

# MAKING ROOM FOR ACTION

## Charles Aubin and Carlos Mínguez Carrasco

In 2002, Diller + Scofidio completed their Blur Building, a lightweight structure planted within Lake Neuchâtel in Western Switzerland.<sup>1</sup> The temporary building housed a filtration system which absorbed water from the lake and returned it by spraying it back out as a fine mist through more than 30,000 high-pressure jets. The vapor system was responsive to local weather conditions, calibrating the degree of water pressure according to ambient temperature, wind speed, and humidity. To enter, visitors walked a four-hundred-foot-long gangway from the lake’s edge that led into the cloud—a foggy, formless environment shorn of the usual characteristics of depth, height, or scale expected of a building. In its unstable nature, D+S’s Blur Building responded fittingly to Peggy Phelan’s definition of performance: it “becomes itself through disappearance.”<sup>2</sup>

But then, what can a visitor to the 2013 Lisbon Architecture Triennale make of *Superpowers of Ten*, a carnivalesque theatrical production by Spanish architect Andrés Jaque and his Office for Political Innovation? What kind of “architectural performance” was this? A live pastiche of Charles and Ray Eames’s 1977 film *Powers of Ten*, *Superpowers* delivered a critique of the original nine-minute-long film, used as an educational tool for decades across the United States. And to do so, *Superpowers* played with all of the canonical characteristics of performance: The audience was invited to arrive at a specific time and place; it relied on performers using props and carrying out actions to draw the audience’s attention to a scenario unfolding in front of them.

The Blur Building and *Superpowers of Ten* offer two greatly different examples on the spectrum of possibilities for architects eager to engage with performance. But, what is it that we talk about when we intersect architecture with performance?

And is it a recent tendency? Probably not. As early as 1931, in his provocative performance *Experience #2*, the Brazilian architect Flávio de Carvalho challenged the fervent procession of Corpus Christi down an avenue of São Paulo by walking in the other direction with his hat still on. The crowds nearly lynched him, but de Carvalho’s performance unmasked the tensions between individual expression and manifestations of social order embedded in the streets of a city. In Paris and Amsterdam in the late fifties, the Dutch architect Constant Nieuwenhuys similarly sought to spread seditious attitudes against urban planning by encouraging *dérives*, or endless roaming through the built environment. In 1966, with their “Experiments in Environment” workshops, choreographer Anna Halprin and architect Lawrence Halprin asked a group of young dancers and architects to spend a whole day in San Francisco’s Union Square silently logging their perceptions of the busy plaza.

According to Bernard Tschumi, the relationship between architecture and performance is a structural one: “There is no architecture without action, no architecture without events, no architecture without program” is the opening statement of his essay “Violence of Architecture.”<sup>3</sup> Architecture, he points out, should not be considered an “object of contemplation” or a history of styles, but a place that “confronts space and actions.”<sup>4</sup> Architecture lies in the interplay of the built space, human beings, and their activities.

This relationship has provided fertile ground for architects to rethink their own discipline within an “expanded” field. *Bodybuilding* is interested in this alternative historical lineage. This book investigates architects who have played with the limits of their discipline by incorporating actions and staged, time-based situations into their practice. Most of these architects engaged with human bodies—with methods often borrowed from theater, performance art, and public rituals—to undermine architectural conventions. As such, *Bodybuilding* focuses on these experiments,

The Blur Building by Diller + Scofidio on Lake Neuchâtel in Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland, 2002.

*Superpowers of Ten* by Andrés Jaque / Office for Political Innovation at the Lisbon Architecture Triennale, 2013.



often provocative or confrontational, designed and performed by architects to challenge their discipline.

If traditional narratives discussing the relationship between performance and architecture generally focus on the legacy of early twentieth-century utopian projects and the “radical architecture” of the postwar era, these instances are largely limited to theoretical proposals or unrealized projects.<sup>5</sup> Very little has been written about architects who actually employ performance as a way to practice architecture or explore critical questions about the built environment, be it its relationships to labor, security, race, migration, the environment, gentrification, or modes of public assembly.

Over the last decade, architecture has deeply assimilated performance. With construction commissions and public competitions plummeting after the financial crisis of 2007–08, newly minted architects, unable to build, turned to alternative ways to continue working within the field. In our respective positions over the past years—at Performa and Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York, Lafayette Anticipations in Paris, and the Oslo Architecture Triennale and ArkDes in Stockholm—we have witnessed this proliferation of performative architectural practices. We also contributed to this emerging history by commissioning new works and bringing together practitioners and theorists to reflect on this development: “Making Room for Action,” a symposium held during Performa 17, served as a stepping stone for this book.<sup>6</sup> *Bodybuilding* is our effort to locate these new endeavors within a larger framework and a network of historical actors.

1. The firm’s name changed to Diller Scofidio + Renfro in 2004 when Charles Renfro became a partner.  
2. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked, The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, first published in 1993, 2005), 146.  
3. Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, first published in 1994), 122. (“Violence of Architecture” originally appeared in *Artforum* in September 1981.)  
4. Tschumi, 141.  
5. Germano Celant, “Radical Architecture” in Emilio Ambasz, ed., *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape. Achievements and Problems of Italian Design* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 380.  
6. Held on November 11, 2017, “Making Room for Action” was a daylong program presented at the Performa Hub as part of the Performa 17 biennial. Lluís Alexandre Casanovas Blanco opened the program with a lecture-performance that provided the basis for his essay featured in *Bodybuilding*. A public conversation between Elizabeth Diller and RoseLee Goldberg followed; an edited version of it is included in this book. Ila Beka and Louise Lemoine then screened *Selling Dreams*, followed by a response by Ife Vanable. A panel discussion between Giovanna Borasi, Yve Laris Cohen, and Thom Moran (T+E+A+M) and moderated by Charles Aubin and Carlos Mínguez Carrasco completed the program. “Making Room for Action” ended with *Offsetted*, a lecture-performance by Cooking Sections on the financialization of urban trees turned “carbon reserves” in New York to offset pollution. *Marching On*, the performance discussed by Mabel O. Wilson and Bryony Roberts in their essay “We March,” was commissioned by Storefront for Art and Architecture and presented as part of the Performa 17 biennial.

