

# FUTURE ARTS SPACES

## The creative space race

FT architecture critic Sharon Miller listens in on a sourced debate at MOMA Heathrow

The late composer Morton Feldman reputedly said that the best thing about the 20th century was "that for one brief moment – maybe, say, six weeks in the 1950s – nobody understood art." At the dawn of the 21st century, it's the spaces we use for producing and performing, displaying and storing art that are increasingly being called into question. With books, film and music digitalized and rampant on the web, spectators demanding to be recognized as active participants and private collectors tumbling over one another for their share of prized young talent, does anybody still understand what our museums, concert-halls and libraries are for?

In response to the uncertain future of today's prime arts spaces, MOMA Heathrow Airport, the newly opened London branch of what many still consider to be the world's leading modern art museum, ended three days of inaugural celebrations with an interdisciplinary video-debate on "Arts Spaces for Tomorrow". Chairing the debate from a simultaneous event at MOMA Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, was Fredrik Barro, MOMA's chief curator for collaborative arts. "When MOMA New York moved into its 53rd Street building in 1999, the museum's founding fathers weren't just getting an architectural upgrade", said the outspoken Mr Barro. "They set out to transform the function of museums everywhere, by producing a modern style of design and arts, and by abandoning the atmosphere of the Beaux-Arts temple to become a club-house for art lovers to see films, shop and dine."

## Sticky business

As UK arts spaces struggle to meet the needs of fuzzy communities, the outsiders may be closer to the inside, finds Fiona Hicks

In an eccentric sideline to Britain's rampant arts-access debate, police acting on a provisional court mandate arrested Cuban-born artist Teresa Las Zechas and five further activists who had set up their outside Amber Arts Centre in Manchester. Amber Arts Centre is a showcase 'grey' arts space, combining media and library services, exhibitions and live performances with day-care, medical facilities and gated security for elderly citizens. Police intervened after Ms Zechas and her team were found soliciting and conducting recorded interviews of visitors, staff and others present at Amber Arts Centre, including permanent residents, ambulance drivers, 'arts nurses' and even cleaners. Speaking on the phone from an Arts Detention Centre where she is being held for questioning, Ms Las Zechas told the Financial Times that she was interviewing an artist to bring public attention to the UK government's "60+" initiative. She said she was solely aiming to address controversial issues of access and that she was "not an activist". A 78-year woman attending an antiques' fair in the centre's basement said she had been prompted to talk "spontaneously" about her present-day life from the point of view of future generations and life-forms. "There were several playful and irresponsible negotiations with our disabled elderly citizens", said Elizabeth Coin, the centre's curator. "I'm very happy that police have gone along with us in cracking down on these youngsters."

Following official protests by Cuba's Ambassador to the UK and NGOs such as Amnesty International and Freedom Fjord, Ms Las Zechas has kept abreast of unfolding events by dismissing all accusations. She said that all material was destined to be posted for public debate as part of a 'Future Archive', an open online

Meeting the demands of today's global arts tribes requires MOMA to expand its simple culture-and-coffee offering and explore new opportunities for hybridisation, cross-selling and combined programming, argues Mr Barro. Opening branches in Asia's emerging arts capitals and global transport hubs such as Heathrow airport has allowed MOMA to stay ahead of competitors stuck in urban centres, raise visitor numbers and exploit a new range of 'fruitful creative and commercial opportunities'. Which isn't necessarily to the liking of Stephan Toublanc, co-founder of Freedom Fjord, the Brussels-based creative industries watchdog. Taking to task the arts establishment for concealing inequalities of access with formulas such as "co-design" and "collaboration", turning artists into nomads, and refurbishing arts space into theme-parks for "curated consumption", his call for the arts spaces that promote solidarity within the creative industries and are dedicated to a culture of genuine sharing.

