



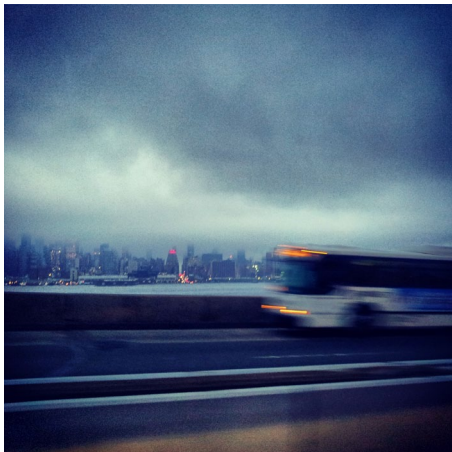
'Cloudgate' - Anish Kapoor at Chicago's Millennium Park - SOM

DULUX STUDY TOUR 2014 REPORT

Suzannah Waldron



LAX Airport



Road Trip to New York



Farnsworth House. Photo: Jenna Rowe

ON TOUR

Learning from America

Touring is leisure with a purpose. An opportunity to observe, reflect and learn. It was fantastic to be part of the first Dulux Study Tour to travel to the USA. A shift away from the usual gravitational pull of both the tour, and also the industry, in often looking towards Europe.

American architecture and practice revealed itself to have some interesting parallels with Australia. Shared issues emerged of commercial culture, procurements processes and urban solutions. Those widely studied European models for urban space, competitions and public procurement are sidelined.

But alongside this exists a particularly American history of speculation, risk taking and entrepreneurship. The legacy of modernism co-opted into a commercial culture. And a diversity public private partnerships that stretch beyond the corporate and into the philanthropic and the not for profit.

This report shares anecdotes, observations and reflections to explore some of the issues that appeared from taking a closer look at American cities and architecture during the eleven day tour. A few collected thoughts on how we might perhaps learn a little more from America.

Thankyou

Thanks to Dulux and the Australian Institute of Architects:
Phil White, Sarah Nadenbousch & Bernadette Wilson

My co-tourers:

Ben Milborne, Jenna Rowe, Cherry Williamson & Michael Zanardo.

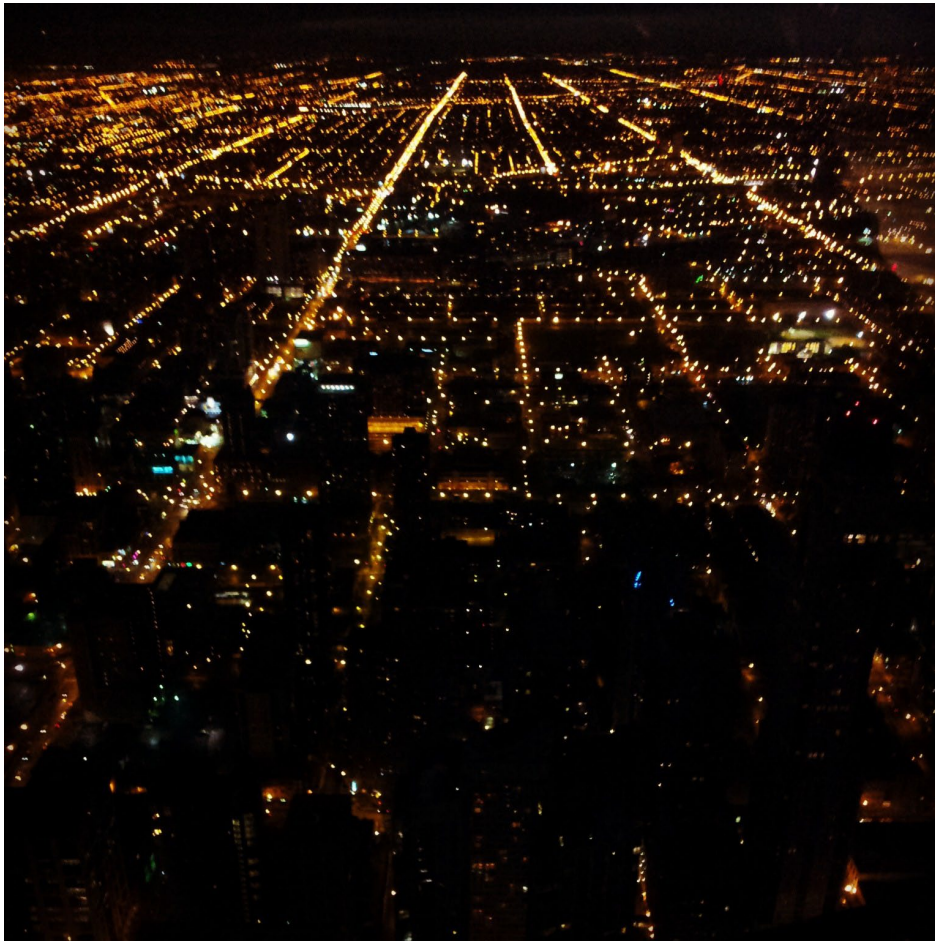
And to all the generous practices we visited:

