THE VENICE BIENNALE AND BEYOND: AN INTERVIEW WITH RICKY BURDETT | Gareth A. Jones

Professor titular em Geografia e Desenvolvimento
London School of Economics & Political Science

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Entrevista realizada por Gareth A. Jones

RICKY BURDETT É o principal consultor de *design* do Olympic Delivery Authority, empresa pública encarregada de organizar os Jogos Olímpicos em Londres em 2012; é também membro do Comitê de Qualidade da Cidade de Barcelona e diretor do Urban Age (Era Urbana), projeto organizado pelo programa de Cidades da London School of Economics (www.urban-age.net). Ele tem sido também consultor de arquitetura da BBC, Tate Gallery e outras agências públicas da Grã-Bretanha e em outros países. Burdett foi curador da 1º Bienal de Arquitetura de Veneza, que ocorreu de setembro a novembro de 2006.

GARETH A. JONES Gareth é professor titular em Geografia do Desenvolvimento e diretor do mestrado de Urbanização e Desenvolvimento da London School of Economics and Political Science. Tem atuado como consultor de várias agências internacionais como DfOID, Habitat-ONU, do departamento de habitação do governo da África do Sul, e participa do Conselho de Administração de várias ONG. Atualmente tem trabalhado em pesquisas sobre urbanismo contemporâneo no México, sobre condomínios fechados na África do Sul e sobre jovens moradores de rua e violência na América Latina.

The 10th Venice International Architectural Exhibition entitled "Cities, Architecture and Society" took place in 2006 directed by Professor Ricky Burdett of the LSE. The Exhibition was located over a number of sites in Venice. At the Corderie dell'Arsenale the emblematic experiences of 16 'world' cities were presented, through the Giardini a range of invited research institutes and practices presented project and city-wide interventions, over 50 national pavilions, and two displays with a specific Italian-Mediterranean theme, City-Port and Cities of Stone. A two-volume Catalogue of the Exhibition entitled "Cities, Architecture and Society" is published by Marsilio and further details are available at <http://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture>.

GJ: It must have been a huge honour to direct the 10th Architecture Biennale and a wonderful opportunity to shape how we think about cities. How did you set out to make this Biennale different from previous ones and create its own identity?

RB: I think the first thing was that it would… you

would enter the space which was a very large space in Venice and not see endless series of architectural models or architectural renderings, however beautiful, on their own. That was my first sense. I was going to try and do something which reconnected the architectural object with its context. And by context I meant three different levels. One is the physical level of the city, how does architecture make or relate to that. Secondly, and very much the one you and I are involved in at LSE, is the social and economic and even political context. What is it that architecture can or can't do which relates to these processes? And the third one is the environmental context in terms of what role does architecture play in making cities more or less sustainable? So, in that sense it was very very clear from day one when I was asked to do this, that it would be a very different show because it would require reinterpretation of what the value of architecture is.

GJ: Would it be fair to say therefore that the emphasis shifted away from the sort of 'jewel box' designs and maquette? …

RB: Very much so, that's a high risk operation because [in Venice] we're in the temple of celebration of architectural objects or jewels as you say. But given that the Exhibition closed two months ago, and a lot of people went, 130,000 people went to see the show which is more than the last two Biennale, what that means is that even though we went away from the conventional way of displaying architecture, it connected somehow to an audience… I don't know exactly the profile of the audience but it tends to be an architectural and very international…

GJ: The shift to this broader agenda seemed to give more prominence to design and planning issues. How were you able to capture this in the style of the installations, the pavilions and the research projects?

RB: Well, first of all, let us remind ourselves that as the director of the Venice Biennale you really do two things. One is you are responsible for curating one very large exhibition which divides itself as it happens, or I decided to divide it into two parts. I'll come to those in a moment. And the second is that you set the theme which is what the national pavilions choose to respond to *or* not! And that decision [to comply] is completely up to the individual national organisations. So, the way this worked is having been asked by the Biennale Board to work on this issue of cities and having decided to link the theme of architecture to cities and society, and hence the title of the show, in November of 2005, the Biennale and I wrote to the curators of the national pavilions… of which there were more than 50 this year in fact, it's quite a high number, although not everyone necessarily chooses to exhibit because of lack of funding or lack of interest in the theme or they haven't got their act together. Over 50 *did* which is a large number. I'd say roughly 50% … no 60% did respond in quite an interesting way to the big theme of cities and the relationship between architecture and society.