**Will arts spaces seize upon the future as an opportunity to grow out of their role as the world's favourite talking shops?**

"MOMA claims to be a non-profit institution, but what is it doing to prevent intellectual property from becoming the oil of the 21st century?", asked Mr Toublanc, whose red-headed and beady-eyed delivery likely would have solicited more nods from French union workers than it did amongst MOMA's bemused evening crowd. "Behind their shining new facades, MOMA, Tate and many other 20th century arts spaces act as central warehouses for the arts, accumulating our cultural capital and exploiting the creative proletariat – mon dieu, c'est du Marx!" A more finely poised argument was offered by the only architect speaking on the panel, Li Shenzu of Shenzhen and Associates, Tianjin. In an age of global warming, resurgent nationalism and looming energy wars, Ms Shenzu warns of arts spaces as

havens of irrationality in which immaterial artistic agendas are granted priority over humanity's more practical needs. However, culture should help to bridge public perceptions and provide the 'missing link' between the challenges confronting a nation and its ability to deliver pragmatic responses if it were embedded in a more worldly architecture. As a Chinese architect looking to the future with concern, Ms Shenzu noted that her foremost professional concern was "building corridors that connect to the real world". Yet what rings true for the citizen of a 1.5 billion nation on the brink of ecological meltdown could not have seemed less compelling to Horst Buchwald, the Austrian philosopher. Dressed in black Prada apparel for the panel discussion, he was seen leaving MOMA Heathrow barefoot in the early hours of this correspondent.

"What's the future anyway – an island of the blessed?", was Mr Buchwald's lofty question to his blank-eyed audience. "Can we know who will win the creative space race? Must we determine the future? Or is there a return flight?" Lamenting the "huge symbolic power" exerted by arts spaces and "deconstructing" architectural progress as a "myth" may all be fine and well for Mr Buchwald. But at the debate's end, when Mr Barro had conveniently logged-off and resumed the pressing tasks awaiting him at this time of day Bishkek, Mr Toublanc and Ms Shenzu were left to talk away the London night on their own, unheard by the audience and repeatedly overheard by each other.

On French union workers, MOMA Heathrow and other next-generation arts spaces will eventually seize upon the future as an opportunity to grow out of their new-found role as the world's favourite talking shops. Sparingly applied and artfully orchestrated, brief moments of misunderstanding may well have the provocative power to transform art and architecture alike. Perpetuated indefinitely, however, they're one more sign of a luke-warm relationship, in which meaningless conversation belies a sheer lack of creative guts.

## Create as you go

As creativity steals the show, citizens struggle towards a flexible future, writes Richard Sands

In a world dominated by silent and seamless digital infrastructure, will our reliance on 'real-world' resources disappear along with the old-fashioned materialism of steel ships, noisy airports and congested roads? The answer, according to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR), is a resounding 'no'. In a new report released yesterday, experts claim that the physical equivalents space our most highly prized virtual resources, such as information, intelligence and creativity, will provide the mainstay of future economies.

At present, Virtual Resource Planning (VRP) focuses on identifying and exploiting the virtual equivalents of such commodities such as petrol, copper, maize and money. But the authors of the new VRP-report, Kristy Butler and Perez Zubenik, both innovation economists at Cardiff University, contend that the future will still be filled

with solid stuff, albeit of a more lightweight kind. "In the past, you got all sorts of stuff ranging from love relationships and shaving kits through to financial markets and encyclopaedias moving online", explains Ms Butler. "What you get now is a lot of stuff that you could almost touch it", says Mr Zubenik. "In the morning, it's always been a two-way street between the real and the virtual, but so far VR-planners have only looked at one end of it.

Perhaps the most intriguing example of a virtual-to-real transference provided by the authors is creativity. "Nowadays we see creativity popping up on every street corner, so solid you could almost touch it", says Mr Zubenik. "In the morning, it's what you brush your teeth with. During daytime, it's what you work with. In the evening it's the bread on your table. It's what you feel whenever you allow your feet to touch the ground. Speaking in terms of VRP, creativity is the new gravity." As an ever larger segment of industrial production hinges on direct creative input by artists and consumers, creativity is fast on its way to becoming an everyman's ore. Given the right tools, creativity can be reconfigured into marketable products ranging from simple t-shirts and mountain-bikes to complex combined goods, such as aircraft or buildings. Web-based design studios and platforms for creative

