

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE - EXPLORING THE DIGITAL CITY – FIRST 1-2

Neil Spiller: ... methods to dislocate myself from the architecture, from being the sole author of the architectural object, so kind of dislocation of the architectural self. This is a piece of a project that I did in my graduating year, my graduating piece, I merely show it you because it's the column outside an architectural school and the idea was that the students, as they came through the door, year in and year out would deface this column or add things to it, and how that might somehow represent the vitality of the profession at any point in time, a sort of Dorian Gray column, so for all those reasons. I suspect now it's probably just evolved into a bucket of (word inaudible). So anyway, then I started working with another colleague in the late 80s and we developed a kind of schizophrenic way of drawing, where he would draw exquisite corpse(?) piece, where this is the first kind of interstitial drawing between art and architecture, for a railing outside a pub in Blackheath where we lived at the time. And so another tactic is, if some of the artistic conception for someone else and don't have any bearing on it at all and then weave it together, so this was that. Now 20 years ago sites were real and unassailable, architecture was simpler and the architect's skills were less numerous. Architecture and architects looked relatively safe as a profession. I started experimenting with an encrusted architecture, a kind of series of filters and architecture beyond the style (word inaudible) is the functionalism and architecture is a way of representing itself, it was a combination of extravagant prose and a graphic gambit that was as powerful as it was invigorating, energetic, loose-limbed. My architecture language has been honed by years of experimentation with technology, with mythology and with shifting aesthetic preoccupations, and above all, without a control. Another example, a vitriolic column, starting with very simple elements of architecture and trying to sort of re-work them, again that exquisite corpse (word inaudible). And then the experiments moved on to the larger scale to the planned competition entry in the late 80s for the Piazza Dante in Genoa, a series of pieces inserted into the city, kind of like pieces that don't necessarily have a use but you can play on them, shelter under them, sunbathe on them, some of them are bridges that connect the (two or three words inaudible) together. You can see the details of this, there's a table, there's a canopy, there's some traffic lights and there's some bridges and various bits and pieces. Some of the details of the bridge are like a man on a horse holding the reins, details of some of the other bits. And so you can see that there's a kind of graphic evolving that was starting to develop various competition protocols. There's a project in Piestany when the velvet revolution happened in Czechoslovakia, the Slovaks invited me over to Bratislava and this is an art wall and a series of urban dribbles that try and connect the kunsthalle, the kunstforum in Piestany to the main city, the communists had located it miles away so the idea of trying to draw people out towards the kind of life in London and the South Bank, miles from anywhere. So these urban dribbles might be bus shelters or fountains, working very quickly using this sort of idea of out of control-ness or cosseting or enabling, inspired particularly by the architect Cedric Price. So the name of course cyberspace and all that mullarkey and nanotechnology appeared and they were a series of projects,

the hot desk of nanotechnological desk, kind of operates like a computer desktop but with iconic objects, so taking inspiration from Francis Yates and theatres of memory, the art of memory, and so the information structures might actually be something you hold and move around the desktop and change and wilt with nanotechnology over time. I think that was the first nanotech project where an architect had ever drawn about some sort of nanotech idea, 93 I think that was. And this is the sort of prototype of the desk, this is the whole desk. Anyway, so an interesting nanotechnology and biotech cyberspace kind of default mechanism for nanotechnology out of control with the grey goo problems where because of the exponential rate of duplication of nanofactories possibly, in Drexlerian nanotechnology we could all be living in a load of houmous in ten hours, it covers the planet if it all gets out of control, so trying to develop maybe an icon that nanotechnological structures with a sort of default into it. Just ideas that come right at the beginning before fuller assimilation into architecture, which is still yet to come obviously. Heady days, this is the working environment at the time. Another piece, very interested in artificial intelligence in the 90s, was asked to do a proposition on Parkers Piece in Cambridge for a mediatech, didn't really get round to the building, I was more interested in the series of sculptures that would come alive and kind of waltz down across the park in the shape of cellular automatas the moment the Turin Test was passed, if it ever is. And then in the mid 90s also there was a kind of interest in mediaeval tryptichs and trying to redesign those or redesign their kind of cultural agenda in relation to the new flesh and the new media, and so there was the tryptich. Also taking inspiration from Hieronymus Bosch, I'd read a book at the time saying that he was possibly a Cathar and Cathars believe that all in the world made matter was the work of the devil, and that's clearly the Pope, and that everything of light was obviously God's work, it's a very interesting parallel between the world that we inhabit at the moment, a kind of ephemeral world of cyberspace, it seems almost holy. And so taking some Boschian motifs, this is the first piece, it's called from Genesis to Genocide. Quite simply I've left the realm of architecture at this point really, there are art objects. Saint Sebastian and the idea of the saint being shot at with the arrows of technology, influenced by Francis Bacon and figures at the base of a crucifix, new flesh being extended and pulled and almost crucified in a sense, trying to cope with the new geometries of technology, and therefore vicariously architecture. This is called Nativity in Black, it's from the Black Sabbath song, and there you see three together, so it's quite a concoction I think you'll agree. So at this point the work starts to try and get to grips with these, what I started calling the sort of unconic, conic sections of vision after the impact of advanced technology and therefore there were a series almost Mandela type projects, this one is called Bioscape Vertigo, that somehow are trying to search the technological geometries that might be used to create a new idea of architecture, a new idea of landscape, so they're not orthogonol, they're lay scaler, I think it's amino acids but I'm not sure, it's been a few years, which lock on to other proteins and these are like the points, the places where a sort of elbow might be fitted into something and I think they become important again later in the project when I properly (one or two words inaudible). These are some bus seats, these particular pieces of protein furniture and the geometries are inspired by protein geometries when viewed at a certain distance. Also interested in a kind of ribbon moulds of DNA, (word inaudible)

