IMPROVISATION

Corey Saft, editor
W. Geoff Gjertson, coeditor
Michael McClure, coeditor
Hector LaSala, coeditor

CREDITS

ACSA
Stephen Schreiber, FAIA, ACSA President
Michael J. Monti, PhD., ACSA Executive Director
Russell Rudzinski, ACSA Southwest Director

Conference Chairs
W. Geoff Gjertson, Michael McClure

Proceedings Editorial Board
Corey Saft, Editor
Michael McClure, Co-Editor
W. Geoff Gjertson, Co-Editor
Hector LaSala, Co-Editor
Ashlie Guidry, Production Assistance

Conference Development Team
Garth Alper, jazz musician, composer, professor
Steven Bellanger, architecture graduate student
Danny DeVillier, musician, composer, teacher
W. Geoff Gjertson, assistant professor architecture
Hector LaSala, professor, architecture
Michael McClure, assistant professor, architecture
Jerry McGuire, poet, writer, professor
Elemore Morgan, artist, professor emeritus
Robert Russett, film and media artist, professor
Corey Saft, assistant professor, architecture
Amy Waguespack, actor, director, teacher
Cissy Whipp, dancer, choreographer, teacher

Additional thanks to:

UL Lafayette
Dr. Ray Authement, President
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Gordon Brooks
Dean, College of the Arts
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Robert McKinney
Director, School of Architecture and Design
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Jean Edwards, associate professor, interior design
Brooke Davis, assistant professor, industrial design
Andy Loewy, assistant professor, industrial design
Tom Sammons, professor, architecture
Eddie Cazayoux, professor, architecture
Continuing Education Department, UL Lafayette
Taz Wininger

AIA
AIA Louisiana executive committee
AIA South Louisiana Chapter
    David LaBarbera, President
    Eric Crozier- vice president
    Geoff Gjertson-treasurer
    Mark Steilper- secretary

Hosting Firms
Architects Southwest
MBSB Group
David Courville Architect
Artists and Architects Gallery

cover image by Jonathan Wehri

ON IMPROVISATION, MAKING, THINKING

JULIO BERMUDEZ ▪ UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

TOM FOWLER ▪ CALPOLY, SAN LUIS OBISPO

BENNETT NEIMAN ▪ TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Argument

This paper investigates architectural design as a nonintellectual act. Today architecture is suffering from the hypertrophy of the intellect. What cannot be rationally articulated, either from theoretical or pragmatic extremes, is given little or no value. Even the most obviously irrational proposals are presented with logical justifications. Students and some faculty believe that by rationalizing the design act they will establish a higher level of architectural meaning. This panel offers improvisation as an alternative method that confronts the tendency to over intellectualize.

This design work investigates the potential role of improvisation in architectural design. It intentionally proposes intuition over thought in the decision making process. It challenges the prevalent belief that thinking and control lead to understanding and problem solving. It is based on the premise that inspired design rarely comes out of a priori thought. It highlights issues often undervalued or ignored in current design teaching and research. It reminds us of important things. Good design advocates a construction

process that materializes through the body and, as Peter Zumthor states, ultimately comes from insight and feeling rather than pure reason. In so doing, this panel re-situates the role of the intellect in architectural design.

Some might say that current post-structuralist theory, particularly those dealing with rhizomatic ideas, has already taken care of disproving the solidity of thought, strict methodologies, and pure rationality. To an extent this is true. However, these efforts come through over-intellectualized argumentation that tends to freeze any action beyond words. Thinking, no matter how clear or correct, is not equal to actual doing. Exercising improvisation and intuition cuts through all of the pre-thinking and delivers us into ordinary processes readily accessible to designers, and therefore a more useful response to "real world" situations.

Three different design investigations are offered as case studies: the cyberPRINT (by Julio Bermudez), the imaginedRealities (by Tom Fowler) and the bebopSPACE (by Bennett Neiman). Despite their distinct characters, approaches and results, all three are based on a technique of letting go of thought, (of 'explaining') and instead using an intuitive process of making and thinking. All three follow the language of new media, building on the conventions of old media. In addition, they find common ground in their inspiring nature, seductively motivating by requiring the observer to remain in a state of fluid perceptual "inhabitation." They demand the viewer's own improvisation and thus a committed participation. As a two-sided event, these works wake up architectural dreams in order to challenge, discover, and invent. As a result, they

provide strong proof that an alternative architectural practice based on improvisation is not just possible, but preferable.

These works are questions, not solutions. The goal is to open up an intellectual space aware of its own power and shortcomings to serve architecture.

The cyberPRINT by Julio Bermudez
The cyberPRINT is the architectural expression in digital space of an individual's "lifespace" in real time. The cyberPRINT is both a probing and representational system that brings together science and art through architectural design. The cyberPRINT provides us with the opportunity for expressing and exploring architecturally the improvisational nature of being alive.