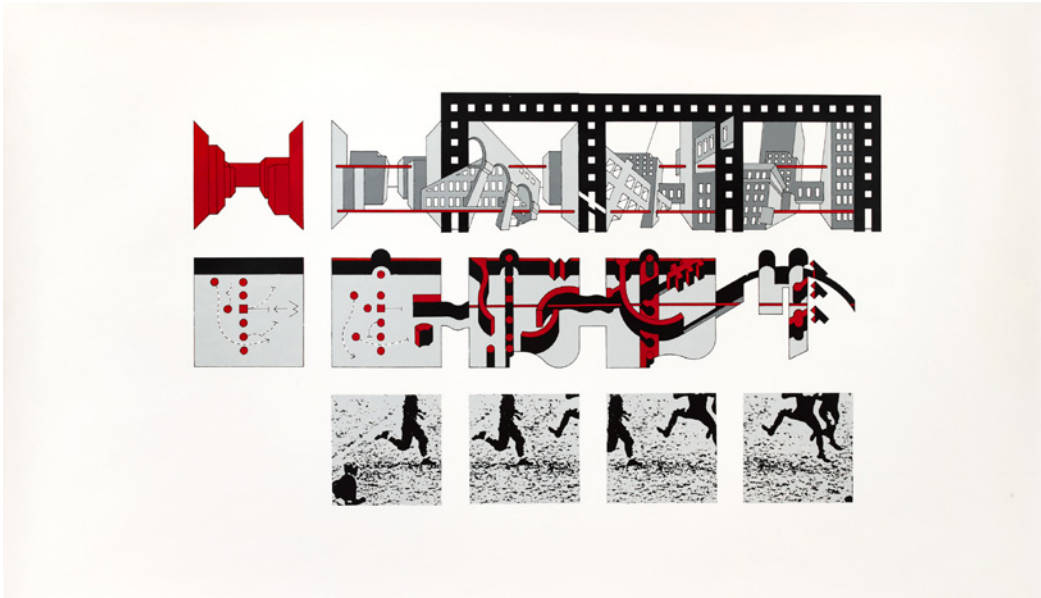


Bernard Tschumi, *The Manhattan Transcripts 4 (The Block)*, 1981.

With its emphasis on permanence and solidity, architecture at first resists an easy pairing with live performance, more typically associated with transience, ephemerality, or elusiveness. But beyond the surface differences, architecture and performance share a core concern: the push and pull of bodies and space.

From the get-go, we decided to focus our attention on the intersection of architecture and performance, and the new forms that arise when these two activities inform each other, lie across each other, transform each other. However, in the last century, both “architecture” and “performance” have expanded to encompass far more territory than before. If we wish to understand the relationship between them, perhaps it is best to insist that “architecture” and “performance” are not catch-all terms. Even the Blur Building has an inside and an outside.

“Alles ist Architektur” (*Everything is architecture*), declared Hans Hollein in 1968.<sup>7</sup> But is it? And is this maximalist claim helpful today? While such a definitive statement helped Hollein to move away from infrastructural approaches to architecture (i.e. erecting buildings) fifty years ago, it endures now mostly as a tripwire:



preventing us from establishing clear-cut boundaries, and obscuring possible intersections with other practices, such as performance. Still, Hollein’s polemical statement might prove useful by placing architecture within an expansive network of social, political, cultural, and technological concerns (in other words: the built environment, a terrain of human experiences and interactions). *Bodybuilding* operates within this expanded field, where the roles of architecture and the architect extend past the fulfilment of projects for clients or the discovery of design solutions. It is a field that shifts intermittently between formal preoccupations and ethical responsibilities.

For Tschumi, architecture always exists in a conflictual negotiation, its violent nature understood as a “metaphor for the intensity between individuals and their surrounding spaces.”<sup>8</sup> Hence, architecture lies in the interplay between spaces and the actions that take place within them. Not that Tschumi’s own work is performative as such: Most of his theses, as he himself has written, are primordially engaged with forging concepts rather than devising and implementing actions.<sup>9</sup> His *Manhattan Transcripts* (1976–81), for example, considers various actions that highlight the relationship between space and its social use and value, yet these striking visual compositions remain theoretical speculations. They are aspirations or guidelines, but could hardly be considered scores. But what happens when you extend Tschumi’s approach to real actions, real bodies, real spaces?

More specifically, *Bodybuilding* is not about *theories* of architecture and performance, but about putting those theories into practice. The philosopher Michel de Certeau and his brilliant depictions of tactics of the pedestrian to subvert maps and institutions are ubiquitous in architectural publications;we’d like just as much attention afforded to Anna and Lawrence Halprin’s “Experiments in

The Arab World Institute by Jean Nouvel, Paris (inaugurated in 1987).

Environment” taking place on the streets of San Francisco.<sup>10</sup> If Gaston Bachelard precisely described how bodies and actions generate and inflect the qualities of a space in *The Poetics of Space*, we decided to highlight DAAR’s meetings over coffee, which assert the human capacity to alter an area’s experience in an equally profound way (page 56).<sup>11</sup> Yes, the voice of Maurice Merleau-Ponty is crucial in approaching architecture from a phenomenological perspective; here, we prefer to focus on Shusaku Arakawa’s more tactile experiments in enveloping structures for the user (page 50).

Tschumi, in a 2015 interview, offered a useful distinction between architecture and performance on the ontological level. For Tschumi, the former is a “field” (he proves reluctant to use the term *discipline*, as, according to him, it suggests a closed, definitive, or restricted territory), while the latter is something else. He categorically refuses to consider performance art as a discipline, considering it instead a “form of questioning disciplinary boundaries.”<sup>12</sup> We too, in *Bodybuilding*, treat performance not as a standalone discipline but as a *tool* to help architects accomplish a task, collect information, or disrupt a situation, sometimes more effectively than a drawing, 3D rendering, or model. More significantly, the tool of performance can serve as a *heuristic* device, allowing architects and collectives to probe the limits of the discipline, to learn, to solve problems. Performance, in this view, is as much a kind of knowledge production as an art form.

Historically, if *Bodybuilding* owes some debt to the utopias of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes, as well as to the “paper architecture” of the sixties and seventies, our editorial direction privileges actions and constructions that *actually* took form, even furtively, over theoretical and unrealized projects. Hence, for instance, our inclusion of Kunlé Adeyemi’s ephemeral structure *Prelude to the Shed* (page 102) and our omission of Cedric Price’s unrealized Fun Palace. Inspired by Price’s blueprints, Adeyemi and his studio, NLÉ, built something that was ultimately put in motion and performed by performers in front of an audience, according to Price’s intention.

Another limit of our research lies in the pervasive conflation of “performance” with the idea of the “live”—which often leads writers to limit discussions of performance and architecture to “responsive” buildings and parametric and data-driven design. Are the *moucharabieh*-inspired camera aperture windows of Jean Nouvel’s Arab World Institute in Paris an instance of “performative architecture?” Responding to daily levels of sunlight to adjust their shutters, they allow a constant level of illumination. And at Morphosis’s Bloomberg Center at Cornell University, thanks to motion sensors, the building is sensitive to its own occupancy levels and controls its own energy use accordingly. Really, though, if interactivity may help streamline the use of a building, it is hardly a path toward its own agency. Similarly, our interest in the Blur Building here stems from its unusual, evanescent nature, not its data-driven operating system.



7. *Bau: Magazine for Architecture and Urban Planning* (Vienna: Central Association of Austrian Architects, issue 1/2, 1968).

8. Tschumi, 123.

9. In an interview with Omar Khan and Dorita Hannah, Bernard Tschumi confessed: “I am not interested in taking an idea and materializing it, maybe to give it a materiality, yes, but that is different from embodiment. The issue for example with the *Advertisements for Architecture* is simply developing a body of ideas, which you are trying to communicate not only to others but also to yourself.” in “Performance/Architecture, an interview with Bernard Tschumi,” *Journal of Architectural Education* (London: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, Inc., volume 61, no. 4, May 2008): 54.