In Chicago: SOM, PORT, Wheeler Kearns, Studio Gang, John Ronan, Kreuk + Sexton, Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill, Strawn Sierralta.

In New York: 1100 Architect, LTL, Foster + Partners, Reiser + Umemoto, Family NY, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Toshiko Mori, Leeser Architecture, REX & SHoP Architects.

SPECULATION

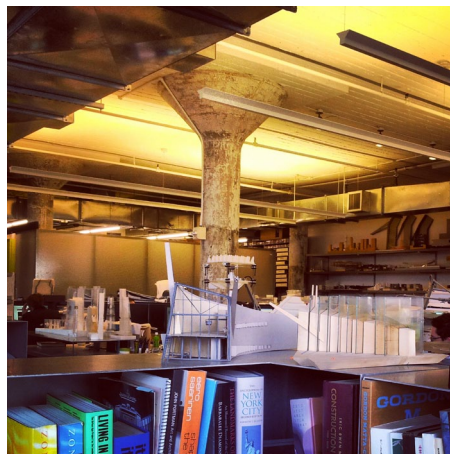
from urban to entrepreneurial



Chicago's Illuminated Grid - John Hancock Tower



Columbus Circle & Central Park - New York



Slow House models - Diller Scofidio + Renfro

Urban Speculation

The view from the top of the John Hancock tower in Chicago lays the speculative urban grid bare. It stretches away uninterrupted towards the horizon. Non-hierarchical and universal. A generic system which contains a huge amount of specificity and urban opportunity.

Predictions

Chicago and New York were both founded on speculation. In *Delirious New York* Rem Koolhaas describes the creation of The Manhattan Grid as "the most courageous act of prediction in Western civilisation."¹

Appetite for risk

In visiting both of these cities I wondered if this speculative attitude has filtered down and permeated an approach to the urban environment. How are architects speculating both about the future of cities and also their own future opportunities?

Speculative starts

We met many practices engaged in speculative work, or who at least began their practices this way.

On the Fringe

There is an interesting legacy in New York of practices beginning on the fringes of architecture. Diller and Scofidio's early 'projects' were largely installation and arts based. Walking around their office there was the strange but informed juxtaposition of models from some of these early explorations scattered between large building projects now being realised.

Competing

For Reiser + Umemoto speculation was through competitions - despite there being no Euro-style competition route for American Architects to achieve built commissions and establish their practices. After over 10 self funded years the strategy recently paid off with two competitions wins for a Pop Music Centre and Port Terminal both in Taiwan.



