



Post- THE CURATION OF THINGS—
 Post- A CONVERSATION WITH
 Post- SARAH HEARNE

Post- Anna Tonkin & Beatrice Myatt

Post- Anna Tonkin (AT) and Beatrice
 Post- Myatt (BM) caught up with Sarah
 Post- Hearne (SH) over coffee when
 Post- she was in Sydney late last year.
 Post- Shifting between the historical
 Post- and the contemporary, the
 Post- conversation covered the information
 Post- infrastructures of Architecture
 Post- Biennials to the production and use of
 Post- architectural drawings in the 1970s.
 Post- Whilst the scale and temporality of
 Post- a biennial seems disparate to the
 Post- physicality of an historical drawing,
 Post- Hearne's interest and specific
 Post- approach to unpacking the systems
 Post- that inform architectural production
 Post- draws them together. What follows
 Post- is an edited transcript of the
 Post- conversation:

(AT) You were the associate
 curator of the 2017 Chicago
 Architecture Biennial which
 ended in January this year.
 Could you tell us about
 that experience and the
 processes behind making
 event?
 (SH) Yes I was working with the
 artistic directors Sharon Johnston
 and Mark Lee (Johnston Marklee)
 and joined the team in November
 last year. They borrowed the title
 from an Ed Ruscha art book that
 was published in 2009. It's this thick
 brick-like book, but all 600 pages
 are blank. The point was to invite a
 contribution but also that of course, a

blank page is never 'empty' because
 you approach it with the full weight of
 what has come before.

In the end, the show was
 oriented to the relationship of
 practicing architects to their study
 and use of history. We invited 140
 architects with an artistic statement,
 which was pretty open. The list
 included a cohort of Johnston
 Marklee's peers that were identified
 as engaging with diverse aspects of
 'history'.

(AT) How did the overarching
 theme translate into what
 work was included and then
 how it was exhibited?

(SH) I would say that there were two
 big moves; the first was a spatial idea
 about site specific transformations
 of the Chicago Cultural Centre
 venue into viewing typologies like
 arcades, hypostyle halls, salons,
 and lounges. We invited different
 artists and architects to engage
 with these typologies so we had
 BLESS customising a lounge of
 artek furniture, or AGENDa making a
 marbled velvet arcade of curtains.

Curatorially, alongside
 the invited pieces from various
 firm's existing work, there were
 two collective projects where we
 invited two groups to respond to
 shared briefs. The first brief was the
 Vertical City project that invited new
 takes on the 1922 Chicago Tribune
 Tower competition. These were
 built as huge 18 foot models that
 were laid out in a grid that created
 a hypostyle hall of model tower
 'columns'. The other collective project
 was Horizontal City that invited 18
 architects to choose and respond to a
 photograph of a canonical interior as
 a large scale model, which inverted
 many of the interests that were in the
 other collective room.

(AT) Who would you say was
 the audience of the Biennial?

(SH) The interesting thing about the
 Biennial is that it's held in the former
 Chicago Public Library building,
 which since the 1990s has been the
 main free-entry Cultural Centre for
 the city. It's very well used, it has a
 big lobby with tables and chairs and
 you have people meeting in there,
 kids getting tutored after school, it's
 an important day time shelter for
 people who live homeless in the city.
 In some way it does bring a public

Post- audience (who we like to imagine in
Post- architecture that we're engaging with)
Post- in contact with the Biennial. In fact, I
Post- would say after the vernissage that
Post- many people who passed through
Post- the Biennial never specifically came
Post- to the Cultural Centre to see it,
Post- but bumped into it on their way to
Post- municipal offices or perhaps just to
Post- avoid the cold.

(BM) That seems to be the
criticism of every Biennale
– that it's not speaking to
enough people. Yet critics
will say that the role of an
exhibition is for architecture
to speak to a wider audience.

(SH) Yes, in this case we had the
audience but perhaps that led to
some criticism about the insularity
of the work – which was by nature
discipline-oriented.

(AT) The critique might also
come from the context of
what's happening politically
in America right now. There's
so much going on, it seems
like so many people are
engaging with political issues
and the push for architects
to consciously engage with
politics is greater than ever.
Despite this context, the
Chicago Biennial seemed
isolated and that there was
no relevant political position.

