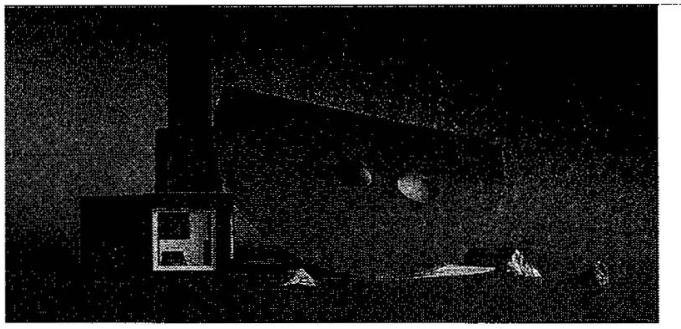
A conversation with Mark Foster Gage, Michael Meredith & Michael Young

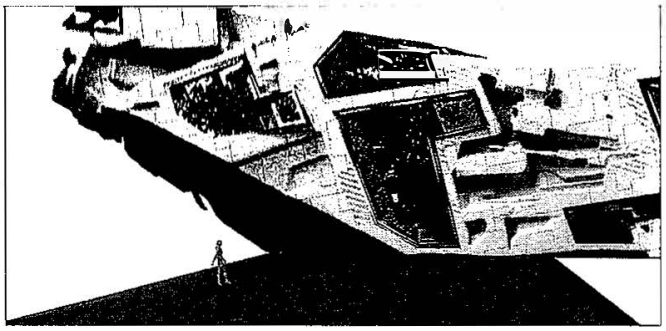
MMM: Multiple Resolutions

On April 11, 2019, Michael Young, assistant professor at the Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture at The Cooper Union, hosted a conversation at the school between two New York–based architects and educators, Mark Foster Gage and Michael Meredith. Young characterized the meeting as a middleweight boxing match, as it was the first face-to-face exchange between the two men, who had previously stated their positions in Log, and *gave them an opportunity to spar over the state of architecture in real time. What follows is an edited excerpt of the transcript.*

MICHAEL YOUNG: About a year ago my partner Kutan Ayata and I were interviewed for *Tarp*, the Pratt School of Architecture journal. The interview began with a series of binary choices to elicit quick responses to things like Mies or Corb, wood or marble – you had to choose one. And then came this question: Are you object-oriented ontology (OOO) or indifference? First of all, it's a funny question, because if you're indifferent to it then you have already chosen a side. Conversely, if you choose one or the other, you can't be indifferent. More important, I didn't know these two positions were in opposition. But I did know what the question was referring to. It originated in articles written by Michael Meredith and Mark Foster Gage in two consecutive issues of *Log*. In his *Log* 39 essay "Indifference, Again," Michael argues that there is a younger generation of architects that no longer cares about formal experimentation through technology or the moral promises of sustainability or the ethical issues of social justice, but is simply indifferent to these as architectural positions. Mark wrote a response in *Log* 40, titled "Speculation vs. Indifference," in which he claims there are several developments in contemporary architecture that don't fall under this label of indifference or into the positivistic problem-solving categories Michael identified. One development that falls outside these definitions Mark locates in the influence of speculative realism and Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology.

What's important to me is not whether these ideas are





MOS, House No. 14 (Adjacent Roof), 2018. Right: Mark Foster Gage Architects, House on Ile Rene-Levasseur, Manicouagan, Quebec, Canada, 2015. All images courtesy the architects.

architectural discourse. This is something we are sorely lacking today: people willing to put something on the line, have a disagreement, and through this disagreement, hopefully get somewhere in terms of defining what it is that we're doing today as a discipline.

To open tonight's discussion, I want to highlight issues of representation and aesthetics that are crucial concerns for both architects. I'll do this by showing three pairs of images that should suggest possible talking points. I will refer to Mark as MFG and Michael as MOS. It's important to realize that this work is the product of practices, not individuals. Mark has worked with numerous employees over the years, and Michael's practice is in partnership with Hilary Sample and a collaboration with numerous others.

The first image pair [above] shows two models. The fact that they are tilted at exactly the same angle and treat apertures with a similar gold trim is weird, but there are some important differences. For MFG the formal expression is treated as an inflected yet coherent whole that is then intensely articulated internally. For MOS the massing is a purposefully awkward displacement of odd primitive elements articulated flatly and abstractly to sit in a kind of nonchalant adjacency. These are clearly different aesthetic positions regarding composition, which seems to suggest a way to identify traits of their two positions. MFG has made a very strange object, it is hard to define its scale, materiality, and allusive mechanical and geological qualities, yet it is clearly the product of an intense refinement of architectural expression. MOS has made an odd ensemble of vaguely familiar objects, producing the appearance of informality and casualness, yet to create this effect requires a significant amount of expertise. Labor concealed through indifference?

The second pair [pages 18–19] compares drawings. Again, I like the odd similarity of the overall geometries. MFG's drawing plays on conventions of the architectural construction document, especially the extreme end of technical drawings. MOS's plan is radically simple. The line weight of the furniture is as strong as that of the walls, which have been simplified to a single-line diagram. It would be easy to describe the MOS drawing as abstract and the MFG drawing as realism. But these categories miss the fact that both representations are attempts to advance conceptual agendas through aesthetics. The informality and equality of the entourage in the MOS plan speculates on inhabitation. The intensity of the notational excess in MFG's drawing creates a plausible reality we know to be absurd. In different manners they both use the aesthetics of abstraction to comment on "the real" through representation.