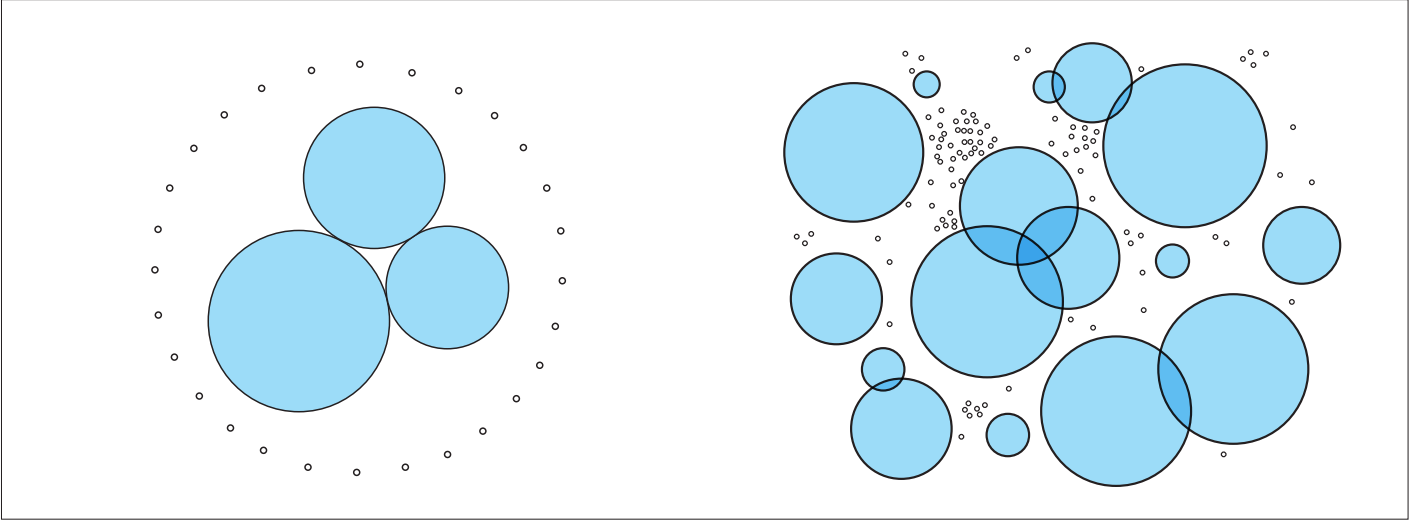
collaboration allow us to shape the world we inhabit on a create-as-you-go basis. Eventually, even simple goods such as pasta will only materialise once their creative and informational components have been added online and set into the desired shape.

**Creativity is what you brush your teeth with**

Inevitably, this scenario of creativity at once materialised and ubiquitous raises the question whether we are all in the process of turning into artists. "Andy Warhol promised everybody 15 minutes of fame", says Ms Butler. "But as our digital infrastructure is increasingly making both front-of-house and backstage production areas accessible, people are becoming accustomed to constantly performing, producing and enjoying all in one go."

What's the future anyway – an island of the blessed? – was Mr Buchwald's lofty question to his blank-eyed audience. "Can we know who will win the creative space race? Must we determine the future? Or is there a return flight?" Lamenting the "huge symbolic power" exerted by arts spaces and "deconstructing" architectural progress as a "myth" may all be fine and well for Mr Buchwald. But at the debate's end, when Mr Barro had conveniently logged-off and resumed the pressing tasks awaiting him at this time of day Bishkek, Mr Toublanc and Ms Shenzu were left to talk away the London night on their own, unheard by the audience and repeatedly overheard by each other.

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Communities may converge towards a single point or practise direct collaboration between all members

## Letters

**An unfinished symphony**

From Mr Elias Novak

From Ms Beth Woodliff

Sir, your analysis of the arts as a form of social glue ("Sticky business", November 2) is music to my ears. In their time, Mozart, Beethoven or Purcell were rightly worried about premature death, as without them their compositions could never have been finished. But the Beethovens of our time needn't worry, for creativity is now seen as a gift to all of humanity and collaboration its ideal mode of orchestration – given access to basic creative production facilities, hundreds of equally competent individuals are always waiting for their cue and ready to continue where others have left off.

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**An ecology of ideas**

From Mr Burt McLuger

Sir, Sigur Yau's call to end design by competition is on target ("Unnatural Selection", December 10). I am not an architect, but I have seen dead elephants and wouldn't like to live in one them. And what is the point of stuffing a beautiful parrot – to brush off the dust afterwards? Had nature designed our public buildings and monuments surely she would have liked them alive and breathing. As humans, let us go beyond the mere 'survival of the fittest' and promote a healthy ecology of ideas.