Now, I am going back to the first bit … the curating … the bit which is my show, I divided it into two parts. One is an exhibition of 16 world cities, which is really what the catalogue is about and it is designed as a sequence – an experience of what it's like to move from one of these cities to another. It's trying to make a journey – a very visual journey, very strong, covering 16 cities from major regions of the world. The second bit which I curated is in a separate building called the Padilliona Italia, which is in the heart of the gardens of the Biennale itself which is the historic core. Again a very big exhibition space in and of itself where I invited eleven different institutions from around the world, academic, professional and others to talk about certain themes

which relate to architecture and the city environment. So, you could say that within my part of the Biennale there was, within the Corderie, the first of the two spaces, a lot of research and a lot of it generated and developed by the London School of Economics and the interdisciplinary team here with the Urban Age project. We had a lot of new research which went into trying to tell a unified story of these 16 cities according to a number of themes. While the Padilliona Italia was a very disparate experience in many ways but very research based. So for example, from Mexico City our colleague José Castillo did a show which comes out of their research on how Mexico City has evolved and addressed key issues of urban change now. Similarly the Urban Design Research Institute in Mumbai. So at one end it had quite earthy community uses to try and retro fit the most basic problems of cities in developing countries and at the other end of the scale we had the MIT "Senseable Cities Lab" as it's called, spelt S.E.N.S.E.A.B.L.E. just to complicate it, where they did something called 'real time Rome' with a very large screen showing where people were moving at that very moment in time across the streets of Rome. A sort of a simulation, not a simulation, using a mobile phone tracking system. You could call that a form of research, it's a way of depicting the city and understanding the city. Or another one of the exhibitions was a really beautiful show of wonderful photographs of cities, by great artists, both contemporary and from earlier times, of what living, being, engaging with the urban condition means. They were not just documentary style photographs, some were extremely abstract and looked at images of urban life in a non academic way – very pictoral. So these two components complemented each other but around them, were these 57 [national] pavilions within the gardens, each of which had things as different as the British pavilion, a

pretty wacky exhibition about Sheffield and how funky it is…

GJ: Is this the Echo City?

RB: Yes. The French exhibition took the metaphor of the city as a commune and literally inhabited the pavilion with a bunch of architects and artists for the period of the Exhibition. So, you went in there and they were living… these are neo-classical pavilions on the whole… they put in scaffolding beds… and being French a fantastic kitchen. You could smell the garlic and olive oil and everything, to make a point that you can inhabit and reuse buildings. The Germans similarly looked at the notion of how you can retro fit a city particularly the densities of Eastern Germany, where there's a population loss. So just by walking around there you got a sense of what's happening around the world in cities.

GJ: Was there a particular request to exhibitors to be innovative in the use of media and delivery of particular installations?

RB: Well, there wasn't a request to be innovative per se, but just by saying what we are trying to do is explore the role between the physical and the social, that tended to imply… well then lets not just have a model or a computer rendering which only shows the use of colour and the glass, and that did happen. Perhaps I can come back and describe in more detail the exhibition within the Corderia; there's no doubt that it proved to be much more accessible to the larger public because it didn't require superior knowledge or ten years experience in an architecture school to understand a cross section of a drawing. And within the Corderia it was quite didactic intentionally: here are some facts, here are some figures, here are some pictures, this is what happened…

GJ: That sounds like a good opportunity to talk about the Corderia space because my next question was about bringing the public into the Biennale, a non – technical public…

RB: Sure… First of all, I think the way to engage the public, and on the whole [the subject] works quite well in graphs and documents, but the question is how do you turn it into something which is visually exciting? The way that I decided to do that … and this is extremely important, is who you work with as a team, so Sarah Ichioka and Bruno Moser and others at LSE, and the Exhibition Designer who is absolutely the most critical person because they interpret your ideas and turn it into something else. And there I was lucky to work with an Italian designer called Aldo Cibic and a team of graphic designers from Italy with the improbable name of *Fragile*. The sort of core ideas which came out were, first, to take out some of the big themes which cut across the different cities and then take a journey within every city. The big themes are: How are cities changing in a global world? You enter the exhibition and there is a series of projections of 360 degrees in a very large room where you actually saw images of maps of the world with the growth rates of cities… Mexico City, Shanghai or whatever from 1950 until today. So you could see the extraordinary exponential growth… Tokyo in the post war era, Mexico City expanding wide rather than high, Shanghai with 3,000 skyscrapers now when only 15 years ago there were 300… you actually see that in a space as a cinematic experience. Then you move through themes as you are walking along this very long linear corridor, which is 300 metres long, the length of St Marks Square in Venice itself or twice the length of the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern… what would be the equivalent space in Sao Paolo?

