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Improvisational Practice as Design Method: Cedric Price's McAppy Project

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Abstract: This paper argues that architectural design methods integrating improvisational practices can generate and develop capacities for intervention in and through their processes. The McAppy project (1973–1976) by the British architect Cedric Price serves as a case study. Its aim was to improve working conditions on the construction sites of a leading British construction company. Based on his cybernetic thinking, Price implemented a three-phase procedure that intervened in the existing situation of an ongoing construction site and changed its spatial and organizational structures on a test basis. Through this testing procedure, Price opened up a programmatic spatio-temporal framework, which in turn enabled and attempted to evoke creative or critical interventions by all those involved in the process. My article suggests looking at this process as an improvisational practice: The events on-site and the practices of those involved come into focus. They testify to the critical-creative and thus interventional potential of design as a cultural technique.

Keywords: Design; Design Methods; Improvisation; Participation; Cultural Technique; Mediality; Performativity.

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Introduction

Architectural designs usually work toward concrete goals, serve explicit purposes, and fulfil specific programs. Using various cultural-technical processes, designs therefore model possible futures for these defined goals, purposes, and programs. But how do designs emerge in situations where the future seems uncertain, where programmatic necessities are complex and can only be guessed at, where purposes have been formulated but their relevance is questionable, or where those affected by the planning and their needs have not yet been considered? It is precisely in such precarious[1] initial situations that design processes that know how to deal with indeterminacy and uncertainty can be made productive. Their focus is less on »finished« architectural designs than on the processes, practices, and media. They explore the unknown and thus intervene in the precarious. These approaches implement an understanding of architecture that also questions hierarchical understandings of roles and – especially since the late 1960s – attempts to establish participatory design processes. Their particular potential to intervene in existing spatial and social processes unfolds through the nature of their procedures: In practice, they are open-ended depending on those involved and their practices are not unlike those of improvisation.

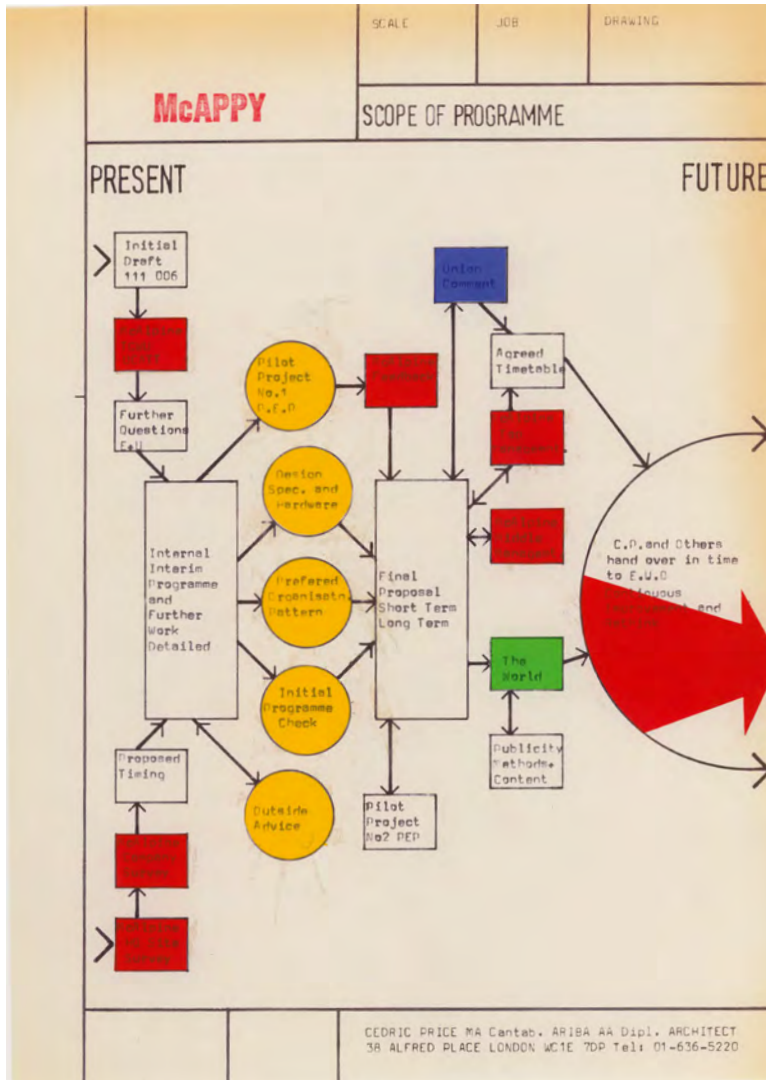
This article analyzes the McAppy project (1973–1976) by the British architect Cedric Price (1934–2003) as a case study of such an improvisational process. Improvisation was explicitly and programmatically planned in Price's influential earlier »Fun Palace« (1961–1964). But, improvisational practices can also be discerned as immanent to the (design) methods in the McAppy project. They shaped the logic of the project's methods, from which it drew its crucial possibilities for intervention. However, these possibilities for intervention are not only directed at something external to the process, but also unfold within the process itself. This corresponds to the potential inherent in design as a cultural technique in general: It can transcend itself and its methods (cf. Hauser 2013).

1 The etymology of »precarious« – borrowed from Latin *precarius*: »given as a favour, depending on the favour of another, (of property) held by tenancy at will, uncertain, doubtful, suppliant« (*Oxford English Dictionary*) – underlines the dependence on a revocable favour, will or decision of another, which leads to an uncertain and doubtful situation for the self.