proteins and how that can be used to create most baroque structures. Here's a baroque fountain in plan. Protein geometries and geometries of ribbon notation genes, elevation. Bernini eat your heart out I say. And so the project, just as that is a quick synopsis, I want to talk to you really about is my project Communicating Vessels. Communicating Vessels because it harks back to Andre Breton and the surrealists and basically my notion is that I want to create an architecture that somehow grows, that somehow is determined by chance but also is kind of like a memory theatre and engages with certain elements in the history of art and the history of architecture, and so has a sort of continuity back in time, but fully utilises advanced technology, particularly cyberspace, biomechanical organisms and nanotech. So as with most of my projects they start with a kind of allegorical sketch, and this sketch is called the Object Beside Itself and the other idea that informs this project is that all objects exist along what's called the virtuality continuum, which is, if you like, liken it to a hifi knob. On zero you are in full treacle space, (word inaudible) psychogeography and all that stuff but I won't get into the situation of saying you're in the real world, you're not particularly cyberspatially tooled up and at ten you're in full bodily immersed in cyberspace and along that continuum all objects exist and can be moved and occupy certain places at certain times and certain durations. Now concurrent with that, one of the modus operandis of creating this architecture is capturing space time vectus. If you imagine a snooker table, or if you're American pool table, with a camera up it and you pump one of the balls forward and it hits another one and you take a series of slides over the pool table, one a second, develop those slides, stack them all up vertically, join up where the ball is and you get a kind of spindly spaghetti space. And this is a very simple Minkowski diagram of space time, and we all generate myriads of them, there's forests around us, going through time, just as I do that or each hair, it's just a whole big nested thing. So I wanted some way of capturing that so the first experiment was, if I put a sensor on a bee's forehead and let it buzz around a bit and match those little nested geometries into a computer, collapse them, handed them and free them in a CAD/CAM machine, I would end up with something like this, and this is based on an actual bee's geometry. For a few seconds only, so you end up with a kind of heavy metal art nouveau gate. So there you are, so this is the kind of geometry that this architecture that I've been working on exhibits. If I caught a load of them I could weave a forest with a hole in the middle for example, and what would I weave them out of, I might weave them out of aerogel, a kind of gel that's like a fog where it's basically 99% nothing and with molecular bonds but enough to be able to pick it up. Maybe it's not a nanotech and it would grow over time and twist around itself according to events. So at this point in the project it's very important for me to start determining some of those causal links and what exactly I might be able to do, so it's simple things to take a vista with a sculpture and start to reinvent it. Now obviously these technologies are highly surreal, they're forcing me to create very surreal work and I wanted there to be references to the whole surrealist tradition in the work which would become clear. This is the Velasquez Machine, I wanted with my small components, small piece, to create a system, a kind of cybernetic system that had two major sort of foci of inputs and a series of outputs, so this first piece, the Velasquez machine is inspired by obviously Velasquez and also Dali, who equally was inspired by Velasquez. Now as many of you know I'm sure Velasquez's great painting

Las Meninas, I think is the first time it shows an artist actively working, a sort of self-portrait (few words inaudible) looks over the side of the easel and behind is being (word audible) up, and that's a major point in art history. And in a way it's a kind of narcissistic point, so I got the idea that maybe I would create a machine that's linked up to the web, and every time an artist or someone blogged, or blogging wasn't the word that I knew when this was drawn, it vibrates and obviously it would vibrate and vibrate faster and faster. Inside this sort of cage in the middle are often two fish of varying types, a kind of frying pan with holes in the bottom and a series of these objects which I call roo objects which are kind of hydrochloric acid inoculated with jumping kangaroo mechanical flea things. And they jump up and down according to various inputs and inoculate the fish, the fish decompose, fall through the holes in the bottom of the frying pan onto a very highly sensitive tongue-shaped thing. The tongue-shaped thing lays also on a bumpy couch whose bumps change and I call this the Oncological Couch which you can see there, hence the funny geometries of that. I just want you to hold that one there in your heads, I told you it was going to be (word inaudible). The second site is outside Bramante's Tempietto in Rome, which is also the Spanish Embassy, it's a piece of Spain in Rome. Tempietto I think 1502-ish, renowned as the kind of flowering of the renaissance in Rome, an attempt by Bramante to make the most perfect architectural object, and he came quite close, but obviously he did design a kind of circular courtyard which you can see on the bottom, around the Tempietto echoing the circular and radial geometries. That was never built, however another courtyard has been built and so poor old Bramante like any architect suffers from two problems, one is with the nature of stone and architectural construction, any architect will never manage to create something that's perfectly proportioned, it will approximate to those proportions but it will never be, so there are minor bifurcations in the actual object of the idealised proportioned object. And the other thing that he suffers from, like a lot of architects, is that the courtyard which was never built but replaced by something not very similar, also leads to another series of discrepancies from the ideal and the second input is a kind of not very smart measuring stick that's moved around by the Spanish guards every day and placed up against various bits of the Tempietto by sheer chance and that records differences from the ideal, both the big difference is between the Tempietto and its surroundings, and also the small difference is between the Tempietto and the idealised classical proportions based in the machine as it were. So these are two different sets of information being channelled towards some sort of reconciliation and also it is vitally important that you observe the plumb line coming down from just above the pouch with the fried egg on it. The fried egg, as you all know, is a kind of ironic reference to Spanish vernacular painting used by Dali but also found in Velasquez's kind of vernacular painting. Now as the machine rattles, the fried egg, it's not a real fried egg I'm not stupid, and those geometries become the geometries of which my sculpture operates and comes in and out of the vista, so it's a mobile sculpture. There's an island in a village called Fordwich, about two miles outside Canterbury in Kent, which is roughly where I grew up, I've never set foot on this island and it's kind of like my Avalon, so this is the output site, this where in amongst this is where I would want to grow my new landscape. It's the smallest inhabited island in the UK as far as I know, it's only getting its vistas I can imagine (word inaudible) gates wafting in the wind. So it's kind of

