3: <u>Can you comment on how you think these films engage and/or contribute to both the history and also the trajectory of architectural filmmaking?</u>

RM: To be specific, there were no films in the show; they were all digital videos. Technologically, the instruments with which they were made differ from cinema at least as much as the iPhone camera differs from the Leica. To the degree that the history of media is a history of such discontinuities, videos like these are structurally distinct from earlier films, just as the mostly realistic renderings that accompanied them differ from earlier drawings made using filmic techniques like montage. But so-called new media always bear traces of older ones. One striking attribute of the videos and renderings in the show, as well as any number of other contemporary visualizations, is the predominance of perspectival views. Just as the photographic camera internalized certain technical aspects of classical perspective such as the standpoint or viewpoint, computer algorithms have rewritten "photorealistic" perspective as code and made it ubiquitous, built-in.

The reasons for this might seem a bit chicken-and-egg: audiences (i.e. clients, or markets) demand realism, even as those audiences are daily trained by the entertainment industry that writes the

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software to expect their video games and special effects to be evermore lifelike. Partly in sync with these developments, perspective has returned to architectural representation with a vengeance. After all, the animation software with which architects usually make their movies was designed for Hollywood and is still used there to far more dramatic effect. More importantly, the demand for photorealism works, in microcosm, on exactly the same ideological register as does the American dream: it naturalizes decisions that are otherwise contingent, such as the decision to favor, and to represent as natural—real, given, unquestioned—a way of life.

As the follow-up Buell Center research also showed, the most widely circulated images from the show were the most "realistic" ones, whether they were renderings or photographs of models. The videos were surely seen by a much smaller portion of the audience, since watching videos takes time, and they did not circulate outside the gallery space. A YouTube exhibition might have put them into wider circulation, but that would probably have required a different format!

To your other question: I'm not sure how aware most of the designers were of precedents in architectural filmmaking or

videography, since these are not widely known for similar reasons. If anything, the most notable continuity with precedent was in the overall effort to communicate with a general public, to explain the work rather than just present it. Even the most artful of the videos were, in the end, didactic. This was in keeping with earlier multimedia efforts to explain architectural or urban propositions to a broader public, whether at museums like MoMA or in venues like world's fairs.

BB: There is no single history of architectural filmmaking, but the great moments in that diverse history would include films that are as inventive in their techniques of framing, editing, montage, and even title sequences as Le Corbusier's highly propagandistic films of the 1920s and the amazing film work of the Eameses. Almost since its invention filmmaking has appealed to architects as a medium that is spatial and temporal in a way with fascinating parallels to architecture itself and thus has attracted a great deal of experimentation from architects. One thinks of the incredible resonance between experimental abstract films, such as those by Hans Richter, and the emergence of an architecture of spatial planes and sequences, a relationship solidified for instance by the seminal film issue of the avant-garde review G in the 1920s.

4: How do these films fit within the larger institutional direction and/or ambition of architectural curation at MoMA?

BB: MoMA was a pioneer in using film and television in relationship to its architectural and design objectives over the decades, although that history has yet to be written. One thinks , in particular, of the television appearances of Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. around the "Good Design" campaigns of the 1940s and early 1950s.

Ever since I arrived at the helm of Architecture & Design in 2007, I have found film critical to my commitment to architectural exhibitions that engage audiences in understanding what is at stake in architectural design and decision making. For instance, in the exhibition Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling (2008), film played an essential role in creating an exhibition that was about the design and fabrication process rather than simply about end results. The real challenge in making an architectural exhibition is how to engage the public critically with the work on display. In past decades the means of architectural representation often cultivated a level of complexity that was frankly mystifying to the uninitiated. For me the real challenge of an architectural curator working in a museum that has a mass appeal is to exhibit not simply the results but the

MOS
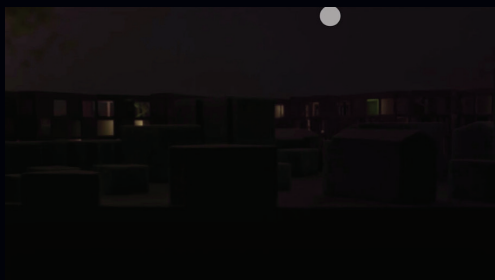
very processes and the larger
stakes—creative, social, eco-
nomic, even ethical—of archi-
tectural practices in a world
that demands radical change.
In Home Delivery this took the
form of creating anthologies
of historical footage—mostly
documentary—of house prefab-
rication. And then for the new
commissions of prefabricated
prototypes the website of the
Museum hosted weekly updates on
the design, fabrication, and
delivery of five prefabricated
or digitally fabricated houses.
The exhibition itself played
out temporally.

    Given a larger budget it
would have been very inter-
esting to precede the pre-
sentation of the projects
in Foreclosed with a room of
projections of films and televi-
sion programs that had helped
build the American dream,
from "Mr. Blanding Builds His
Dream House" (1948), inevita-
bly, to "Leave it to Beaver."
Ever since Beatriz Colomina's
pioneering work, we know that
media representations of archi-
tecture are an integral part of
architectural culture, as much
building blocks of the horizon
of possibilities and desires as
any other forms of representa-
tion by which architecture is
projected or recorded.