The McAppy Project

The McAppy project was initiated in 1973, six months after the first major national strike by the newly formed Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians (UCATT), at a time when the British construction industry was under economic and political strain (cf. Williams 1977; Herdt 2012a: 226). Cedric Price was commissioned by his friend and building contractor Sir Robert McAlpine to carry out a study of the construction sites belonging to his company, which was one of the leading construction firms in Britain. Price was to investigate the on-site working conditions and to suggest measures for their improvement. McAlpine was focused on production efficiency, management restructuring, and possible changes on the construction sites. Price argued that both the social organization of the company as a whole and working conditions on the construction sites should be examined in order to better coordinate the relationship between management and workers, thereby improving the quality of work (cf. Herdt 2012a: 227). Building on this premise, he sought not only to improve the current situation but also to suggest »useful future procedures and activities«, many of which could be applied to the poor state of the construction industry in general (see fig. 1), as Price wrote in »Why Bother?«, the introduction to the later McAppy report (Price 1974).

Essential to Price's understanding of possible future transfers and to his design approach and procedures in the specific case of the McAppy project, is his systemic view of the built environment. Accordingly, he understood each construction site as »a system of spatial and social relationships« (cf. Herdt 2012b: 50). The starting point for his process-oriented planning approach in the McAppy project was therefore the existing situation on the construction site. Thus, in the first phase from March 1973, Price and his colleagues began to observe how the work was organized and its spatial and structural conditions on-site. Data was collected using field research methods. Protocols for work processes and activities were analyzed. They formed the basis for suggestions for improvement, which were directed against obvious deficits in the organization, such as in the furnishing and equipment of the construction site. They noted, for example, simple shelters, hardly any break rooms, poor catering, no work helmets or protective clothing, garbage and building materials lying around, no safety barriers, and no first-aid rooms (cf. Herdt 2012a: 230). Based on the conclusions from the site study, Price produced the first McAppy report (January 1974), which was a guide containing specific



1.

Cedric Price, McAppy: Diagram illustrating scope of program, between 1973 and 1974. © CCA, Cedric Price fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture.

ideas for interventions. He assumed that both spatial and organizational changes could contribute to a positive influence on the working environment and its existing system of relationships and processes, as Tanja Herdt explains (cf. Herdt 2012b: 50). Price's systemic view of the built environment, which shaped his working methods (cf. fig. 1), was adopted from the cyberneticist Gordon Pask (cf. Herdt 2012a: 238) and expanded to include Patrick Geddes' rediscovered concept of the joint »co-evolution« of a city and its inhabitants.

The Architectural Relevance of Cybernetics for Price's »Architecture of ›Ecology‹«

Price met Gordon Pask (1928–1996) in Cambridge in the early 1950s. In 1963, Price and the theater director Joan Littlewood asked Pask to work on their Fun Palace project. He significantly influenced this collaboration – which in turn influenced Pask (Price 1993). Some of his insights into the project can be found in his 1969 article »The Architectural Relevance of Cybernetics«. In it, Pask reflected on the shared philosophy of cybernetics and architecture. Thus, his article not only offers an approach to understanding some of the possible foundations of Price's cybernetic thinking, but also allows Pask's cybernetic considerations to be applied to the McAppy architectural project, as this article argues. Although such a reference does not come from Price himself, it seems fruitful for a discussion of an operational design methodology as it can be observed in the McAppy project.

In his article, Pask argued that »architects are first and foremost system designers« (Pask 1969: 494), designing systems that include both structural and human components. He reflected on the role of the architect within the mutual dependencies of a system that includes the city, architectural structures, and the people who operate within and with them (cf. also Herdt 2012a: 232). In line with the architectural mutualism he advocated, Pask refined the concept of functionality in architecture: A building is »only meaningful as a human environment« (Pask 1969: 494). In interactions, it serves its inhabitants while at the same time guiding (controlling) their behavior. Cybernetic theory therefore has an »appreciable predictive power« (ibid.: 496). Furthermore, according to Pask, it can claim »explanatory power« when architectural design processes, i.e. »experimentation in the language of architects« (ibid.), are imitated. For him, this implied, for example, examining the specifics of materials or given information. Pask

saw the possibility of externalizing this practical architectural knowledge through an AI computer program: By imitating architects, it makes these experiments accessible in the form of a »reactive environment« (ibid.) that it designs. Since the designer himself designs this designing (i.e. controlling) computer system, he concluded that »design is control *of* control«. At the same time, he noted that if the goal or purpose of a designed system is underspecified in relation to the controlled entities – and as Pask added »it […] nearly always *will* be underspecified« – there is no longer an »authoritarian« controller, but »an odd mixture of catalyst, crutch, memory and arbiter« (ibid.). In conclusion, Pask identifies this combination as a desirable disposition for a designer (as controller) and as qualities that should be embedded in the (control) systems they design. The shift from the first to the second cybernetic order (i.e. to the design as control of control) thus assigns design and the designer a less direct but more indirect mode of control. Moreover, design is seen as dynamic rather than static. It evolves operationally, according to Pask's »philosophy of operational research« (ibid.: 494), from the concreteness of its situated environment and its unfolding processes. Instead of working on defined control mechanisms, designing then allows work on the conditions for »desirable modes of evolution« (ibid.: 496) – in a productive dependence on the »reactive environment«.

