED BOLLARD THAT LIGHTS THE PLACE AND, WHEN YOU TOUCH IT, IT OPENS THE DOOR IN FRONT.

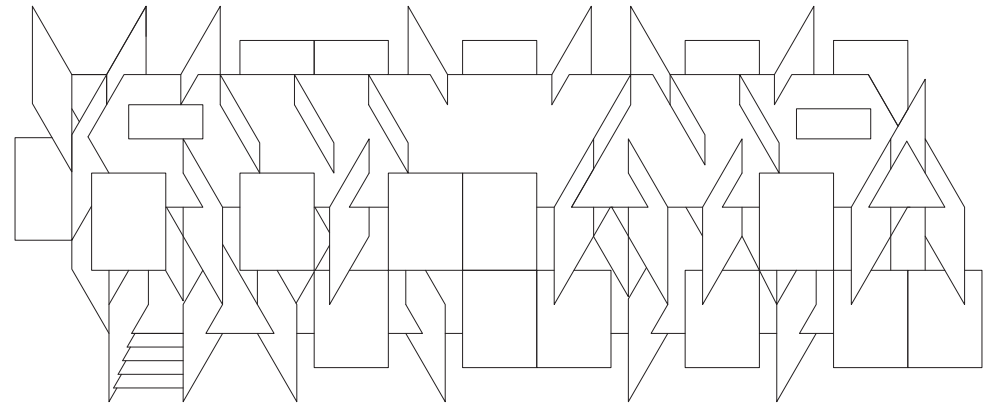
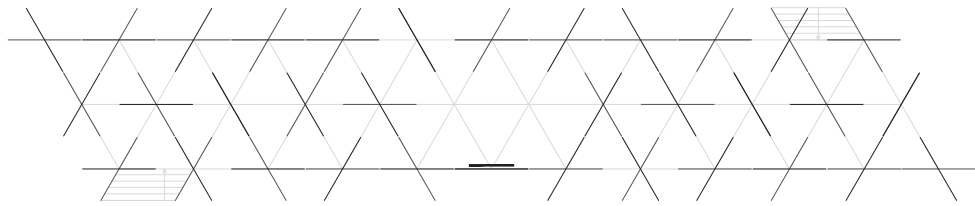


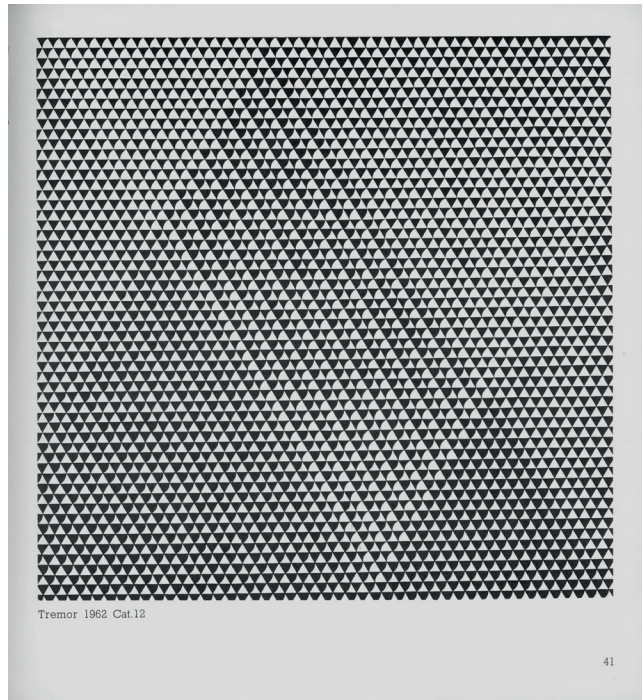
Dialogue and stills from *Koolhaas House/life* (2013) by Louise Lemoine & Ila Béka

...first, it closes and then, it opens...

A MAZE FOR BRIGET RILEY'S *TREMOR*

Rob Scott | May 2020





Tremor 1962 Cat.12

"WOULD YOU TELL ME PLEASE, WHICH WAY I
OUGHT TO WALK FROM HERE?"
"THAT DEPENDS A GOOD DEAL ON WHERE YOU
WANT TO GET TO," SAID THE CAT.
"I DON'T MUCH CARE WHERE," SAID ALICE.
"THEN IT DOESN'T MATTER WHICH WAY YOU
WALK," SAID THE CAT.
"SO LONG AS I GET SOMEWHERE," ALICE ADDED
AS AN EXPLANATION.