10. “Walking in the City” in Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, first published in 1984).

11. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, first published in Paris in 1958).

12. “Architecture Beyond Architecture: Cathryn Dwyre and Chris Perry in conversation with Bernard Tschumi,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 37, no. 1 (January 2015, PAJ 109): 11.

As simple as it may sound, we are interested in performances understood as actions, happenings, events, or staged situations. They may bear various cultural signifiers, such as pageants, processions, ceremonies, or rituals; they may, or may not, include bodies; but their intrinsic nature lies in a shared, even if furtive, experience. Variables of presence, ephemerality, and intensity help us fine-tune our investigation. Moreover, for *Bodybuilding*, performance is also embedded within an institutional framework. In a Duchampian manner, Richard Schechner considers that “there is nothing inherent in an action in itself that makes it a performance or disqualifies it from being a performance. [...] What “is” or “is not” performance does not depend on an event in itself but on how that event is received and placed.”<sup>13</sup> Here, performance is understood as a live experience or action involving a specific and deliberate theatricality, even minimal, in the power fields encompassing performers (bodies or ephemeral constructions), viewers, and actions carried out. An intentionality is required. While an audience need not always be constituted to witness the action (e.g. Ugo La Pietra’s *Il Commutatore*, page 42), the very fact that we were able to gather so much photographic documentation for this book indicates that the initiators of each project included here anticipated an afterlife for their actions. Even more so now: amid a daily deluge of Instagram posts and stories, where images prevail over actual experience, they qualify as “performance.”

A final note on terminology: You will rarely find terms such as *performative* and *performativity* in *Bodybuilding*.<sup>14</sup> First coined in 1955 by John L. Austin in his “How to Do Things With Words,” a series of lectures presented at Harvard University that grounded his speech act theory, the adjective *performative* has since endured a bumpy ride of mutations, misuses, and ambiguous transpositions from one field to another, including architecture.<sup>15</sup> As much as possible, we refrained from overusing these slippery terms, though we agreed to make space for them when deemed productive. In short, our use of *performance* follows an art-historical tradition established by RoseLee Goldberg, but we acknowledge that performance, in itself, is never “pure.”<sup>16</sup> Occasionally, we therefore estimate that it may be valid to drift away from art history and into, say, linguistics, if that other field’s understanding of performativity clarifies our own.

Initially, with his concept of performative utterances, Austin argued that language could do more than represent or describe a situation; it had the ability to transform that situation. When a person (invested by the correct authority) enunciates a performative utterance such as “I now pronounce you husband and wife,” it indeed produces effects on the world. Such an example bears political, legal, and financial implications. However, for Austin’s theory, it is of paramount importance that the performative utterances be expressed within the appropriate context. If used playfully or with insincere motivations, Austin deems them “unhappy,” and, as a consequence, null. Turning speech act theory on its head, Jacques Derrida later asserted that it is this very playfulness and possibility of being reiterated that makes these speech acts productive. They “break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable.”<sup>17</sup> Judith Butler would soon build upon Derrida’s concepts of citation and iterability to shape her performative approach to gender, formed over time by the repetition of culturally prescribed actions and accepted behaviors.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, the performativity of gender is productive inasmuch as it creates, repeats, distinguishes, and (most often), reinforces gender roles.

But if, with Butler, it proves helpful to examine gender formation through the lens of performativity, what could a performative architecture be? Isn’t architecture performative in itself—as it creates conditions for activities while ascribing roles to its users? Architecture prescribes space and the modalities by which space may be used. It determines access and patterns of circulation, as expressed in the ultimate architectural cliché: the “panopticon” described by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*.<sup>19</sup> We spent a lot of time thinking about an answer Foucault gave to an interviewer in 1982, when asked whether he knew of any architectural projects, past or present, that instead encouraged liberation or antagonism. “Liberty is a *practice*,”

Foucault countered. He added: “There may, in fact, always be a certain number of projects whose aim is to modify some constraints, to loosen, or even break them, but none of these projects can, simply by its nature, assure that people will have liberty automatically, that it will be established by the project itself.”<sup>20</sup> Performance, at least sometimes, may be a tool to exercise this liberty.

# Modernist Vistas

Yet the twentieth century is full of failed attempts to liberate us through architecture.

Growing urbanization and new industrial and colonial fortunes, as well as the proliferation of new technologies and the newspaper boom at the end of the nineteenth century, dramatically transformed everyday life and cultural habits. In the new modern city, with its subway cars and elevators, travel distances shortened and time got compressed. The city championed a new way of life *on the move*.

These new urban lives called for a revamped relationship to the built environment, one now conceived consubstantial with speed and movement. Believing that modern life demanded modern art and modern architecture, many avant-garde European movements of the early twentieth century explored radical, totalizing projects to reprogram society—often eliding any distinction between architecture and performance. Yes, the nineteenth century does offer a few precedents of architecture incorporating movement: follies, panoramas, or temporary constructions for universal expositions. But few of these projects championed all-encompassing agendas in the manner of later modernist constructions, which asserted a new program for the masses on a large scale. Modernists’ aspirations to collapse art and life have often provided the toolbox for most of the conceptual conversations that unfolded throughout the remainder of the century. Taking various forms and often antithetical directions, they nevertheless opened up possibilities to imagine new modes of material and social life driven by more transient and flexible approaches to architecture.

In his Futurist Manifesto (1909) published in the newspaper *Le Figaro*, in and among its warmongering and misogyny, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti declared that “the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed.” For Marinetti, the city of the future was an enthralling machine crisscrossed by racing cars, speedy subway trains, and soaring airplanes.

Beyond the Futurists, the Russian Constructivists of the 1920s argued that the city of the future had to be mobile. In El Lissitzky’s words: “The static architecture of the Egyptian pyramids has been superseded—our architecture revolves, swims, flies. We are approaching the state of floating in air and swinging like a pendulum.”<sup>21</sup> Vladimir Tatlin’s iconic project for the Third International (1919–20), often nicknamed “Tatlin’s Tower,” epitomizes this glorious spectacle of dynamic architecture. The motorized building would literally *perform* by rotating on its axis in accordance with the passing of time. Tatlin’s Tower was meant to be a tool for communication and propaganda and prompt profound, radical social change. Its dynamic mechanisms had been tasked with pervading the lives of all of the new men and women of the Soviet Union to come.

This new approach to architecture, in which movement would command the built environment, was mapped on a desire to radically redesign society and social interactions through new understandings of space. Several Constructivists in the building arts followed the lead of Vsevolod Meyerhold, the theatrical director whose biomechanical techniques sought to reorganize the human body in space and imagine new postures, new gaits, and new interactions for the modern life. Social change could only come hand in hand with radical architectural advancements, themselves inscribed within a comprehensive reinvention of all art forms. Architecture, for its part, had to join forces with art and theater to reinvent the place of the body in space. Architects made their way to the stage and the new Soviet comrade was then integrated into a technologically transformed environment. Alexander Vesnin, for instance, one of the leaders of Constructivist architecture, turned his back on the construction of buildings per se to embrace a role within the theater,

13. Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London, New York: Routledge, first published in 2002, 2017), 38.