A retrospective look at Price's understanding of architecture and design revealed a shift that can be interpreted using the premises of Pask's essay, as Tanja Herdt explains (cf. Herdt 2021: 59; 2012a: 201): In the 1970s, Price developed a two-part architectural concept in which system and structure form a functional interplay. Within this systemic approach, design interventions involved both the design of architectural objects and the design of the organization of social systems that interact with and through architecture. Following Pask's cybernetic approach, Price understood both systems as part of urban structure, as reacting and influencing, as balancing and stabilizing the city and its social and cultural life (cf. Herdt 2012a: 217 f.). Price's »architecture of ›ecology‹« (ibid.: 198) extended the cybernetic approach to include the concept of »co-evolution« by the biologist and urban planning theorist Patrick Geddes, whose publications Price had discovered at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London (cf. Herdt 2021: 50). In »City in Evolution«, Geddes had described the city as a dynamic whole which evolves with and through the interaction of the people:

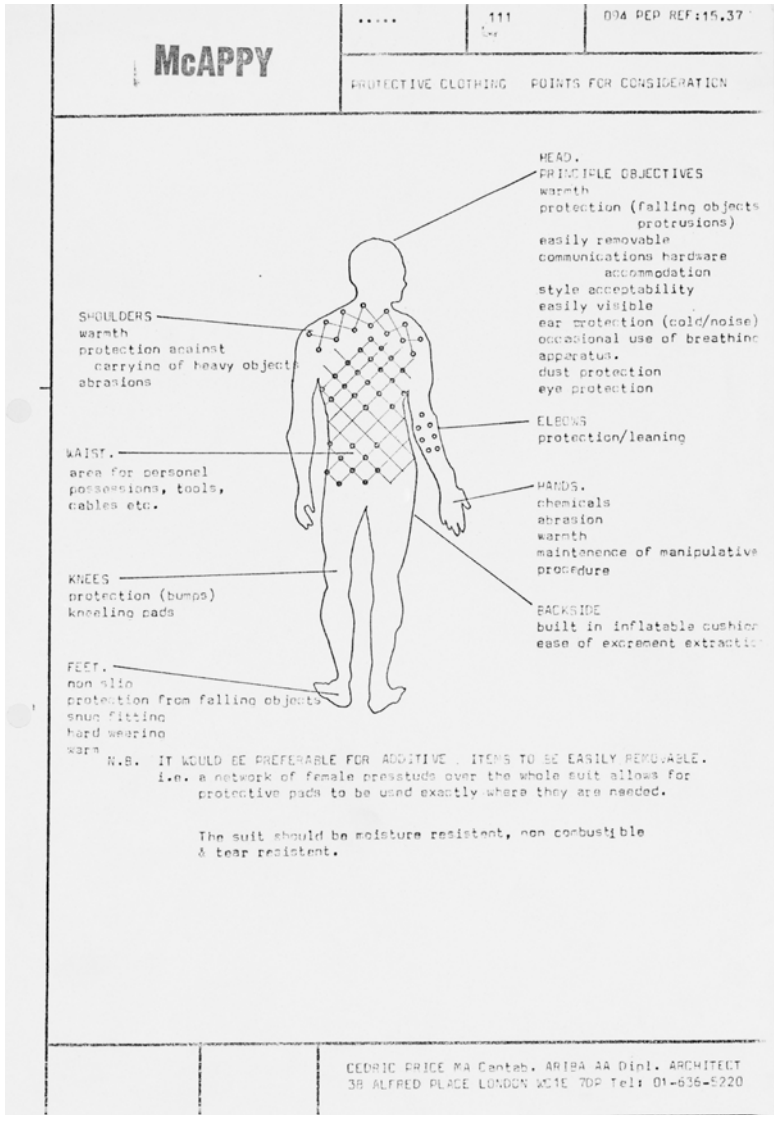
> »Healthy life is completeness of relation of organism, function, and environment, and all at their best. Stated, then, in social and civic terms, our life and progress involve the interaction and uplift of people with work and place, as well as of place and work with people. Cities in Evolution and People in Evolution must thus progress together« (Geddes 1915: 392).

The individual users and the facilitation of their spaces for action in new forms of dialog and interaction were the focus of Price's new understanding of design as an instrument for »process-oriented, temporary system intervention« (Herdt 2012b: 46).