A parcel from TONIC came from London to Barcelona, waited to be picked up, and left again for London. Later, four photographs and a series of videos arrived. The images framed hands opening the parcel. The hands brought out a concertina paper letter and nine flat wooden rectangles with connecting points at the centre of each side. They stacked the pieces to make a table-like frame which eventually toppled down out of balance.

The first things that came to my mind were related to play, scale, and thinking with one's hands. It reminded me of a podcast I listened to a few months back about Froebel's gifts, educational objects given to young children as ways of understanding the world. The objects were gifted in stages, starting with solids and increasing in complexity to enable the children to unpack each object into components and relate the abstract material geometries to the experience of their surrounding environments.

I saw a set of puzzle-like wooden pieces similar to the TONIC rectangles, and bought it, hoping that playing with it and touching it with my own hands would give me another experience from which to write this piece. This time I thought of the connection between the pieces, that stacked like a house of cards, but held each other in place. It made me think about balance, and I wondered why the hands in the video stacked them in the way they did, probably knowing that they would fall. I played with these and instinctively searched for stability in the structure.

I wrote all of this down initially as I sat in a cafe in Barcelona's Sant Antoni neighbourhood, overlooking one of the 'superblock' urban interventions¹. I returned to this writing under very different circumstances, not too far from that same cafe, but now confined to my home, under complete lockdown. This change of context alone transformed my reading of the same object, and the previous writing. The rectangular pieces from the parcel continue to read as play, but now make me think about the importance of physical rather than digital contact. With this I mean taking a break from the speed of screens and playing at the pace of the material, but I'm realising it could also be an analogy for touch and human connection right now.

As I play, I see the piled up pieces as a building structure with walls that differentiate what is outside and what is inside. In these critical times, the outside and the inside have become more rigidly defined, legislated and policed. On the outside, the superblocks, for example, designed for community, gathering and rest have been emptied of people and meaning. They have reached a disjuncture: spaces designed for public wellbeing are now a threat to that very same thing. The only people who continue to inhabit the public space are those who have no inside to be in. These are no longer restful places but places of exposure to disease and state control. I wonder how will these outside spaces transform themselves when slowly we start to re-inhabit them, and what will this mean for designing public spaces in the aftermath of COVID-19?

At the threshold between the outside and the inside, the way urban space designed affects the levels of inner isolation, and in this context, it depends on balconies, roof terraces, the closeness between buildings and their relation to the street - something we've probably all witnessed this through countless videos on social media. Community in cities has often come to mean people with whom we have things in common, and not necessarily those who share our physical space on a street or in a neighbourhood. From my balcony I hear the little boy from the flat across the street learning English by pointing to the colours of the clothes hanging out to dry on everyone else's balconies. When we occupy the border for the daily applause at 8pm, I am easily able to make out

my neighbour's faces and expressions, and I search for these now familiar faces to say hello. For me, this represents perhaps a better example, of the 'streets in the sky'². Here the street is felt, not by a physical corridor in front of a row of dwellings beyond which is a void, but through the relations of proximity and reciprocity enabled by the closeness of the buildings across from each other.

When the balcony's doors are closed, I am reminded that on the inside, shelter also means isolation, and it looks different depending on your economic situation, the people you're sharing with and how you live in the space. With the inability to leave and reenter on a regular basis, activities of daily life necessarily scale down. As you get to know, quite literally, every corner of your home and perhaps repurpose areas within it, the building's original design decisions about the smallest and most awkward of spaces become noticeable and even abrasive.

I wish the hallway was wider, so I could inhabit it. To make a place of it. I wish more light would reach the hallway. Its function to see me to the outside door or welcome my guests is no longer necessary. The hallway died with the lockdown. It is now another room, with only a memory of transit. I want to live in it until it reemerges into movement, as a transition, as a return to the outside coming in and the inside going out.

I write this as a way of playing; unpacking the fragile table of rectangles and reassembling it with my own wandering through questions about the scales, types of spaces and how I am, or 'we' are, inhabiting them at present. I send this repacked parcel on its travels again, from Barcelona back to London, to TONIC and all the places where its readers are.

1 An urban project designed as a participatory process with local residents which prioritises pedestrian usage, and by including curbless paving, green spaces and areas of rest in the street itself. It was featured in the BBC's video report *What would a city designed by women be like?*, published at the end of 2019.