(SH) Definitely and I think it has
something to do with the artistic
directors' position that these real
world problems are more systemic
than our disciplinary agency. Which
perhaps is an idea that is being
challenged right now in many ways.
Funnily enough the biennial we got
compared to the most was Aravena's
'From the Frontlines' in Venice which
was very much oriented toward real
world problems and architectural
agency. In some ways one might
question the biennial format as well
if the two poles can fall to the same
criticism.

(AT) Do you think it's
important that the exhibition
engages a wide audience
through addressing broader
concerns or is there value in
presenting work that is more
introspective towards the
discipline?

(SH) I don't think they're mutually
exclusive. In fact, the better works
managed to convey disciplinary
interests in very unexpected ways.
I would also say this about a biennial
as a format; One thing that surprised
me was how much emphasis the
participant list had, and the fact that
a lot of reviews of the show were
coming out before we'd even opened
– the reviews were based on the list
alone.

I think there is an expectation
with the biennial format that one of
most important things is the group
of people you bring together. The
list was also groomed over by the
PR for metrics and stats. There was
an incredible sense of stocktaking
or accounting. The first Chicago
Biennial in 2015 took the form of a
survey of contemporary architecture.
I think the question there is how do
you represent 'everybody', which is
what a survey promises. What does it
mean to set the survey up as a format
for architecture? How does one put
together this list? There was – rightly
so – a lot of scrutiny if you claim
to represent everybody. Whereas
'Make New History' two years later
got some heat for repeating many
participants from the 2015 list,
because perhaps the first edition
had set an expectation for the survey
and therefore a whole new list of
participants. But I think the idea was
not to survey but to take on some
common interests already seen in
the first biennial and push it toward a
more thematic focus.

Perhaps along similar lines
as the critiques before the show
opened, the temporality of a biennial
is a curious one. It seems to begin
long before the doors open and is
very much related to the 'content
managers' who are not often seen
but who (largely) before the event
regulate the lines of communication.
We had Consortia who consult on
web content. There was the PR firm
who were connecting the architects
with journalists more directly. So it
was really unlike any other exhibition
that I have worked on with just the
enormity of managing content. There
seemed to be a constant need for us
to feed information, which was like a
full time thing in and of itself.

(AT) But that's also
interesting because you
have the biennial as the
event itself, and if people are
critiquing it beforehand and

if there's a relationship with
the PR agency, the 'event'
almost began when Sharon
Johnston and Mark Lee
were first announced as
the curators.

(SH) Absolutely.

(AT) And how do you make
it an exciting exhibition if you
have to set something up so
early and be consistent and
accurate with it, even though
things might change?

(SH) Consortia was dealing with that.
They were basically planning out
aspects of the exhibition or particular
architects' projects that they could
publish and the PR kept asking,
"What can we announce?" (laughs).
And the catalogue which I was
working on, also had to go to print in
four months, which is an incredibly
tight turn-around to begin so as you
can imagine it had to go out before
the work that we were showing was
even confirmed. So even the format
of a catalogue, which traditionally
documents the event and the work
had to be reconsidered to fit with the
temporality of a biennial. I suppose
what this all points to is the difficulty
of finding the limits of the biennial
as an event, exhibition, and the
information infrastructures of them.

There was an almost
provisionary nature to information
in this environment because it
had to get out at a speed that was
immediate, so there were media
rooms for instant online reporting. All
the reviews – as someone pointed
out – had at least one error, almost
every one; people getting left off,
misattribution, spelling, little things.
The mentality seems to be that you
correct and edit after you publish
rather than checking before. You'd
really want to start thinking about
what this means for the permanent
record or documentation of the show,
speaking of making new history!

(AT) Could you discuss your
current research, particularly
in terms of the construction
of the image in relation to
architecture?

(SH) My interest in drawing is to
provide a counter history of the ways
that authority was constituted and
managed through the architectural
drawing set and its reproduction

Post- and circulation. Right now I'm
Post- looking mostly at the 1970s when
Post- architectural drawings became very
Post- visible with a series of exhibits, and
Post- many people were writing about
Post- the market around selling drawings.
Post- The drawings that were exhibited
Post- are kind of a mixed bag as everyone
Post- tries to sort out the new context.
Post- Some of them are intermediary, or
Post- sometimes quite elaborate drawings.
Post- They weren't necessarily operating
Post- to communicate to an audience or
Post- toward a building, so some of them
Post- were (to use Eisenman's term a little
Post- later) more project oriented. There's a
Post- sense that working in this way would
Post- have been closer to some idea of
Post- 'architectural autonomy' in that they
Post- were not to connect with the world of
Post- real estate and development per se.
Post- Drawings for drawings sake... but I'm
Post- also looking at 'working' drawings in
Post- that time as well, and the ways that
Post- the artful and production drawings
Post- diverged. And the anxiety in offices
Post- about these useless (non productive)
Post- drawings.