Anyway, it's a series of sequences of cities in four different continents. But, in between, there are

these big themes. One is how the world is changing, that's the statistical experience, and then a comparison, if you take Google Earth images more or less of each of these 16 cities, and then zooming in from the Google Earth to the urban scale what do these cities look like from 300 kilometres wide, 30 kilometres and then I took 2 square kilometres of the centres of each of these cities. So you're actually standing in a room and you see around you these patterns on the wall and you begin to say… well these patterns represent different ways of living, different cultures and different dynamics, whereby people from different parts of the world choose to live and the first thing is obviously the incredible difference of scale and compression. If you saw an image of Cairo you'd have thought it was printed on a different scale to the image of London but then you go and look at the width of the street and they're all the same, so it makes the issue of density. The big themes which then emerge and structure the way in which the stories of these cities was told is we look at transport and mobility as a major theme, density, the social dynamics of cities through public space, and through showing films of public spaces in all these different cities and then finally a sort of conclusion which is where does this go from here? So to repeat, the big themes: how cities are changing, the density of cities, transport and mobility and then public space. So you would move from one of these… wherever there is a thematic content you had a comparison between all the cities so you looked at transport in all these cities and how they worked or you went to the density space and there were all these amazing models – probably the strongest images of the show itself. Imagine a graph of density which you might do as a powerpoint, we actually built these graphs in three dimensions so that some of them were seven or eight metres high. So, you could see Sao Paolo incredibly high and

dense but compared to Cairo or Mumbai, relatively shallow and next to it London or Los Angeles which is flat as a pancake. Just seeing those things, which is going back to your question about how do you engage the public? Well, you just look at that and you begin to think about density in a completely different way.

GJ: Did you pose questions to people walking through or did you leave it to their imagination? And you mentioned that the relationship between the installations and the public was encouraged to be didactic. How did that work?

RB: In the narrative with each of the cities there was a lot said, of why … why does density… etc. Certainly I would have explained in the captions and everything else why density is an issue, not open questions in a sense. Except for the very end where in the final room, which has five enormous panels with five enormous questions which really pick up on these different themes…

When you walked into lets say Bogotá or Sao Paolo, there were always three levels of information, so you could either read that room exhibit very quickly and move onto the next or spend five minutes there or spend 45 minutes there because of the amount of data and this was graphically treated in a very simple way. You either had like a newspaper some texts that you could read this size – half a metre high letters – Caracas has grown 1000% in the last 100 years, Berlin has reduced by 20% and you could actually see these at 10, 20 metres. Then there were obviously a lot of photographs with text describing the key dynamics of change in that city, for example in many of the Latin American cities it was crime or with Barcelona and London the issue of regeneration. So within each city the graphics allowed it to be read in three different ways but there were also three different components within each city. One is, as I say photographs and text, just describing what's going on.

Secondly is very powerful film of each of these cities. We commissioned a film for each of these 16 cities which you could sit through 5, 10 minutes to see what it's like walking down the street in Mumbai. Each of the films have one of these sound bells that you could stand under and hear the sounds of the streets… It wasn't a narrative, just the sound of the place. So, I mean music was very important, Sao Paolo had bloody good music as you can now imagine and in New York the music changed according to what part of the city the film was showing … The third element is linking back to architecture projects. On one level we reverted to displaying architecture through images, but with an enormous amount of attention to why we show a project in order that we explained, lets call it it's social raison d'être. So, to give you one example, Sao Paolo, we chose not just the projects which hit the architectural magazines which look good we chose ones which look good *and* satisfy a new political or social objective. For Sao Paolo we showed this programme which showed about six of the new schools which were part of the programme which was providing facilities into the heart of the favela. The interesting analysis provided by the architects and others show how the presence of these schools has helped to reduce crime amongst teenagers for the simple reason that these schools were designed in such a way that they could be open up to 18 hours a day and on the weekend in some cases and I'll never forget flying in a helicopter and seeing on a Sunday or whatever in the middle of the dense mass of favelas these rather elegant schools with swimming pools completely full of people. And I was saying, why are these schools now open, because they are a community facility, this was architecture for a social programme that worked. You know at the moment what happens with the classic problem of having too few schools is that they have