arcadian. That's the pub across the road. So this is the sculpture and now it's called the Wheelbarrow with Expanding Bread and this piece is a kind of receiver of something of output information gleaned from the Stick and the Velasquez Machine. It's characterised by a symbiotic relationship between its position and the vista that forms around it. So as I mentioned attached to the side of the Velasquez Machine is the fried egg and that provides the overall segments of that being sensed transmitted provide the geometry around which the sculpture skirts around the vista. Obviously it's laden with a variety of surreal symmetry and symbolism. The Paris Metro light which Dali associated with the praying mantis and particular sexual connotations of the praying mantis and its mating habits. The Wheelbarrow that Dali postulated with his (word inaudible) crystal method by re-reading Millais' Angelus, I'm talking about the Wheelbarrow sexual position, it's all there. So the object again, this is not a modernist object, it's not the sort of modernist object that I was taught which is stripped of all symbolism, it's very fecund in that. There is a piece of break, Dali's symbolism, very interested in the baguette and the bread and the bread on the head, which I won't go into particularly but this piece of bread is expanding so as the sculpture goes round the vista, when people look at it, the bread has a subsumption architecture, very simple sort of with a programme within it, that wants 50% of the surface to be seen by the viewer, so if there's more than one viewer, contortions result. And so the dotted line represents the fried egg at a point in time and is the trajectory of the sculpture I've just shown you, various viewing points from movement of viewers from one position to another over time, the kind of parallax shadows behind objects with the expanding bread and those objects, those shadows, those spaces where two or more viewers can't see, for a split second as the bread expands or nips behind a tree, are spaces which can then be occupied virtually with very brief times and durations. So it's that kind of composite drawing, Velasquez Machine in the vista. That's just a set piece, having achieved this I realised that it was all going swimmingly and started to postulate other things, for example like in those shadow spaces, those parallax spaces I started to become inspired by Holbein's Dance of Death, the whole tradition of the Dance of Death showing relatively unpious people with a skeleton on their shoulder, saying death comes to all of us, and so I thought I need to inhabit those prime spaces that would be seen at certain points of time by people other than the observer who is causing the bread to go and inhabit it with something. And of course my skeleton related again back to surrealist symbolism. Dora Maar's photograph Pere Ubu, don't ask me what it is, I think it might have been an embryo of them I'm not sure. So the last bit I'm going to show you, there are more pieces to this landscape as it's built up but the next one kind of talks very much about the compositional intellectual protocols of why I'm doing what I'm doing with advanced technology, and they (couple of words inaudible) schools. Now I'm going to read you a little bit of narrative, just a paragraph. The misty dawn lifts to reveal six wooden boxes, perched on the riverbank above a seldom bubbling, silent pond. Its surface reflecting the tickle of midges and the sway of lazy branches. These boxes are attached to what looks like fishing rods, which curve beautifully with the load of their catch. Each catch is not a fish but a white alembic. And alembics you'll remember are a sort of alchemic vessel. Diana wanders aimlessly around the boxes finally selecting one. She plonks herself down on one, sitting on the small seat. The box's invisible suspension inductors buzz

ecstatically, realigning themselves, the fishing rods tug on the neck of the alembic up and down, up and down. A small globule of grease from the alembic floats down stream. Beneath her Diana can hear the whirl of the clinamen swerving in its palace of pataphysical machines, desire being swerved into poetry and vicariously into a reflexive landscape. Diana is a stranger to their sort of mechanical love. One day she prised the lid off one of the boxes and she blinked in disbelief of what she saw. I'll show you what she saw in a minute. The Dee Trunk is a kind of box, a roughly made box, about that square, big enough to sit on and was influenced by obviously John Dee, natural philosopher and magician who was interested, he was an alchemist, in the microcosm as a reflection of the macrocosm of the universe. The universe to Dee was characterised by ascalar geometry and divined by a series of almost cyclic distillations. Even the lowliest materials, the most noblest, the alchemist's prima materia, the elusive Slough of Despond that is everywhere but nowhere. To architects the elusive prima materia that's nowhere and everywhere and is prized so lowly, is space it seems to me. So as I said My Trunks are positioned in Fordwich, near Canterbury in Kent, and for alchemists the alchemic opus needs to be personal and be imbued with an autobiographical psychogeography, so it's not just about turning lead into gold, the chemical experiments are a microcosm of a wider spiritual search. So the trunks are about three buttocks wide and three buttocks square and I've kind of evoked, as I started working on this idea, I came across a series of individuals that have been collectively called the pataphysicists, but anyway I'll talk about that in a minute. Basically the Outside the Box is a simple roughly hewn made slatted crates essentially, and there's a series of items outside, there's a futurist cloak based on Marinetti's futurist cloak, various other bits and pieces which I won't bore you with now, but inside, this is the plan, the interior of the box enclosed a machinic tableaux. Each box has two slightly inclined sides opposite one another, the insides were only pristine once, there is a small table in the centre of each box, set on the floor are some draught pistons from Duchamp, a cucumber, two De Chirico mannequin statues from The Disturbing Muses painting of 1925, the ubiquitous surrealist umbrella, a teeth paviour machine from Raymond Roussel's Locus Solus, some Swiftian academic gearage, half of Duchamp's voyeur's door and various other bits and pieces. Now these are all symbolic of pataphysical machines, the greatest pataphysical machine is Duchamp's large glass, it's a desiring machine, it fits into the literature of Raymond Roussel and Kafka with Metamorphosis, Edgar Allan Poe with Pit and the Pendulum, there's a good case for putting it within those traditions. Also according to Duchamp, it's a kind of (couple of words inaudible) thing sectioned through four dimensional space and so actual machines or designed machines as these are called have like the large glass the bride on the top, some sort of boundary in between and a set of juddering frustrated male objects. Now the thing about the inside of the box, whilst it's a kind of little pataphysical machine tableaux, this main object is a rotating and buzzing thing, so that's the interior perspective, the rotating buzzing thing is the thing with the (couple of words inaudible) and that's called the Clinaman, and the Clinaman I think it was first mentioned by Lucratious many many years ago, it was a kind of a swerve of an atom as it falls to the ground, so it's the swerve, it's the idea that you can't control something, the wonderful geometry of the swerve. And this I think, this geometry is the geometry of advanced