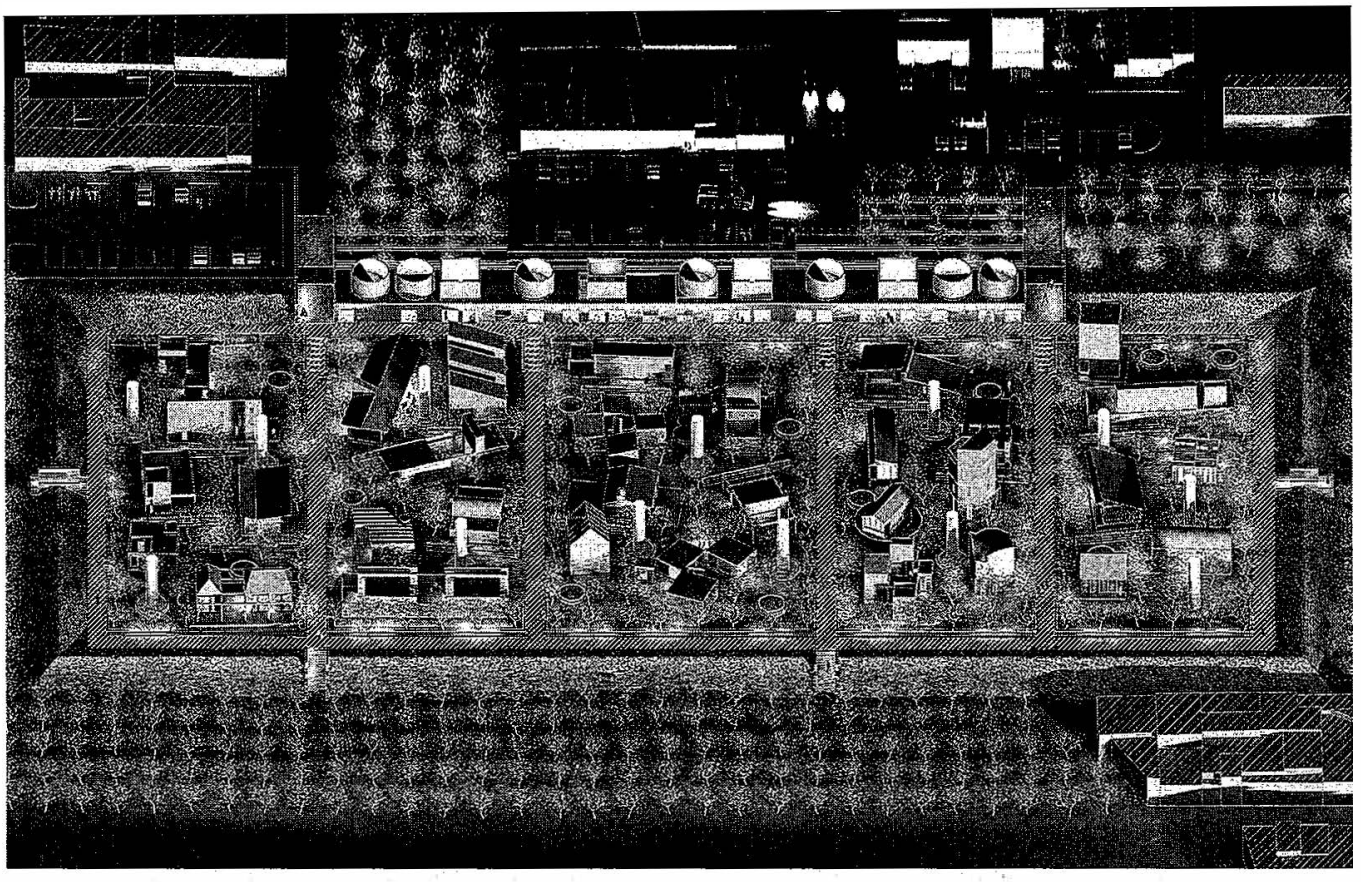
The last pair of images [pages 12–13] concerns the issue of resolution. Both digital renderings use resolution to create an

atmosphere that establishes the mood of the scenario. In MOS's aerial axonometric, low-res, three-color screening is demonstrative of the digital medium in which it was generated. In MFG's rendering, the context of sand and sky is rendered with high fidelity to approach the resolution of photography. These images raise important questions. All architects work digitally and we all work through images. All digital images deal with resolution as a fundamental question. Is an image critical if it calls attention to low-res pixelization as a kind of honesty about the digital medium? Does immersion in high-res, photo-real imagery automatically entail nefarious seduction? These assumptions seem too accepted to be of much use. Is there really any "high-res" or "low-res," or is it more likely that resolution attracts attention only through the juxtaposition of multiple resolutions?

Let's start with this question of resolution. We say the word *resolution* and we think we know what we're talking about, but I know you both have differing opinions about it. Is there a shared place in which we can overlap a debate, a discourse, a discussion about the issue of resolution? Michael, you recently curated a show at Princeton called "44 Low-Resolution Houses," so I'm assuming you have something to say about resolution.