Figure 2 Performer experimenting with technological hook-up (above). Two improvisational architectural expressions of the cyberPRINT in performance (below) For more information, please, visit http://faculty.arch.utah.edu/cyberprint/index.

More specifically, the cyberPRINT is an electronic bio-feedback system driven by physiologic data drawn from a performer via special sensors attached to the body and transmitted wirelessly to computers which, in turn, generate and project a specially designed and programmed audio-visual 3D virtual reality in real time. Since the resulting virtual artifact represents the individual whose biological data generate and sustain it, it is a cyber-PRINT or personal signature of that individual in digital space. By enveloping its user through screen projection and/ or virtual reality technologies, the cyber-PRINT allows that individual to visualize, inhabit, and interact with others in unimaginable ways. It enables the performer and the audience to explore the creativity of non-intellectual, intuitive, and live design improvisation. Such architecture of being reverses the way we have hitherto interacted with and created architecture. In doing so, it opens new insights both into the nature of self, dwelling, design and making in the context of a totally new understanding of architectural improvisation.

imaginedRealities by Thomas Fowler
imaginedRealities is an unconventional methodology for integrating material in a building tech-
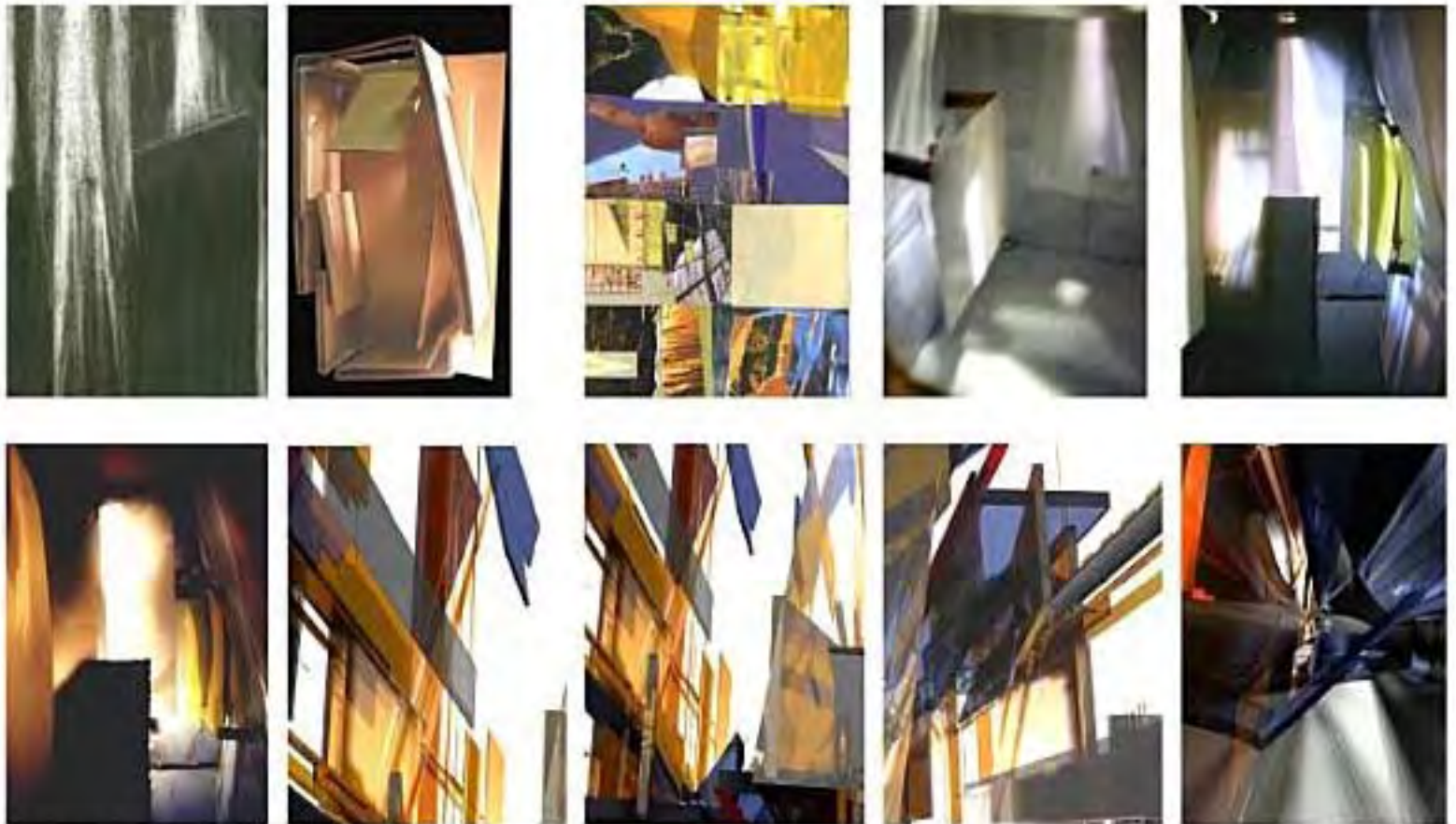

