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Park McArthur at the MoMA  
The Most Prestigious and Public of Places<sup>0</sup>  
By Noah Barker

In 1971 a camera was set up to film viewers in gallery with the live video projected for others in an adjacent room. While this work by Keith Sonnier is not particularly novel for its era, the exhibition series it indoctrinated was. The first program of its kind, *Projects* sought a more lean and flexible format to accommodate neo-avant-garde practices that were developing alongside social turmoil. Adopting the language of theater, in the wake of Michael Fried, the ‘audience’ was said to activate and be the subject of works like John Giorno’s dial-a-poem<sup>1</sup> from Kynaston L. McShine’s *Information*, which predated *Projects* by a year and, along with Jennifer Licht’s *Spaces*, announced the institution’s awakening to new reflexive mechanisms. These exhibitions required “collaboration of people and flexible adjustment of roles and areas of responsibility”<sup>2</sup> as the museum underwent “re-appraisal and self-examination.”<sup>3</sup> Put another way, the institution grasped a need to better *manage* its affiliation with and participation in the decentering of authorship and claims to distanciation rather than autonomy. Coextensively, the museum along with other “non-profit, privately supported enterprises” suffered from “constantly rising costs and the simultaneous shrinking of endowments”<sup>4</sup>. While this led to staff lay-offs and a strike in the year of *Projects*’ founding, it foreshadowed a prioritization of real-estate holdings that would tether expansion to reinvestment beginning with the 1979 sale of air rights for the construction of Museum Tower.

Cupping an iPhone to my ear, I stroll through Yoshio Taniguchi’s elegant halls. A crisp, articulate, yet warm voice speaks to me, “apartment 54B. 3339 SF (310 SM). 3 bedrooms, 3.5 baths. North, South, East, West Exposure. Price: \$12,300,000.” This and other listings are also available to be read from a framed page in a fourth-floor gallery overlooking a crowd of selfie takers in Philip Johnson’s courtyard; the former grounds of Abbey Rockefeller’s residence, as the voice has already reminded me. A label nearby testifies the tastefully formatted folio is an artwork titled *After Project 17*. “Provided to interested parties by the sales team at the 53W53rd showroom,” the voice clarifies. Assuming a prestige and value accrued by the city that plays its host, 53W53 doubles as the address and name of a new Jean Nouvel designed tower under construction on property purchased by Houston based developer Hines from the museum in 2007. Elsewhere, a brochure accompanying this sparse presentation of documents and wall text cues me into the coincidence that *Projects 17*, held in 1989, featured the work of architects Diller and Scofidio who were commissioned for museum’s current expansion that will occupy 40,000 square feet of 53W53. Beyond coincidence, the title of their exhibition, *Para-site*, has been re-used to title the audio-guide-cum-art-work I am listening to. The name of the artist responsible is writ large on a wall along with a project number of its own in a format and scale mirroring a graphic on the brochure’s cover: *Projects 195 Park McArthur*.<sup>5</sup> This too is a work, along with the re-numbering of the project as 195 from 109 to account for the 86 unnumbered iterations beginning with Sonnier’s in the 70s, titled *Is this an investment, pied-à-terre, or primary residence?*

In the museum's online *Magazine*, Sean Anderson, associate curator of Architecture and Design, interviewed by McArthur, elucidates the significance of not only Projects 17 as a formative 'rehearsal' for the architects' career, but a series of architecture exhibitions from the late-80s, sponsored by Hines, the current 53W53 developer: "By breaking down and reassembling those elements that once signified structure [...] or power, it was suddenly possible to grasp that history was something to be conferred rather than built. What we saw was a shift from form to language and back again."<sup>5</sup> One of these exhibitions, *Deconstructivist Architecture* from a year before Diller and Scofidio's, did much to cement its participants as household names, not unlike the *International Exhibition* five decades prior. The textual shift that occurred in the span between those groupings, both curated by Phillip Johnson, was not isolated to architecture but encompassed within a broader postwar crisis of signs that threatened the institutional monopoly on representation. The museum sought a mutable refashioning to avoid its own fragmentation while facilitating viewers viewing themselves within modernism's panoptical 'exhibitionary complex' that had been inverted since the phenomenological thrust of minimalism qualified the body in the realm of the art experience. Accompanied by architecture's *real subsumption of theory*, these shifts supplemented the prior recuperation of avant-garde negativity "as a release valve of an unlimited potential for development" as Manfredo Tafuri once diagnosed.<sup>7</sup> Never truly broken down, let alone reassembled, the ivory towers of modernism, whether intellectual or residential, entered through ground floor or education department, continue to service the passions of industry and ideology. What better excuse has been written for a skyscraper that reminds you of "where you are" than Delirious New York?<sup>8,9</sup>