Testing and Being Tested: Expediency of Operational Validity

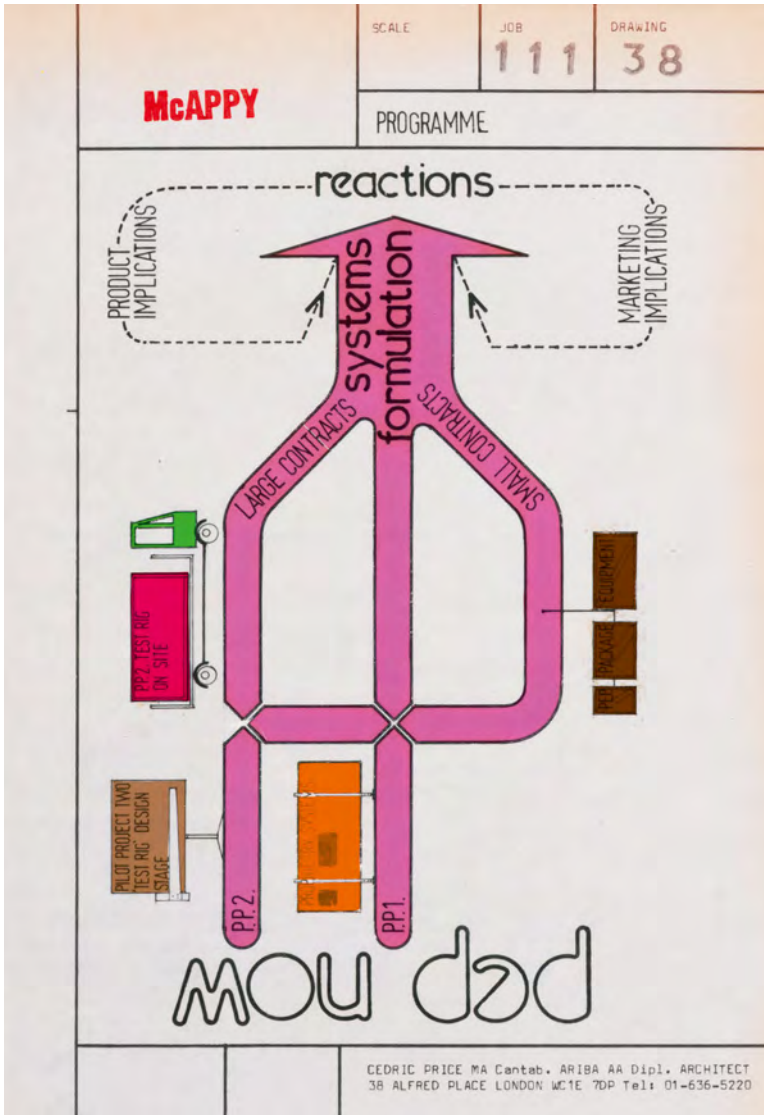
In the McAppy project, the concept of the »architecture of ›ecology‹« can be identified in two specific programs that Price proposed to intervene in the »social life« and »structural life« of the company: The provision of »good food, encouragement, and dignity […] changing / lockers / showers« (Price 1973 cited in Herdt 2012b: 54) was intended to help regulate and stabilize the overall system of the construction site by providing the individual worker with the necessary conditions for creating a desirable working environment and for its successful development. In Price's design approach, this included both social and structural factors. The short-term PAL program dealt with labor protection and physical and psychical conditions – »**P**rotective Clothing«, »**A**limentation«, and »**L**earning« (see fig. 2). The long-term PEP program (»**P**ortable **E**nclosures **P**rogram«) was a new stacking system for enclosures with various programming options, e.g. for hygiene facilities, lockers, and break rooms. To test their »operational validity« (Price 1974), the recommendations were implemented for a year at an ongoing site at Angel Court (and at a further site) in the subsequent second phase of the McAppy project (see fig. 3).

Four years earlier, Price had already reflected on the operational testing of designs – the article appeared in the same issue as Pask's paper on cybernetics. To respond to the unbridgeable difference between an apparently »soluble problem« and its actual »indeterminate situation« (Price 1969), he referred to the concept of expediency:



2.

Cedric Price, McAppy: Diagram illustrating points for consideration for protective clothing, 1973–1975. © CCA, Cedric Price fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture.



3.
Cedric Price, McAppy: Diagram illustrating Portable Enclosures Program, *first McAppy report, between 1973 and 1974. © CCA, Cedric Price fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture.*

> »Expediency implies the time element – for its respectable acceptance it demands recognition of time as a constituent. Beyond all ›good‹ EXPEDIENCY must justify TIME bothering with it. Nevertheless, expediency is too exclusive for it plays its own game, fortified with its own choice of time. In physical design, expediency must continually be on trial – not theoretically, but operationally« (ibid.).

Price brought time and practice into play and placed them alongside expediency – and against arbitrary design. With his statements about one's own choice of time and the need for justification through time, he marked the possible spectrum of meanings that expediency can contain in relation to time. According to Price, expediency allows for »use-producing working methods«, which in his view meant »the nearest miss to correct that can be expected from a design tool« (ibid.) – knowing the general »narrowness« that methods and tools entail. At the same time, the narrowness of methods and tools can be overcome, paradoxically or precisely because of the »inability to reverse« (ibid.) in physical design. For when used in time, something previously unforeseen or unknown can emerge and become perceptible as meaningful. Transformation, then, is not only possible, it happens and is operational. In this respect, Price's understanding of expediency points from theory to practice, and from what is otherwise merely one's own (and thus exclusive) design to a design that is more than one's own, to a collective design. It points to the operative mode of interactions that test expediency through their respective shared practice. The methods used in the McAppy project could be interpreted as such an architectural practice of a testing procedure.

Perceiving and Producing On-site: »McAppy Access/Use Location Strategy«

From February 1974, workers involved in the construction at Angel Court took part in the process of testing the design. Price's suggestions encompassed the design of break and changing rooms, meals, and safety helmets, among others (see fig. 4). Since these measures were introduced into the regular work environment, the employees' behavior, their actions and non-actions, were understood as reactions to the recommended improvements. The reactions confirmed or denied the operational validity and allowed for further conclusions. As such, a certain communication behavior could lead to a

certain internal organization of the enclosures (cf. Herdt 2012a: 238). Spatial mappings, interviews, and participatory observations were carried out (cf. Herdt 2021: 52). As in the first phase, they were summarized in a report and transferred into the modified planning approach, the »McAppy Access/Use Location Strategy« (Price 1975). It was intended to create offers and opportunities that were accessible to the workers on their own initiative (cf. Herdt 2012b: 54).