14. For a detailed account, see Victoria Bugge Øye, *Performing Architecture: A Theoretical Investigation on the Notion of “Performativity,”* Columbia University GSAPP, 2012.

15. Posthumously published as *How to do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, first published in 1962).

16. RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (London, New York: Thames & Hudson, first published in 1979, third edition, 2011).

17. “Signature, Event, Context,” in Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, trans. Samuel Weber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 12.

18. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, London: Routledge, 1990, third edition 2006).

19. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

20. “Space, Knowledge, and Power,” Michel Foucault interviewed by Paul Rabinow in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Christian Hubert (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 245.

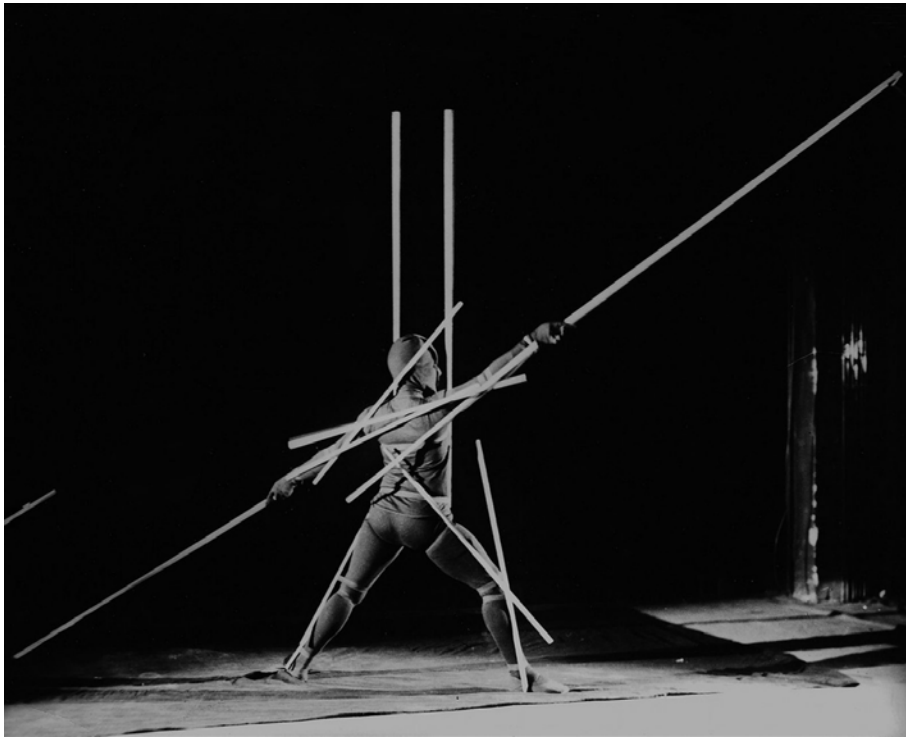
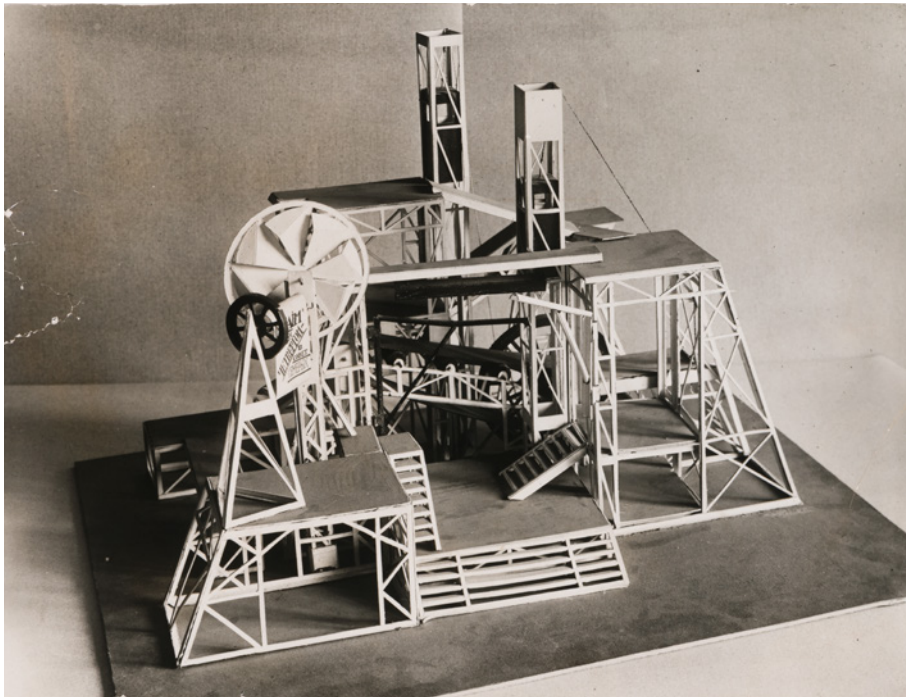
21. El Lissitzky, *Life, Letters, Texts*, ed. Sophie Lissitzky-Kuppers (London, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1967), 330.



Alexander Veenin, photograph of a model  
for the set for Chesterton's play  
*The Man Who Was Thursday*, Kamerny  
Theatre, Moscow, 1922-23.

*Slat Dance* by Oskar Schlemmer, 1927.

Frederick Kiesler, model for an  
*Endless House*, New York, 1960.



and instead worked for directors such as Meyerhold and Alexander Tairov, who materialized the rhetorics of movement.

After the first world war, in the first years of the Weimar Republic, Walter Gropius expressed his ambition for his newly established Bauhaus school in crystal-clear terms. “The ultimate goal of all art is the building!” was the incipit of his 1919 manifesto. Gropius's intention was unambiguous: art forms taught at the Bauhaus had to be at the service of architecture. But here is the Bauhaus paradox: the school did not actually offer any classes in architecture until 1927, after it had moved its campus to Dessau. Therefore, the formative years on their Weimar premises sought alternative ways to address questions of space, so crucial for architecture. In this respect, Oskar Schlemmer, who headed the Bauhaus's theater workshop, became a key figure. Through a series of abstract dance exercises, Schlemmer composed geometric shapes and actions that examined space through movement. This practice became a way for the German sculptor and painter to define, articulate, and order space.

With his *Merzbau*, Kurt Schwitters, who briefly studied architecture at Hanover's Technical College, engineered a sweeping transformation of his family house. Turning several rooms into grotto-like immersive environments of angled surfaces and protuberances, Schwitters proposed that architecture would grow over time in poetic and organic twists and turns that stood far from the Constructivists' mechanical ambitions. *Merzbau* also was an architecture that lived several lives: in Hanover; then Lysaker, near Oslo; and eventually Elterwater in England.