three different time frames, and therefore the 12 year old kid that goes to school from 8-12 then hangs around on the street or if the parents are out there is no problem with coming home late or whatever. The way these new schools are designed is that they've got communal playgrounds or swimming pools or whatever so that you stay within the remit of the school and perhaps go and play with your friends or whatever … and the effect of those is in some cases, apparently, that it has led to a drop in crime within the local community of 20-30%. So, that's one example of how we have tried to show architecture in such a way that it has meaning. Also, I have to say, the projects look good.

Similar, for Caracas we showed a small project called the "vertical gym" designed by a group called The Urban Think Tank which had a similar impact. The project which then won the overall Biennale prize is a tiny project in Mexico City on a street called 'Brasil No 44', which is just a simple idea of how do you reuse an existing structure rather than demolish it, in a city like Mexico which has a real need of regenerating from the centre, to avoid, well not avoid, to try somehow to reduce the never ending sprawl and in that sense really becoming the issue of sustainability of the city over the next 30-40 years. So, when you come into each narrative of the city the Exhibition tries to describe the city in terms of the social, geographic and cultural DNA.

GJ: The preamble to the Exhibition Catalogue makes a dramatic claim as to the key themes about cities shaping climate change, human justice and dignity. This seems to be architects moving beyond their conventional terrain, at least in recent times. How could you imagine drawing these things together?

RB: This is a ridiculously ambitious claim and the danger is that architects are appropriating responsibilities that he or she shouldn't. On the other hand, just stand back and say if buildings or the shape of the environments that we live in can actually mess up your life, and I'm thinking of the 60s and 70s housing states that get blown up all the time because they have been dysfunctional, then the opposite is also the case. In other words if you get the environment right, or the physical environment right, then it won't make people happy, it won't make people rich but it will improve the context within which certain things happen rather than not happen. So, not designing gated communities in Johannesburg, I would say absolutely is a statement which is an architectural statement, which the profession take a view on whether they should be doing these things or not and what are the impacts. And that's why words about tolerance and dignity do come into that because I think for too long architecture has hidden under the shroud of aesthetics and it disconnects from everyone else when the reality is that when you are walking down the street then how buildings come together to make urban forms which are either sociable or not. That's the theme which I think came up very strongly in Venice. You could see people looking at an aerial view of Caracas and seeing the 1950s housing estates which were highly problematic in terms of integration and seeing the mass of unstructured housing that was slowing eating up the spaces in between – people stood there with their eyes open saying "God, I can't believe that this is the case". And another one in terms of your point about dignity and the ambition which goes beyond the role of architecture is that the disciplines are much more interrelated, because it is to do with planning, it is to do with transport and I see architecture as part of that. The architecture of the city is not just the buildings it's how it all gets put together. Transport and mobility, I think, came out as the strongest themes… in fact I hadn't realised how powerful

these things are. And the one reason that the city of Bogotá won the Venice prize is because of a series of extraordinary initiatives that they have had, partly to do with architecture such as the public libraries and schools, very powerful, but substantially because instead of allowing the city to sprawl in the way that every other Third World city tends to sprawl given a free reign where the housing development follows any form of transport, in Bogotá you had three mayors in succession that decided 'no', that's not what we are going to do. We are going to invest in a basic transport system with bicycle routes and the Transmillenio buses, all by the way copied one has to acknowledge from Curitiba in Brazil. The former mayor Enrique Penalosa said very clearly that I saw what they did in Curitiba and copied it with some refinements. This is now being copied in Jakarta. In London we showed the Congestion Charge. It might be odd, you might say why should we show these in an architecture exhibition but people are fascinated that you can do something about these things. And the Bogotá example is particularly relevant in cities in developing cities because it shows there's a non hi-tech way of solving a problem. The classic predicament is hitting Mumbai today which is investing in new high speed elevated systems to relieve congestion. Yet when the mayor of Bogotá was faced with a Japanese infrastructure consultancy report which would have cost $3 billion I think, and the World Bank was ready to pay for it, that's always fascinating, he ripped it up. He said "no, why should we be investing in this" and the spent far less money on the Transmillenio system which has had a real impact on dignity or what I would call access to a form of democracy. If you can get to work cheaply in a quarter of the time, you are doing something. That is the great problem when we look at the case of Johannesburg where 12 years after apartheid there is no public transport system, people that don't have a car don't go to work and the city is totally fragmented.

