



XXV International Union of Architects (UIA)
World Congress DURBAN 2014

UIA 2014 South African Host: Iain Low | UCT Architecture-ACC

UIA 2014 Tuesday 5th August – 8.00-.8.10 am

Good morning, my name is Iain Low. I am an architect and academic from the the School of Architecture at University of Cape Town and on behalf of the UIA 2014 Organising Committee its my pleasure to welcome you to this mornings proceedings, marking the second day of the UIA 2014 World Congress here in Durban under todays subtheme of *ECOLOGY*.

By now we are all familiar with the overreaching topic of this years congress; '*OTHERWHERE*'. It is a term quined by Hilton Judin, yesterday's host introductory speaker, and the overall convenor of the 1998 exhibition and seminal publication entitled '*blank_____architecture apartheid and after*'. Similarly to '*blank*', '*Otherwhere*' projects a valent play on words, one that is emblematic of the conditions under which the contemporary project of architecture has to be produced.

Whilst *OTHER* speaks to our '*not selves*', and prompts us to engage the uncomfortable and unfamiliar, it is also a representation of the contemporary condition of globalisation and the radical extremes that are emerging within its production. In South Africa and in territories of the South, *OTHERWHERE* in fact represents a non-western place. A place of the privileging of difference, particularly the kinds that have been historically marginalized and excluded, most notably by architecture and similar disciplines whose practices operate through discrimination.

Architecture is the most discriminatory profession. In drawing lines, we set things apart, however, we can also deploy such acts in the interest of bringing dissimilar things together. In contrast it is possible to establish an *ECOLOGY* of cooperation wherein it is absolutely plausible for difference to co-exist, and be constructively exchanged within a horizon of inclusivity.

'*OTHERWHERE*' then stands for those places yet to be made; yet to be made in response to global problems, to milenium development goals, to poverty, inequality and underemployment; to the detritus of a modernism stripped of its social program. In other words it speaks to the speculation within the creative mind that describes the incredible design agency that architects uniquely possess.

No other discipline is capable of deploying spatial imagination in the service of complex human problems with such dexterity and in such a manner as to produce new knowledge about how we might dwell in comfort together on this earth. Architecture, when ethically produced is capable of solving problems and in so doing offering profound solutions that are capable of mediating in problems of human conflict.

[I'm not sure if any of the ministry representatives are still here today, but if there are any, you might convey that message to Government with respect to the challenge that was laid at architect's feet by the ministries yesterday morning and let professionals tender on the basis if ideas and quality as opposed to fees and quantity]



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Anyhow, in my mind, speaking from the South, OtherWhere is also probably then a non-white space, or at least a non-western one; one where origins are re-absorbed into the incomplete project of modernity to productively recover the sensibility of traditions, those erased in the onslaught of colonialism's imperative of overwriting history. Ricouer and Hoontonji's challenge of 'How to become modern without losing touch with sources' precisely defines this timely challenge for our profession.

Notwithstanding the above, there have been many categories of resistance in the face of the collapse brought on by the loss of certainty that has accompanied so-called post modernity. In the absence of a new narrative, subjectivity has become elevated with consequences of heightened levels of extreme individualism and autonomy – further distancing modernisms social program. RESILIENCE ECOLOGY & VALUE represent the three thematics that our scientific committee has identified as conditionalities that are capable of providing the necessary grounding to a re-oriented architectural thinking; that is the type of thinking that is capable of restoring commons to the project of architecture, and capable of bridging the gap between the extremes that divide.

At the Venice Biennale this year Rem Koolhaas has taken this return to origins back to the basics of architecture, proposing a re-evaluation of fundamentals and their elemental components. Much of the critique directed at Koolhaas' Biennale has been positioned in relation to his apparent failure to identify or privilege any language that demonstrates a manner in which fundamentals and elements are arranged in space to make an architecture. In this they claim he has failed architecture.

However Koolhaas' curation has deliberately sought only to reground us in fundamentals. Grammar is a practice that averts categorization and is strategically left to the individual designers to define through the asking of thoughtful questions – of what is possible under any given set of circumstances. Koolhaas is proposing a situated modernism, one that is highly responsive to an author's critical reading of contextual relations in order to produce what we might term a literary as opposed to an autobiographical architecture.

This has been most effectively communicated in the MONDOITALIA Pavilion where individual Italians have responded through the exercise of their own individual design agency. Further, an array of highly compelling approaches, developed by the curators in their interpretations of individual country pavilions, each articulating a particular projection of modernity having been produced under highly specific local conditions.

So what is perhaps being suggested by our UIA 2014 World Congress is that it is not so much a question of how we deploy the fundamentals of architecture, but rather one of in how we apply the principles that underpin RESILIENCE, ECOLOGY AND VALUES, as common informing sensibilities, individually and severally capable of transforming the project of architecture in our time.

Today's thematic of ECOLOGY implies a systemic approach, one based in the recognition of the interdependence of all things as the basis for life as we know it. Underlying this is a proposition of new order and of reconfigured spatial arrangements, ones which enable the exchange between different bodies. Recognised in our field under the trope of *ECOLOGICAL URBANISM*, a term evolved at Harvard's GSD under Mohsen Mostafahvi and Charles Waldheim, and one tracing a line of integrative thinking from Penn's McHarg through James Corner's *LANDSCAPE URBANISM* and up to our gathering today, where ECOLOGY is qualified by particular measures, that is the RESILIENCE AND VALUES that are capable of elevating the most noble of architectural intentions; that of giving Life to Form.

As we proceed with today's program I am convinced that this ECOLOGICAL thinking will manifest itself in the architectural work presented by our speakers. So I call on Andrew Makin to chair the next panel session. Please join me in welcoming Andrew Makin to the podium to introduce the Francis Kere, Susanah Drake and Kjetil Thorsen for his morning's plenary.



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