MM: Nowadays, I feel the need to describe and group work in reaction to the atomization of the field. It's very basic; I want to produce collectives to find ways of arguing aesthetics and value systems: this is more low-res, that is more high-res. The groupings are very abstract at some level. It started from looking around and seeing what work is being produced, and perhaps it's related to the indifference thing – there is work being produced, discussed, and propped up in architecture that seems to be against the the three of us were all taught. We come out of a moment in the field that was very much engaged in progressive arguments based on technology and technique. It used to be that we would find small differences and argue over who used different techniques. Everyone knew what software everybody was using, whether Maya or Rhino or writing their own software. I don't think anybody cares about that stuff now, and if anything, it might be going too far in the other direction. The low-res show, with all its problems – I understand it's relatively vague – was a way to try to group things and produce a structure around it. I felt like people who are high-res would be happily high-res and people who are low-res – nobody's happy to be labeled anything nowadays – would be happily low-res. The show was also a way to have a technological narrative in the mix. I could have said basic houses or dumb houses. The fact that it was called low-res is because technology is still lurking around. Even *technology* is a very fuzzy word – too broad, perhaps.

MFG: The low-resolution show is a good place to start. I just want to give a little shout-out to why OOO is a part of this discussion. Its fundamental tenet is that you value objects for their individual qualities rather than their relationships with other things. For instance, Deleuze would say a water bottle isn't a water bottle; it's some chemicals that happen to make plastic, presently in the form of a bottle, and on their way to becoming a different chemical arrangement in a landfill. Deleuze would say everything is a process on the trajectory of becoming something else. OOO says no, this water bottle is a water bottle in this moment in time, and it is a singular object with specific qualities: perhaps transparency and flexible plasticity and things we humans can notice. But it also has a lot of qualities that we cannot sense, which I'll talk



MOS, Housing No. 8 (Laboratorio de Vivienda), Apan, Mexico, 2018.

in that idea because it is a fantastic intellectual weapon against parametricism, which is all about the interrelationships of things – thousands of tiny little parts. This is related to that, which is related to that. OOO, on the other hand, is about individual objects and their qualities. What I found problematic about the low-resolution show is that it was about the interrelationship between the 44 houses, not their individual qualities. Because they all shared some particular aspect of low-res, the show was about being able to categorize them rather than revealing any of their particular architectural qualities as individual entities. What wasn't on the table was how these particular houses produce any architectural qualities that are sensible to humans or the value of what was produced. The idea of a show like that plays into a standard repertoire of Enlightenment categorization, where you have species, genus, family, order, etcetera. The Enlightenment's contribution to science was to parcel things into categories to study them. But when you put something into a category it means you think you know something about that thing, so you're less likely to look at the thing itself. By having 44 low-resolution houses all shown in the same way, Michael's making a statement about the value of a collective narrative – architecture as categories as opposed to the architectural and aesthetic qualities of any one house. I am far more interested in the actual qualities of things in the world than the conceptual vagaries of how they're categorized in some antiquated Enlightenment way. There are new ways to understand things on the table now that largely emerge from aesthetics, which allows us to go far beyond mere abstract collective categorization. I just don't see the value anymore of creating categories in architecture. All it does is force us to play the game of what fits in what camp and we never talk about architecture – only how it's grouped.

MM: I like this already. It's getting good. One counterpoint...

MFG: No counterpoint. I won, you didn't. [laughs]

MM: Fair enough, but one counterpoint to OOO is, why does all the work look similar or related?

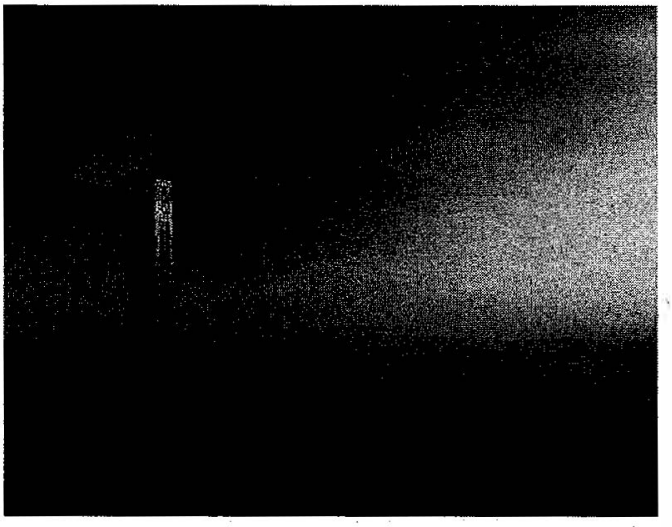
MFG: Whose work looks similar? David Ruy's work, my work, Tom Wiscombe's work, Michael Young's work?

MM: I'd group it together.

MFG: How could you possibly put it together? You have to be more specific than that.

MM: Well, we could talk about the role of figuration of surface.

MFG: Let's talk about that because I don't see any similarity. The reason we started looking at the fundamental operative system of architecture – that is to say, a shift from architecture's Deleuzian (and parametric) emphasis on becoming to one of ontological existence, literally of being and the qualities of being – was because it wasn't merely a new formal style. It was a fundamental philosophical idea that could prompt the development of many different formal directions and therefore resist mere stylistic categorization. Architecture should be way, way beyond style at this point. Saying there's commonality in my work and Tom Wiscombe's work is a gross overstatement. Tom uses smooth but patterned or folded surfaces to reveal slightly hidden volumes existing deeper within an architectural form. My work hasn't used a complex smooth surface for nearly a decade. I think you're making a lazy categorization based on what you know of our pasts. Again



Mark Foster Gage Architects, Automotive Display Facility, Ad Diriyah, Saudi Arabia, 2016.