Acquainted with the Surrealist movement, the Austrian-American architect Frederick Kiesler experimented with a similarly unstable piece of architecture—one that was always in progress, that moved as it changed, that offered both continuity and infinity. *Endless House* (1947–60), an unrealized project for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, opposed Le Corbusier's commanding rationalization of life through its sequence of bulbous and ovoid chambers, one grafted onto the next. Kiesler's *Endless House* would evolve over time, thus constantly renewing the inhabitants' relationship to space. It was—or would have been, if it had ever been built—a house that performed the ebb and flow of life.

## Second Story Addition

As early as the Crystal Palace of 1851, international exhibitions and world fairs have offered platforms for architects to probe the limits of the discipline. These fixed-duration events allowed architects to showcase a more radical and unstable sort of building, and, by the postwar era, fairs and expos became testing grounds for faster, more extreme sorts of architecture that could never be executed on traditional construction sites.

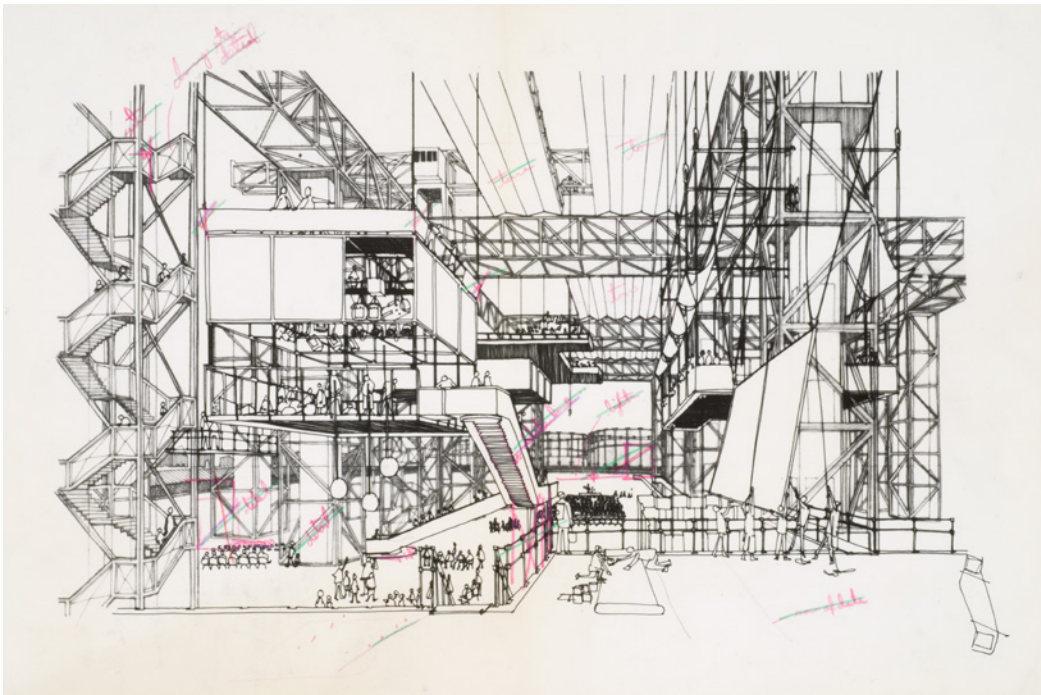
Quite a few of the most ambitious fairground structures incorporated time, interactions, and the study of human behaviors in their designs. Consider the Philips Pavilion for Expo '58 in Brussels, a collaboration between architect Le Corbusier and music composer Iannis Xenakis, who designed a multimedia environment in which sound, projections, textures, and architecture blended to produce a quasi-theatrical experience. In 1964, the IBM Pavilion for the New York World's Fair, designed by Eero Saarinen in collaboration with Charles Eames, invited audiences to sit on a series of bleachers on the ground floor, which then spectacularly rose into an elevated ellipsoidal theater projecting a gigantic multiscreen film. With a similar spectacular flair, Arata Isozaki and his two building-sized robots for Osaka Expo '70 explored human-computer interactions by collecting ambient information, which the robots translated into choreographies for the delight of the fair-going audiences (page 90).

Perhaps the most iconic project in the Hall of Fame of unrealized performative architecture is Cedric Price's Fun Palace (1959–61), whose interactive flexibility has made it a frequent reference point for contemporary marketing teams. A collaboration between architect Cedric Price and theater director Joan Littlewood, the Fun Palace sought to be an interdisciplinary “cybernetic” art



The Philips Pavilion by Le Corbusier and Iannis Xenakis at Expo '58 in Brussels, 1958.

Interior perspective for Cedric Price's Fun Palace, ca. 1964.



center which could be constantly reconfigured by means of mobile cranes and platforms, accommodating dance, music, and theater, in an interactive and “liberating” setting. Its metamorphic architecture was conceived to respond and transform according to users’ needs. It was meant to “learn” from their behaviors and plan for new, unexpected settings. The project was never built. Yet the Fun Palace laid the (ever-shifting) ground for a more radical understanding of how architecture could be reimagined integrally as a *performance*.

Averse to the imperative to build, Peter Cook, with Archigram, channeled this ethos of performance too. Opposed to traditional architectural principles of stability and durability, they preferred the creation of ephemeral events in order to liberate “bourgeois” architecture. Their propositions for “instant cities” imagined temporary intrusions in a landscape or urban fabric, featuring mobile apparatuses and technologies such as cranes, zeppelins, and screens. Architecture would ultimately disappear into a network of mobile populations traversing a multi media environment.

In many of the best cases, postwar architects’ turn to performance built on or even completed the conceptual explorations that have frequently been grouped under the name “paper architecture.” While a conceptual work of architecture might never leave the page, performers could enunciate or execute it in nimbler or less expensive ways than brick and mortar. This optional attitude to execution

bears similarities to Lawrence Weiner’s 1968 approach to art making: “(1) The artist may construct the piece. (2) The piece may be fabricated. (3) The piece need not be built. Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.”<sup>22</sup>

By 1975, RoseLee Goldberg had elaborated that performance, for all its immediacy, actually drew its power from many of the same preoccupations that animated conceptual art. Space, for her, was an arena for the realization of concepts, with the performing body as its active agent. “It is in space that ideas are materialised, experience experienced,” she wrote in “Space as Praxis,” and added:

While some ‘conceptual’ artists were refuting the art object, others saw the experience of space and of their body as providing the most immediate and existentially real alternative. Much of conceptual art, when presented as either ‘land,’ ‘body,’ or ‘performance’ art, implied indirectly or directly a particular attitude to and investigation of the experience of space.<sup>23</sup>

Some of the first architects to draw from these art-world precepts were the British practitioners Jenny Lowe, Nigel Coates, and Paul Shephard.<sup>24</sup> All studied at the Architectural Association in London, where both Bernard Tschumi and RoseLee Goldberg taught, and, in 1975, they took part in the exhibition “A Space: A Thousand Words,” co-organized by Goldberg, then director of the Royal College of Art’s gallery, in collaboration with Tschumi. Through temporary installations and actions in vacant and derelict buildings—London’s real estate market remained depressed in the wake of the 1973–75 recession—these young architects found a way to practice without building. For the architectural historian Sandra Kaji-O’Grady, tracing Goldberg’s argument, they used performance as “a vehicle for materializing architectural concepts, preserving ambiguity and acting directly upon the city.”<sup>25</sup>

