

Surplus Value
Architecture and labor

A proposal for the Oslo Architecture Triennale 2019

by

Brendan Cormier

+

FIG Projects (Fabrizio Gallanti and Francisca Insulza)

+

Mabel O. Wilson

London / Montréal / New York

October 2017

Surplus value

Architecture and labor



Introduction

In recent years, the role played by architecture, urban planning, and in general design practices with regards to the organization of labor has become central to the interests of numerous subjects. Rather than thinking architecture as a neutral agent, its modes of operation have been considered instrumental to the deployment of economic and social apparatuses of dominance. The theoretical engagement of Brazilian architect Sergio Ferro, who elaborated during the '60s and '70s the notion of the architectural project and its construction as means to extract surplus value, anticipates numerous current concerns, that on one hand concentrate about how architecture contributes to the control of workers and on the other seek for potential alternatives. The scope of such focus has expanded: generating new alliances between unions and trans-national advocacy groups in order to guarantee workers' rights during the execution of signature buildings or coming to describe the entire city as a complex economic mechanism, within which design and planning play a crucial role (Le Corbusier mentioning transport as time subtracted to workers or Archizoom's reading of the totality of the metropolitan realm as a factory) or seeing life as a whole as the object of exploitation (the concept of biopolitics analyzed by philosophers such as Melinda Cooper with the corollary demand for universal guaranteed salary).

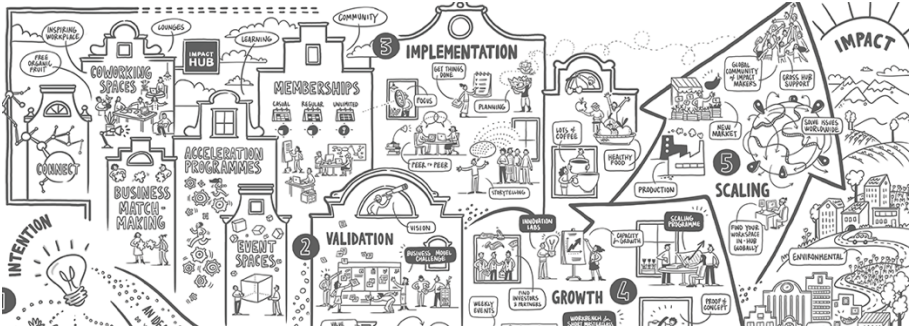
Theme

The proposal titled "surplus value" considers how architecture is engaged in the organization of labor. The current transformations of labor and work (off-shoring, automation, novel forms of immaterial production, on-demand hiring, digital surveillance of productivity, etc..) are incessantly changing and so are the forms of political mobilization to counteract the mechanisms by which capitalism continues to extract surplus value. Ultimately labor as we know it might entirely disappear: how will our lives and the spaces around them become when work will no longer be there? In organizing space and time, architects and numerous

complementary professionals have supported capitalist initiatives to arrange and control workers and to dictate their activities. At the same time, architectural expertise has also been mobilized to counteract such strategies, providing alternative political visions, different forms of social organization and contributing to the launch of deliberate acts of resistance

“Surplus value” explores the contradictions architecture faces when addressing the condition of work and its current organization.

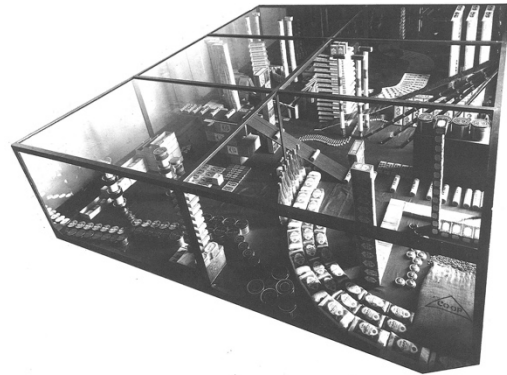
Concept



The different components included within this proposal aim to establish a framework to debate how architecture is equally a proactive agent of exploitation and a tool of emancipation. The project intends therefore to shed light on this dialectic, following three main narratives: how design implements the organization of labor and how this is being transformed in the actual neo-industrial epoch; how the building process is articulated from conception to execution, mobilizing diverse expertise and subjectivities and finally how the so called “creative” work of design is currently structured.