(AT) That's really interesting
– these different types of
drawing sets being produced
for different audiences and
the links between them. In
terms of renderings that were
produced for commercial
reasons and then the more
artful drawings that were
produced for a disciplinary
audience, do you think
there was anyone crossing
between these types? Or
were they too separate?

(SH) Yes, well, renderers or
illustrators. But also it's probably just
about how the architects divided
and managed the drawings that
were circulated – the way you saw
them and how you then associated
that back to their signature. On that
note, one important aspect of my
research is looking at the terminology
of how drawings were labelled and
organized into a sequence. In the
most traditional tellings, you'd have
the sketch on a napkin (if you're a
modernist), it's immediate, you are
putting down your first idea. And then
there would be design development,
where the drawing would then march
towards becoming construction
drawings in a sense. Right now I'm
looking at how those phases were
determined, and how their labelling
starts to shape the ways that they

circulated, were stored, exhibited
or collected. What you start to
see post-war was the category of
'working drawings', meaning those
that were developed for building
production becoming increasingly
problematic. There were studies
into working practices that claimed
architects were effectively mimicking
the shop drawings that fabricators
were also making, and adding extra
aesthetic touches like hatching that
needn't be there. So there was some
consternation about what information
needed to be on the drawings that
is more endemic to the organization
of labour behind the building
production.

(AT) So in a way, elements
of these functional working
drawings were actually
more useless than say the
'useless' (non productive)
exhibition drawings
themselves?

(SH) Absolutely. The problem at
that time was that the regulation
and organization of building
production became more and more
fragmented and complicated – you
had to communicate to more and
more distributed groups of people.
Drawing sets ended up larger and
larger. There's an idea that every
audience needed a little bit of
different information. So on the one
side there's a lot of discussion in
the period around use; the use of
the drawings, or the uselessness
in the case of those that floated
off into the gallery context. If you
look at the reviews in the 1970s
you have someone like Reyner
Banham looking at the proliferation
of exhibitions around architectural
drawings at that time, and pointing
out that even though the production
of architecture no longer necessarily
required architectural drawings,
the architects kept going through
the motions of making drawings
regardless. It's sort of a very similar
lament to today with BIM and so on.

(BM) That's interesting
though. With the shop
drawers, and the need to
have authorship over the
drawing in order to legitimise
the profession.

(SH) I guess the biggest point to be
made would be that architectural
drawings have always been

collaboratively produced often with
anonymous contributions. Maybe
what's more interesting about the
1970s is that because of the sudden
attempts to make drawings valuable
as sale items the need to re-attach an
artful authorship became a priority.

The re-assertion of value
in drawing which tended to involve
arguments around the artistic
autonomy of work on paper,
is a disciplinary throwback to
architectural intellection over the
more manual aspects of building.
But I would argue, that if you start to
look at the tools you'll get stationery
stores, the tool manufacturers, paper
types that allowed for certain types
of drawings. Or if you look at the
institutional side of things, you'll see
the drawing training, the professional
regulation of drawing types and
their marks and templates. So you'll
start to see, it's just as embedded
and absolutely entangled with the
so-called real world, as everything
else. You know, it's a fantasy that it
was somehow otherwise.
And that's why the 1970s is the
perfect time then, because these
guys are investing in the idea that
you could produce a drawing and
that it somehow is autonomous.
Architecture for architecture's sake.

*Sarah Hearne is an architectural
historian, curator and educator
currently based in Los Angeles.
Hearne graduated from UTS and then
practiced at Ateliers Jean Nouvel
in Copenhagen and Paris. She is
currently completing her doctorate
at UCLA while also teaching and
working on curatorial projects. She
has particular interest in alternate
forms of architectural production.
Her research focuses more broadly
on the procedures and protocols of
art and architectural production, and
technologies of representation.*

*Anna Tonkin and Beatrice
Myatt are Architectural Graduates
and Masters of Research students at
UTS School of Architecture.*

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Image (reverse): Post-

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