Chicago Skyline



Andy Moddrell - PORT Architecture + Urbanism



Reiser + Umemoto Photo: M.Zanardo

Being Speculative

Andy Moddrell from PORT Architecture + Urbanism is attempting to take matters into his own hands through developing an 'Entrepreneurial Urbanism'. Using 'Public Design Advocacy' their 'What About the Valley?' handbook catalogues transformative civic interventions for an industrial valley in Cleveland, pitching proposals directly to the community and stakeholders. While it remains unrealised but has acted as a catalyst for suggesting urban solutions to others including a planning study for the Los Angeles River Greenway which they term an 'Actionable Design Speculation'. Andy's advice for pitching the speculative is to simultaneously "try to be quick" and "put all your eggs in one basket."

Risk Aversion

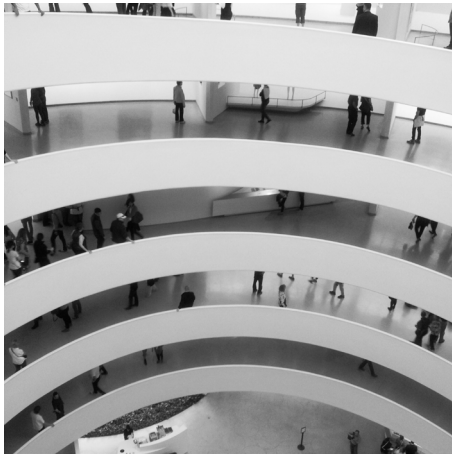
A consensus seems to be that architects should operate in more speculative ways to generate opportunities. But one of the problems that American Architects seems to suffer from is an increasing risk aversion.

PORT were exhibiting in a group show at the Art Institute of Chicago. 'Chicagoisms' put forward speculative urban projects for Chicago alongside a critique; that this city that was once the laboratory for urban design, may appear to exist in the shadow of its own history. "It's lost its ambitiousness, its will to take on risky projects. It's a safe kind of urbanism."²

This is a critique that might equally be levelled at cities elsewhere. Can entrepreneurial urban speculation overcome the dilemma of architects not realising their urban speculations so much anymore.

TO BE FRANK

a legacy of modernism



Guggenheim - Frank Lloyd Wright



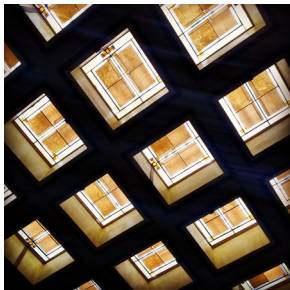
Fallingwater - Frank Lloyd Wright



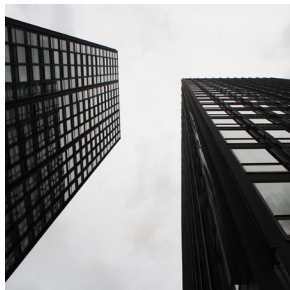
Unity Temple - Frank Lloyd Wright



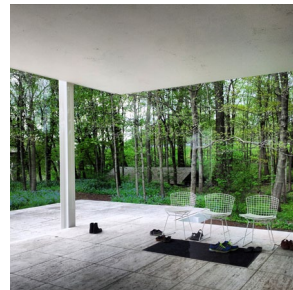
Chicago Federal Centre - Mies van der Rohe



Unity Temple - Frank Lloyd Wright



Lakeshore Drive - Mies van der Rohe



Farnsworth House - Mies van der Rohe

Frank vs Mies

Two pioneering masters of modern architecture. Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe seem to be lurking everywhere and at all scales. We visit and see many of their projects. From the urban to the residential. City to Countryside. Realised to Speculative. The list is long. They cast a long shadow.

Queuing at Chicago O'Hare airport we attempt to debate their respective merits. Frank vs Mies. A consensus is not reached, although Unity Temple may have tipped the balance in Frank's favour. We are on our way to Fallingwater where it will soon become clear that Frank Lloyd Wright easily wins the popular American vote.

Pilgrimage

At Fallingwater we are immersed. This is architectural pilgrimage. We instinctively recoil as we arrive to see two large school buses in the carpark. We feel the need to absorb and appreciate the masters in relatively hushed tones with space for reflection. The tour starts and the school group disappears. On approach the classic cantilevered forms are strikingly familiar. The interior spaces compress, expand and surprise. A curved and cantilevered stepped concrete canopy linking to the guest house is a unexpected highlight.