The topic will be addressed by juxtaposing historical precedents in order to provide depth to our understanding of the current conditions and to critically re-engage with past ideas and proposals that might become valuable today; built and ongoing projects that either are iconic of the current trends or are providing forms of resistance to them; analytical readings, where the tools of inquiry and representation, proper to architecture and urban studies, can be mobilized to create and disseminate knowledge; and prospective initiatives, where novel visions can be developed as political instruments for change.

Components



Main exhibition

The exhibition will operate as an inventory of singular elements, consistent with the concept and its structure. Audiences will be exposed to a multiplicity of contents, sometimes controversial, with which to engage in relationship to the personal conditions of their labor: ultimately, we all work. During the initial phase of research salient sub-topics and groupings will be identified and articulated to generate the curatorial narrative of the exhibition. It is the general intention of the exhibition to operate by analogy and comparative readings, with attention to Norway and Oslo: narratives of work registered there will be placed in tension with examples and experiences from other contexts. Elements of the exhibition can include historical material as the inquiries by Hannes Meyer about the organization of agricultural work in Mexico during the '30s, the Bürolandschaft concept developed by Eberhard & Wolfgang Schnelle in the '50s or the Bauhäusle self-building initiatives coordinated by Peter Sulzer and Peter Hübner in Stuttgart in the '70s; the ongoing researches on remittance urbanism by Husos, on vertical urban factories by Lina Rappaport or contemporary slave work in the building industry by Contraconductas; commissioned new documentation and analysis around emerging activities and their spatial configurations, which can be developed by film-makers, photographers and other practitioners (automatized indoor farming in Northern California or massive cosmetic surgery facilities in South Korea); novel typologies such as "impact-hubs", "co-working spaces", "temporary workers' camps" or entire urban interventions, related to specialized production as Paju Book City in South Korea; critical readings of highly symbolical projects such as Silicon Valley recent company headquarters; and new proposals that can federate different specialists and experts, as Lab.Pro.Fab. from Caracas, Arquitectura Expandida from Bogotá, (all)zone from Bangkok, AAA from Paris or Interboro Design from New York. The main objective of the exhibition is to reveal the articulated landscape that surround the reflection about labor and spatial production today, inscribing it within a wider historical trajectory.

Activities



The proposal seeks to find integration and overlaps between the different activities and events which will be part of its core programming (for instance academic workshops connected with the locations of the project for public space, “The Workers’ Assembly”)

Project in the public space

The Workers’ Assembly.

During the entire period of the Oslo Architecture Triennale, we propose a series of meetings in the city of Oslo and its surrounding territory to intercept, document and express the different forms of labor. These meetings will take the form of assemblies where workers, trade unions personnel, representatives from companies and institutions, mediators, designers and external contributors will discuss about the specific conditions of work. By identifying several quintessential locations (the start-up, the manufacturing factory, the corporate headquarters, the farm), the series of encounters will provide a parallel narrative to the main exhibition. Design workshops within the framework of the Academic Forum can accompany such assemblies.

Conference

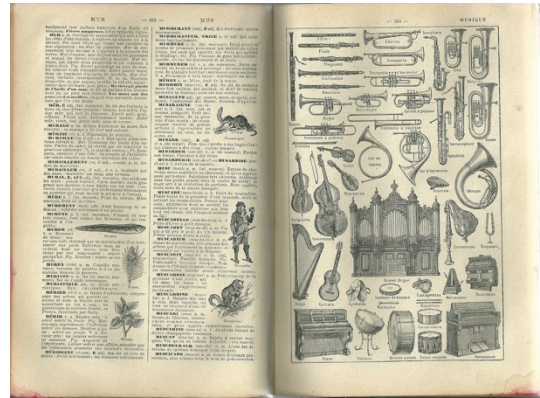
An international two-day conference will gather activists, politicians, union members, designers and experts to understand what are the current tendencies within the relationship between architecture, spatial production and labor and what are the concrete actions that can be developed to counteract the pressures of the market, accompanying ongoing initiatives.