The interesting thing again in Bogotá is not just the physical infrastructure but the politics of how you talk about the city. In Venice some wanted detailed captions to explain it all. But we said that no one will ever read this stuff, it's an architectural solution. They just want to be wowed out of their minds with these amazing models with steel and glass and whatever and I probably walked through the space 50 times during the three months that it was on and I mean it was amazing how people would stop and take notes. So, this didactic dimension surprised me but people actually took it in. So, one of the points I was making that people did take home, and I would have conversations with people afterwards, or journalists would ask me in having seen it said, was that the Transmillenio buses took the place of the classic combi taxis but in order not be shot by the guys whose work was being taken away, as each one of the new buses took over from seven of the combis, they gave the old drivers a share in the new bus. So there's partnership and involvement and everything… architecture and governance was one of the themes that was raised by people at the end of the Exhibition.

GJ: Yet architecture has an image problem in many peoples minds, from Charles Jencks comment about becoming 'celebrity chefs' or the 'air miles brigade, and there are regular pieces in the media about the 'most hated buildings'. So, is the Biennale and beyond witnessing an attempt by architects, and urbanists, to re-engage with the city from a wider set of standpoints, social, concerns with ethnicity and politics, revisiting its desire for social engineering?

RB: Does Venice signal a change in direction within the profession? I think regrettably the answer is no. Is it an attempt to try and affect a change in direction? Yes. It is trying to get architecture 'out of the

box' for sure. The fact that the Exhibition is coming to the Tate Modern in London says something. There has never been a show which deals with these issues which then gets put into a modern art gallery. The point is that the profession, and most schools of architecture, train people to look from the edge of the building inward and not from the edge of the building out. And obviously I mean that on many different levels, the physical level, social and economic level and the environmental issue. The interesting question is whether the big name architects respond. In that sense, this was a risk. In my position, my world overlaps with conventional architecture, as an advisor to the Olympics, judging competitions of what is a nice stadium, so you don't want to lose your reputation amongst the star architects, architects that are good at doing what they do. I have found that of the most respected architects that I'm familiar with, that have seen the Exhibition, there is an enormous interest in what's happening in this debate. Rem Koolhaas has been there before… you could say in may ways that my show could have never have happened without these people who have been working on these themes for ten or 15 years. It's linking the world of fast, mad growth of Lagos or Pacific Rim China which Koolhaas studies, to a deeper understanding from the world of Saskia Sassen and the effects of globalisation, or the inner-soul of the city of which it's set. In that sense it's a triangulation between these worlds which is informing the research. *That* I find is becoming of greater and greater interest to individual architects, even if it is not reflected though the schools.

GJ: There was a fascinating quote in the essay section of the Catalogue by Massimo Fuksas which throws up a question perhaps about the reliability and social awareness of architects. Fuksas writes: "The architect is never a theorist, but rather someone who has an idea, forgets it the next day and

does something else". And I wondered whether these linkages which you are trying to draw, between climate change and human rights, justice and dignity, and the integration of communities… huge socio-cultural and ethnic themes… whether the architect is a reliable agent within that mix, compared to the planner who is kind of there for the long term in a sense.