Invisible masterpiece

Visiting Mies van der Rohe's IIT campus the previous day, we had by contrast found it almost deserted. It must be the holidays. Crown Hall is a highlight amongst a repeated matrix of low level concrete frame, blonde brick and blackened steel buildings. The urban composition is hard to read, although the offset rectilinear composition reoccur with legibility in both the Chicago Federal Centre and Lakeshore Drive Apartments. I recall reading OMA's commentary that "the IIT campus is a masterpiece invisible to the contemporary eye ... unnoticeable without explanation"³

Reverence

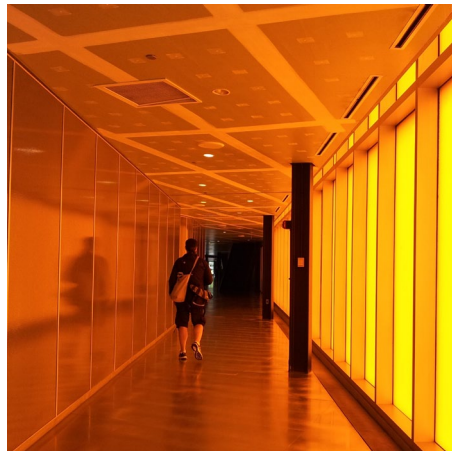
Across the campus are dotted multiple Miesian moments. Crown Hall lookalike buildings by SOM almost fool and provide an interesting case study in modernist deception, transforming many of Mies 'truthful' structural and material strategies into



Crown Hall, IIT - Mies van der Rohe



Toshiko Mori - Toshiko Mori Architects



McCormick Tribune Campus Centre, IIT - OMA

aesthetic adaptations. OMA's McCormick Tribune Campus Centre both exaggerates the generic and embellishes material surfaces. A reverential explanation.

Adaptation

We meet several Architects who have been tasked with the adaptation and or restoration of projects by key modernists. It is a task fraught with difficulties. The strength in the legacy of modernism particularly in Chicago seems hard to challenge at the best of times.

Mies Police

Kreuk + Sexton had been tasked with the prestigious yet perhaps frustrating task of restoring Crown Hall at IIT. They describe their encounters with the "Mies Police" architectural historians at the IIT Campus. They liken the nine month process of finding design solutions for adapting Miesian window frame as being "like forensics".

Dead Men

Toshiko Mori has designed public and residential projects next to, in reference to, and in addition to the works several modernist masters. Frank Lloyd Wright, Paul Rudolph, Marcel Breuer, Mies van der Rohe, and Philip Johnson. Her Dialogue in Details installation for the 2010 Venice Biennale compared large scale plaster cast details of her own 'addition' projects with those of these five modernists. She self mockingly reveals while laughing that one well known architectural critic reflecting on her reverence for her subjects remarked ... "so your exhibition is about five dead men."

Legacy

It does feel as though a reverence for Modernism has prevailed. On tour architectural aphorisms and modernist mantras are becoming hard to ignore. Less is more. God is in the details. It has infiltrated the architectural language. Forms are following functions. Truth is winning out over decoration. A tower in Asia is "seamless ... it doesn't feel decorated". We wonder if this need be. Miesian has become a design term. Frank is the quintessential architectural hero.

American modernism's legacy can be felt particularly strongly. For a moment if you pause to think of Melbourne it all seems somewhat strange.

LOOKING UP

modernist innovation to commercial universality

THE typology

As the birthplace of the skyscraper, Chicago has a definite affinity with the tower. It is not a typology they are ready to dismiss. It seems that almost every Architect we ask wants to build one. Walking through such vertiginous skylines daily must make Architects in these cities restless to contribute.