In the post-recession New York of the late seventies, by contrast, the conceptual and performative experiments taking place in the lofts of SoHo largely featured artists, musicians, and choreographers, with few architects. One rare exception was Gordon Matta-Clark, whose works of “anarchitecture” appeared at the SoHo space 112 Greene Street and throughout the city. Trained as an architect, Matta-Clark’s disorienting actions—splitting buildings or creating hollow conical shapes—brought the provocations of conceptualism directly to the Hudson River piers or the working-class New Jersey suburbs. Several years later, Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio, produced some of their earliest architectural projects in the form of theatrical pieces and outdoor performances. *Traffic* (1981), a 24-hour-long reorganization of Columbus Circle using 2,500 orange traffic cones, and *American Mysteries* (1984), whose plot is driven by a box-like device that dictates the performers’ movements, show how performance was key for these architects to test the ideas they would later solidify in glass and concrete.<sup>26</sup> Goldberg, who by then had moved to New York and witnessed these early performances, specifies: “Diller + Scofidio’s diverse and innovative theater projects served not only as full-scale working models for their ideas about architecture, they also provided a laboratory for the concepts that would give their first buildings their most distinctive qualities.”<sup>27</sup>

The various exchanges (of methodologies, influences, forms, etc.) between visual arts and architecture infuse *Bodybuilding*. Victoria Bugge Øye’s essay describes the porosity between the two milieus in 1960s Vienna, where members of Coop Himmelblau attended transgressive performances by Viennese Actionists such as Otto Muehl, Hermann Nitsch, or Günter Brus, and rubbed shoulders with a generation of artists including Peter Weibel and Valie Export (page 72). However, we have restricted our case studies to works by architects, those trained in or practicing architecture, or who participate in the discourse on architecture. Some personalities obviously exceed these rules, such as Gordon Matta-Clark, mentioned above, or Vito Acconci, who moved on from New York’s downtown poetry and performance scenes to furniture design and architecture in the 1980s.

22. Lawrence Weiner, “Statement of Intent,” 1968. First published in *January* 531, 1969, exhibition catalog (New York: Seth Siegelaub, 1969), unpaginated.

23. RoseLee Goldberg, “Space as Praxis,” in *Studio International* (September 1975), 262 and 254.

24. Sandra Kaji-O’Grady, “The London Conceptualists: Architecture and Performance in the 1970s” in *Journal of Architectural Education* (London: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, Inc., vol. 61, no. 4, May 2008): 43–51.

25. Kaji-O’Grady, 50.

26. Diller + Scofidio titled their first solo exhibition “*Bodybuildings*.” Presented at Storefront for Art and Architecture in 1987, the show has been an inspiration for this publication.

27. RoseLee Goldberg, “Dancing about Architecture,” in *Scanning: The Aberrant Architectures of Diller + Scofidio* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2003).



EXYZT's Southwark Lido at the 2008 London Festival of Architecture. The temporary scaffolding structure included a sauna, paddling pool, spray deck, viewing platform, and changing rooms.



# The Roof is on Fire

By the 2000s, alternative, ad hoc, and participatory forms of architecture of the 1960s and 1970s had mutated from countercultural experiments to more direct, socially oriented practices—ones that, sometimes, could be hard to distinguish from public service. In Europe, the welfare state that supported a generation of large-scale civic projects had withered, and community-driven architects of a new, neoliberal era had to conceive of cheaper, more flexible responses.

“We are fully aware that we operate somewhere between theatre, event, spectacle and performance,” wrote the members of the German collective raumlabor in 2008. “We prefer to call our projects campaigns than events because in a planning context the term event stinks!”<sup>28</sup> Starting to work with installations and actions in 1999, raumlabor has pioneered a form of turn-of-the-century radical urban activism, eschewing the trend of “signature buildings” and treating the city’s empty lots and deteriorated public spaces as laboratories for bottom-up action.

Other collectives operating in line with this ethos include EXYZT and Encore Heureux in Paris; Basurama (page 136), PKMN, Todo por la Praxis, and Zuloark in Madrid; Orizzontale and Stalker/Osservatorio Nomade in Rome; Studio Nomad in Budapest; Research for Architecture Domain in Kyoto, a77 in Buenos Aires, Super-sudaca, futurefarmers, and Center for Urban Pedagogy, among many others. The crowning act of this group of practitioners is Assemble, a London-based collective who won the 2015 Turner Prize—defeating three visual artists—for their community-led project to rebuild a derelict neighborhood in Liverpool.

We contend that the global financial crisis of 2007–08 had an amplifying impact on the development of these “critical spatial practices,” to borrow Jane Rendell’s term for architectural endeavors that intervene directly in social space.<sup>29</sup> Not only did the crisis push part of the profession in precarity due to less frequent rates of construction commissioning, it forced practitioners to reflect on their own discipline and its complacency within the speculative construction frenzy that led to the recession in the first place. While unable to prove themselves by erecting buildings, they could refine their approach to architecture by using what was at hand: inexpensive materials, help from friends and collaborators, and even their own bodies.

The financial crisis shone a klieg light on the absorption of the architectural profession into the commercial real estate industry. Unmasked as little more than valets for the developers and financial interests who set off the crisis, architects

(at least some of them!) published articles and mounted debates that probed the hidden complicities of the discipline.<sup>30</sup> Not a few of these interventions took the form of participatory performances—such as the staged parliament “Ten Days for Oppositional Architecture Towards Post-Capitalist Spaces” led by the Berlin-based collective An Architektur in November 2009 in New York for Performa 09. If a generation of architects started to use action-based alternative initiatives as a form of critique of architecture’s conventions before the crisis, it is after 2008 that performance became their go-to.

Here’s the tricky thing, though: the very same economic shifts that saw young architects turn to performance in the early twenty-first century also permeated the cultural institutions in charge of presenting and discussing architecture, often in search of an audience-friendly public platform. Since the early 2000s, museums and art centers have increasingly turned to event-based programming over the collection and display of objects. They agilely adapted to the “experience economy” with, for instance, a steep increase in dance and performance programs.<sup>31</sup>

In the world of architecture, the budding outlet of the new experience-oriented economy has been biennials and triennials, which have multiplied from Oslo (initial edition in 2000), Rotterdam (2003), and Lisbon (2007), to Istanbul (2012), Chicago (2015), Seoul (2017), and Sharjah (2019). These public forums do satisfy the appetites of architects for questions not evidently considered within their traditional remit. As Léa-Catherine Szacka emphasizes: “These large-scale exhibitions use architecture, design, and the urban environment more broadly to tackle societal topics ranging from sustainability to our sense of belonging and from robotization to the power of form. They follow and record economic crises, city crises, migration crises, and they speak of phenomena closely linked to the world situation rather than just architecture per se.”<sup>32</sup>

And performance is often their medium of choice. In 2015, with *We Know How to Order*, Bryony Roberts addressed the de facto segregation of Chicago at the city’s inaugural architecture biennial, inviting the South Shore Drill Team to perform on the piazza in front of the Federal Center, a paragon of power representation designed by Mies van der Rohe. Two years later, Roberts joined forces with the architecture scholar Mabel O. Wilson for *Marching On*, which explored similar questions of public assembly with the Marching Cobras of New York City, a drumline and dance team from Harlem. Roberts and Wilson’s essay for *Bodybuilding* undertakes a careful study of earlier marches and processions in the city, including the 1917 Silent Protest Parade against racial violence in the American Jim Crow South, parades by black soldiers of the Harlem Hellfighters returning home after the First World War, and Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association processions in 1920s Harlem. As the architects argue, following Judith Butler’s *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, “the gathering of bodies en masse performs collectivity, embodying shared experiences and assert political presence.”<sup>33</sup> Performance thus functions as an act of reclaiming public space; it is another way to practice architecture, without building.