Academic Forum

During the period of preparation of the Triennale, a series of thematic workshops will be conducted with the collaboration of architecture and design schools, in various locations around the world (3 to 4). Potential partnering institutions include the School of Architecture of the University of Illinois in Chicago; the Architecture Programme at the Royal Academy of Arts in London; the College of Architecture and Urban Planning at Tongji University in Shanghai and the Escola da Cidade in Sao Paulo. The results of these activities (which could invest practices of description or of design) will then be presented in Oslo, with the collaboration of the Oslo

School of Architecture and Design AHO, during a concluding forum. The forum will incorporate public presentations, tours and workshops to be conducted in synergy with “The Workers’ Assembly” module.

Publication



“Surplus Value” will be accompanied by a book, structured around three key components. Critical essays referred to the case studies, stories and topics presented within the exhibition; contributions (both textual and visual) that illustrate current localized conditions, in order to generate an indexed atlas of spatial practices referred to contemporary labor (following the model of the dictionary included in the volume “Blank--: Architecture, Apartheid and After”, published by NAI in 1999) and an anthology of existing essays and texts, apt to frame the discourse, with particular emphasis on the translation of material not yet available in English.

Digital Publication Series

The material gathered with local actors during the international workshops conducive to the Academic Forum will be at the base for the realization of a series of special issues of an online magazine, composed of texts, visual essays, documentary videos, analytical diagrams and representations that will portray specific local conditions as symptomatic of wider trends.

Timeline

A schematic allocation of time would structure the main activities as follows:

Thematic research and identification of participants

January 2018 – May 2018

Definition of the operative structure

January 2018 – March 2018

Research on archival material

January 2018 – October 2018

Commissions to participants (definition of contracts, fine tuning of briefs, meetings,)

May – September 2018

International academic workshops

September 2018 – June 2019

Curatorial sequence and object list

January 2019 – May 2019

Exhibition design, budgeting and production planning

February 2019 – May 2019

Production, edition and formatting of works for exhibition and publications

March 2019 – June 2019

Loans requests, purchase of material, transports to Oslo

March 2019 – July 2019

Final edition, proof reading and layout of publication

June 2019 – December 2019

Final production and installation

July 2019 – September 2019

Opening week

September 2019

Public activities in Oslo

September 2019 – November 2019

International launch of publication

January 2020

Structure of curatorial team

The proposed team is composed of Brendan Cormier - London, FIG Projects (Fabrizio Gallanti and Francisca Insulza) – Montréal, and Mabel O. Wilson – New York, with equal and complementary responsibilities and roles as chief curators.

This collaboration is based on the shared interests and ongoing research of the members, dedicated to the relationship between economy, politics, urban transformations, production of space and design practices. Also pour different backgrounds and trajectories will allow to cover a wider international approach.

The complete structure of the working group (including collaborators such as research assistants, curatorial coordinators, editors, etc.) and of complementary partners (exhibition and graphic designers, Internet developers, etc.) will be determined in the early stages of the curatorial work. The curatorial group intends to establish a semi-permanent office in Oslo to develop the research and the different components of the Oslo Architecture Triennale 2019.

CVS (extended documentation available upon request)

Brendan Cormier



Brendan Cormier is a writer, curator, and urban designer currently based in London. He holds a M.Sc in Urban Design at the Bauhaus Universität-Weimar, Institut für Europäische Urbanistik and a Bachelors of Urban and Regional Planning at Ryerson University, School of Urban and Regional Planning in Toronto.

He is currently the lead curator of 20th and 21st Century Design for the Shekou Partnership at the Victoria and Albert Museum in LONDON. Prior to this role, he served as the managing editor of Volume Magazine, continuing to collaborate as editorial advisor. He regularly writes for various publications including Mark, Domus, Azure, Monu, Thresholds, Conditions, and Canadian Architect on architectural and urban issues.