RB: I think the question of reliability is an interesting concept. Just because you have someone there, and I can think of probably every single planner in every single city in this country for the last 50 years… unfortunately they've been so reliable that they have messed everything up. I think you can take the other angle. The great interest for me, and sometimes that's why I focus on small projects, is that they can be a spark that can introduce a new paradigm to the relationships that we are talking about. The Fuksas quote is an interesting one and he is someone that is engaged in these issues, so much that he can make a comment about himself and his profession. But if you listen to the way in which Richard Rogers or Norman Foster speak about architecture, the language is possibly changing. It's much more political. But then, I would connect this discussion about the role of the architect as reliable and the role of the politician. In many cities that we have been interested in there is sometimes an incredibly powerful connection between a Ricardo Legorreta and the 'establishment' that he works with, certainly between Richard Rogers and the current [London] regime, or you go to Barcelona and both Oriol Bohigas (city planner) and the (former) Mayor Pasqual Maragall will be very well known. And that has a lot to do with the fact that you can make one or two things which will actually get a mayor re-elected. You create a park, everyone sees it and if they love it you get re-elected and if they don't you don't. Actually architects in the UK are incredibly naïve about these things.

GJ: Cities and societies at large have democratised regardless of the thematic linkages that the Biennale tries to draw, but there is a synergy which architecture and good design can bring. I was wondering to what extent the Biennale might reflect a democratisation of architecture, not only by that didactic experience for the public but maybe a sense that architecture itself is less bounded as a profession in the recent times do you think?

RB: I think this is where a very thin boundary exists between public relations and genuine belief. There is the language of community engagement, public participation – these very words – that translates to community architecture and different sort of planning methodologies. But I would say that in many cases the architectural profession gets involved in these dragging and kicking. I would say that there are still very few architects who genuinely engage in the bottom up process with great gusto. And there still is this sense that "guys I have the good idea and let me convince you…" rather than an inner democracy. The role of the architect becomes the impact or belief in the system, that is profoundly cultural. For example the difference between Holland and Britain. In Britain at the moment I'd say architecture is part of the propaganda to get planning approvals, and by the way not only for an office block but also now for new built housing. If you've got a good architect, someone that's been published in journals, it helps but it doesn't necessarily mean it's going to be 'fit for purpose'. In Holland this is taken for granted, you know, it's not part of a wall papering exercise, it's very real. Now, one of the problems I face as advisor to the London mayor and with the Olympics is to convince those that spend money on projects, whether it's social housing groups, private developers or project managers, that have a distrust for architects that these people see as basically waste money. In Holland again and in Spain, it's much more a part of the DNA. The developer is

going to go for a better architects because the building might not just win an award but people will end up rather liking it because the bedrooms let in more daylight. Here they've invented, we've got these organisations, such as The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment who are falling over themselves to value architectural design. On one level you can say "What is the point" because it's so self evident, and on the other level you have the accountancy management world that needs to know the cost for everything. So that's why you get those ridiculous studies to show that if you design something well, like a hospital, then patients recover more quickly, or people work longer in an office.

GJ: Can I get your views of particular ideas at the project level that came out of Venice: the idea running through some of the installations about the organic and the pre-planned city; the idea of retro-fitting the modernist city and how ideas of control, density and diversity, fuse together in the notion of public space. Which projects caught your eye which illustrate these ideas?

RB: Well for organic versus planning, the one message which comes out is that big master plans for cities don't work. They are too inflexible, some dogmatic ideas about the shape of the city which is so rigid that it can't adapt. Lets take Barcelona, the Cerda Plan from the 1850s is fascinating because it is rigid on one level but it has adapted fantastically because within the island blocks with their Champford corners and classic courtyards of a certain size, behind which there is a whole world of increased density, lower density, higher buildings, lower buildings, but the framework of the city is there. I'm a great believer in the grid. I think the grid has enormous potential and every time you see an architects' plan that has squiggly things just for the hell of it you think, why? London of course is a distorted grid.

