

Yes,
it's more.



MANAGE YOUR OWN
THE STRONGEST AND MOST
POWERFUL
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Dear Conditions, I cannot fulfil your request! I went to the re-launch and had a lot of interesting conversations about the exhibition. I really tried but I never gained full control of my communication with big. I don't want to disappoint you and offer a glamorous compromise. This is the conversation I always wanted to have with Bjarke Ingels (and therefore had to make up myself).

We asked Danish architect and critic, Boris Brorman Jensen, to visit the recent re-launch event of *Yes is More* in Aarhus to discuss and unfold these conditions further with Bjarke Ingels. He didn't. Instead he returned with this totally fictive and

Is *yes* more?

inconsistent 'interview', taking up the challenge of BIG's own archicomic discourse – and of course pushing us at the editorial board out of our own comfort zone, not knowing if this real fake interview is compromising the whole issue or not!



BORIS BRORMAN JENSEN is associate Professor, Ph.D. Department of Urbanism and Landscape, Aarhus School of Architecture. Boris Brorman Jensen is educated as an architect from Aarhus School of Architecture, Denmark with graduate studies at State University of New York in Buffalo and a doctoral degree in civil engineering from Aalborg University, Denmark. He has been a visiting academic at The University of Sydney, and guest teacher/lecturer at Chulalongkorn University Bangkok, KTH Stockholm, AHO Oslo and Harvard GSD. He is currently Associate Professor at the Department of Urbanism and Landscape at Aarhus School of Architecture. Boris Brorman Jensen has exhibited and published several research projects on globalisation, urban development and architectural theory. He is former partner of TRNASFORM - a Danish architectural firm dedicated to architecture and urbanism. Earlier projects include the awarded City Wall Xian project exhibited at the 10th Biennale di Venezia and the prize winning Performing Arts Center in Kristianssand, Norway.

BORIS BRORMAN JENSEN

BORIS BRORMAN JENSEN: In your exhibition you use the genre of comics as a frame for communication and as a funny way to tell some of the anecdotes about the tumultuous conditions in which your projects often are created. I think this works okay. For me it is legitimate to lift the veil of the chaos that governs the creative process. But why present it like cartoons or "archicomics"? It seems that you don't really dare, like you try to distance yourself from the facts by pushing the story into the popcultural framework of the comic book – a genre that can be both pornographic and hyperviolent. Even though there are clear typographic references, I don't see much SIN CITY in the exhibition!

BJARKE INGELS: This makes it clear that you haven't understood a thing. First of all, we don't try to poke fun at our lack of skills for idealistic control of the creative process. Ironically, it is in our encounter with obstructions and resistance that we make the greatest inventions. This is also communicated by the catalogue. I don't know why you want more violence involved. One of the most violent episodes during the riots of Nørrebro happened right outside our office, and this is of course a part of the exhibition, since it influenced the atmosphere in the office while doing the proposal for "Sjakket"

What was the last point of accusation? Well, pop culture and porn!

Yes! Architects can be deeply serious when presenting themselves. We try to avoid this. In fact, we are in a deep debt to popular culture. That's the way it is!

It can be that most architectural critics believe that architecture



belongs solely to the elite culture. But this is a very depressing position.

BBJ: What do you mean?

BI(G): In my opinion, it is too easy to distance yourself from popular culture. It is only old grumpy critics that still believe artists and architects absolutely have to behave like bohemians. BIG has more in common with various subcultures like graphitti, skating, parcour, even the supercommercial graphic designers of advertisement we have more in common with. But subcultures are often sectarian, and that's why we use the popcultural genre. It is probably the lowest common denominator we have in culture, but still it represents a relatively neutral ground, where the different cultural factions are mixed and can show off.

BBJ: You didn't relate to the issue of porn!

BI(G): Well, you are the one speaking about porn, not me!

BBJ: So why all these references to Sin City?

BI(G): OK! You can call our way of communicating a bit pornographic! Porn is very direct, and I somehow appreciate that. Porn is of course also a highly contaminated genre, loaded with almost any bias you can imagine and under heavy commercial exploitation. Nonetheless it is also a direct kind of representation with an ability to go all the way in exploring all kinds of expression in any kind of combination. It's very powerful because it depicts the wildest fantasies and wicked biases we have. Maybe I'm fascinated by porn as a strategy for communica-

tion and a tool for breaking down any given taboo obstructing creative processes.

BBJ: This sounds quite abstract!

BI(G): It's not. We are always very explicit in our messages. That's why we communicate a lot through these explicit models, hardcore-graphic diagrams and juicy renderings. We believe in unfussy and straightforward messages – always aiming direct on target. Public communication demands strong and simple codes that are easy to understand. This doesn't mean that we only have simple messages or do simplistic work. I think complexity can be both invented and expressed on its own, direct in the making, without any blur, theoretical wrap or poetic veil to cover up the lack of real intensity. It's about refraining from any constraining authorship. There should be no parental guidance, no intellectual manuals or connoisseur instructions in between our spatial experiments and any given mode of individual experience. It's not about hiding behind glossy images. Not at all!