MM: Come on, there are similarities grouped under the OOO moniker. Generally, OOO work can be seen as an extension of the '90s complexity project – figuration, digital tools, flows of matter, curvature, the effects of movement, perhaps post-Greg Lynn Ark of the World, post-Zaha Hadid. The work is very much based in specific modeling tools and techniques. Whereas we are interested in pragmatism, so we have a different relationship to the world, to the economy, to construction, etcetera. I'm against architecture's foundation as purely empiricism or science. We play with things like typology, but not the Aldo Rossi essentializing model of urban grammar. Rafael Moneo tweaks Rossi a little, hints at a more open, shifting definition of type in "On Typology," but it doesn't go as far as it could. At the moment, I am interested in us looking together at things as a group, in arguing about their value and meaning, reviving or finding new or alternate typologies. The discipline of architecture is simply looking at things together, structuring similarities and differences. For instance, I may see similarities in your work and the work of Tom Wiscombe, and you may not, but that tension is incredibly productive for the field. In any of these shows, or in grouping people in the indifference article, there are radical differences

different. You need to stage the similarities to look at the differences more carefully. OOO does that too. I hope that people look closely at the houses, that was the whole point. I wasn't trying to make them equivalent.

MFG: You erased all of their differences. You did them all out of white Bristol paper, put them on the same pedestals, against the same curtained backdrop, at the same height, and then essentially branded them "MOS Office" by numbering them like you do your own projects. I think in that show you're making a subtle but strategic play to set yourself up as the godfather of this group of people by forcing them into what is essentially a category of your own projects. Anyone can do that – someone who does architecture that is only in red can find 44 projects from around the world that are also red and say, *Look, it's a new movement! Something new and fantastic and relevant is happening!* I could easily find 44 projects now that make it seem like the future of architecture is all spheres or clapboard siding or yellow mobile homes. You erased their differences to make them fit into your own agenda.

MM: No, there are both differences and similarities. The materiality was notational. The models operated a little like drawings. The students at Princeton encoded the materiality in colored lines.

MY: Michael, maybe you can speak more specifically about how you're thinking about resolution. Because when you and I have had previous conversations about resolution, it was much more than a relationship to digital images or the resolution of rasters. It had something to do with composition and material construction. Because I agree with Mark. If everything is in white Bristol board, then it controls or limits how we see the differences. rial and construction, even though they highlighted the formal aspects more than the material ones. There were basically three categories for low-res. One had low-res house components, like a pitched roof or a window or a chimney or a dormer. Another was low-res construction tectonics, cheaply made or roughly made, no curvature or smoothed out or anything; the projects expressed that they were put together parts and materials. And the last category was a compositional low-res, with heavy abstraction like a circle or a square in plan – very little composition. Those were three ways of defining low-res.

MFG: Again, that's more categorizing. That's the problem with the Enlightenment categorization, it masquerades as discourse but you just spend all your time talking about what things go in which box. It's very difficult getting to actual architectural qualities and aesthetics because academic arguments such as the ones you're making are about whether something is in this or that category.

MM: I guess I subscribe to Wölfflinian models of art history or architecture. I believe in comparison. I believe in everything being in conversation. You put things next to each other, then you look at them and try to find similarities and differences. I don't know what it means when you say *look at a building on its own terms*. I couldn't do it. I'm happy if you can do it. I can't. I experience and look at buildings in relation to other experiences, buildings, and objects.

MFG: That's impossible. You can't be in Villa Savoye and the Farnsworth House at the same time to compare their actual architectural qualities side by side. You can only compare your concept of each, or representations of them, side by side – never the actual things

and their actual qualities. Francis Bacon used to talk about his paintings working directly on the nervous system. I experience architecture that way, individually and directly. For me, architecture's great strength is that it can't be reduced to a drawing and maintain any of its actual qualities – nor digitized, for that matter. When I experience architecture in person, I find myself being more curious about its qualities. I get much more excited about the things I realize I didn't or can't know than the things I thought I did.

MM: So do I.

MFG: I'm sitting here in front of a microphone that you can put in the category of microphone or machine or audio equipment, but you can also – and this would be an aspect of OOO – try to go deeper into its qualities. For example, this microphone's stem is made from aluminum, which is only forged in a supernova of dying stars. This aluminum is over four billion years old, because it's on Earth, but no more than 13 billion years, as that's how old the universe is. It makes this microphone far more interesting to think of it in terms of its qualities – even the ones we can't access – than one's ability to put it in the audio section of B&H. I think your show puts a bunch of houses in a section of B&H rather than looking at the qualities of any of the houses in particular. The act of categorization removes the curiosity to go more deeply into things. You think you understand things when you put them in a category, but you don't.

MM: I totally disagree. I'm not talking about scientific categorization. We've been through typology as science and through technique as positivist methodology. These got to heightened levels in the '90s when everyone was looking for all kinds of pseudoscien-

architecture, like hybridization or biomimicry, or trying to focus on novel techniques as a way out of type/categorization. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about a much more collective act of looking, evaluating, situating work, and comparing it.

MFG: But why does it have to be the same old way of talking about things? This is why I wrote in *Log* 40 in opposition to your piece on indifference. You began by saying there are two directions in architecture. There is technology, sustainability, social justice, all this other stuff, and then there's me and my cool friends doing indifference. And you're making little tribes of categories. *This is my cool tribe. This is what's going on. I'm the leader of this.*

MM: I didn't say I was the leader.

MFG: You did, in the way you organized the low-res show and presented each house as your own project just by numbering them, house one, house two. That's what you do on [the MOS] website.

MM: Oh, you're talking about the graphic listing. Let's do one subject at a time.