Burt McLuger  
Assistant Caretaker  
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**Flawless future**

From Mr Elias Novak

Sir, Sharon Miller betrays binary thinking when she dismisses public debate on tomorrow's arts spaces as so much hot air ("The creative space race", July 7). Given the institutionalized standing and unwieldy administrative apparatus of today's prime arts spaces, "creative guts" may indeed be in short supply. But short of a revolutionary architectural breakthrough, incremental improvement are surely possible.

As a software engineer who has overseen the redevelopment of major database hubs throughout the US – the museums of the digital world – I've learnt that in a volatile environment, the key to survival is adaptation, not optimization. The newest version of a software product isn't better because it has fewer bugs – it usually has more. But it is better because it offers new functions and capabilities that allow us to respond to sudden changes in the environment. Thus, let us not try to programme one flawless 'future arts space' that will fly us to the moon and back, but let us open many different frontlines, allowing us to pursue different options for development.

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## Say PPP for planet earth

Margaret Thurley looks at the impact of social innovation on Canada's number-one fishing spot

Palleburen, 200 km north of Vancouver, was until recently known primarily for its abundant fisheries and a well-heeled retirement community. Yet Palleburen is also home to the historic Pallen Planetarium, whose iconic triad of copper cupolas manifest a majestic and spectral presence, reflecting in the swirling, chalk-white waters of Adriane River – lovingly dubbed the 'Milky Way' by locals.

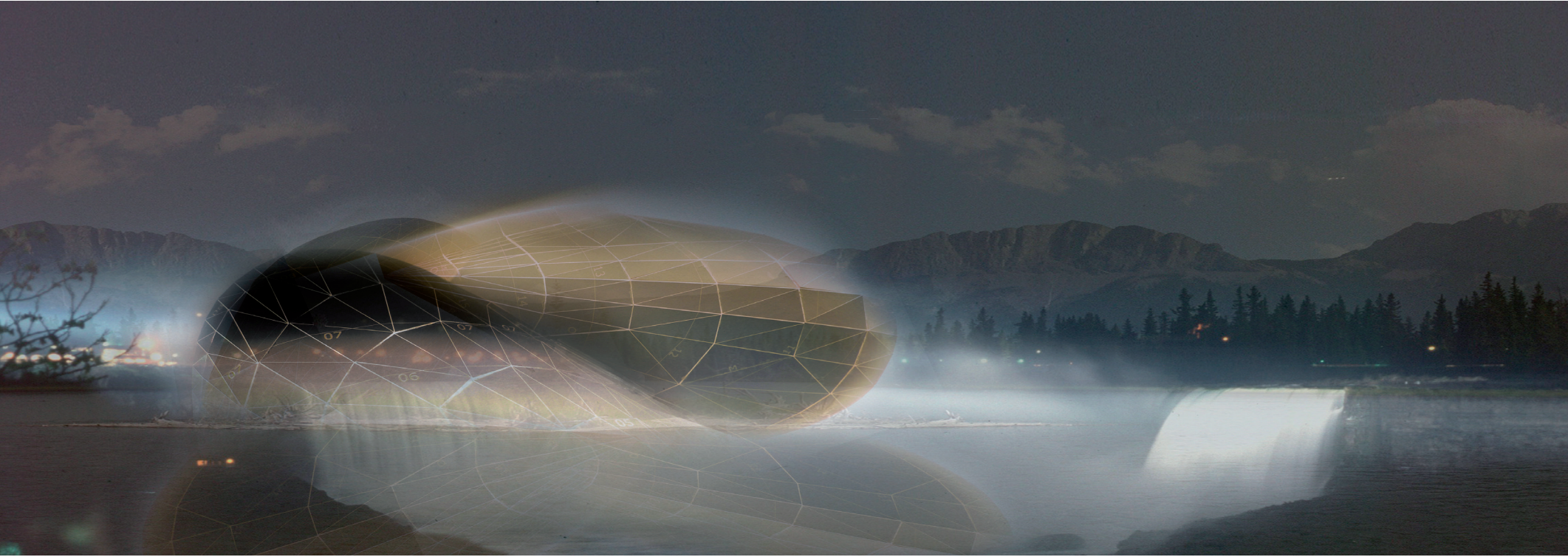
Few would have foreseen that just one year after action was first taken to breathe new life into the spoken-of remains of this underrated piece of 19th century architecture, the re-opened planetarium is being hailed as 'materialised music' by critics and now lures hundreds of visitors to Palleburen every month, as well as the high-yield luxury fishing hub. "Markets have never been as deregulated as they are today", recalls Ms Lucas, shrugging her shoulders with seasoned cool. "Hence our emotions tend to be deregulated also."