2 Conceived by Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith for Park Hill in Sheffield.



CARLO SCARPA | Querini Stampalia, Venice

photograph taken July 2016



photograph taken March 2016

blue monster

I am nothing, I have everything and yet I have nothing. When you think life is ordinary, mundane and ritualised, think on. I no longer have purpose and tears fall down my cheeks with ease, my head aches as thoughts empty out from my skull.

I am a human, whatever that means but I am no longer a complete human; I am damaged and can no longer function as I did. I have a damaged brain with a malignant tumour that resists eviction. Is this a gift from some higher order that allows me to see things from a different place? I am hollow and confused. Matter within me swirls around looking for an idea to stick to.

The irony is rich for one so fascinated with the sensual qualities of stuff and non-stuff...that being space. What I see, smell, taste, touch and hear are all distortions of reality so my world no longer makes sense and my thoughts are catastrophic rants reverberating within the empty husk of a once spirited body. There is no order only disorder, I am in an entropic state.

Entropy: in thermodynamics, is a state function originally introduced to explain why part of a thermodynamic system's total energy is unavailable to do useful work.

Accepting this definition; as I have too, as I know nothing; it is a refreshing realisation that my brain is in this context equivalent to a thermodynamic system where only part of it is functioning. The removed parts lie in the surgeon's dish, long gone now and of no use to anyone or anything.

I enjoy imperfection as this is how I am now, damaged goods. Before, I would seek and embrace perfection in made objects...

The perfect white wall against the blue sky, a line of water reflecting the wall beyond; the sliding planes of a Dutch living cube. Are you an architect? If so, you will know what I refer to and will no doubt have done the same as I so often did. Searching and waiting for the moment to take the perfect shot when no one occupies the frame and the building can be captured without scale as a perfect, yet abstract thing.

Nature embraces imperfection and with that grip celebrates beauty in the imperfect. Am I the only soul on the beach collecting the imperfect shells? I'm the only one who wants to give the wonky x-mas tree a home, and the three-legged carrot a place on my dinner table. I seek and celebrate the imperfect and embrace the richness it brings to my life as I can now talk to it as a partner.

When we design, do we consider imperfection? Would incorporating imperfection into our work add another dimension to the finished article? As Hitchcock made unscripted cameo appearances in 39 of his films, I challenge you to take a moment to design in some imperfection that only you know of, a small pause from the relentless precision. A thumb print on a discreet piece of meticulously polished concrete, a carved initial on a skirting or door or some other little 'worm' that respects the beauty of imperfection.

The Japanese call this wabi-sabi.



photograph by Jo Crotch

Wabi-sabi: the Japanese term means "a way of living that focuses on finding beauty within the imperfections of life and accepting peacefully the natural cycle of growth and decay."

With imperfection disorder may follow...What do I mean, as I now really believe the contrary to this and that a sprinkling of imperfection gives us harmony. When things appear ordered, say with symmetry, they often are not. Asymmetry is often unplanned, our facial features for example are in number equal and symmetrical across a vertical divide but, oh no, faces are not symmetrical. The more symmetrical, the more beautiful?! Beauty is an abstract concept and always lies in the eye of the beholder, there is no measure to it yet many foolishly strive to achieve it in their oh so nearly perfect work!

An imperfect world is one that we might think of being fraught with frustrations. This takes us back to entropy. Social entropy is a measure of the natural decay within a social system. At this moment in time I do wonder what our anthropic measure of today's social system might be. Listening to the news I would guess it would be low...possibly off the scale. If only a little bit of imperfection were embraced we may be a more relaxed and happier society for it. Reflecting on the Japanese way where imperfection, aging incompleteness are all celebrated. We discard that which is broken and don't seek the beauty in the dishevelment of deterioration, sadly this is true of what we make and who we are. This short rant challenges you to do what may seem wrong but that which is inherently right and embrace imperfection, enjoying the release that it may surprisingly bring.

ONLY WHEN YOU GET INTO THE
PROBLEM, AND THE PROBLEM
BECOMES CLEAR, CAN CREATIVITY
TAKE OVER.