technology, the geometry of the age that we're in, it was talked about in these terms by Alfred Jarry who was a symbolist writer and poet in the 1880s up to about 1910. He was a suicidal drinker mixing ether and absinthe, he was short, he lived in (couple of words inaudible) and I think that's where Being John Malkovic got the idea of living in half another story, and his pataphysics, he invented pataphysics, he also invented the word shite for his first Pere Ubu play, the first word was shite, the Parisian public at the time went mad and he invented this idea of pataphysics as a poetic affront to ideas and metaphysics, ideas that scientists at the time were having, that provided they can find all the rules to the way the world works, they can predict everything. And of course to Jarry, a creative writer, that was the worst thing in the world. So he invented pataphysics to rejoice in the particular and the exceptional, and I think this project is very much about rejoicing in the chance geometries, the pieces as they move in the world. There are three declensions of pataphysics, one is anomaly, another is (word inaudible) and the third one is clinaman. He also wrote the clinaman as a painting machine which runs riot in a palace of machines and so therefore that's what's inspired this particular piece. Now concurrent with that, so it's a painting machine, so as the little girl sits on the box, it whirrs and paint gets splattered all over these objects and concurrent with that there's a kind of virtual landscape which flows through the box as well, and that's almost like a planting plan, each planting form holds poetry, some of the old surrealist poets. So there's bits of paint come into this landscape, lines and sentences and pieces get nicked, so it's kind of like a scratch mixing poetry machine as well. Now the positions of the box, the other bit without the virtual environment where those pieces of paint land, are the pieces, the positions that start the vistas at various points, so you'll see here's the virtual landscape just about to go out of that hole in the corner. On of the great kind of outsider pieces of architecture at the Palais Ideal outside Paris, built by the Facteur Cheval who was a postman, it's quite large but the interior space is only big enough to hold his wheelbarrow, which I kind of liked, as he went on his rounds he picked up stones and went back and unloaded his wheelbarrow and built these amazing things. They were idealised by the surrealists and often you see photographs of Andre Breton or Roberto Matta in front of them. Likewise I have a wheelbarrow which I've just shown you so I need a kind of temple of repose for it as well, and so this is it, so the geometry of these pieces is taken from Diderot and how to make a brass man on a horse sculpture and how to vent the various bits of the pieces without it contracting and therefore splitting, and how to vent air through it, so that's my kind of temple of repose. So I could go on with this but I know time is at a premium so I won't, so what I'm trying to do with this and there are other bits, is trying to create an autobiographic landscape, a landscape that is not against nature but works in conjunction with nature to reveal the kind of vicissitudes of nature, the small minute breaths of nature, using advanced technology to do that, creating an architecture that is symbolically fecund, and all these seem to me to question the old dichotomies of architecture that I was taught, truth to materials I don't think exists any more, ornament is certainly not crime in my opinion. Firmness, commodity, delight, I don't even know what that means, so that's the kind of polemic of the project and of course like the pataphysicists, which I'm nearly a fully paid up member now since they found out about me, everything is different, everything is exceptional, everything is particular and happens at certain times and duration, and this is

what our technology gives up, the opportunity to delight in those things. Thank you very much.

M: Thank you for contextualising your work in this way, it's very interesting and I think perhaps an interesting question to ask in the light of (couple of words inaudible) is to what extent do you feel involved as an author, or what is your sense of, because you bring together so many (word inaudible) streams?