Ego is a ... word

Chicago practice Smith + Gill are currently competing to outdo themselves to design the worlds next tallest tower. They are experts in the super tall and we gain a few tips in the design basics including Y and H superstructures and how to identify "the ego part of the tower". It seems right that a Chicago practice should be exporting the super tall to the world, even though they are yet to find a spot in the city's skyline themselves. Skyscrapers are, after all, this town's architectural legacy.

The sky is the limit

Smith + Gill's Kingdom Tower in Jeddah will be over 1km high. One week later at MOMA looking at the original drawings of Frank Lloyd Wright's Mile High Tower they seem strikingly prophetic rather than utopian.

The illusion of height

Everyone wants to be taller, or at least appear to be. According to Dan Wheeler from Wheeler Kearns this statement is at least true of Chicago's towers, perhaps a by product of knowing they were destined to be superseded at any moment. Dan shares some historical anecdotes of the city including one of unidentified optical innovation in one of the city's landmarks. Built in the 1920s the Wrigley Building is clad in over 250,000 individual glazed terracotta tiles. Undergoing a recent restoration it was discovered that the tiles at the top and bottom didn't match. What appeared to be a continuous white facade was actually a gradient of eleven different colours, blending the tower into the sky. Creating an illusion of even greater height.

Verticality

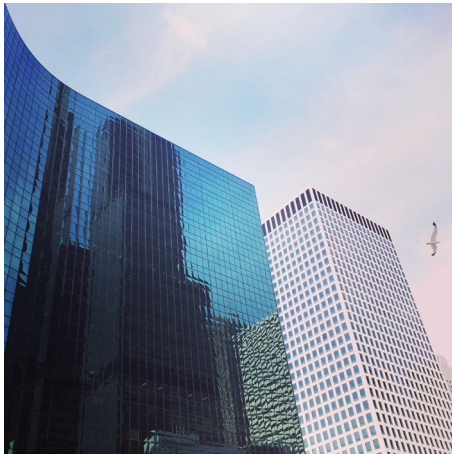
The Chicago skyline is a timeline of the continual progress of the skyscraper. From Louis Sullivan to Mies van der Rohe and SOM. It is a history of pragmatic structural solutions



Frank Lloyd Wright - Mile High Tower. Photo: Footnote 4



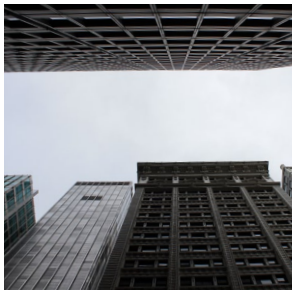
Smith + Gill - Kingdom Tower model. Photo: M. Zanardo



Riverside SOM in Chicago



Inland Steel Building - SOM



Chicago - looking up



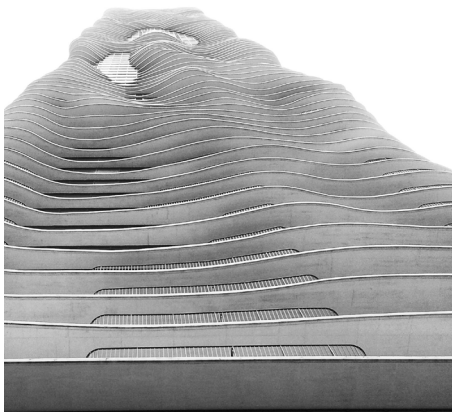
Spruce St Tower - Frank Gehry



New Museum - SANAA



Marina City - Bertrand Goldberg



Aqua Tower - Gang Studio



Natalie de Blois & Gordon Bunshaft. Photo: Footnote 5

elevated into architectural innovations. Vertical urban solutions are everywhere. The CBD 'Loop' exists on three levels, with elevated rail above and sunken service roads below the grid. In the middle of The Loop we discover a high rise prison designed by Harry Weese in the 1970s. Inmates wave from the rooftop exercise yard.