BBJ: Are you saying architecture shouldn't be erotic?

BI(G): No. I was speaking about communication not promoting any kind of architectural sexism. Let me make things clear! Porn is often very anti-erotic and shall in this context only be taken as a kind of communicational strategy.

BBJ: So what's erotic for you?

BI(G): There is always an erotic element in architecture. I love sensitive skin, even when there is hair. There is no hair in mainstream porn.

I have always been eager to explore new ways to express Scandinavian sensibility. I'm deeply fascinated by super soft, red sunlight, kissing a concrete wall on an early winter morning. I love the feeling of a warm wooden handrail. You have to understand! Tactility is not in opposition to flashy iconography, and unambiguous messages. We try to tease and perform, inform and surprise. Touchability can successfully be merged with pop art. It is not either or. I believe you can have both!

BBJ: That's what you mean by 'BIGAMY'

BI(G): Yes BIGAMY is about having both; being both hard and soft, simple and intricate, tactile and conceptual. It is also a notion we have introduced in our vocabulary in order to clarify why we don't kill our darlings. Many avant-garde architects believe in serial monogamy. They think it's wrong to have more than one love affair at the time. Or they tend to stick to the same kind of spatial relationship throughout their whole career. Any good idea we invent will stay in bed with us! Creativity is a promiscuous activity and we are not just looking for affairs with virgin schemes. This gives us an ability to get a lot of babies out of numerous relationships. BIGAMY is a taboo in western architecture in many ways. It's also confronting an old-fashioned European contextualism. Many people were shocked when we, some years ago, proposed to swap a project from one Danish town to another. We are not speaking about complex settings; we were dealing with totally generic sites! And this was more than thirty years after Archigram introduced their

plug-in city! There is a long way to go before we are emancipated from the repressive idea of 'the one and only architecture'.

BBJ: So do you have any other secret desires?

BI(G): Peeping at my neighbors in the VM houses when it is dark outside, or listening to the different sounds coming out of open windows on hot summer nights....

BBJ: Really? That's voyeurism.

BI(G): What do you think Mies was doing? Architecture has always been closely related to some kind of voyeurism. Think about it. I totally disagree with all the cultural-pessimists and conservative sociologists claiming that a new kind of post-modern intimacy is threatening the city and the public sphere. I believe it is profoundly stimulating to be in a public place and confronting the 'other body'. It's just like the voyeuristic façade of the VM houses, where modernistic transparency merges with passion and curiosity. Or like the Copenhagen harbor bath where you find almost naked people down town: girls in wet t-shirts playing next to groups of office people having lunch. Voyeurism is an engine for urban life.

BBJ: Are urban cultures not sup-

posed to be blasé, depending on a certain kind of neutrality?

BI(G): Forget it. Simmel is dead. The city as he knew it is long gone. The innermost centers of our nice historic cities are deeply suburbanized and individualized. Suburban life forms, and their specific expressions and desires, have entered the cultural centre long time ago. No fear! Real urbanity, the café latté atmosphere and authenticity are something we shop for. Suburban happiness has very effectively transformed the way we conceptualize urbanity. Look at The Mountain project in Copenhagen. It is all about suburban living in a new, dense hybrid scenery. Our (prize winning) housing project is one BIG celebration of the automobile and the front lawn! It's a crash. It's cultural intercourse and it's something you have to get used to.

BBJ: One last thing. How do you feel about becoming some kind of a creative class celebrity – a famous and glamorous starchitect?

BI(G): Actually I feel quite OK about it! How do you feel? Are you jealous?

BBJ: I'm the one asking questions. You don't suffer from any inferiority complex do you?

BI(G): No I'm really comfortable with being BIG. I would even say we are not yet BIG enough. Becoming a starchitect is not the worst thing. We spoke about communication strategies, and as I said before: understanding media is a part of the game. Don't be afraid of popular media culture! Look at OMA; they are referring to Star Wars in one of their latest proposals for an instant city in the Gulf. We used a LEGO modelling tool to explain the simplicity of a project in Copenhagen. It's quite simple. You may call it 'street credit' or pop, I don't care. Architecture is no longer controlled by the regime of high culture.

BBJ: Interesting... One of my old heroes, Donald A. Schön, wrote more than twenty years ago about how professionals (architects, engineers, lawyers, planners, doctors, etc) were losing their respect among the general public. Is fame a new strategy to reclaim this lost esteem?

BI(G): I don't know....

*My name is Bjarke Ingels
and I have almost approved
this message!*