Neil Spiller: I do very much feel the author even though I'm choreographing chance to a certain extent but I'm also being very specific about how that chance is used, it's not just, it has my aesthetic preoccupations about it, and it's full of paradoxes as well. The project is, and my work generally and possibly (word inaudible), is full of paradoxes, and part of the reason for that is being an architect, everything is kind of paradoxical. So yes in terms of where the authorship of the work is, I think it's me, I think it's obvious it's me, however I do like to use chance in that way, but I spend my time thinking about wild and wacky ways to use that chance. I mean one of the (word inaudible) that I haven't shown you, perhaps talks about it, maybe I will quickly because it's the end. These are the pictures of the island as the vistas grow and the vistas focus onto places where I had, there's a bit of a narcissism involved here, some people tell me it's sweet and it's partly to do with middle age crisis, but there's sort of things, where I had my first kiss is around here, so there's a vista to that where I had my first Saturday job selling condoms in Boots, another one, and we can name them accordingly, I won't name them because some of them are a bit naughty, but you start getting this prehistoric rock, geometries coming from the pieces, so they start to grow. And then they may get overgrown and then you have to cut them back, these are other bits but life is too short for that. The other thing about the chance, this is the piece, it's called the Genetic Gazebo and I was also interested in biopoetry and how DNA has its quadrilateral coding, so here's a cunning way, I had a gerbil in 1976, which died in 1976, its cage is still in my mother's garage, I could take that cage and use that gerbil's DNA as a motor or a driver for one of my systems and also combine it with a bird bath, it's the kidney shaped thing at the top and as birds bath in one of the sectors, that's another co-ordinate so I get a four by four grid which I could then use as another driver in the work, it was used very specifically but it's used in an anamorphic way but I won't go into it. So I can get my impulses from wherever I like because I have different types of technology, therefore when you get them becomes terribly important, of course here they're used as polemic, so yes I think I'm the author. At the beginning I showed that thing with the (word inaudible) of the chat, that particular piece of graphic comes from my sketch book, PNT'd by a graphic designer called Gordon Oliver who is one of the great record cover graphic designers who has just finished Scott Walker's new record, so I don't know who owns that, because that's not what my sketch book looks like, it's been PNT'd and moved so that you get a sort of blur. So I sometimes feel I ought to name Chet Warner as I am now and it was the status of that object or graphic, so the copyright issue is certainly always there and of course the gerbil thing, that's another issue about ethics and law and copyright and using people's small (word inaudible) genetic material. It's all other big issue, I suppose that's very akin to what Andres

was talking about. So I sort of do this project really as a way of hopefully opening people's eyes up to the appalling disservice that architecture has done to humanity in the last century, masquerading under modernism, what I call traditional modernism, the idea that's getting on for 100 years old, probably older. And just open mainly architects' eyes, although surrealist historians are very interested in my work because I'm alive and I don't think they've met any alive ones. So it's a polemic project, the other thing people confuse when they talk about it is the idea that I would go out and build this, of course I wouldn't, I'm not interested in building, it's not my bag. Richard.

Richard: Do you scrounge around the internet using Google and so on as Breton might have visited flea markets and the like, is it part of your (word inaudible)?

Neil Spiller: No I don't, well the internet is wonderful for finding stuff out, I don't always worry whether what I find out is actually truthful.

Richard: You can search every medium for that.

Neil Spiller: It's a way of checking whether I'm far out enough, if I can put something into Google and not get any hits then I know it's something I'm interested in. I don't use Google that much, I mean I do what all academics do and put my own name in occasionally but Google image, that's an interesting thing, I don't quite understand how that works because it seems to give you different images and different moments in time, and not all of them have been put on in the intervening period so I don't know how it works out its hierarchy. So no, also I'm not particularly interested in ideas of virtual (two or three words inaudible) or things like that, I'm not interested any more in those kind of situationist Marcus Novak soft Babylon type things where anything can happen and it's like new Babylon where we're in some sort of luddic educational playful environment. Of course we're in a sense but it's not something I'm particularly interested in using as a backdrop to what I'm doing any more, I was at one point. When I started getting interested in all of this stuff it was as a kind of antidote to architecture as a way of dissolving architecture, breaking the vessels and I think a lot of us, as the technology has progressed in the last decade or so have become much more interested in that kind of blurred territory between the virtual and the actual, as opposed to being in one or the other and so that's another sort of position that predicated this work because work of this sort isn't being done very often, so I think it's vitally important to bring the variety of different things that technology will allow us to bring into architecture, bring them in and see what they do.

M: What is the medium, are these pen and ink drawings?

Neil Spiller: They are traditional pen and ink drawings, no computer has been used in any of these drawings to make a representation, they're scanned and then they're put into PowerPoint, they exist.

M: That's what I figured, that's what they look like and I was wondering how you see the divide between the interest in incorporating technology and you mentioned nanotechnology and cyberspace, digital technology.

Neil Spiller: And drawing.

M: And the way then internalise it through drawing, internalise it and represent it through drawing.

Neil Spiller: There was a stage where I started to feel very guilty and I still do because everyone was getting out their computers and getting their 3D studio macs out and then I came across Douglas Adams and he said something in an interview which was: "just because you think and write about telephones doesn't mean you have to hold one in your hand all the time." So I kind of got that. Now it's much easier and I don't feel guilty at all, a lot of the problems with students using technology and I think a lot of the relatively famous American so-called cybertechs, the blobbists(?), is that with a computer it's like trying to create on the other side of a closed window sometimes and there are obviously different ways you can use a computer, you can embed intelligence in materials and sensing and all that, and that's I suspect where I'm more allied at the moment, as opposed to using the computer to make blobby shapes and using CAD/CAM to try and actualise them. And I think there's a big problem with all that because no-one actually touches anything any more and there's no visceral feeling of drawing the curve of the building or the sweep, drawing is another way of getting information into the architect's head, I think we've lost something. I always try to push my projects to be just on the other side of what's realisable, and obviously as technology increases and accelerates, being just on the other side is more and more difficult because it all becomes more and more achievable, I think with this project I don't see anything that's not particularly technologically unachievable, there's nothing in there, there's a variety of Victorian technology. So I like drawing and I'm going to keep doing it, but it did cause me a little bit of an epistemological problem about eight or nine years ago.

M: I feel guilty and I don't even know how to turn off my wife's mobile phone and I always have to have her do it and my fingers are too fat, I don't have particularly fat fingers but my fingers are too fat to touch that button, so I used to feel guilty about that but I wasn't really referring to the possibility that you might feel guilty about it, although as I said I do appreciate that you feel guilty about it. But I was more thinking about the relationship to the technology, I get the sense that you wouldn't actually be able to use the technology in the way that you're interested in using it, ie in incorporating it in these kinds of narrative if you were to compile these drawings by technological means and it seems to me that part of your ability to imagine and narrativise the technology involves this kind of distance you have to have and I was just hoping you would say something about that. (Word inaudible) and distance is what I'm really talking about.