But this event-based and “festivalist” approach is, at best, a double-edged sword. As Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello laid out twenty whole years ago in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999), the commingling of “creativity” and alienated labor pervades everyday life; it has only gotten worse since, as we post our lightly edited selfies to Instagram from our coworking space. In the twenty-first century, performance may therefore no longer always be an expression of artistic freedom or a “disruptive” agent. Under this new paradigm, it might sometimes plainly participate in the processes of commodification. While Diller Scofidio + Renfro’s *Mile-Long Opera* (2018), a communion of more than a thousand New Yorkers gathered to sing on the High Line, was an unparalleled celebration of the architects’ hometown, it also functioned as a marketing opportunity for the conspicuous real-estate fever that has gathered along the route of the old freight-train railway.

28. Raumlabor, *Acting in Public* (Berlin: Jovis Verlag GmbH, 2008), 17.  
29. Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006).  
30. See for example Reinhold Martin, “Real Estate as Infrastructure as Architecture” in *Fundamental #13, Places Journal* (online, May 2014); Pelin Tan, “Architecture After Crisis,” in *ARQ* (Santiago: Universidad Católica de Chile, no. 91, Dec. 2015); Douglas Spencer, *The Architecture of Neoliberalism: How Contemporary Architecture Became an Instrument of Control and Compliance* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016). Several exhibitions also addressed directly or tangentially these questions: “9 + 1 Ways of Being Political” curated by Pedro Gadanho at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012–2013); “Adhocracy,” the 2012 Istanbul Design Biennial curated by Joseph Grima; or “Close, Closer,” the 2013 Lisbon Architecture Triennale curated by Beatrice Galilee.  
31. B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 1999); Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells, Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London; Brooklyn: Verso, 2012).  
32. Léa-Catherine Szacka, *Biennials / Triennials* (New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2019), 19.  
33. Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).



# Laying the Groundwork

The central question of *Bodybuilding* is: What happens when performance enters the world of architecture? Understood as a tool, a method, or a heuristic device, performance is a blade that cuts into the matter of architecture. It slashes it open, but it may also help shape it.

*Bodybuilding* charts an alternative lineage of architects (though not an exhaustive one; further examples beyond the West remain to be studied) who deliberately engage with this methodology. The book is organized into three sections; each features an essay followed by a series of concise case studies ordered chronologically. These sections are not hermetic or mutually exclusive; we constructed them having in mind that some of the entries could be a nuanced combination. For instance, Moore Grover Harper’s televised charettes are as much events that built knowledge to properly conduct the design phases as they were critiques of the opacity that usually prevails in such situations. They could, in this respect, with a different emphasis, have migrated to the third section. Also, Victoria Bugge Øye’s essay discusses how Coop Himmelblau used medical technologies to *critique* scientific abstractions of the world, but it is the complex codependency between Coop’s architectural structures and their users that led us to insert this essay in our second category, not the third. Finally, two interviews function as hinges between the three sections.

## 1. PERFORMANCE AT YOUR SERVICE

What happens when architectural practices incorporate performance into their design methods? Santiago-based architect Rodrigo Tisi describes the potential of performance as a generator of design. Architects “require useful mechanisms to analyze our proposals,” he writes, and, “there are many representational tools, including digital simulations, scaled models, and full-scale prototypes.” But *performance* for him “provides a guiding paradigm for testing and evaluating architecture objects, from conception to production.”<sup>34</sup> In his essay “Trauma in a Real Estate Office” (page 26), Lluís Alexandre Casanovas Blanco gives an illuminating example: a housing project design in Madrid implemented in 1968 and led by Ricardo Bofill and his office Taller de Arquitectura, which required the organization of a year-long series of performances in a mock-up of a real estate agency. Infused by Antonin Artaud’s writings and The Living Theatre’s techniques, these performances—which included gesturing mimes, projections, and sounds—were imagined to introduce potential apartment buyers to the Taller’s unconventional visions of domestic life. The goal was that the audience and prospective clients would buy right there, upon exiting the room.

Other architects featured in this section have used performance to collect information crucial for the design process, but also to learn through performing. These include the San Francisco architect Lawrence Halprin, who, with the choreographer Anna Halprin, staged collaborative workshops where professionals from different backgrounds (dance, architecture, visual art, psychology, and pedagogy) developed new forms of perception and architectural creation through kinesis and body-environment awareness techniques (page 40). Charles Moore was involved in the Halprins’ experiment, and we also find him a decade later in Virginia, Ohio, and upstate New York running a series of *Design-A-Thons*: televised charrettes on a local television channel that brought citizen participation into urban planning (page 46). These performances, with live critiques and public responses, eventually generated significant knowledge for them that fed into the design process.

## 2. OUT OF CHARACTER

In Vienna, a large plastic sphere inflates and deflates on the hour. Grafted onto a residential building, it houses a platform for two people who, once inside, sit in an uncertain space—neither fully private, nor entirely public. And, as seen from the street, the bubble, *Ballon für Zwei* by Haus-Rucker-Co (page 84), only episodically reaches its state of completion. In Venice, visitors cruising down Punta della

Dogana come face to face with an enormous theater joyously floating in the Grand Canal, with San Marco’s Campanile in the background. Aldo Rossi’s *Teatro del Mondo*, reminiscent of sixteenth-century buoyant follies for Venice’s water parades, temporarily offered chamber music and *commedia dell’arte* for the adventurous mind (page 94). In Seoul, a geometrical building is turned spectacularly upside down with the help of cranes, bringing down a program that was until that point on the roof. OMA’s *Prada Transformer* (page 98) offered a large variation of uses of its steel pavilion: movie theater, fashion exhibition, art exhibition, and special events.

Here are three occasions in which architects create buildings that breathe, float, and move as if they were organisms. They can even talk, as with MAIO’s contribution to the 2015 Chicago Architecture Biennial, for which the Barcelona-based firm made “smart” inflatable columns that circulated throughout the exhibition, in dialogue with what one was looking at. Freed from the importance to last, these unusual structures offer instability, fantasy, and adaptability, and open up alternative possibilities for user engagement. These temporary designs are key components of *Bodybuilding*’s approach to performance: Human bodies do not always need to be center stage for these ephemeral experiments to qualify as performance.