In terms of projects or interventions, I would say that the Bogotá Plan of placing cycle ways from the city centre out to areas which are not yet developed is going to have more of a dramatic impact on the growth of that city than anything else. It's a very simple statement. I actually cycled in these areas with Mayor Penalosa and then you see the informal city coming along but it stops along the lines of these routes, where the sewers are and everything else, so that gives a sort of order. We were together in Mexico City walking around Netzahualcoyotl, one of the most remarkable experiences because I couldn't believe that it had not been planned. There's a sort of natural process. In terms of looking at projects which can deal with the unplanned organic development, then grid plans which are flexible are significant. I'll use another example which is not necessarily a contemporary project, but very significant here. An area like Notting Hill in London is I think a model of development. It's interesting because it was developed by private developers as London was expanding. So a similar problem to Shanghai, Sao Paolo and everywhere else, how do you create a new neighbourhood? The developer also went bankrupt but built houses that are five storeys [floors] high, with communal gardens in the back, speculatively built, so cheaply built, no big deal about it. At that point in time, basically for Victorian middle classes with maybe four children and a maid. The building fabric itself has remained the same for 150 years that it has been there – 50 years, 60 years after they were built the area changed, it became an area where there was a lot of high density occupation, low level rent. After the Second World War Notting Hill became a place where students lived with drugs and whatever… today, each of the floors is occupied by young professionals, with or without kids, what has remained the same is the built form and the grid. So there's a resilience of the built form and the plan, and this is where the architect has a fundamental role. Why is it an architectural thing and not just a planning thing? The planner tends to work on two dimensions and at a *very* large distance, not on the ground. But the relationship to the curb, the relationship between the door and street, whether you can see out of a window, these are the things that make Notting Hill what it is despite going through 'ups' and 'downs'… you can have a row of shops underneath apartments, or flats or houses if you want because there's that flexibility.

GJ: Are we learning or does the Biennale help us to learn about the difficulty of the modernist city to adapt, with technology, retro-fits and designs?

RB: You know, I don't think there's anything that the Biennale or anything which I have done in my research here or elsewhere which can solve Brasilia…

GJ: And that was implicit in my question!

RB: But, Brasilia is what it is, and I think it's turned into…well, it has its own dynamic. It's very formal, it's quite soulless in its centre but it has created its own dynamism around its edges with its own informal development of the crossroads. So everything finds its pace and its place. There are ways that you can begin to rethink some of these formal environments, which clearly came across in the case study of Caracas, the 23 de Enero development, that was built in 1957, commissioned by the right wing and then built when the democratic movement came along. They followed the classic Le Corbusier model, thin blocks in this luscious green landscape. And then, basically what happened is that the city contaminated it all, so what has happened to these blocks is that they have been humanised. So you go down to the ground and you have barrios which has got the local butcher, the shop, so I think that is a fantastic lesson for modernism. It is a form of retro

fitting which is not… which on one level has enormous problems and you know I was inside one of these modernist apartments, it had toilets, running water and everything was small but dignified. Down in the barrios they probably didn't have water, in terms of connecting the organic with the formal, I think that is an extraordinary experience. In other words, I think to have city, you need density and I think the modernist notion of zoning, the modernist notion of keeping things apart in terms of uses is clearly wrong and things are moving in a different direction. The big divide that is necessary because of pollution, noise and health of course by factories is no longer such an issue for western countries, while clearly for China and India they are, and living check by jowl with work is more possible. I came across an extraordinary statistic from Mumbai recently – 90% of the population lives within 5 minutes commuting time from work, whatever work means here.

Retro-fitting, I've used two examples already, but I'd say there are three, the "Vertical Gym" (Caracas) is a very interesting version of retro fitting, also the public toilets in Mumbai, which I couldn't understand until I went there. Now I realise how important they are… they are absolutely fundamental. And the schools in Sao Paolo would be a good example of retro-fitting. Literally retro-fitting a city and changing its social geography. In terms of control and regulation, by which I think you mean governance? Having been very involved here with The Urban Task Force one of our more radical proposals that was never accepted by the British government was that instead of having a threshold for maximum density you have a threshold for minimum density, and then how dense you go is purely regulated on whether it's any good or not. I think there are clearly some cases in many of the cities which are in the Biennale and I'll use London as that one example,

where what is happening is that we are building at far too low a density for the people and the buildings that are going to be there. And that is because regulation is written with a sort of different thing in mind, now clearly one isn't arguing that the favelas without water is the model, but maybe Netzahualcoyotl is.

GJ: I was struck by how many of the installations were moving away from the sort of mega projects and the metro city scales of imagination toward infill linkages which seems to be a very neat way of bringing density in at a human scale rather than the government autocratically saying… right everything has to be 200 people every square kilometre. I found that very interesting, and something vis-à-vis Caracas and some of the ones that I'd particularly focused on, that I hadn't seen before to the extent presented at Venice but here was a critical mass.