Neil Spiller: Plenty of my colleagues at the Bartlett had this kind of, you can't talk about it unless you can wire it up yourself, and I don't believe that obviously. I can't plumb in a sink either but I like to use one. So being slightly divorced from the immediacy of the technology I think for me is a kind of useful strategic device, because I don't get caught up, I don't get anoraky if you know what I mean, like oh I've got to write the code for this and it's going

to take me a year, I don't give a shit, someone could write the code, there's loads of people out there who can write the code like there's loads of people who can plumb in my sink. So I have a relatively traditional architectural take on the technology part of it. So it doesn't worry me, I like to be able to operate in biopoetry, it doesn't mean I have to be able to distil something's DNA in a little bucket, because with me it would be a little bucket.

F: Just (few words inaudible) your drawings make me think that the well established traditions within architecture (few words inaudible) and also when such (word inaudible) were not interested exclusively in building, they were interested in (few words inaudible) buildings should look like and there is a wonderful example, you mentioned Rome earlier on, the Baroque period in Rome (few words inaudible) ephemeral architecture or imaginative architecture, I was wondering whether you were seeing yourself and you were very much into (one or two words inaudible).

Neil Spiller: Yes, I've just written this book for Thames & Hudson called Visionary Architecture which is the whole history of the 20th century of visionary architecture, I think there's one building in it and it's about that and obviously the 20th century started, one of the big influences for this project is the 1499 book written by Brother Colana who (few words inaudible) because it is this kind of arcadia, the kind of desiring psychogeography and coming across weird things in the landscape that are kind of embossed or encrusted with polytheistic symbolism, so that's the start and of course then we go on to Ludu and Piranesi and all that sort of stuff, so I do see myself in that tradition. I'd like to see myself, it's (word inaudible) company, and also going up as far as architects to people like Mike Webb and the Temple Island project, another motivating piece about this, I've wanted to do a book the law of architectural projects, so the book becomes the architecture of which this is obviously the start, because of Mike Webb's Temple Island (two or three words inaudible) a memory, speed and learn memory and Temple Island when he was a kid and the Henley Regatta, it's all very English I know. So yes I'd like to think I'd (word inaudible), actually my book finishes with me, I figured if I'm going to spend five years writing a book I might as well rearticulate the epistemology of visionary architecture and include myself.

M: The phrase that you used which hooked me and which I would like to use to kind of link things around a bit, you describe this as autobiographical landscape and I guess I don't really have a question, but I have a couple of thoughts about that, about narrative, about using architecture or urbanism to create narratives, about narratives which may or may not be autobiographical, but I guess any narrative is at least, well not necessarily I was going to say every narrative at least is personal in some way because there's an author but I guess there are plenty of examples of narratives which aren't, I mean the Exquisite Corpse was a good example and something which isn't and Dream Interpretation is a very good example of narratives which are constructed through somebody else. So I take back the personal bit but I guess what I'm wondering is, to what extent do you think that, no I don't want to ask a question, I'm just going to say...

Neil Spiller: I haven't replied!

M: I'm interested in the idea that you can, or I'm becoming interested in the idea that I'm looking for forums that provide opportunities for people to produce narratives. People have blog sites, there's a lot of examples of that in websites on the internet and I'm interested in how like when you walk around a city you could begin to find, identify forums where you could say right this is beginning to be a place where narrative events could happen, if you think of agit prop theatre that happens in the street and the idea for that would be that if cities made those kinds of forums possible it would be a way for in effect strengthening city culture. The reason why everybody loves New York I think is that basically there are so many narratives around the place, the reason why not so many people love Dundee is because there are fewer narratives about the place, and if you want to revivify a place, you can pour money into it but I bet you a much better way to do it would be to find venues so they people could start writing stories about the place, that's very diagrammatically sketched.

Neil Spiller: Like obviously the technology that you have around us facilitates those narratives, getting out there.

M: But could you see this project being transposed into, well you said you don't do buildings, could you see this transposed into a built environment? Not these drawings built but similar autobiographical landscape projects.

Neil Spiller: Well I think we do it partially already, if you imagine students moving to digs, they come complete with their rucksack and their cardboard box full of stuff, and there's the teddy bear and there's a picture of their mum, and there's the chess set and there's the favourite cup of tea and that bible that everyone gets given, the Gideon's Bible or whatever, stuff, and you populate a space to make it feel homely, you know you put your clothes in the wardrobe, you open out your music collection or I suppose now click on your iPod, so I think in people's lives there are iconic objects that people bring with them, and in a sense this is merely set in a big room which is the island and of course it comes back to notions of art theory and stuff that interests me, but you can set up relationships like between a little room and every time the sparrows flew over the top something would happen, whatever that is, whether the door bangs or a screen lights up. You could start wiring, embroidering your spaces very easily with very cheap ubiquitous technology and therefore that embroidering of space is a kind of driver so that you can split your sites, split your influences, link things that are linked for you in some way, and therefore it's a kind of liberating technology or a liberating idea. Now the problem is you've also said the price was very fluid, you have to give people the opportunity not to engage in that, it's like buying those video cameras with so many special tricks on them and video machines and you only really want to know where the play button is and you really hope when you press the play button that it's going to play and if it doesn't dick shit, so it can get very sort of gizmo-y, I think that's the thing. But talking about notation as we were earlier, there's another side to this, how do you notate, how do you talk about an architecture like this, you can't use the traditional languages, they don't work, how do you actually propose what's happening, how do you analyse what was happening here and it seems to me that there's

