

Rotor, the Belgian collective that curated the Oslo Architectural Triennale (OAT)'s main show, are obsessive collectors, hoarders, salvagers and sifters of objects and data. At the 2011 OMA retrospective at the Barbican, they curated a categorised cacophony of 450 objects (as well as streaming 3.5 million images) from the practice. In Behind the Green Door at Oslo's design and architecture centre DogA, they mounted 650 objects from virtually the whole planet, all relating to the Triennale's overarching theme, sustainability. I asked Maarten Gielen, de facto Rotor spokesman, was the choice random? 'Intuitive,' he replied, after the briefest of pauses. Talk about crunching big data — who needs supercomputers with Rotor around? But more on them later.

Norway yearns for sustainability — it's always been a clean, breezy country strongly attached to an epic-scaled nature that is never far away. Now, perhaps, it also seeks relief from guilt about its fossil fuel riches. FutureBuilt is a key player with sustainable initiatives: for example, their ideas competition for boosting the proportion of cyclists among Oslo's commuters to the cycle-mad Dutch 50 per cent level (not easy in a hilly city) will generate OAT's final show running from 26 November at Oslo's jaw-dropping Valhalla-esque Rådhuset (City Hall). Mainly, FurtureBuilt promotes a sustainable building initiative to complete 50 urban pilot projects by 2020, each of which aims to at least halve conventional energy use (...and that despite the lack of financial incentive, because energy comes cheap in Norway). The first finished project was the Meteorological Institute's Tallhall by architects Pir II of Trondheim, which was showcased at the Triennale's opening. It is a cool design, a trapezoid-defined volume punched semi-randomly with windows, enclosing a hardy garden. Built with low-carbon concrete and clad with recycled aluminium, it achieves Passivhaus certification. The FutureBuilt initiative includes future trophy projects such as the new Deichmanske Library by Lund Hagem, due to be completed in 2016-17, and a new National Museum (which someone in the museum community

confided anonymously wasn't needed: 'We have too much money,' she said). But Norwegian sustainability is a fragile thing. For example, Statoil's globally significant carbon capture programme is being closed down. Locally significant, Oslo's agreeable mixed-use Vulkan quarter, developed by the banks of the mountain river Akerselva, meets all Norway's tight energy building codes but the energy savings are trashed by non-stop patio heating. There, comfort trumps the planet's future once again. Which brings us to OAT's main conference, held in September, called The Future of Comfort.

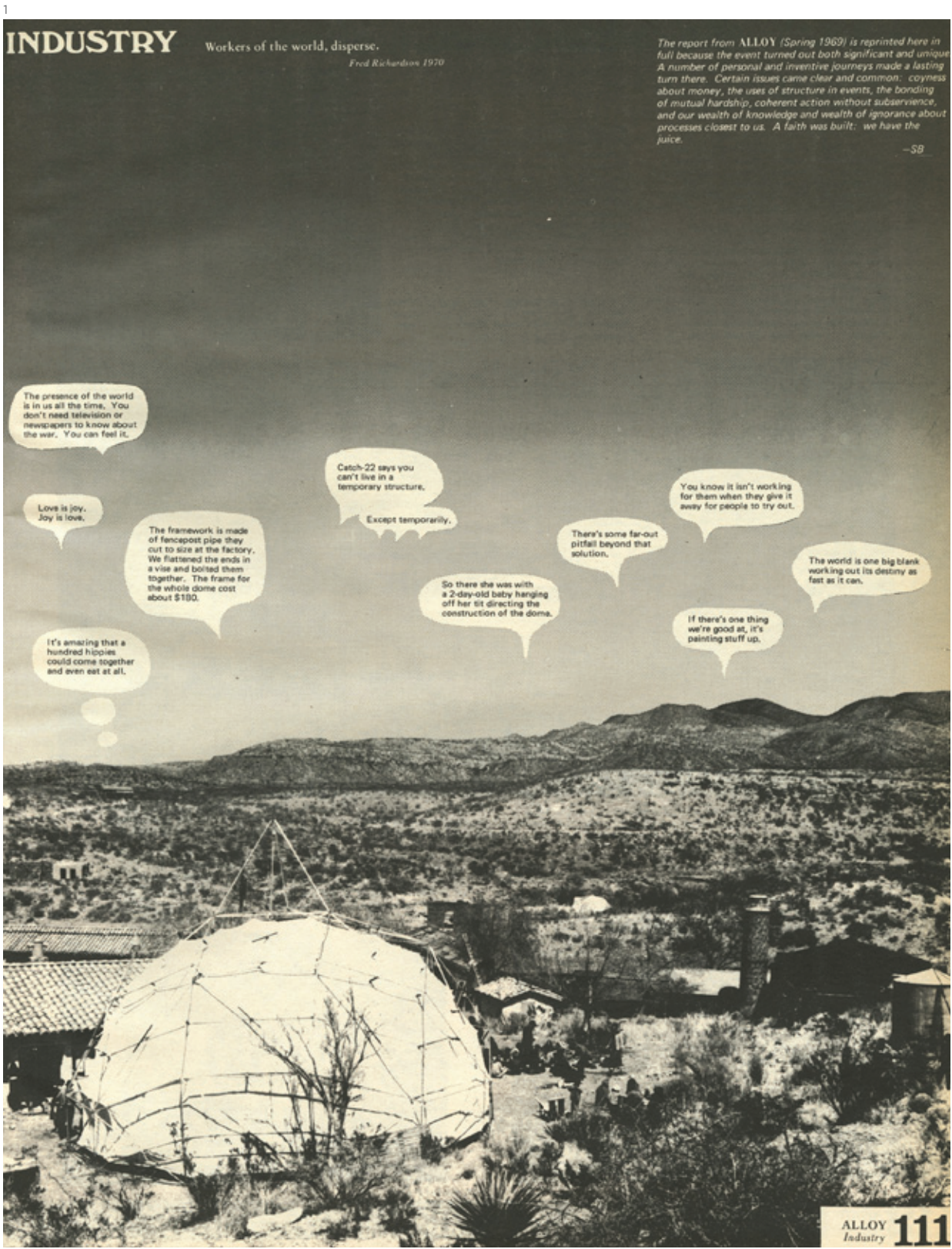
It was held at Chateau Neuf, which is not at all chateau-like but a knackered postwar educational building with a generous semi-circular auditorium. Like any