Figure 3 imaginedRealities design work

page unavailable

must listen and interact with speculative drawings, thus provoking an experience of improvisation. The designer/performer can interrupt the process at any time, allowing for the extraction of space from two-dimensional drawings into three dimensions at any scale, as a detail, as a building, or as an urban design.
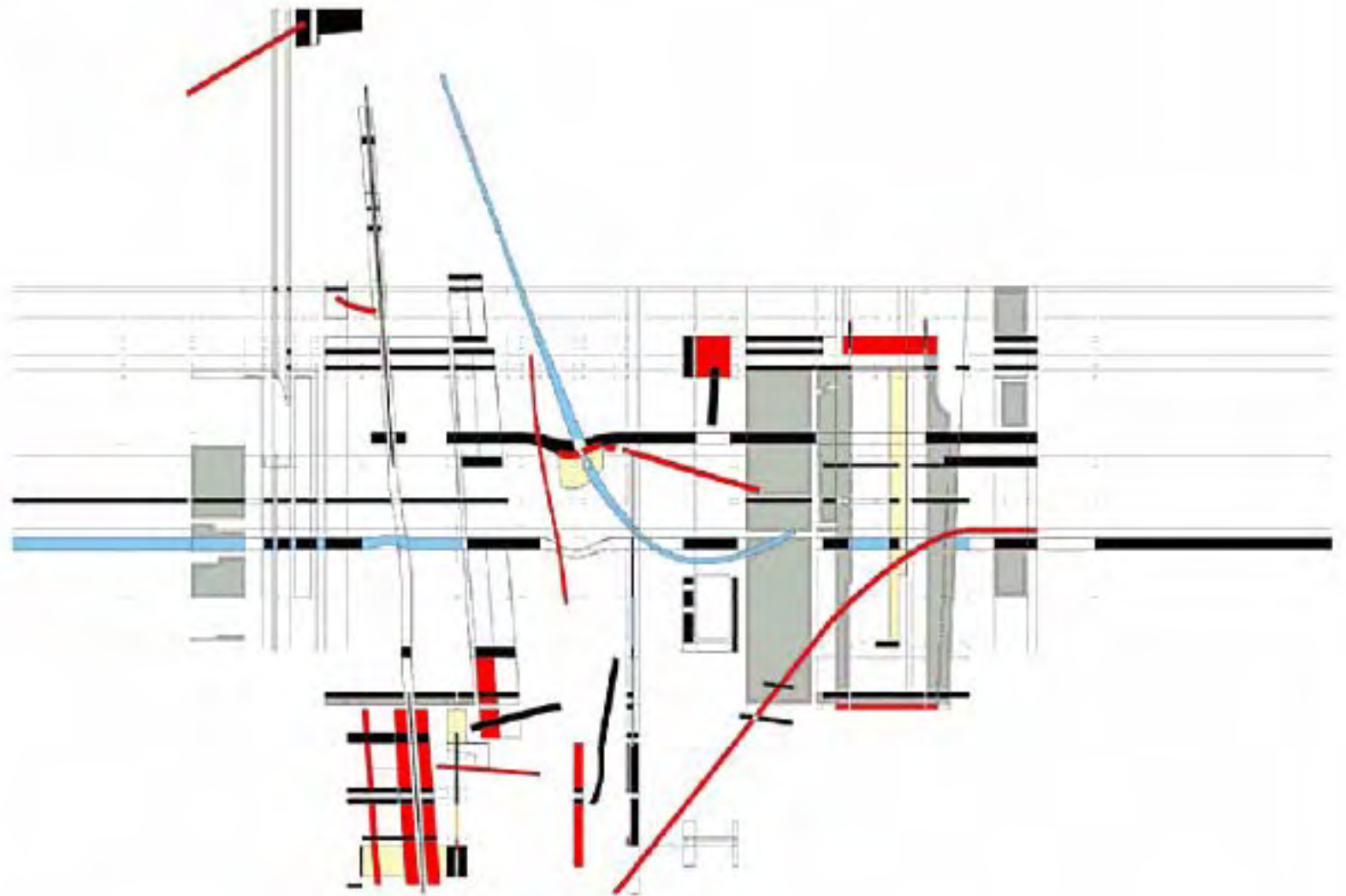
Figure 4 bebopSPACE design work For more information, please, visit http://bneiman.notlong.com/

page unavailable