Price and his colleagues used qualitative methods and fieldwork to collect data in their on-site research. Their aim was to gain a realistic picture of the changing work environment and the conditions on-site in order to be able to respond with the appropriate adaptive measures. The test phase not only led to revisions of preliminary conclusions from the first phase, but also enabled changes to the day-to-day work on-site. It also led to an expansion of the research and design method. In line with the »philosophy of operational research« discussed in Pask's essay on cybernetics, the specific design process of the McAppy project can be interpreted as its practical counterpart: An architectural practice that partially externalized design processes in its third phase. Whereas in Pask's cybernetic approach the computer acts as a design development assistant, in the McAppy project, the test procedure itself seems to take on the function of co-designer. The design of the improved measures for the construction site, i.e. its organizational and structural »control system«, was based on those involved. They co-designed the program in the dialog-driven, participatory planning process. In this way, a »reactive environment« was created that provided feedback through its behavior and actions. At the same time, by involving those affected in the adaptive design process, the scope for action was expanded and made available as a shared space for interaction. Within the framework of the test site, all the participants could influence the conditions of their own working environment. The test phase created the conditions for the possibility of challenging and democratizing the prevailing organizational structures.

Next page:

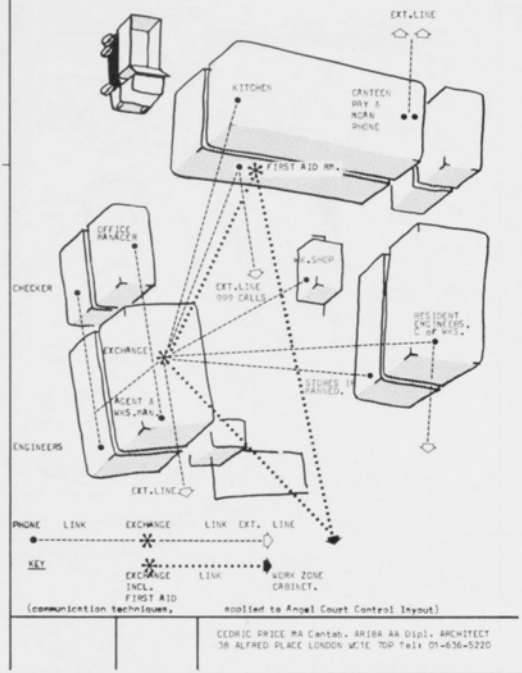
4.

Cedric Price, McAppy: Studies, the Angle Court Story, *an extract, part 2, 1973–1976. © CCA, Cedric Price fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture.*

McAPPY

SCALE	JOB	DRAWING
----	111	15.39
		162

COMMUNICATIONS REMOTE,CONTROL & WK.ZONES 7A-8



ACHIEVED

15.21/22 ACCESS VEHICLES & PEDESTRIAN, ON SITE. ANGEL COURT.

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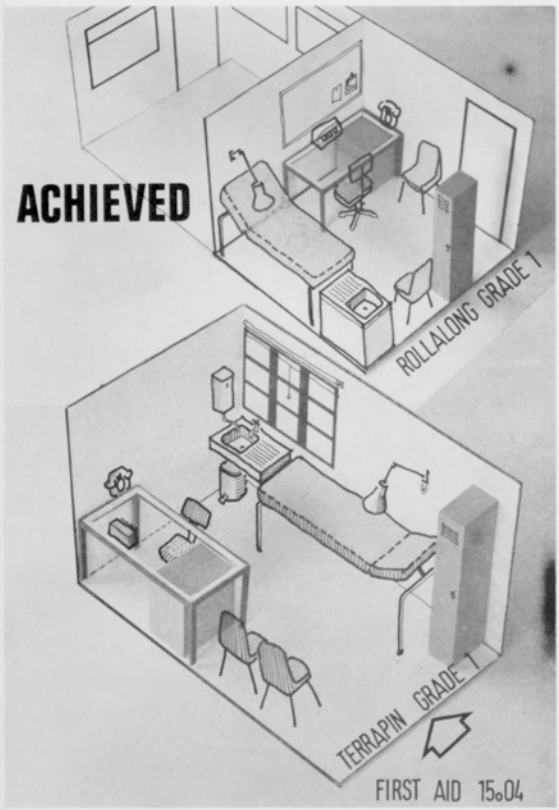
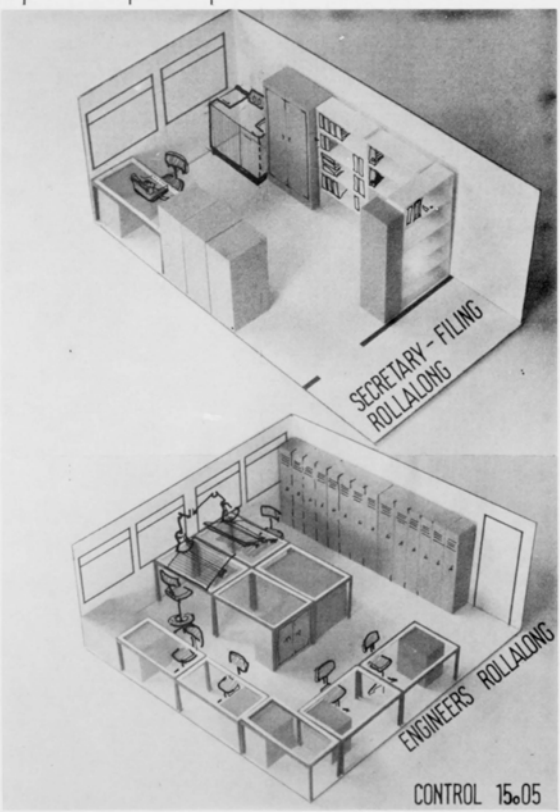
38 ALFRED PLACE LONDON WC1E 7DP Tel: 01-636-5220