MFG: It's the same thing. You've created a category of low-res that happens to be a lot like your own work. Then you list them in the same way you do your work. To me, you are implying, if not claiming some sort of leadership of this group of low-res architects.

MM: Let me start with indifference, then the low-res thing. Unlike OOO, I wasn't starting with an a priori philosophy. I'm happy to talk philosophy with you, but I didn't start with that. I was looking at the world around me, looking at qualities and aesthetics that are already out there. My label was meant as a compliment by comparing the work to "The

Originally, I was asked by Cynthia Davidson to write something about Donald Trump, and so I brought him in through Roy Cohn and McCarthyism and the art production that happens during a moment of incredibly extreme politics. I referred to the article "The Aesthetic of Indifference," written by Moira Roth in the late '70s for *Artforum*. I thought of it as a positive. I meant it as support for young offices out there. I also think it felt true to my experience. Ask around, there isn't a real desire for ideology. If you ask young architects if they are for OOO or indifference they might say, *yeah, I'm both*. Or if you ask, are you a modernist? *Yeah*. Are you a postmodernist? *Yeah*. Do you like this? *Yeah*. Do you like that? *Yeah*. Nobody wants to cancel out any possibilities, because they realize it's a death sentence. Most people want to be everything. And this nonnecessity or desire to not have ideology is interesting. That said, I don't know if it's a sustainable model. Regarding the graphics, we're not the first to number houses.

MY: Let's shift direction. In aesthetic movements, realism is the tension between reality and its representation. People who work with appropriation are often labeled under realism because of the ways they shift attention to different aspects or qualities of the world. The second quality in your low-res group, the clunkiness of a material connection and its detailing, I would associate with questions of realism, of directing attention to something that is usually overlooked.

MM: Yeah, there's some realism.

MFG: There's a story that I think Robin Evans tells, but I believe it's originally from either Serlio or Alberti. I open the [illegible] toward a house on a hill. The person can see the object of the house on the hill as *architecture*, as a physical entity with aesthetic qualities. The person could picture that house in her mind, as a concept, and understand it as *architecture* in that way, or the person could draw the outline of the house on the window and understand the representation as architecture. The debate historically has been whether architecture is the thing that happens in the mind, the thing that happens on the window, or the thing that happens on the hill. I'm only interested in the house on the hill, that's my realism. I don't spend time fetishizing or presenting drawings, or dreaming up some sort of genius concept – like, say, Calatrava calling the Oculus *a dove being released from the hands of a child*.

MM: What are you talking about?

MFG: When architecture fetishizes concepts, like *my building is like a bird*, the question is not about its actual qualities but about seeing its birdness. Architecture's value then comes from the idea of it being a bird, and you recognizing birdness. I believe your show replaces birdness with low-resness. You call a house low-res, so people look for its low-resness instead of trying to understand it as a more complex and rich entity. My interest in realism is that it places a heavy emphasis on architecture as the thing that exists in the world, on the hill.

MM: I'm definitely interested in architecture as a thing in the world, on the hill, but the either-or aspects of your arguments are odd to me. It's as if qualities or realism are totally unmediated – either you have a pure experience of qualities or you have a silly metaphorical relationship. And for some reason these are opposed to each other. All I was

doing was trying to put things in dialogue with each other and give a starting point for a conversation. Also, for sure, MOS's work is very much in the world, concerned with building, experience, qualities, economy, construction, etcetera.

Thinking about OOO and you talking about the microphone and dying stars, I'm reminded that the various ways we look at architecture and how we teach it are important questions. Attention and distraction are what I've been thinking about recently, via Joshua Cohen's book on attention [*Attention: Dispatches from a Land of Distraction*]. From that, I got into William James, the psychology of attention, and also pragmatism. And from that, I looked at the pragmatist conference at MoMA ["Things in the Making: Contemporary Architecture and the Pragmatist Imagination," in 2000]. The conference seemed so brilliant to me. I really think it needs to be looked at more carefully. We need a discussion about how we are all looking at architecture now and how to work against the current distracted model. One counterpoint to distraction for Cohen is reading, which is a way to subvert distraction. Although, with reading, there's a loss of the world-at-large. I'm not interested in returning to a dogmatic close-reading model, but there have to be other models of reading that we can do together. How do we look at work together? How do we discuss it? Camps are inevitable, but we do need to be looking at buildings together and discuss *how* we see them. I'm for very inclusive models, everything is valid for discussion, even OOO. I'm always curious how others see things, even though I rely on horribly Enlightenment tactics like typology or finding similarities and differences, grouping things together. I have my way of looking. I can't imagine looking at every building on its own and thinking about a dying star. It would be paralyzing.

and distraction, because I'm fascinated with it as well. It links us to questions of aesthetics and representation. And Mark, I'm not going to let you off the hook so easily when you say you're only interested in the building on the hill, because the ways you manipulate representations to shift attention and distraction is incredibly sophisticated.

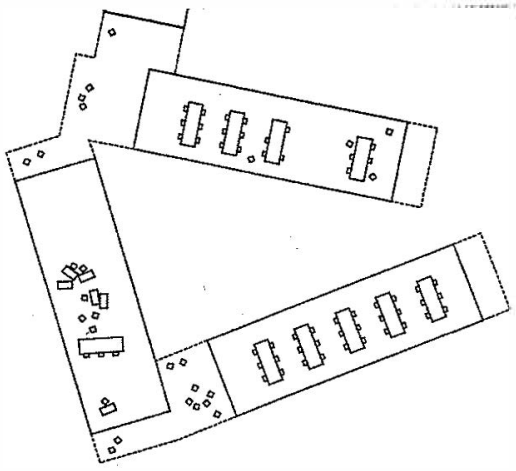
MFG: It's all by accident.