He has taught at the Berlage Instituut in Delft and Bruce Mau's Institute Without Boundaries in Toronto. In 2009 he co-founded the research and design studio Department of Unusual Certainties in Toronto, where he designed several exhibition installations that explored urban issues. In 2011 he was named innovator-in-residence at the Design Exchange, Canada's national design museum, where he was able to

contribute to and influence the curation of exhibitions and programming of events at the museum.

He has lectured internationally about architecture and design in institutions such as Bezalel Academy, Jerusalem, Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam, INDA, Bangkok, Arkitekturens Grannar and the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm, Asia Society Hong Kong Centre, Hong Kong.

He has curated numerous architecture and design exhibition such as “Values of Design”, V&A Gallery at Design Society, Shenzhen, China (2017), “A World of Fragile Parts”, Pavilion of Applied Arts at the Venice Biennale of Architecture (2016) and ‘Unidentified Acts of Design’, Shenzhen Biennale of Urbanism\Architecture (2015).

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FIG Projects



FIG projects was founded by architects Fabrizio Gallanti and Francisca Insulza in 2003 in Santiago de Chile. Wide ranging in nature, their practice extends from architectural explorations (new seat for the Literature School, Universidad Diego Portales, 2003-2005, Santiago, Chile; first prize European 8 competition, Kristiansand, Norway, 2006), urban studies (“The Block”, 2004; “SARS Atlas” 2006; “Donde?” 2006-2012), writing (Fan Club series for Interwoven magazine, 2016-) and curatorial projects (“Su Rut?”, 2004, “The World in Our Eyes”, Lisbon Architecture Triennale, 2016).

FIG projects’s work has been exhibited in different venues including Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Santiago de Chile; exo.org, São Paulo; film + arch, Graz; Architecture and Urbanism Biennale, Shenzhen Hong Kong; Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal; Venice Architecture Biennale; Archivo Diseño y Arquitectura, México; Storefront Gallery for Art and Architecture, New York and Flint Free Festival, published in books such as “USE, Uncertain States of Europe” and international magazines as Domus, A+U etc.

Fabrizio Gallanti has wide-ranging and international experience in architectural design, education, publication, and exhibitions. He holds a Ph.D. in architectural design theory from the Politecnico di Torino (Turin, Italy 2001) and an M. Arch. from the University of Genova (1995). In 1998, he was among the founding members of gruppo A12, a collective of architects dedicated to the hybridization of architectural design and visual arts (www.gruppoa12.org), with which he collaborated until 2004. He has taught in Canada, Chile, Italy, UK and the USA. Between 2007 and 2011 he was the architecture editor at Abitare magazine and chief editor of the Abitare web-site. Between 2011 and 2014 he was the Associate Director Programs at the Canadian Centre of Architecture in Montréal, Canada. In 2014, he was the first senior Mellon fellow at the School of Architecture of Princeton University. He is a regular contributor to magazines such as Harvard Design Magazine, Interwoven and San Rocco.

He contributed to *Asymmetric Labors: The Economy of Architecture in Theory and Practice*, edited by Aaron Cayer, Peggy Deamer, Sben Korsh, Eric Peterson, and Manuel Shvartzberg (New York: The Architecture Lobby, 2016).

He currently teaches at the School of Architecture of McGill University in Montréal and the Architectural Association in London.

Francisca Insulza is an independent researcher, consultant and practitioner. She trained as an architect at the Universidad Central in Santiago, Chile, has a M.Arch from the Berlage Instituut in Rotterdam and a Ph.D. in History of Architecture, from the Politecnico di Torino. Specialized in research related to territorial transformations and the representation of urban dynamics, she was a founding member of the multiplicity network (www.multiplicity.it) and has participated in numerous collective projects that combine research, exhibition and publication, most recently “Moscow Tales’ (Strelka Institute, Moscow) and ‘Sao Paulo Calling’ (Centro Cultural Sao Paulo, Brazil). She has taught in Canada, Chile, Italy, Holland and Russia. She is co-author of “USE-Uncertain States of Europe” (Skira, 2003) and “Maddalena Effect, an Architectural Affair” (Rizzoli International, 2009) and has widely published in international architectural magazines such as A+U and Oris. She is currently Director, Program & Content at Le Forum économique international des Amériques in Montréal.