a whole other type of architectural calculus that could be developed, probably by someone brighter than me, but to talk about this, to analyse complex ecologies because this is a machine (word inaudible) that's all this is, quite a basic one using chance to choreograph some of its bits and using the virtual machine of the computer as a kind of driver. Those complex relationships, no-one as far as I know, can actually do adequate ecological notations of sites, I can't find anyone who can do one, they always leave something out, whether it's the spider in the corner, so an architect is the least likely to be able to do it because all they want to do is noisy road, forest. So there's a whole way of understanding the world that the technology is going to lead us to in terms of understanding the very complex networks of our ecologies, both human and natural and the synthesis, and that's when I think architectures like this can come very dextrous in making incisions very delicately and how they touch the world, and with the minimum amount of disjunction and renting of the kind of ecological fabric. But at the moment I don't think we're really even close to working out the complex ecologies that we live in amongst and obviously that's going to be some sort of very very hyperdynamic notations as well, if it's at all possible and it may not be.

F: Are you familiar with the work of (name inaudible), I assume that's (two or three words inaudible) to what you do?

Neil Spiller: Yes the way they use the idea of developing machines.

F: But also the idea of...

Neil Spiller: I suppose I was describing (couple of words inaudible).

F: In your hamster, guinea pig or whatever it was, gerbil DNA machine, with the idea of something dropping into the pond and then that becoming an assemblage of an event.

Neil Spiller: And also their interest in desiring machines as well, and moving on to (word inaudible) and pataphysics and stuff, it's all deeply in there, so yes it does tie up, I'm not a big (name inaudible) fan because I find their books so dense, but I think they're onto something.

M: Can I ask you a question, your work is polemic in terms of, how do you see the audience for that polemic in terms of, do you see it as how you focus and once you publish and you become part of social space, and a poetical space, do you see that audience in terms of for example how that feeds into the cities of the future? Is it architects, is it city planners?

Neil Spiller: Certainly not city planners, architects are like your dumb little brother, you always prod them with a stick and see if they're quite happy. I think architecture has lost its central place in society, partly to do with emergent technologies, partly to do with the flow of capital that makes it kind of superfluous, if not even worse than superfluous, expensive. So I've never really considered this work in relation to the city at all, to me it's a kind of set in a rural place, it does engage in this kind of outriders and sensing bits of the city but very much in controlled situations that have some sort of symbolic

logic to it that can feed into the old rural depth of the project in relation to artistic theory and all that sort of stuff. I suppose the audience is always architects and because I'm an architect and I spend most of my time sitting training architects or having dinner with architects or listening to other architects, and so I suppose (word inaudible). It's not a philanthropic thing really, I've not had a happy experience of people getting terribly excited about the stuff so I just do it, I don't mind whether people will get offended by it or not. That's not true, most people are very nice about it and supportive about the work but it's not a criteria in the way that I assess it, so it's like masturbation, I do it and I like it and if other people like that's fine.

M: First an observation, just I can't help but think of McLuhan in all the references and that a lot of what we attribute to a kind of digital revolution really dates back to electricity, so the blurring of the boundaries that you talk about, you see all over the place blurring public and private for example, but I just found it very interesting because McLuhan observed, and this goes back to the Mechanical Bride in 1951, that was a sort of parallel development in art and physics in the early 20th century where they both break away from the Newtonian conceptions of space and time, so cubism in painting shows many different moments in time all at once, rather than the single fixed point of view from a single fixed moment in time and that symbolist poetry was also a reaction to this and there's this wonderful exhibit of just a front page of a newspaper as also exhibiting these characteristics which is that you can't read a newspaper from beginning to middle and end, you have a front page which gives you many different items simultaneously and there is no linearity to it, it's what you call a mosaic and ultimately and naturally you come to understand that this starts, and historically this begins with the telegraph. Once the telegraph is invented in 1844 and then one of its immediate applications is to newspapers, and once you start to get telegraphic information feeding into the newspapers, newspapers changed their format from something more like magazines that are linear into the kind of mosaic front page that we all know and that actually is now on its way out as a medium. So I think that a lot of what you're talking about really comes to down to electricity.

Neil Spiller: The ability to take something from here and put it over there, or drive something.

M: And it breaks down the stable conceptions of space and time that we've developed at least since (word inaudible). The other thing that really interested me was your mention of Francis Yates and the Memory Theatre, because this brings us back to tribal or oral culture where we developed mnemonics because there's no way to store information except by remembering, so we have to develop memory techniques and actually we were talking last night about the Aborigines moving through space as they travel around, they remember things because different places hold different memories. There was a theory that cave paintings also functioned in that way and then at least to ancient Greece you find the system that Francis Yates talks about where people imagine walking through spaces, placing items there that serve to jog the memory and then when they're giving a speech they imagine themselves walking through that space again, each imaginary

item that they left behind serves as a marker that helps them remember something they were going to say, which is a fascinating (word inaudible), it sounds amazingly convoluted, so you seem to be remembering more things rather than less things, but actually neuroscience shows that by using the visual mnemonics it helps you to recall verbal information. And then ultimately you get architects trying to construct buildings, theatres, memory theatres in order to serve the function, that very function that originally was used by just remembering a building that was used for other purposes, so Bruno and the Globe Theatre supposedly, also a memory theatre. But that goes out the window, writing makes that less necessary although it's still important to remember things, printing where everyone has easy access to information pretty much is the death of the memory theatre. So I was curious when you were talking in a sense about bringing it back, but if anything something like Google makes information even more accessible, makes us even less interested in memory, our own personal memories, so what does the memory theatre mean for you and in your work?