JEANNE GANG

1,066 FORECLOSURES INITIATED

I THINK THEY'RE IN A POSITION TO

IT BUYS THEM SOME TIME

AND DO THEIR JOB AND THAT'S IT

PEOPLE JUST WANT TO RAISE THEIR KIDS

THE MEXICAN COMMUNITY TOO HERE

WE'LL DO THE CINCO DE MAYO FESTIVAL

THIS OFFSETS HIS EARNINGS FOR THE DAY

OTHER PEOPLE INTO JOBS

A BIG IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

IT'S A TWO FAMILY DUPLEX

MY PARENTS TAUGHT ME TO BE STRONG
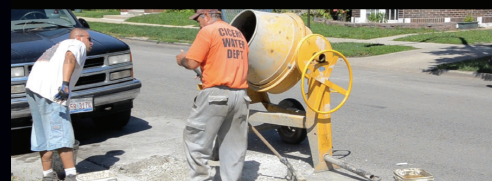
A METAL STAIRCAISE GOING TO THE TOP

SO THEY CAN HAVE AN EXTRA INCOME

NO MATTER WHAT TYPE OF JOB YOU HAVE
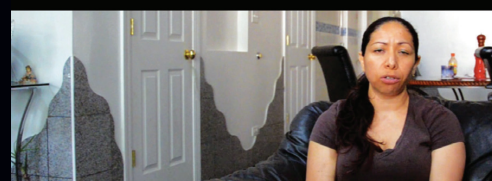
WE'LL SEE A LOT OF BUNGALOWS WITH

AND THEY CAN SELL THEM TO THE STORES

BEFORE GOING TO THESE PLACES

IT'S REALLY SAD TO SEE

SO WE WENT TO THE COURT

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE IN CICERO?

ABOUT $2,000 IN TAXES EVERY 6 MONTHS

DAYS WITH NO GAS

5: Bonus and optional question—intentionally if impossibly broad: can you speak to the value of architectural storytelling, in the past and today?

RM: That would depend. Stories about what? About technological triumph, about the glorious past, about the heroic future, about the eternal present? Stories about justice or injustice, equity or exploitation, truth or lies? Mythical stories or historical ones? Stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end, or just an end? Or maybe: stories about value itself, about how it is constituted, how it is maintained, and how it may be renegotiated? But even then— as comedy, tragedy, farce, or epic?

The narrow answer to your question, then, is that there has always been a narrative element to architecture. Think of the great friezes that crowned the Parthenon or wrapped the Pergamon Altar. Think of the symbolic rituals staged in such structures, or the liturgical procedures written into the plan of a Gothic cathedral. Think of the scriptural cadences sweeping across the surfaces of a centuries-old mosque, or the symbolic and political differences among imperial palaces planned around symmetrical or asymmetrical spatial sequences. Or think of the innumerable instances where buildings exude national myth or prosaic, archaic custom. Some of these were designed self-consciously to tell, repeat, or stage stories of different sorts. Some were not. It doesn't matter. They do it anyway.

Today many architects and many critics suffer under the delusion that narrative equals figuration. But even the most abstract designs, and the media in which they are rendered, tell stories. El Lissitzky allegorized it cheekily in his lithograph "Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge." Still, some are tempted by all of those stories about the end of stories—stories that speak, tautologically, of replacing an outmoded literariness with the immediacy of sheer instrumentality. But as I've been saying, there is nothing more instrumental than a story. So we might as well learn.

BB: I would only add that the very first printed text on architecture with illustrations is a narrative tale, the famous Hypnerotomachia Poliphili of Francesco Colonna. And I would also add that the relationship between space and memory is so intricately intertwined that the standard technique of the Memory Palace tells us that even without a story per se that space has deep resonances with the very way our minds structure the world, time, and experience.

While architecture is not always narrative in its conception, it generates narratives in the way it enters the world. A building once completed and occupied interacts not only with its users but with the changing configurations of its environment as well. Narrative thus accrues even to architecture which sets out to refute or resist it.

What was distinctive about the invitation to deploy filmic techniques as part of the making of a project in Foreclosed was the notion that those elements that accrue can also be part of the way in which architecture helps us to imagine new stories.

AND I LOST IT WITH THIS HOUSE

I GAVE $60,000 AS A PAYMENT

WE ALMOST LOST THE BAKERY

WE ACTUALLY HAD ANOTHER BAKERY

How might architectural history advance if groups of talented film and video makers were charged with telling stories in significant buildings of the past? Just as multiple performances of the repertoire of classical music vastly increase our understanding of the invariant texts of Mozart or Wagner, architectural scholarship stands to gain by encouraging media makers to "perform" works of Schinkel or Le Corbusier, preferably by filling them with human beings and narratives. The pretense of the camera surveying architectural spaces devoid of bodies, as if this provided a gold standard of objectivity, has become threadbare. Anyone concerned with the potential of moving images to illuminate the built environment will want to read this conversation. Two thumbs up!
—EDWARD DIMMENBERG