As this section enumerates, the relationships of these structures to the human body can be rather complex. They may require participation to exist, such as Yona Friedman’s *Museum without Building* (page 104). Some others depend directly on the human body to be put in motion, like Alex Schweder and Ward Shelley’s *ReActor* (page 100) and NLÉ’s *Prelude to the Shed* (page 102). In these cases, the buildings need to be “activated” by their inhabitants, even though these structures simultaneously impact the bodies that put them in motion, in a feedback loop. And this relationship may be even more symbiotic, such as in Coop Himmelblau’s *Soul-Flipper*. Here, Victoria Bugge Øye explains that even the flinch of an eyebrow could become architecture (page 72). Still others are almost performers themselves. In Diller + Scofidio’s early performances, such as *The Notary Rotary and his Hot Plate* (page 96) or *The American Mysteries*, architectural structures actively contributed to the unfolding of the plot. They set in motion a complex relationship between architecture, the human body, and the construction of space.

## 3. SEMIOTICS OF THE BUILDING

Canonical accounts of the role of performance throughout the twentieth century often position performance as a disruptive agent. Dada’s incendiary nights at Cabaret Voltaire challenged the absurdities of the First World War. Yoko Ono’s 1964 *Cut Piece* made visible tacit games of power between performer and audience. Martha Rosler scrutinized the daily violence embedded in kitchen tools and appliances in her mordant cooking show parody *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975).

It is often this legacy that architects seek to channel when they turn to actions and happenings. Site specificity becomes an important factor in this third section, and practitioners here frequently identify a point of resistance in the urban fabric and attempt to stage a response. In several staged actions at the U.S.-Mexican border, Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman engaged with the intricate infrastructures of transnational metropolitan areas, and even imagined new crossings with the official approval of both governments (page 140). Here, performance serves as a critical lens to unpack a situation and uncover hidden agendas inscribed within the built environment. In this way it forms part of a larger discursive turn in architecture, where the role of the practitioner is not to cater blindly to his or her clients’ desires, but to reflect on the discipline and its economic and political dependencies.

Finally, if the biennial format seems ideal for this critical and reflective approach, the most vital, challenging, and often adversarial works may come from a marginal practice: the lecture-performance. A favorite mode of the late 1960s avant-garde (such as Robert Smithson, Yvonne Rainer, and, above all, Joseph Beuys), the lecture-performance has been reinvigorated over the past decade, perhaps in reaction to the boom of TED talks, podcasts, and other digital palavers. Lecture-performances play with the affective tools employed by public speakers

34. Rodrigo Tisi, “B + S + P + T + PL + M, Six Ways to Approach Architecture through the Lens of Performance,” in *Journal of Architectural Education* (London: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, Inc., vol. 61, no. 4, May 2008): 69–75.

and professors to put knowledge and its circulation under pressure. Over the years, thinkers and practitioners such as Cooking Sections (page 146), Liam Young, and Forensic Architecture (page 150) have found ways to expand and complicate what it means to *talk* about architecture, and to engage with the social, economic, and political ramifications of public discourse.

## Doin’ it for the ’Gram

It’s May 2018. We’re in the Giardini della Biennale in Venice. It’s opening week of this year’s architecture biennial, and a line has formed outside the Dutch pavilion: a typical late De Stijl structure, built in 1953 by Gerrit Thomas Rietveld, all simplified vertical and horizontal lines.

Inside the pavilion, the Princeton University architecture professor Beatriz Colomina is lounging on a large bed in her pajamas. She has converted this outlet for national cultural promotion into a remake of an Amsterdam hotel room, where almost fifty years earlier John Lennon and Yoko Ono had staged their “Bed-In for Peace.” In this readymade of flower-power celebrity activism, Colomina has invited such guests as Madelon Vriesendorp, a cofounder of Rotterdam’s Office for Metropolitan Architecture, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, the peripatetic Swiss curator, to join her in bed and chat about the fate of architecture today. She is channeling the by-now iconic imagery of John and Yoko in the Amsterdam Hilton as the starting point for her own thesis: the bed, which went from private to public in the late 1960s, has now become a prime site of work, the locus of our conflation of labor and leisure.<sup>35</sup>

In the twenty-first century, a performance of this kind is just another way to address architecture, as valid as a model, a review, or a rendering. Yet Colomina knew, too, that such a performance now extends past the architect herself, to englobe an audience that both consumes and produces its appearance and its meaning. In 1969, Ono and Lennon could rely on a gaggle of international reporters and photographers, who transmitted their images worldwide through a unitary network of mass media. Those days are decidedly behind us. Atomized, transient, individuated, and self-promotional, today’s mode of media circulation necessitates another kind of performance. As the pavilion curator, Marina Otero Verzier, said: “These live events create a fluid space where performer and audience are not stable categories. Performers in pajamas turn into the audience, and the audience, impersonating the crowd of journalists surrounding Lennon and Ono, into performers. Meanwhile, Instagrammers move around in search of the perfect selfie background, also becoming part of the set. Visitors are doing intellectual and physical work at the same time, at the service of others.”

We’ve seen so many complaints, not all invalid, that social media has reduced architecture to little more than façades. Perhaps this is one further task of performance today: to turn those façades back into realms of human experience, both onsite and online.

Hans Ulrich Obrist and Madelon Vriesendorp in conversation with Beatriz Colomina at the Dutch Pavilion of the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale.



35. See Beatriz Colomina, “The 24/7 Bed,” in *Work, Body, Leisure*, ed. Marina Otero Verzier and Nick Axel (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2018), 189–204.  
36. In email correspondence with the authors, October 2019.









“My experience in *ReActor* is that it really is pleasant, sheltering, even nurturing. But very controlling,” remarks Ward Shelley in a diary entry on July 30, 2016—day four of his inaugural, five-day-long residency in the teetering building. In the sprawling greenery of Art Omi, a sculpture and architecture park in upstate New York, Shelley and his collaborator, Alex Schweder, built and subsequently cohabited a slick, box-like house—a forty-four-by-eight-foot-long construction with floor-to-ceiling windows, balanced fifteen feet above ground level on a single concrete fulcrum at its center. Schweder and Shelley have collaborated since 2007 on a series of similarly precarious “performance architectures”—including a two-sided tower of stacked rooms and an enormous inhabitable wheel—that demand codependency from their participants and investigate domestic choreographies. Raised on a hilltop in the park’s Architecture Field 01, *ReActor* is an environmental balancing act: the structure can spin 360 degrees and tilt like a seesaw, entirely susceptible to the weather and to the people living within it. Gusts of wind or rain set the building in motion. Divided into separate, symmetrical living spaces, the building simultaneously reacted to the movement of its occupants, rising and falling as Schweder and Shelley cycled through their respective daily routines. Simple domestic actions—washing, cooking, sleeping—all produced spatial consequences. The two, clad in orange and red jumpsuits in the whirring, spinning home, became tools of counter-balance, bound together to find stability in constant motion.