Neil Spiller: Well I sort of conflate it with ideas of second order cybernetics and the idea of the conversation theory, Gordon passed on the conversation theory, the idea of the act of observing creates an epistemology immediately, so we all observe, we all have differing epistemologies so in a way it's setting up a memory theatre of my epistemology in these iconic pieces. So what I wanted was a kind of like the hypno (rest of word inaudible) which sets out, allegedly inspired by Bertie and Vetruious, in a landscape there's nearly every kind of classical form, every kind of notion of procession and notion of temple and arcadia and all sorts of stuff. So in one piece of land there's everything that's important in a way and so that fits into the memory theatre for me, so they link out to important bits of art and architectural theory that I'm interested in and then they actually do work as a mnemonic device, when I'm just talking as I have been to you, I'm looking at the picture, searching for the next bit that's going to trigger off a little bit of a litany. So it's a kind of nested memory theatre on a variety of levels there, it does help me to talk about the work because they are iconic pieces set in a sort of architectural space.

M: So you're saying it's an individual personal memory theatre rather than a shared one?

Neil Spiller: Yes, it's not one that you could probably teach as you might teach a travelling minstrel to remember their song lines in the Middle Ages, and it's equally not a shared one like the Aboriginal dream type. The same sort of idea of the dual nature of the landscape, we've stripped it away in our cultures but they are iconic, the geophysical forms are iconic.

M: Well you could theoretically use publically charged or culturally charged symbols and try to evoke memories.

Neil Spiller: The other thing about it was that there's quite a lot of symbolism, if I hadn't said anything, just flashing them up, you kind of get an idea of where some of the depths of it, and the other thing I like about it is, and this is where it acts against - it's one of my paradoxes I think - the fully fledged memory theatre, is I like the enigma in them, I like, when people look at them

and go well I'm quite interested in it but I've got no idea what it is but I can see these bits and if you start to reveal it, it's like creating like when Andres is talking about his creative commons in a way, the ability for people to deconstruct it and reconstruct it, is also quite important and then to get out of it and to be able to see and maybe think about work in their own way. So the other paradox is actually telling people about it as well, it's an interesting thing. I very much like the enigmatic object in art as well, the Joseph Beuys stuff, what am I looking at type thing. So the memory theatre, you can argue that the memory theatre is a forerunner of computers through the cyclic epistemologies of Lamb and Lull(?) and people like that, Bruno and his rotating wheels and if you compare Bruno's rotating wheels to Banerjee's difference engine, it's not a million miles away, there is gearage in Bruno as well. I've always been fascinated by that idea of the memory theatre particularly as my early interest in cyberspace and even the iconic objects and essential the desktop, the Apple desktop is a memory theatre as well, you (two or three words inaudible) and there's no scale like geometry, you're into another space, there's more things to enter. So that's a very important histomology(?) to me I guess, whether I'm using it properly I don't know.

M: (Few words inaudible) you don't care?

Neil Spiller: Not that much no. I love the idea of it, I can be a little bit fickle with what I use and I don't use, if it works for me that's great, if it doesn't I'll drop so these points or these perturbations in art that I'm talking about, did I say that the Velasquez Machine is allegedly sited in the Orangerie Galleries in the Tuilerie Gardens in Paris where Monet's Waterlily paintings are, because their perturbation crucial point between abstraction and representation in art, so hence the Elliptical Couch because that's a skit on those elliptical couches. That's another sort of thing about straddling that line between abstraction and representation.

M: Can I ask a quick question, some of your random art, something like, I don't know if it was a gelatine or some gel that you were using to produce something?

Neil Spiller: Oh the aerogel. It's just a piece of stuff that I saw in a book about these nine years ago, and it had two scientists with the white coats on holding this tube of about that diameter cylinder of aerogel and it's different to nanogel (few words inaudible) which is carcinogenic as far as I can work out, don't breathe any, but it's sort of like solid fog but very light, 99% nothing and you can pick it up. (Few words inaudible) but I don't actually care whether you can make it or not, that's why I said you could use nanotech maybe. It's the principle, it's a conceptual model that you could use. I like the ideas that you might have a lawn full of little nozzles and start to grow these things and I'd happily draw a nozzle plan and design the nozzles as objects. I know such a thing exists out there, it probably wouldn't do what I wanted it to do but it gives me that kind of, that's why I'm not interested in this stuff because it's not conceptually important to me.

M: Perhaps what I'm really interested in is the interaction of what you see between the randomness and I know you did mention this before, it's not

really random because in a way you're initiating some sort of process and that in itself is what's important, so how would you define it then?

Neil Spiller: Random chance I'd call it, yes I decide when chance has a finger in the pie. And that's normally to manifest, to make something unseeable seeable in a way, I often talk about, we only see a very small percentage of what's there because of our eyes and our sensitivity to a very small part of the electromagnetic spectrum and because of the type of fleshly animals that we are, we're not very good at seeing things in long time exposures, and so we see very little and our world is not as we see it and so some of these pieces are about showing us those bits of the world that we don't normally see. Which is of course about these sort of uniconic, the destruction of the conic, the plans are visionary that we used to adhere to, because our technologies can see far wider deep. So the chance thing just allows me to a) make me invisible visible in some way, to also prove that there's kind of a sizzling hotpot of emerging possibilities and that really happily ties in with the polemic that architects are still even in this age producing inert elephant downsized pieces of inertness. And some of them are even pretending that they're not but still doing it. I think I might just have some (few words inaudible) by saying that I think we could do but I'm not going to do it.

END

1 hour 30 minutes