"Returning to the Werner and Elaine Dannheisser gallery on the fourth floor, a sculpture titled, STUDIO/HOME sits on the floor," the audio guide homes me in to stacked stainless steel trays that have been placed in a nook between the stairwell and glass railing. The sculpture is an architectural model for a residential building of McArthur's design with a foot print based on the floor plan of this fourth-floor gallery. Less a model for communicating a plan, *STUDIO/HOME* is a place holder of a dream. *Para-site* facilitates access to its interiors, flushing out scenes from welcoming entrance to a communal pool. The works, like the residents of this propositional building, are co-dependent oneiric generators against which the 53W53 showroom and its accompanying models, also described by the guide, stand in stark contrast. The Nouvel tower haunts the present as a plan that ensures the recurrence of a structure for MoMA's *growth*. As society and the city were once modeled on the factory, from which spurred the grid that brings a Manhattan address relevance, now every opportunity is one for *investment*. And as the old tactic was to 'occupy' space (and then time) to 'explode the contradictions', McArthur resides within, yet does not and perhaps cannot exceed, the hospitality of the institution's reflexive desires.<sup>10</sup> However, the dream, without being bound to vision, and perhaps even extending to all an experience of visual impairment, allows for slippage between expectation and procedure.<sup>11</sup> Picking up from where the guide leaves me, I fantasize that as the institution arrives at its inevitable hiccup following *Projects 194*, McArthur's building might be constructed in airspace above her current exhibition, even bought by the museum from itself with David Geffen's next 'gift'.

0. Robert Storr's phrase when writing about the history of Project's series: <https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/calendar/projects/HistoryofProjects.pdf>
1. Phone-a-poem featured poets reading their prose accessible by dialing a number from any telephone including several installed in the exhibition space. The FBI paid a visit to the exhibition listening to all of the poems, which featured readings by Kathleen and Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale.
2. Spaces press release: [https://www.moma.org/documents/moma\\_press-release\\_333098.pdf](https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_333098.pdf)
3. Press release for MoMA Annual Report 1970: [https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press\\_archives/4766/releases/MOMA\\_1971\\_0202\\_150.pdf](https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/4766/releases/MOMA_1971_0202_150.pdf)
4. Ibid.
5. <https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/30>
6. While more sophisticated in its integration, Diller and Scofidio's Project 17 featured CCTV like Keith Sonnier's, mediating the audience back to itself. However the intention of these to projects differed greatly and is best summarized by Anderson's phrase of a return to form. Sonnier's anticipated the post-modern fragmentation of the subject while Diller and Scofidio seemingly resolve it, "allowing us to see architecture again," as Anderson says.
7. Tafuri, Manfredo. *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*. MIT Press, Boston, 1976. P. 56
8. Jean Nouvel states this as his aim in an online interview regarding Museum Tower: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ake5tqagB6M>
9. Rem Koolhaas participated in both the *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition and the "shift to text" in the pages of *OPPOSITIONS*.
10. When an audience member applauded the museum during a gallery talk with the artist and wondered how such an "uncompromising" exhibition could occur, the curator Magnus Schaeffer responded "as a museum we are dedicated to supporting the artist's vision...all the information here is public and it really is a matter of offering a chance of reflection, self-reflection."
11. Park's response to the same audience member was that "the museum is not a unity or a single person or a single organism at all. There are so many people with different contradictory pieces of information. [...] It allowed for the kind of authority MoMA might put forth to break down into people or decisions."