Dear Tonic Journal,
Thank-you for your intriguing
invitation to contribute.
You said to be concise and
christmas calls so here
goes
Louise

↓ X

I was lucky enough to
grow up with the Games
Cards as my parents had
a pack. I was fascinated
by the pictures, illustrations,
photographs of collections.
The surface design and the
ability to play with and in
3-D led me to this.....

concept
by Benjamin
Pollock's
Toyshop

paper
engineering
by me and
mcb

(40 years
later!)



illustration
by
Claire
Fletcher

designs by
paper d'art

contribution by Louise Heard, Pop Up Pollock's Toyshop



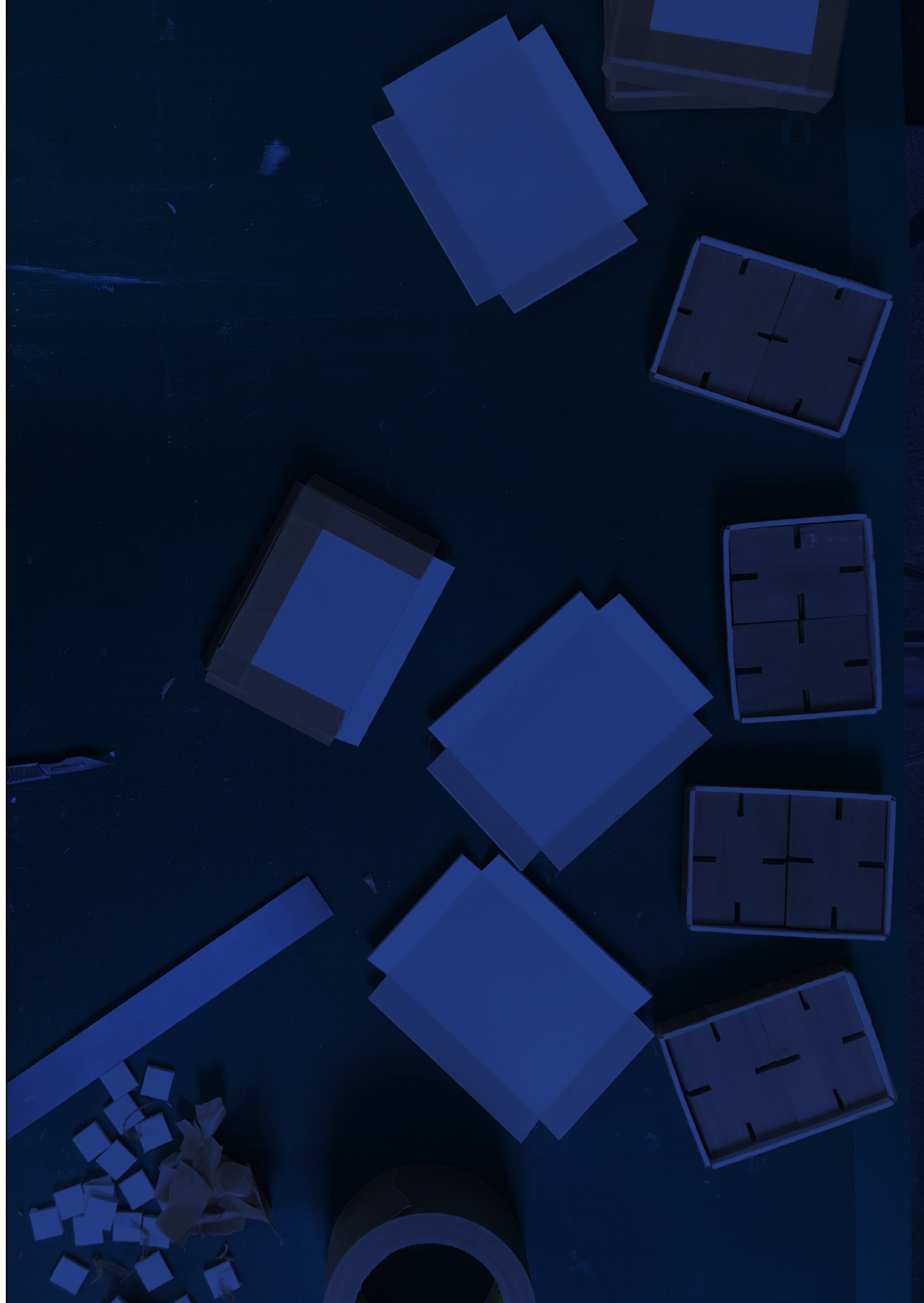


THE CREATION OF SOMETHING NEW IS NOT ACCOMPLISHED BY THE INTELLECT, BUT BY THE PLAY INSTINCT ACTING FROM INNER NECESSITY. THE CREATIVE MIND PLAYS WITH THE OBJECTS IT LOVES.

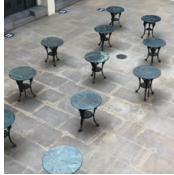


on set

on the left, photograph taken January 2017 | on the right, photograph taken June 2019



5



AUGUST 20