FIRST AID 15.04

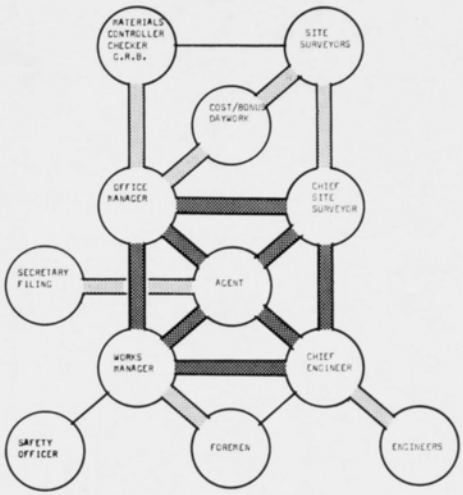


CONTROL 15.05

McAPPY

SCALE	JOB	DRAWING
....	111	172 PEP REF 15.39

PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS (FACE TO FACE)
CONTROL OFFICE ARRANGEMENT. applied to this plan



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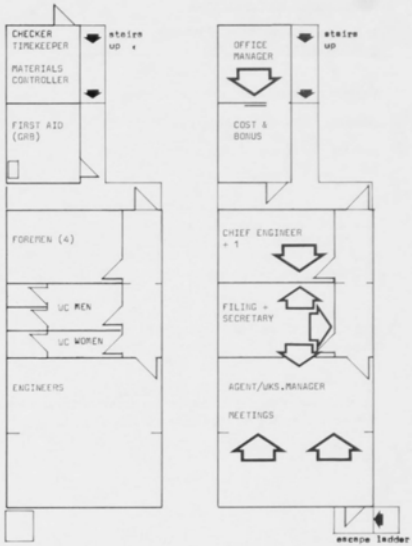
McAPPY

SCALE	JOB	DRAWING
~~41100~~	111	079 PEP REF:15.05/39

ROLLALONG PP 5.5 SITE A, ANGEL COURT, 10 UNITS.
ORIGINAL LAYOUT. PHASE 3A ..CONTROL.



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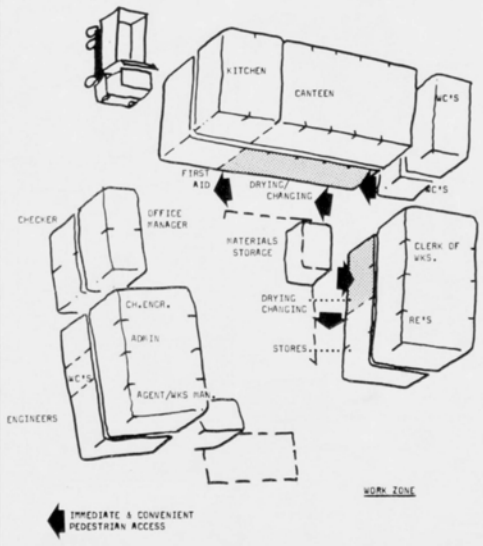
McAPPY

SCALE	JOB	DRAWING
.....	111	152. PEP REF:15.06

'PEP' SITE COMPLEX, IN OPERATION AT ANGEL COURT.
PERSONNEL ACCESS TO DRYING/CHANGING FACILITIES.



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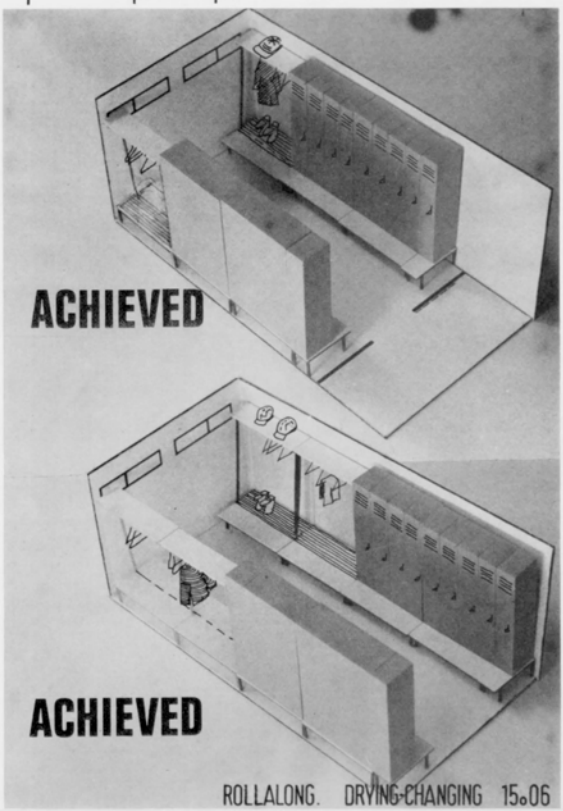

> »Not only increase the range of choice of artifacts but enable the choice to be increasingly in the hands of the user not the dispenser. […] re-think, re-flect & re-choice as a continuous process« (Price 1970 cited in Herdt 2012a: 242f.).