A crucial figure in recasting the local agenda to its current planetary dimensions is Burt McConnell. A tall man with an elegant stride, who after retiring as an architect in Vancouver has gradually begun wearing chequered shirts again and allowed himself to grow a beard, he was for several years the planetarium's sole caretaker. "After three decades in the service of architectural post-modernism, I was looking for something new – perhaps fishing", remembers Mr McConnell. Instead, upon his arrival in Palleburen he immediately found himself attracted to the planetarium and embarked on "a never-ending architectural love affair."

Working single-handedly to patch Pallen Planetarium's leaky roof and put a brake on the building's demise, Mr McConnell quickly became accustomed to enlisting support from visiting foreign researchers and astronomy enthusiasts. Locals, by contrast, tended to take the Planetarium for granted and mostly shrugged off Mr McConnell's incessant call-to-the-arms.

**Anti-public and anti-private sentiments stand in the way of decisive action**

Canadian politicians and administrators at all levels, says Ms Lucas, are increasingly unable to take decisive action in today's double-edged climate of anti-public, anti-private sentiment. Public funds are few, but for a policy-maker seeking



The long view: Pallen Planetarium's telescopes connect a range of diverse artistic and political practises

to reinvigorate materially and spiritually Palleburen's secluded community, the benefits of another mixed-fishing development were fewer still. "When Pallen Planetarium hit the agenda last year, we suddenly saw an opening to do things a different way. Instead of slaying the dragon in another private-public showdown and cooking up hard feelings all around, we decided to tackle the issue on a planetary level."

Starting with the twenty odd real-world contacts that Mr McConnell gave me, we've woven an intricate tapestry of creative collaboration and global co-operation around a real-life building", explains Mr Hosen. Short of money to cover a complete redesign and renovation of the planetarium, he challenged his team to open-source the entire project. Within weeks, contacts and resources multiplied manifold. "We had peer-to-peer travel-accounts in place, a platform for shared accommodation in Palleburen, as well as a

"I came to understand that people who are genuinely open-minded, in tune with the architectural potentialities of a triple-domed planetarium, and who might be willing to commit themselves financially and emotionally to its redevelopment were relatively few", he says. These people also tend to be scattered across the globe, making it difficult to see their combined muscle to work on Pallen Planetarium.

Enter Rhymor Hosen, the council's newly appointed IT-officer. Bringing to Palleburen's chronically under-staffed and overworked e-government department a proven track-record of operational excellence in organic server-farming, his initial priority was to curtail employees' addictive passion for social networking and virtual sociability. But he realized that some of the new web 2.0 skills they were developing in their free time could also be useful in modelling herd behaviour patterns and building a global support network for Pallen Planetarium.

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spaces, although I was too frightened to ever participate in an architecture competition again. Fortunately, there now exist superior alternatives to a system in which competence is determined with the pull of a trigger. But let me first remind you of the reasons why competitions are a threat to the ecology of this profession:

- Losers' carcasses are habitually left to rot, the structural bones are removed on the spot and thousands of potentially valuable ideas discarded forever.
- Architects on different competition teams are forbidden from mating with each other.
- The best ideas often only dare come out when night has fallen and the competition is already over.
- Tasteless but less colourful species are considered unworthy, non-architects are overlooked in the heat of the chase.
- Unfair advantage for bugs, earthworms and specialised tree-dwellers.
- Of course, fair chase conditions are more commonly respected

As they were still in the early days of their present form, there seemed a fair chance that I and other architects shortlisted in the competition could still beat them. But when shots sounded one evening and Ms Shenzu, Mr Dress and members of the competition jury could be seen driving by with their bullet-ridden hunting trophy, a young female architect we all fled for shelter. Nobody wanted to be the next victim of what one surviving architect later called a "big game bonanza."