conference, there were poor speakers with strong messages and vice versa, but three good ones really stood out. Hitting the genesis of both comfort and sustainability issues, namely the discovery of fire a million years ago, Minik Rosing, of Copenhagen's Natural History Museum, said that 'what characterises humans is the urge to burn things', and talked about global energy flows and the survival secret of his own Inuit people — adaptability. French architect Gilles Perraudin charmed and disarmed high-tech sustainable architecture

- 1 – The Whole Earth Catalog's documentation of the Alloy event, in the Far-Out Voices show
- 2 – The main show Behind The Green Door included Apollo 8's iconic Earthrise photo
- 3 – Tallhall is one of FutureBuilt's 50 sustainable initiatives

advocates with a heavily accented revelation of his personal discovery of stone — 'it's very sophisticated, it breathes'. His beautiful vernacular natural stone buildings (including social housing) perform as well as any new technology-laden build, but with less embodied energy. And, when she wasn't giggling, Carolyn Steel, the London-based author of Hungry City, made a brilliant case that metropolises have always been physically shaped by food. To reverse the 'global catastrophe' of 'denatured countryside' and industrial food production, she argued that we have to reconnect our cities with food more directly. That was a big helping of food for thought.

Conferences and other events whizz by in any bi/triennale, but exhibitions stay the course. Well,



1 © PORTOLA INSTITUTE, RANDOM HOUSE



2 COURTESY DOGA, OSLO 3 COURTESY FUTURE BUILT, OSLO

almost. Custom Made at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design ran until 1 November, and collected everything written in Norwegian since 1945 about the country's architectural tradition, displaying it in a 165,228-page open file called 'The Book'. By contrast, Far-out Voices at the National Museum takes us out into the American desert at a time when radicals addressed sustainability. In 1969, 150 people convened in an abandoned tile factory in New Mexico to exchange ideas. The meeting, called Alloy, was documented by Stewart Brand, publisher of the Whole Earth Catalog, a directory of counterculture products. He described it as 'a peculiar blending of high-tech solutions and neo-tribal thinking that defined the radical design approach'. Its idealistic yet often meandering atmosphere is

Norwegian sustainability is fragile. An agreeable mixed-use quarter of Oslo met the tight energy building codes only to see a rash of patio heating

brilliantly captured in photos, documents and a telling quote: 'We're involved in an action-reaction game. A lot of talk is empty cups pouring themselves into one another'. But among the desert radicals were pioneers who built what they talked, such as Michael Reynolds (since the subject of the 2007 film Garbage Warrior), whose Earthship Biotecture appropriated used tyres and cans as building materials, and Graham Stevens, who floated his Desert Cloud creation (1972) of buoyant tubes in a performance about harvesting condensation from the desert air. Curator Caroline Maniaque-Benton's retrospective interviews with them play in the show. She told Blueprint: 'These people are not architects, they are engineers, industrial designers — they try to experiment, not to draw. It's 3D activity, not 2D.' The exhibition also shows us parallel European thinking, encapsulated in the early Seventies by French zines such as *La Gueule Ouverte* or the UK's Survival Scrapbook. The simple mounting of the show in wooden frames, disembodied voices coming from above your head and instantly accessible images and film all make this simultaneously far-out, man, revelatory, and a cool trip.