Generic

In the foyer of SOM we survey a large scale model of Chicago, liberally scattered with little grey buildings demarcating the multitude of contributions made by the practice to the city's skyline. The Inland Steel Building warrants a second look. Original 1950s glass curtain walls now seem somewhat ubiquitous, much copied and repeated. On first glance it's easy to overlook how pioneering and innovative these solutions were. Modernist innovation has become mainstream, co-opted for commercial universality.

Expressive

By contrast the fluted edged twins of Bertrand Goldberg's Marina City towers are geometrically simple and expressively strong. Cruising along the Chicago River it steals the attention of our cameras. We visit emerging practice Strawn Sierralta who have renovated one of apartments for their home and office. Many of their neighbours are also architects. Is this an iconic brutalism perhaps best appreciated only by Architects?

We drive-by the site of the recently demolished Prentice Women's Hospital. Goldberg's other sculptural Chicago landmark. Intersecting cylindrical concrete shells had cantilevered dramatically over a rectilinear plinth. We hear it's been a contentious process. Landmark status was granted then refused. Prominent Architects such as Frank Gehry and Jeanne Gang objected. It is being replaced by a glass curtain wall tower.

Identity Symbols

We pull the cab over for a streetside view of Jeanne Gang's Aqua Tower – Chicago's latest landmark. Cantilevered waved fins twist and shift the form. They are balcony, wind break, shading structure, and cost effective identity. Form is both function and expression. A continued history of pragmatist innovation this time made sculptural. The tower is cited as the only contribution by a woman to the Chicago skyline so far.

I later do a bit of fact checking and learn about the hidden hand of Natalie de Blois - the first female associate partner at SOM. She seems to have been the hidden design hand behind a number of the modernist towers we see. The Equitable Building in Chicago. Lever House in New York. She is relatively unknown. Her boss Gordon Bunshaft won a Pritzker. Attribution is a problem.

MANHATTANISM

commercial culture



Radio City Music Hall, Rockefeller Centre, NY



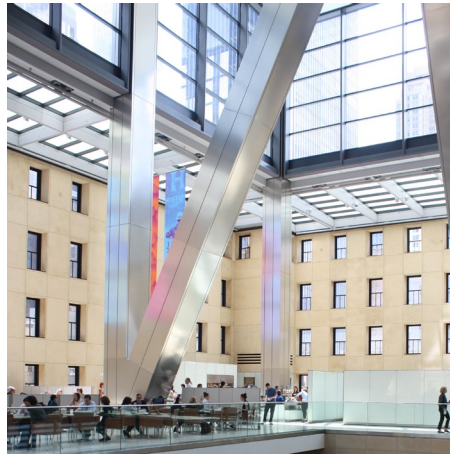
New York hot dogs



Woolworths Building, NY



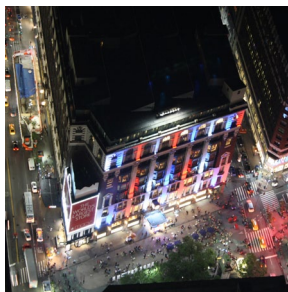
World Trade Centre Memorial + Towers 1 & 2



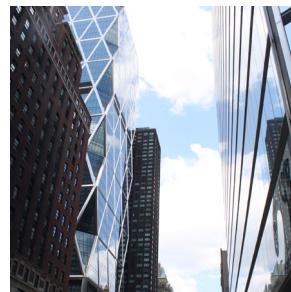
Hearst Tower - Foster + Partners



Tkts, Times Square - Choi Ropiha



Empire State - looking down



Hearst Tower - Foster + Partners

Making it

While not the birthplace of the skyscraper, in Manhattan skyscraper opportunism is best expressed. A history of innovation via manipulating the rules to maximise profit. A competitive skyline. If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere.

