

articulated, and embodied, as well as explored, developed, and also discarded over time.

Within professional design practice, the “discourse” contains the practices and thought patterns that underlie the actions of a group of designers, say in a firm. This pattern is deliberate and human-made, and it is represented in the environment. When we study top design professionals carefully, we notice that leading designers take great care in developing their own discourse that underpins the manner of working in all the projects in the firm. As Ken Yeang reflects on the role he plays in his own architectural office:

Any architect with a mind of his own, whether by design or default will produce an architecture which is identifiable to that architect. ... I had to study ecology, I had to study biology; that was the basis for most of my design work. I’m trying to develop a new form of architecture. We have this climatically responsive tropical skyscraper agenda and [in] each project we try to see whether we can push an idea a little bit further. ... I give every new member of staff the practice manual to read when they join. They can see not just past designs but study the principles upon which they are based. We work these out over time, over many projects. (quoted in Lawson and Dorst 2009)

The agenda of the firm is very clear, and there is a set of very deliberate activities and working methods which support that agenda:

But in a project I have to be very dependent on my architects and each one of them has their own personal way of doing things, and I try to respect that so they are constantly improving and making things better, there is growth and they get motivated.

There is a very sophisticated way of creating a balance between continuity and change within the design practice:

I do competitions more as an academic exercise. I treat competitions as research projects ... it motivates the office—gets them excited—lets the mind develop new thoughts and themes. I put all the drawings together and publish a book ... look in this book, these were our competition drawings for Kuala Lumpur and people said, “how can you spend so much time doing drawings and so on” and I say, “it’s research, it develops ideas.”

The projects and other activities, such as competitions, exhibitions, presentations, and publications, are seen as part of a very explicit strategy for developing the discourse into the future. Ken Yeang and other outstanding architects didn’t report on directly interfering with the projects; apparently they influence what happens in their firms more subtly. They oversee the building and continuous development of the themes and repertoire of frames that together make up the discourse of the firm. This includes approaches to problems,