Not quite so easy to absorb is Rotor's Behind the Green Door, however, but, interestingly, it takes the same era as Far-out Voices as its starting point. High on the far wall of the long exhibition room is a blow-up of the December 1968 photo of Earthrise over the Moon, taken by Apollo 8 astronauts. Many consider Rachel Carson's Silent Spring as the start of the sustainability movement ►

but, for Rotor's Gielen, this was the pivotal moment. 'They almost did not take the picture... Are there things now that we don't realise are happening?' he asks. The other landmark event he identifies fittingly connects with Norway – the 1987 Brundtland Commission report to the UN. The former Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland and her team defined sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. It could not be clearer.

Rotor's fascinating, madly diverse exhibits demand more thought. They range beyond various architectural models and drawings to things such as NASA's 1972 sealed glass bowl in which shrimps and algae can

'You have to set limits to the responsibility,' says Maarten Gielen, one of the curators. 'How you arrange sustainability is the question'

maintain an ecosystem for up to 23 years, trade demonstration sections of wall insulation and a watercolour vista of Shanghai in time-band stages to 2100 by Luc Shuiten. Hanging info-sheets on a rail (a format Rotor used at the Barbican OMA show in 2012) describe projects from Werner Sobek's high-tech eco-house R128 to a ludicrously LEED-rated American car park. Blueprint asked Gielen what his conclusion was. Explaining that Foster's Masdar is carbon-neutral, but only within its own square boundary,

he offered: 'You have to set limits to the responsibility. If there is criticism, it's because there is a limit... Will the pockets (of sustainability) get larger and larger, and connect in a sustainable world? How you arrange sustainability is the question.'

How you arrange your approach to Behind the Green Door, indeed the whole Triennale, is key — follow your intuition for the payoff. OAT explores the theme of sustainability in unexpected and rewarding ways. The 'green door' opens into a space where new questions, like Gielen's, are raised, and where answers, like FutureBuilt's, are offered.

4 – Graham Stevens' *Desert Cloud* (1972)

5 – *Far-Out Voices* contains retrospective interviews with pioneers like Michael Reynolds

Exhibition

Lisbon Architecture Triennale 2013: Close, Closer

Various venues, Lisbon
12 September – 15 December
Review by Shumi Bose

Sunshine and youth gilded the opening of the Lisbon Architecture Triennale in equal measure. In comparison with the stately Venice Architecture Biennale, approaching its 14th iteration, the third Lisbon Triennale is more akin to a teenage block party. Due in significant part to the international reputation of British chief curator Beatrice Galilee, this edition of the Triennale created an undeniable buzz around itself, attracting a huge number of critical observers in its opening week. Entitled *Close, Closer*, the programme was light on showing and heavy on telling, prompting visitors to take up the curators' central provocation: 'But is it architecture?'

The exhibitions are arranged in three parts, augmented by the 'New Publics' programme and a dizzying number of part- or self-funded Associated Projects. Future Perfect and The Real and Other Fictions are cinematic 'set-piece' exhibitions, and, as such, less clearly aligned with the belligerent, politically charged urgency of the overall programme. By contrast, the third 'exhibition', The Institute Effect, most captures the spirit of *Close, Closer* — shunning the physical act of making architecture in favour of open-ended, 'democratic' discussions.

The Real and Other Fictions, curated by Mariana Pestana, leads visitors through a building caught at a perfect moment of ripeness, between intensified beauty and irreparable decay: the crumbling 17th-century baroque Palácio Pombal fairly bleeds with historical narrative. It hosts works by such esteemed art world figures as Carsten Höller and Maria Fusco — whose 'method' brought her to live there for a whole month, gleaning anthropomorphic stories from the resonant space. Installations and performances explore notions of hospitality, picking up on the palace's chequered past as a former colonial embassy, political speakeasy and site of violent arrest — not to mention its original purpose as a place of private, domestic pleasures. Visitors are invited to eat in it, to sleep, perchance to dream.

Without a tour guide to unravel layers of material history — and most visitors won't get one — some works can seem opaque. Perhaps for this reason, one of the more enduring experiences was physical. With an ineluctable but barely perceptible ▶