Since then, I have been able to obtain commissions for other art

procurement-engine that mines the web for left-over building materials and even collects the residual software needed to maintain Pallen Planetarium's virtual architecture." Accused initially of sidestepping the local community, upsetting potential investors and "copping out" of her responsibilities as a public administrator, Ms Lucas' vision of transformation was now underwritten by Mr Hosen's solid-spine IT operations and backed by an international community of volunteers, including artists, environmental activists and scientists. Working together in the Pallen Planetarium Partnership (PPP) with complete efficacy, conceptual elegance and record timing, they stripped bare and completely refitted the building. Perhaps more importantly, they also succeeded in rallying support from a local community dedicated primarily to fishing and wealth management.

One already gets a sense of what has been achieved at the re-opened planetarium's principle entrance, a field of metal mesh filters vaguely resembling metal detectors at an airport. PPP-volunteers, as friendly as they are humble, ask all visitors to remove their shoes before entering a measure taken to protect the planetarium's newly installed, highly fragile virtual surfaces. An elderly resident of Palleburen, who was wearing a seal-fur coat and bent down to undo her red stilettoes before visiting the planetarium for the third time in as many weeks, was clearly

of history – which hold sway over the present day's most cherished prize goose. Had an emerging minority of Russian eco-architects not been overheard and suppressed in the 1930s, for example, Soviet architecture could today be holding the keys to addressing climate change.

**Building is not a selective activity, but a collective process that architects help facilitate**

What I would like to say, then, is that mimicking natural selection by means of design competitions offers comparatively few benefits to us humans, who have strayed further and further from the path of 'evolution' to place our bets on 'cultivated' instead. Compared to the rapid development and accumulation of knowledge, arts and technology over the past 300,000 years, our biological hard-wir-

enthrall by what she was about to experience. "I haven't been as moved since giving unassisted birth in the Rockies thirty years ago – there's fear and terrific hope and no end to it, I'll be making a sizeable donation shortly." Others have been more hesitant in their embrace of Pallen Planetarium's offerings. "I was expecting an optical connection with the universe", said one disgruntled visitor, slipping on his fishing boots. "Once inside, I felt like nose-diving into a half-empty swimming pool." At pains to identify her pair of Lacoste tennis shoes in the mosque-like accumulation of footware outside the entrance one Sunday afternoon, a well-groomed peroxide blonde wearing a blue mini-skirt said: "I'm an honest-to-god art-lover and don't expect my shoes to be lined up amongst the infidels."

Sigur Yau, a PPP-spokesperson who is Norwegian-Taiwanese-born and of uncertain attributes otherwise, says the project was as sympathetic to dissidents as it was committed to its believers. "In the long-term, complexity is unsustainable, because it is born out of falsehood and simulation. We are all pretenders, pretending to be more than we are and wanting more than we can get. The telescopes at Pallen Planetarium allow you to see through the fog of simulation and make things as simple as possible for yourself."

A heartening message that will certainly be heeded by all those considering Palleburen in their search of simplicity and a bespoke way of life. Once you've brushed off the emotional particles that Pallen Planetarium has likely stirred up inside you, building your own home in one of Canada's most tax-friendly jurisdictions couldn't be easier. Located in close proximity to Vancouver, with excellent fishing as well as some of the choicest cultural pickings this side of the Milky Way, you'll find that Palleburen is a wonderful place for business and leisure alike.