An illustrative example of the continuous adaptation process of the third phase was the handling of safety helmets. This issue was discussed against the backdrop of Britain's accession to the European Communities in 1973, which meant that directives on health and safety at work had become relevant. Drawing from the collected data on hazards and the risk of accidents on construction sites (cf. Price 1974), Price implemented safety measures in the research program of the McAppy project. When one of Price's colleagues noticed that some unskilled workers did not wear helmets, it transpired that they did so because of their religious practice. As male Sikhs, they did not appear in public without a dastar, a turban-like head covering. Price then asked his employee to research solutions that would allow them to wear both – so he could offer the construction workers a suitable choice (cf. Herdt 2012b: 62). The design process, which opened up a space for change, thus had the potential to be a critical and creative tool and bring together different perspectives productively – as an opportunity for learning and teaching. Both viewpoints helped to maintain the process of dialog, which in practice offered opportunities for development through emerging conflicts, whether obvious or less obvious, as in the case of the unworn helmets. In order to facilitate the joint design process and to sustain it over time, Price developed a manual and created three new job profiles with the intention of establishing collaborative communication and work culture: »site planner«, »site scout« and »roving medic«. The job profiles should continuously monitor and support the self-organizational improvements. The manual had 16 »low-profile actions« and was intended to make the knowledge gained and the associated future-oriented development perspectives available to other construction sites (cf. Herdt 2012b: 64).

Practical (Re)Modeling: »McAppy Standards for the Future«

The design process's practical approach and the perceptive and responsive open-ended working method of its third phase depended on the reactions of the on-site workers. Conceived as a test site, this framework opened up a space in which the unpredictable and the unknown could emerge, materialize, and thus be perceived and recognized. The third phase was therefore

crucial to the success of the design process. Only when the measures were implemented on the test site could what had previously been designed from an external perspective be tested in practice in the sense of a full-scale 1:1 model: The tests carried out »to establish McAppy standards for the future« (Price 1975) confirmed, rejected or changed according to the actors' individual actions. Price considered his »participatory planning« approach to be well introduced, as he explained in his »Future Company Policy«, »because of its present decision making form being not too top heavy« (Price 1974), but rather practical.

> »The use of full scale ›models‹ in such joint planning will enable objective management, staff and labour rethink rather than dependence ›expert‹ orientated theoretical extrapolations. At this stage the latter would encourage indifference amongst the parties involved« (ibid.).

The process involved the participants of the construction process and their respective actions. The design's success or failure depended on them. The design process was thus constitutively conditioned by them. At the same time, their participation within the test site constituted them as media of the design process: The workers realized and executed the architectural design process by co-producing it through their practices. In turn, these practices were perceived and interpreted by Price in the context of the 1:1 modeling process on the test site and thereby generated as media practices of the design process. The practices and their actors were assigned model-building significance in the framework of the process. The further course of proceedings was to depend on them. In Pask's words, one could possibly speak of a joint »experimentation in the language of architects«, in which exploring different media took place reciprocally: On the one hand, the workers experimented and explored Price's proposals and, on the other, Price and his team explored their follow-up reactions, which manifested themselves in different ways, by responding to them. The final discussion will address the particular mediality of the design process and the responsive reciprocity.

Media Agency in Architectural Design Processes

Price and his colleagues documented the workers' reactions using various methods. They gained insights which led to adjustments that were implemented on-site. However, the effect of the measures could only be assessed

by looking at individual cases (cf. Herdt 2012a: 243). The helmets are an example of this. This conscious perception and open attitude toward the individual case and its significance for the overall process is a key feature that is also anchored in Lidia Gasperoni's media-agency approach.

For it is the open, attentive attitude that makes the difference between the means and the media of an architectural design. With the latter, the focus is on their »agentive, generative and performative function« (Gasperoni 2020: 17. Translation: author). In a model, therefore, the sensually perceptible materiality is not simply used, but generated (cf. ibid.: 28). The model produces the media's meaning which becomes interactively embedded in the process through testing and exploration. In this way, the specific mediality of a process emerges as a synthesis of its various media. Media become actors whose respective – unpredictable, even resistant and uncontrollable – potential unfolds in the design processes and can thus become performatively effective. In contrast to purely instrumental means, which remain outside the process, media are inextricably interwoven with the design process and thus influence it from within (cf. also Gethmann/Hauser 2009). This performative function is realized through the sensually mediated practices of experimentation (cf. Gasperoni 2020: 24) – or as in the McAppy project, through testing. Testing practices constitute the media in a specific way (that of testing) and this constitution has an effect on them. The practices transform the media's potential to be perceived in a specific sensual form (cf. ibid.) – which in turn requires an open attitude on the part of the perceiver. »Perceiving and producing are complementary parts of designing« (ibid.: 31. Translation: author).