MY: No. I want to talk about the two drawings I showed. For the MOS plan of School No. 1 to only be an outline and the furniture having as much presence as the building itself is a mode of focusing and shifting attention to conceptual issues in the architecture. This is related to how Mark takes on the rhetoric and aesthetics of a NASA drawing in order to shift attention and distraction toward the construction of a possible reality through the modes of technical and construction documents that we use as architects.

MFG: When we did the NASA-type drawings for our Geothermal Futures installation at SCI-Arc, the idea was to construct an alternate reality regarding the show's central object, not to describe the construction of said object. The drawings were entirely fake and had nothing to do with the object in actuality. They only vaguely looked like the object and pretended to put it in an actual technical context. The object itself was hollow. The drawings show the mechanisms inside the object, none of which actually existed.

MY: Aspects of this relate to pedagogy because we are all teaching ways of paying attention, ways of looking and dealing with the world through modes of representation. It is fundamental to the way in which architects work.

MFG: Something that has to do with resolution but that we didn't mention, and relates to your



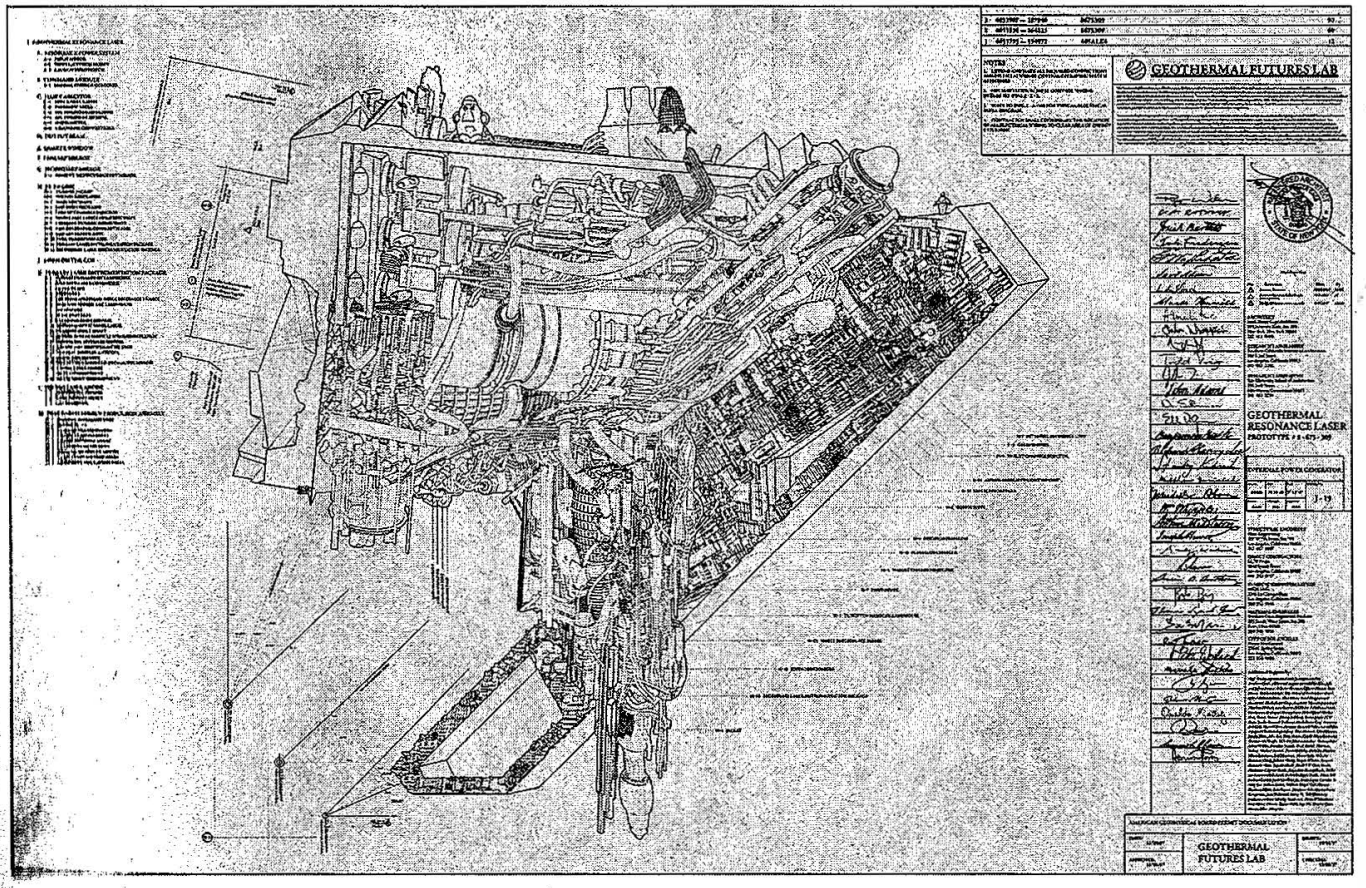
MOS, School No. 1 (Krabbesholm Højskole), Skive, Denmark, 2012.

things that are easily exhaustible, things that you understand quickly and don't think about twice. You eat a Twinkie and you're hardly savoring the complexity of its flavors and textures. Then there are complex things that take more time to wrap your head around, or things you don't quite understand or that generate curiosity, wonder, a touch of awe. Kant says that nature and architecture are the only things capable of producing the sublime. He gives the examples of thundershowers and the facades of Gothic cathedrals. If done right, architecture has the ability to not be easily exhausted.