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Mabel O. Wilson



Professor Mabel O. Wilson teaches architectural design and history/theory courses at Columbia GSAPP in New York. She received her B.S. in Architecture from University of Virginia, Masters of Architecture from Columbia GSAPP and a Ph.D in American Studies from New York University.

She is Senior Fellow at the Institute for Research in African American Studies and co-directs Global Africa Lab. Her design and scholarly research investigates space, politics and cultural memory in black America; race and modern architecture; new technologies and the social production of space; and visual culture in contemporary art, film and new media.

Her transdisciplinary practice Studio And has been a competition finalist for several important cultural institutions including Lower Manhattan's African Burial Ground Memorial and the Smithsonian's National Museum for African American History and Culture (with Diller Scofidio + Renfro). Exhibitions of her work have been featured at the Wexner Center for the Arts, the Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum's Triennial, the Storefront for Art and Architecture and SF Cameraworks.

She is a founding member of Who Builds Your Architecture? (WBYA?)—an advocacy project to educate the architectural profession about the problems of globalization and labor. WBYA's work was featured at the 2014 Istanbul Design Biennale and at the Arts Institute of Chicago in 2017. In 2011, she was honored as a United States Artists Ford Fellow in architecture and design.

She is the author of "Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums" (University of California Press 2012) and of "Begin with the Past: Building the National Museum of African American History and Culture" (Smithsonian Books, 2016).

She contributed to the volume "The Architect as Worker: Immaterial Labor, the Creative Class, and the Politics of Design", edited by Peggy Deamer (2015), "Asymmetric Labors: The Economy of Architecture in Theory and Practice", edited by Aaron Cayer, Peggy Deamer, Sben Korsh, Eric Peterson, and Manuel Shvartzberg (New York: The Architecture Lobby, 2016). and to the catalogue of the Oslo Architecture Triennale 2016 "After Belonging".

Her scholarly essays have appeared in numerous journals and books on critical geography, memory studies, art and architecture. She has received awards, fellowships and residencies from Getty Research Institute, New York State Council for the Arts, and ID magazine. For 2015-2016, she is the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Senior Fellow at the National Gallery of Arts Center for Advanced Study in Visual Arts.

She is currently developing the manuscript "Building Race and Nation: How Slavery Influenced Antebellum American Civic Architecture" and collaborating on a collection of essays on race and modern architecture.

<http://studioand.org>

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Achievements

Information and material about past works by the members of the curatorial group can be obtained via their respective websites or upon direct request. Here below a brief oversight of recent exhibitions and installations.

Brendan Cormier



Unidentified Acts of Design, Shenzhen Biennale of Urbanism\Architecture, 2015.



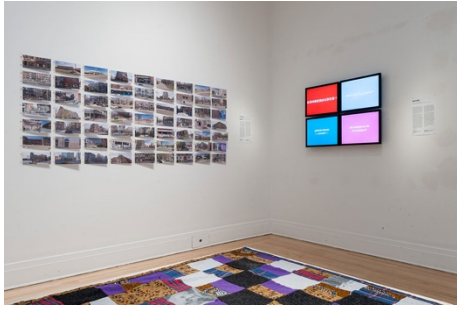
A World of Fragile Parts, Pavilion of Applied Arts at the Venice Biennale of Architecture, 2016.

Brendan Cormier + FIG Projects



Tortona Stories, Monditalia, Venice Biennale of Architecture, 2014.

FIG Projects

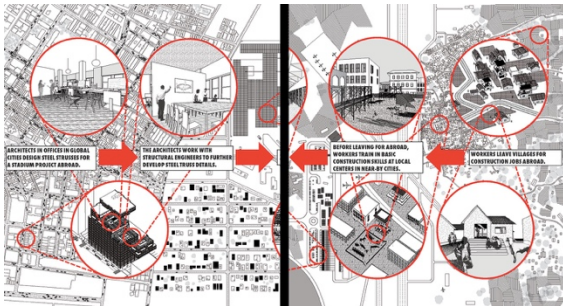


Donde-Where, ABC MTL, CCA, Montréal, 2012.