Herdt describes that Price saw the implemented measures »as catalysts for a process of change that began directly in the everyday lives of the workers« (Herdt 2012a: 241. Translation: author). The process created the conditions for this to happen: It »activated« the catalysts in the synthesizing process of exploratory testing. It was here that Price's own designs were exposed to – and thus negotiated with – the unknown designs, i.e. the unknown reactions of the workers. In this way, the co-designers explored the measures for improvement in dialogue. The syntheses of their (media) practices jointly shaped the measures and the test field created the cultural-technical conditions for this 1:1 modeling process, which was capable of operationalizing the designing action (cf. Gethmann 2009: 360). With regard to the control logic of second-order cybernetics – in which »design is control of control« – it can be stated: Price distributed his control and agency for

designing, at least partially and temporarily in the procedure. In this respect, the design method deliberately created precarious conditions: The designed improvements were given the status of provisional models awaiting negotiation through the intervention of others.

With this method, Price marked and recognized the limits and potential of the openness of his own methods, perceptions, and (media) practices. The method did not rely on fixed interpretation and the meaning of measures, but opened up a space to design these meanings by testing interactions, i.e. for the previously unknown, for contradiction and correction, for other interpretations and attributions of meaning. In such a design process, which is based on reciprocity, the knowledge of one's own bounded perspective enables future transgressions through the actions of others. These others (re-)define the meaning, necessity, or possibilities of designs through their medial practices – provided that their mediality is recognized as such.

Responsive Reciprocity: Improvising as Intervening

The logic of such a reciprocal-responsive practical design method as that of the McAppy project suggests an understanding that »did not see architecture primarily as the design of an object, but rather as the organization of activities and change within a cultural system« (Herdt 2021: 52), as the field research methods and diagrams underline. The specific nature of this organizational process may be found in the logics of improvisational practices.

In improvisation, process and product fall into one. Improvisation arises as practice in practice. It happens in real time and constitutes specific spaces for unexpected experiences, perceptions, and imaginations. This is due to the basic structure of improvisation, in which a performed action does not stand on its own, but is always connected to actions following it (cf. Bertram/Rüsenberg 2021: 99). In this respect, improvisation reacts to the past and relates actions to future reactions. It does not intend these actions with regard to a specific content or goal, but rather evokes them as yet uncertain follow-up actions. How impulses are taken up necessarily remains open, left to the individuals who follow (cf. ibid.: 99–104). Therefore, »responsive *attention* for the situation is primary over pre-shaped *intention*, since pre-shaped intentions are realized abductively, or improvisationally, by responding to concrete situations.« (Bertinetto/Grüneberg 2023: 51). It is the specifics of the situation from which the various assembled sources of action evoke and enable reactions. In improvisation, the requirement to act is seen as

an opportunity to open up possibilities. In this sense, improvisers acquire the appropriate skills to perceive and recognize unexpected impulses »not as disturbances but as affordances« (Bertinetto/Bertram 2020: 206). They need – and realize – both »a sensibility for unanticipated events« (ibid.) and an »evaluative and practical sensibility« (ibid.: 215) to be able to respond. Reactions implicitly reflect previous impulses in embodied forms and simultaneously embed them in the overall context of the improvisation. Such embodied forms of reflection can also be recognized in the actions and non-actions of the construction workers. The respective classifying evaluations were implicitly expressed in their reactions. These responses put preceding actions, i.e. Price's proposals, in a new light. In this respect, the workers became media in the Gasperoni sense in their implicitly improvising actions as reactions. They took on agentive, generative, and performative functions within the process. Their media practices were in this sense »artefacts […] as specific types of embodiment« (Gasperoni 2020: 24. Translation: author), social and cultural constructs that were performatively expressed through practice. Reactions – as is usual in improvisation – depended both on the situation, previous impulses, and the actors, as well as on what they »brought«, e.g. their professional skills, habits, and experiences, but also their social embedment in the context or beyond. In this sense, actions and reactions were also connected to other (past and future) contexts that were not present and yet were represented in its media practices. The practice of improvisation as applied in the McAppy project was therefore complex and unpredictable, continually full of ongoing tension and remained precarious throughout the process. It was experienced as a joint happening that emerged in the interaction of single individuals. In this sense, improvisational practice can offer a specific epistemic dimension: It opens up access to aims and intentions that arise and develop in practice (cf. Bertinetto/Bertram 2020: 206) and that were hitherto unknown. Since the unknown is brought into play practically, the improvisational practice itself shows a way of dealing with it. Improvisation therefore reveals »›procedural knowledge‹ of the performing practice they [the improvisers] are involved in« (ibid.). At the same time, the actors constitute themselves as sensitive and responsive by the practical and operative way of experiencing the other and the self in improvisation. This practical experience is the main potential of the method. For the method not only creates the conditions that enable intervention and thus transformation, but also allows these to be realized by means of the method, namely through and in its practice with its media.

This improvisational approach characterizes the McAppy project. The course of everyday work was interrupted and a spatio-temporal framework was opened up that created the cultural-technical conditions that made it possible to perceive the actions taking place within it as media practices. As the design process was characterized by an improvisational structural logic, the design, i.e. the »control of control« was shared with the participants. They realized their media potential in the joint synthesizing »experimentation in the language of architects«. The design's scope of action was thus expanded and it was able to develop and transcend itself through its method.

Creating the conditions for such a program open to future design still seems useful today. In this respect, using 1:1 models as test sites can be helpful tools: They make it possible to recognize what is in need of change, what is not yet in place and what is still missing, since the practice of those involved will continue to bear critical and creative witness to this in the future. However, this requires a framework that intervenes in the precarious – for example, by exploring it through improvisational practices. Architects have the skills to codesign such a framework for and with all those involved. The McAppy project demonstrates this.

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