I was trained as a classicist, and in classicism you generally have three or four scales of operation, from overall mass to cornice lines, which divide a building into smaller sections vertically; to pilasters and columns, which divide it into further sections horizontally; to large details like pediments or arcades, to small details like guttae – there are maybe five ranges of scales of things. In our office we're generally working with 10 or 20 scales. The purpose of that isn't to do high-resolution for the sake of high-resolution or to show that digital technology is so cool that it can do all these things; it's to not be easily exhaustible. It's to entice and invite a level of curiosity that doesn't allow architecture to be so quickly consumed and dismissed.

those interested in paying attention there are a lot of things going on, probably so-called Enlightenment things. There are games of symmetry and asymmetry and games of rotation; the idea of the house as split at the entrance. There are some Venturi Scott Brown things. There are four wings and a fifth one is added, which produces a diagonal symmetry related to the little curve on the other side. The courtyard seems to be arbitrarily cut and indifferent to the pitched roof forms. The voided court produces various local symmetries and super awkward moments that are interesting to us. You know, there's a lot of basic architecture stuff happening. Programmatically, there is no living room but there are different scales of inhabitation, and furniture is involved in it. When you look at those things you can talk about this house in relation to other courtyard houses. There's a relation to or inversion of Wrightian structures. There are histories of architecture even if we don't intend them to be there. I don't know if anyone will pay attention. Honestly, I don't know how we would make an architecture that would be immune to being easily dismissed nowadays, like you're saying. I don't think it's in the surface or in the complexity or the novelty of it or the newness of things or the intensity of scale. It can all be easily dismissed. This is why I'm thinking about how we talk and look at buildings at the moment. You're suggesting it's the object itself that has inherent meaning, but I don't believe that. It's much more constructed.

MFG: This may be a nice segue into Jacques Rancière. Requiring that one read a building is socially problematic to Rancière. Charles Jencks called it double coding, in that there is a reading for regular people and a reading for architects. You're saying the ambitions of your architecture are not located in its form,



Mark Foster Gage Architects, Geothermal Futures Lab, 2018. Technical drawing produced for an exhibition of the same name at the SCI-Arc Gallery in Los Angeles.

meaning you've coded them so that regular people cannot access them. That's a connoisseur-level reading.

MM: I'm interested in that, but it's not what I'm talking about.

MFG: If your architecture requires a certain type of reading then it's not an architecture for anyone other than architects. For Rancière, that removes the ability to understand architecture from all but the most erudite of observers.

MM: There is no singular view for architects or for regular people. There are many ways to look at buildings. I'm not interested in a single dominant reading or viewpoint. I don't think that's currently possible and may never be. All readings can be discussed and evaluated.

I'm more interested in the idea of

than conceptual. This is found in things that are not so easily understandable – like the release of the photograph of the black hole by the Event Horizon Telescope team that makes human differences seem incredibly small. How can you simultaneously hold in your mind the existence of something that is 6.5 billion times more massive than the sun, that is 50 million light years away, and be angry about immigrants coming into our country? The existence of such vastness and wonder compels us to see our own differences from a much different perspective. That is to say, they seem very small by comparison. Architecture can produce these effects, according to Kant. If this sensibility can only be produced by nature (by black holes) and architecture, it's a much more interesting problem for architects to imagine how their work could be collectively wondered about and not understood – the

low-res mean it's more easily consumed, more commercial? I would say no.

MFG: Yes.

MM: I knew you'd say yes, but I could also say that the images you show all fit in a class culture of consumption and luxury goods. You obviously play with that. Their gilded quality can just as easily be dismissed. What may be less easily consumed is something that seems like it's off or doesn't quite fit. Maybe, in general, architecture cannot escape consumerism.

MFG: I think we're in a world of low-res. I'm from Nebraska, and the low-res show looks like a lot of the suburban, pseudo Tuscan villas that I drive by every Christmas when I go to our family farm. Only a trained eye would see the difference between the low-res show and the suburbs.

MM: I don't think so.

MFG: There are pitched roofs, boxes, chimneys, and kooky half circles that aren't tectonically arches.

MY: You could also argue that lowering the resolution increases accessibility and dissemination online because it's now more easily deliverable, it takes up less memory, fewer bytes. It is pragmatic, but it also produces an aesthetic effect.

MM: For me the aesthetic effect is more interesting than the technology or science of it. Something can appear low-res whether or not it is. Like, let's say, Pascal Flammer's house. If you look closely at it, it's Swiss-made, a beautifully crafted house, sophisticated. At another level it can appear as pretty low-res, it may relate to other houses, maybe produce more distraction, quite the opposite.

MY: My point is much simpler than that. At one level, to make categories again puts us into this either-or thing. It appears that one of the reasons you decided to develop representations that foreground low-resolution is because it's against a slick photorealism, but I don't know if the reactionary stance of lowering resolution is productive.

MFG: There are so many things we could wonder about and discover in any architectural project before plopping it in a high-resolution or low-resolution category. Once it's in a category, the human mind makes the mistaken assumption that it's understood and closes the door on further interest. For example, if I introduce you to two equally fascinating people and then tell you one is in the Democrat category and one in the Republican category, you will think you know more about them than you actually do.