The World in Our Eyes, Garagem Sur CCB, Trienal de Arquitectura de Lisboa, 2016.

Mabel O. Wilson



Who Builds Your Architecture?, 2014-2017



Who Builds Your Architecture?, 2015-2017. Installation views: left, 2nd Istanbul Design Biennale, 2014; right, Arts Institute, Chicago, 2016-2017.

17 October 2017

Oslo Architecture Triennale
c/o Norsk design- og arkitektursenter (DOGA)
Hausmannsgate 16, 0182 Oslo, Norway

Dear Oslo Architecture Triennale curatorial selection committee,

I am writing in support of the joint candidature of Brendan Cormier, FIG Projects and Mabel O. Wilson as chief curators for the 2019 edition of the Oslo Architecture Triennale.

Since its inception, the Triennale has characterized itself in a rather original way, especially if compared to analogous initiatives. The choice of curators has always depended, above anything else, on the strength of one idea, for instance, the critical assessment of the concept of sustainability in 2013 and the novel circumstances of mobility and residency in 2016. Moreover, the selected topics have been and continue to be crucial to address the condition of our contemporary life, considering architecture as a powerful apparatus of knowledge facilitating understanding and proposing possible alternatives.

Within such lineage, I strongly believe that "Surplus Value," as proposed by Brendan Cormier, FIG Projects and Mabel O. Wilson, would fundamentally contribute to the role of the Oslo Architecture Triennale as a site where reflection on sociopolitical reality and its architectural repercussions is pushed in insightful ways to its extremes. How we work and how architecture shapes the spaces where labor is performed is a fundamental aspect of our late capitalist era. In order to tackle such an endeavor, the team has articulated a clear and thoughtful proposal and I believe that the sum of their expertise, personal trajectories and interests could develop a particularly strong and timely statement. The complementarity between these authors, the breadth of their cosmopolitan connections and the acuteness of their analytical skills would guarantee an appropriate environment, where fundamental ideas exploring current conditions of labor and the architectural implications can be articulated across different media (exhibitions, public events and publications). I particularly appreciate the fact that their statement is voluntarily dubitative, wishing to use the Triennale as an occasion to consider the contradictions inherent within the design activities.

In my role as Philip Johnson Chief Curator of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, I have experienced numerous of the endeavors of the members of this temporary "coalition" and it would sound redundant to praise the individual merits of their work, disseminated through international exhibitions, publications and a constant critical presence in an expanded field of architecture. I am particularly familiar with the work of FIG Projects and Mabel O. Wilson, who recently collaborated with us on the Frank Lloyd Wright exhibition here at the Museum, organizing a highly important section on questions of race. The curatorial teams' intellectual curiosity and the high level of professionalism, proven in many instances and in various constellations, are guarantees of the further developments of this proposal.

What I would underline is a common characteristic that appears across their works and that is at the base of their mutual engagement: design does not operate in a vacuum but must be understood and read through the prism of economic, political and social commitments. I support their aim to expand the content of the project, back into time, trying to reconstruct the depth of the phenomena and events that surround us now through the lens of history.

For these reasons in addition to the deep personal trust I have in their individual trajectories and many more elements that are not in this letter, I would like to express my strong and enthusiastic support of their candidature.

Sincerely,



Martino Stierli
Philip Johnson Chief Curator of Architecture and Design
The Museum of Modern Art

19th October 2017

To the attention of the selection committee for the curatorship of the Oslo Architecture Triennale 2019,

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Dear members of the selection committee,

This letter is intended to support the proposal "Surplus Value" by FIG Projects in collaboration with Brendan Cormier, for Mabel O. Wilson. I support their submission for seeking the role of chief curators for the Oslo Architecture Triennale 2019, based on their individual trajectories, on the potential of their collaboration and on the strength of their proposal.

I currently serve as Founding Director of the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, a national research centre, and as Professor at NTU's School of Art, Design and Media. In my prior role as curator and educator at MIT's Department of Architecture I had the opportunity to work with Fabrizio Gallanti and Francisca Insulza even before they started their collaboration. It is their enduring political awareness that underlies their projects and which is also at the base of this proposal that brings me to support this initiative.