Tower Envy

Near Columbus Circle in New York we visit Foster + Partners, located on the 26th floor of the Hearst Tower designed by them. Faceted glass facades hover above a 1920s Art Deco building, originally designed as the base for a tower which never eventuated. The lobby is vast, shiny and full of people. The model room is empty but has stupendous views down 8th Avenue. Norman Foster writing about this tower reflected that Manhattan is "of course, the place where every architect wants to build his tower ... The good news is that my firm now has a tower in New York. The bad news is that it is a very, very small tower – only 46 storeys."⁶

Height is relative

The good news is this will only be short lived problem for Norman. At the World Trade Centre site we view his latest addition to the New York skyline under construction - Tower 2 will be 79 storeys high. The bad news is that height tends to be a relative thing. Located immediately adjacent to Tower 1 which climbs to 104 storeys the increase in scale may be hard to gauge. The day we visit we catch just a brief glimpse of the top of One World Trade Centre through the parting clouds.

ShoPPORTUNISM

SHoP Architects have embraced opportunism. Their office is fittingly located in the Woolworths Building, known as the 'cathedral of commerce'. Deliberately adopting a "swim down with the sharks" approach, developer objectives are co-opted for architectural ends. Commercial constraints becoming catalysts for innovation. Their proportionally 'super skinny' West 57th Street tower – 13m wide and 411m tall - plays with vast internal voids to meet FAR rules while pushing luxury apartments skyhigh in search of views over Central Park. We know they have just won a competition for a tower in Melbourne. We miss out on a sneak-peek, but wonder how Manhattanism will make it in Melbourne.

PRIVATELY PUBLIC

problem or potential



Storefront Art & Architecture - Steven Holl



Seagram Building - Mies van der Rohe



Broadacre City model - Frank Lloyd Wright at MOMA

Lessons

We stop in at the American Institute of Architects and discover an exhibition in the basement. Recounting '*7 lessons from the European Prize for Urban Public Space*' it's packed with pocket parks and piazzas. Apart from the strip I wonder what lessons America might have to offer us for public space?

The Storefront for Art & Architecture is also focusing on the importance of the public realm. '*Letters to the Mayor*' is an interesting read. Fifty international architects engaging in civic advocacy, articulating ways for design to contribute to the construction of public life.

Bonus

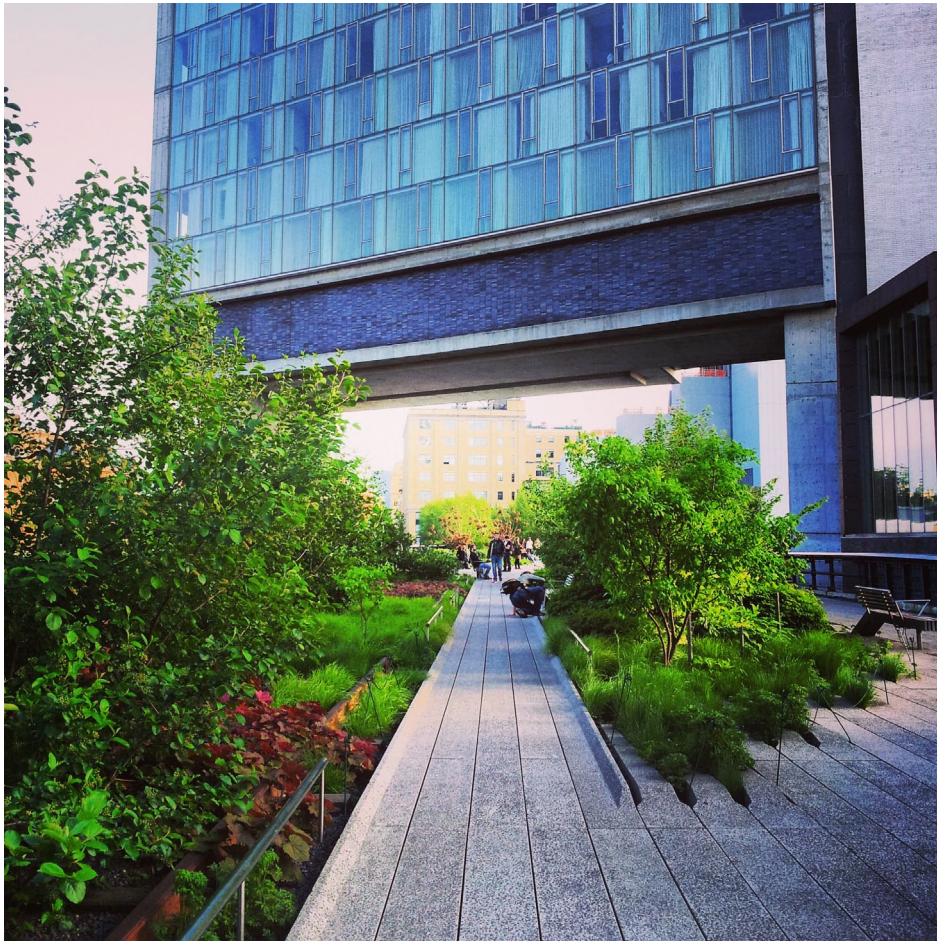
But New York, we discover, has it's own models of public space. We visit the 'Elevated Acre' by Ken Smith & Rogers Marvel - a redevelopment of a barren 1970's plaza. This is an encounter with the POP – privately owned public space. Introduced to New York in 1961 this zoning resolution incentivised commercial developers to provide public space in exchange for an increased FAR bonus. There are now over 500 of these market driven POP spaces across New York.