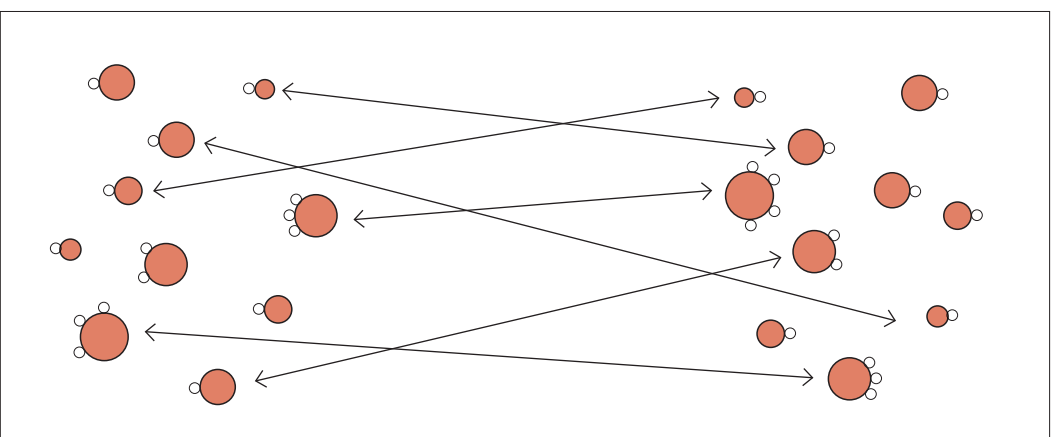
Given the high proportion of Pallen Planetarium's architecture that is virtual and continuously evolving, it is a building no longer rooted in the past, present, or future. "There is a specific form of nostalgic longing connected to each of these time frames, even and especially the future", elaborates Ms Lucas. "By discarding these time frames, we effectively discard nostalgia itself, which is an enormous relief in terms of freeing the arts, liberating politics and sharing the Pallen Planetarium Project with the global community as well as our local residents. Simply stated, we begin to see how messy things how to make things possible for each other."

Rhymor Hosen, though rightfully proud of his initial contribution to the IT-infrastructure that makes possible the colourful myriad of risks, innovations and interactive invitations one encounters inside Pallen Planetarium, sounds a similar chord: "Ultimately, by getting everyone to look as closely as they can at arts, science, economics and politics, we begin to see how messy things how to make things possible for each other. Once you've brushed off the emotional particles that Pallen Planetarium has likely stirred up inside you, building your own home in one of Canada's most tax-friendly jurisdictions couldn't be easier. Located in close proximity to Vancouver, with excellent fishing as well as some of the choicest cultural pickings this side of the Milky Way, you'll find that Palleburen is a wonderful place for business and leisure alike."

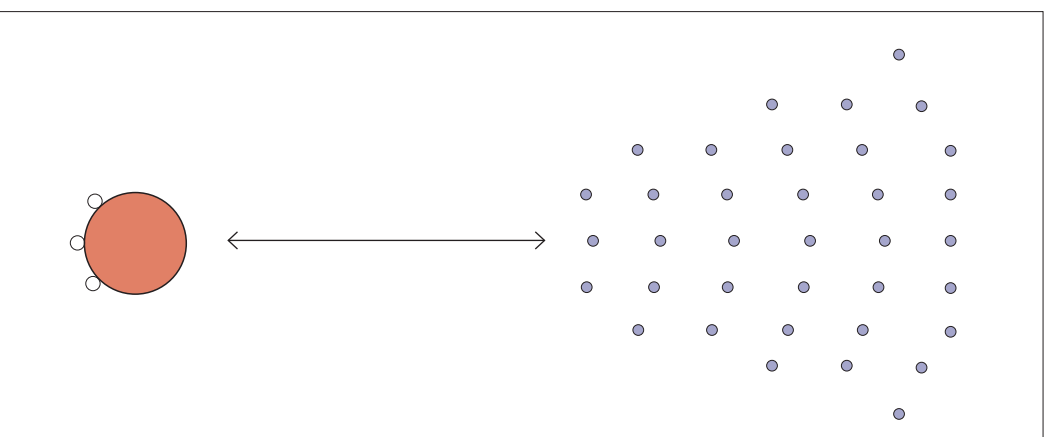
**The planetarium's IT-infrastructure supports risks, innovations and interactive invitations**

Navigating the unpredictable fields and porous voids of Pallen Planetarium often means stumbling through the dark, as rudimentary patterns emerging and collapsing in rapid succession all around provide only scant guidance. Many visitors are bound to walk away from PPP under the impression that refashioning global society to attain sustainability targets is an infinitely complex affair. But Sigur Yau believes that these doubts will eventually dispel themselves. "Complexity is a provisional state", says the spokesperson. "In the long-term, complexity is unsustainable, because it is born out of falsehood and simulation. We are all pretenders, pretending to be more than we are and wanting more than we can get. The telescopes at Pallen Planetarium allow you to see through the fog of simulation and make things as simple as possible for yourself."

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"We are irreversibly headed for a single, ubiquitous creative space"



"One-way creative discourse is over"