Francisca Insulza founded the collective multiplicity, a group of researchers and designers in Milano, and in 2002 they contributed to Documenta11 where I was a member of the curatorial team. The seminal research "Solid Sea 1: The Ghost Ship", was dedicated to the routes of migration across the Mediterranean and installed throughout the attic of Kulturbahnhof. The installation was one of the key works of Documenta11 situated at the crossroad between urban and territorial research, documentary process and visual practice addressing the migration crisis already back then. An analogous approach and equally compelling results can be felt in "Surplus Value", where architecture is conceived as an open form of knowledge and inquiry with which to probe economic, political and social issues.

My familiarity with Fabrizio Galanti's practice dates from the same period, during his tenure as Chairman of the Jury of the

Akademie Schloss Solitude, a high profile residency programme in Stuttgart, but also as an editor of the influential Milan-based architecture magazine ABITARE. Since then, we have continued a dialogue across time and sometimes far away locations and further developed a mutual curiosity in our practices, constantly exchanging ideas, opinions and suggestions.

I sense that an analogous curiosity has been at the base of the constitution of this extended curatorial group, where different approaches, backgrounds and expertise converge to establish a tool for further research. The work of Brendan Cormier on production in China and of Mabel O. Wilson about the construction industry appear to be complementary to numerous inquiries by FIG Projects. Also, all the members of this "alliance" have a very clear capacity of dissemination, where content is translated to different stakeholders, always opening possibilities of exchange, rather than limiting itself to recued specialized elites.

That is all the more important, given the topic of the proposal: how we conceive labor is becoming central to understand our future. Exploring the controversial role of architecture and design activities within that scenario is of urgency, rather than providing packaged answers, this proposal raises numerous questions, intended to open up a necessary debate.

I am convinced that the approach of this collaborative group, based on an open research methodology and its sustained interest in the phenomena and processes of contemporary life would be highly suitable to establish a powerful argument for the Oslo Architecture Triennale as it tackles what is important in our current time of uncertainty.

Their outstanding CVS and achievements are guarantees of the level of engagement and professionalism that will conduct this endeavor to success, and therefore I unconditionally support their candidature. I am certain the proposed project will stimulate and encourage the understanding of architecture as critical part of civic engagement.

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Please feel free to contact me if you would need further information.

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Sincerely yours



Ute Meta Bauer
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About the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore (NTU CCA Singapore)

Located in Gillman Barracks, the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore (NTU CCA Singapore) is a national research centre of Nanyang Technological University and is supported by a grant from the Economic Development Board, Singapore. The Centre is unique in its threefold constellation of exhibitions, international residencies, research and academic education, engaging in knowledge production and dissemination. The NTU CCA Singapore positions itself as a space for critical discourse and encourages new ways of thinking about *Spaces of the Curatorial* in Southeast Asia and beyond. The Centre's dynamic public programmes serve to engage with various audiences through lectures, workshops, open studios, film screenings, *Exhibition (de)Tours*, and *Stagings*. As a research centre, it aims to provide visiting researchers and curators a comprehensive study on the contemporary art ecosystem in Singapore and the region.

Since the Centre's inauguration in October 2013, the NTU CCA Singapore has featured leading artists presenting their work for the first time in Southeast Asia, making it one of the few spaces in Singapore to present contemporary art from around the globe. The Centre's residencies programme is dedicated to facilitate the production of knowledge and research, engaging and connecting artists, curators and researchers from Singapore, Southeast Asia, and beyond, across various disciplines. The Centre's seven studios support the artistic process in the most direct way – by giving the time and locale to be fully engaged, and the access to an interesting and immersive context to further the space for developing ideas. The Centre's Artist Resource Platform contains visual material and audio recordings of talks from over 90 Singapore based artists, NTU CCA Singapore's Artists-in-Residence, and independent art spaces in Singapore. This archive provides local and visiting curators, scholars, and writers, as well as an interested public, a point of entry to contemporary artistic practice.

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