Mies started it

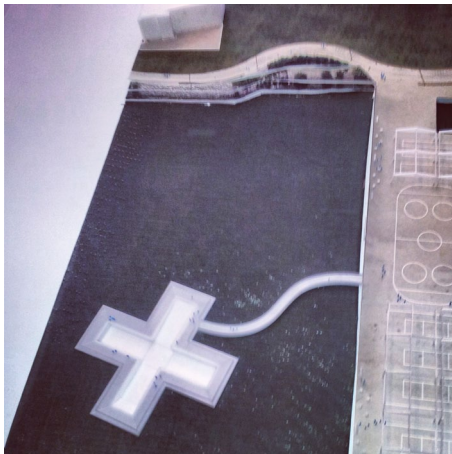
Apparently Mies started it he was the opportunistic architect looking for ways to manipulate the zoning rules to privilege open space at street level. His Seagram Building along with Lever House by SOM became the prototypes for the new zoning regulations and a subsequent spate of urban plazas. Visiting on a Sunday these Park Avenue plazas are empty. The POP is a model that is at once positive although problematic standing in the shadow of a fifty storey tower.

Frank's Alternatives

Meanwhile on 53rd Street, MOMA has '*Frank Lloyd Wright and the City: Density vs. Dispersal*' on show – featuring an original mega model of Broadacre City, which toured America in the 1930s. It is a vast, low rise, individualistic utopia shown in juxtaposition with designs from the same period for radical new skyscrapers. The drawings captivate



The Highline - Diller Scofidio + Renfro / James Corner Field Operations



Plus Pool model - Family New York



East River Pier - SHoP Architects

but the sprawling scale of the model is confronting. There is a tension in these differing visions for how to fix the modern city. Are these the urban visions that gave American (sub)urbanism a bad name.

Deep Pockets

We wander the length of the High Line with our guide Dustin from Diller Scofidio + Renfro. It is a unique public space and an unusual public private partnership. Community lobbying saved the elevated rail line and generated support for its transformation to public park. Construction was mostly paid for by the city. But operations and maintenance reverted to the original lobby group. As a result private philanthropic contributions play a huge part in this publicly owned project.

Family New York show us their speculative proposal for a floating community pool. Plus Pool pioneered the use of crowd funding for public space. This is architect as self-initiated transformer of the public realm. Public support is high but funding still needs to be found. Kickstarter raised enough for water tests in the East River, but falls well short of delivering the project. Deep pocketed philanthropists are needed.

Letters

In an ever more privatised world maybe there a place for learning lessons from American Public Space – can we prioritise public space by way of incentives. Perhaps we should be writing letters to developers and the private sector as well as mayors.

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