Now, having seen the low-resolution catalogue and my own so-called high-resolution work, I realize that one aspect of low-resolution that could be interesting is the concept in Greek antiquity called *para-micronic* beauty, which means that for something to be beautiful, it can't be perfect, it has to be off by a little to be truly unique and beautiful. For instance, Marilyn Monroe is considered beautiful because of her mole, which would normally be considered an imperfection that detracts from beauty. You're saying that low-resolution may have the possibility to generate an "off-ness," which generates its own form of curiosity, that something's not quite right and deserves a second look. That would be a great direction for low-res as opposed to how I read it, which is as easily consumed. Granted I didn't see the exhibition, but I saw the book and what was published in *Log* 44.

To me it was look at these quirky, cute little houses. Now I'm going to go get a sandwich.

MM: You're an architect producing your work. You're going to have a reaction to certain things. In Netflix terms, our work is more like *The Office* in the sense that it's both generic/familiar and off, and the work that you two do is much more sci-fi, like *Star Wars*. It's a different aesthetic. Maybe these categories don't help you, but they have different enthusiasms, engender different things, have different relationships to reality and different economies, and could be for or against different aesthetic and cultural institutions.

MY: We have as much time as we want for questions. If you have a question, I think these guys would be happy to talk to it.

MFG: We can't promise any resolution in the answers, but we'll try.

AUDIENCE: I want to ask about the idea of exhaustion. The 44 houses are reductions of information, so that you can compare and contrast them. That's one move, or one series, that you can do with the houses, but there are infinite series technically. Once Michael Meredith does this with 44 houses, is that then complete? Are those the only 44 low-resolution houses that exist, now reduced to formal models, or is this just one extrapolation of those houses?

[illegible] It's not a stable thing, it's a temporary thing. I'm okay with the fact that everything we do is going to be dismantled and dismantled at some point. Again, going to the attention/reading thing, reading always involves a certain loss. To be able to read, we can't have everything present all the time. We had to lose something to compare [illegible], and we had to choose something. The small, you see only white, but there was other information. We don't talk about the almost infinite idiosyncrasies of each project, the individual team members or clients or money or whatever, so we can compare and discuss things outside of themselves.

MY: But there is a difference between close reading and close attention. Jeff Kipnis and others have brought up this question.

MM: I didn't know.

MY: Kipnis, Andrew Atwood, and a number of other people are talking about this. I would like to return to the compositional idea of symmetry in your House No. 10. When you produce that symmetry, you make the house appear as twins or as doubles.

MM: It also looks like one long extruded house that's broken.

MY: It actually makes you pay more attention. I don't think it's a reading project, in which you take out the plan and overlay it in order to extract layers of history and its formal arrangement. I think this is an important issue to bring up as we attempt to clarify what's at stake with the issue of resolution, because it is about attention. Radical shifts in resolution make one pay attention.

MM: I wasn't trying to pooh-pooh high-res – well, maybe a little bit. But the shifts in attention seem right to me.

MFG: I wouldn't pooh-pooh low-res because I've already forgotten about it.

AUDIENCE: I think you're both into hoarding. Mark, you hoard things by putting them into one building. There are so many things going on. Like when you download mul-

images of a really simple house, but then you have crumpled pieces of paper, a bicycle, a trash can, and small models of plants, all super high-res details, for a rendering of a low-res building. Maybe you both flip when you use high-res and when you use low-res.

MM: It's exciting we're using these terms. Even if the exhibition was a failure, the fact that we're discussing low-res/high-res and trying to understand whether low-res is bad and consumer driven and how it relates to attention seems productive, makes me happy – although I might be regretting it soon enough.

MFG: My only interest in philosophy is that it gives us new tools to understand what we're doing. The term *resolution* initiated by the show isn't new to architecture but can be another tool that helps us to understand what we do and how it fits into the world around us. Proust says that the real voyage comes not in visiting new lands but in having new eyes. If resolution is a shifted perspective that allows us to see architecture in a new way, then it opens up new possibilities for discourse. I welcome it to the table.

AUDIENCE: Earlier it was mentioned that architecture and nature can create the sublime. Do we need the sublime in architecture in a society where success is functionality based? Should we strive for the sublime, or do we just need moderately aesthetic, conventional buildings that work?

MFG: One can make the argument that most of the history of architecture was done in the service of capturing the sublime, because most architecture was religious, from the temples of Mesopotamian antiquity to Gothic and Renaissance cathedrals. Most of the money spent on architecture throughout pretend, which in most cases was religious. The question might be whether there is room in contemporary architecture for a secular sublime or whether architecture should give up the project. I couldn't do it, as I think it would be giving up a significant part of what makes us human. We all strive to do more than merely function. We love, laugh, create, argue, and buy overpriced fashion and accessories that make no sense functionally. Our most incredible qualities as a species are the ones that move us beyond mere function.

MM: Architecture is still religious in a very deep way. What I like about the pragmatism of William James and Cornel West is their reconciling of their religious beliefs with empiricism and scientific rationalism. That's why I am using pragmatism instead of functionalism to think about architecture. We have all experienced the strange belief systems of architecture – go out and try to convince a nonbeliever in architecture that this or that is good design. You're going to have a hard time. You might resort to science or empiricism – that's the model nowadays to convince people. You would say these are the metrics, it functions really well, it's sustainable. Nobody can argue with the numbers, right? The nonbelievers will probably still not like how it looks. Architecture requires a belief system for people to enjoy or appreciate it. It's a very bizarre thing.