RB: I think these things are out there, they've always been happening but Venice allowed us to put them together so it looks as if there is a trend. I think they have always been there, I don't think they are necessarily new but what is new is that we are talking about these issues at an architectural showcase like the Biennale, because normally we wouldn't.
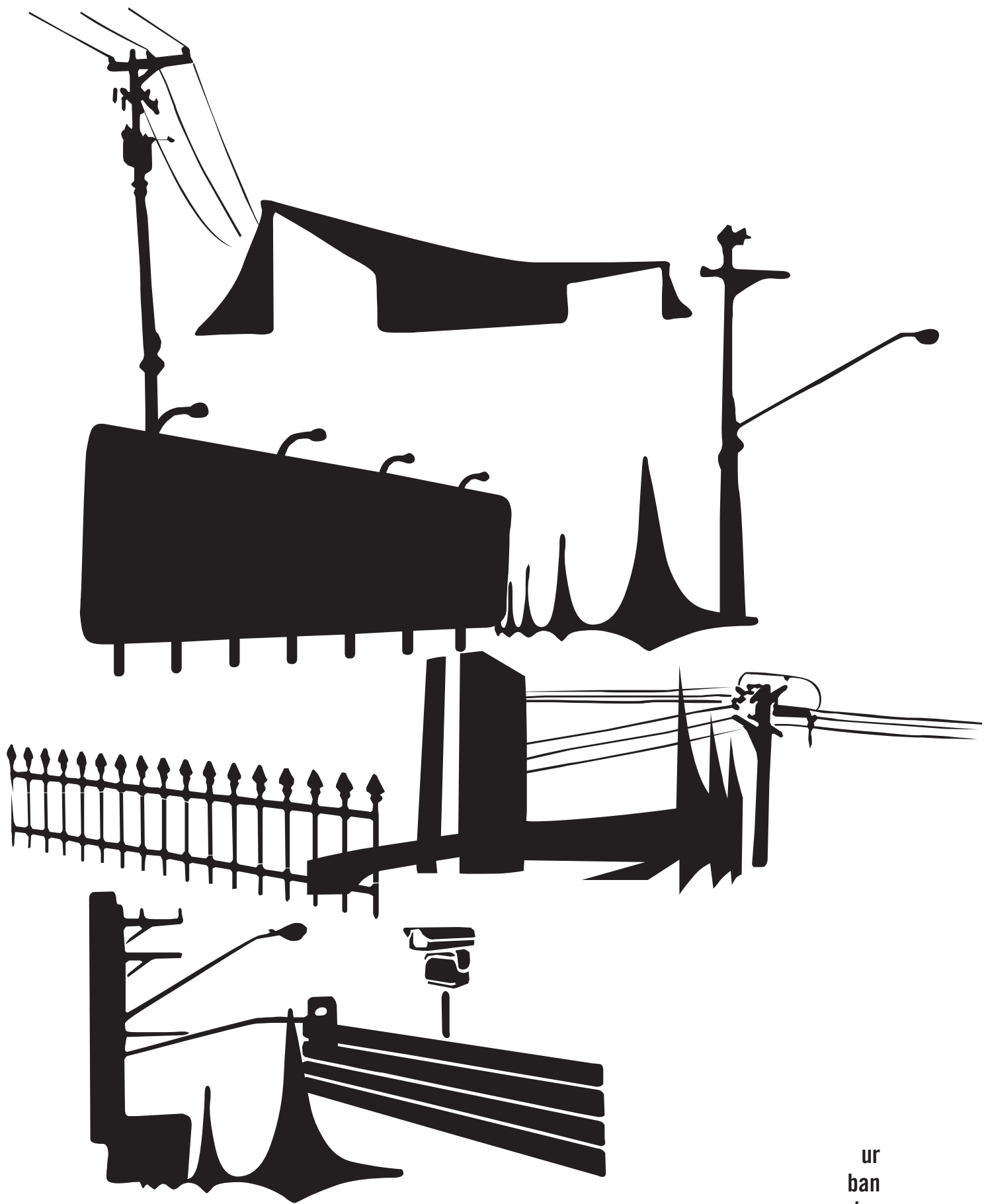
GJ: What is next for the Biennale installations?

RB: We are reducing it down to ten cities, Sao Paolo will be one of the ten, and bringing the Exhibition to the Tate Modern in London. I am co-curating it with people at the Tate, with Sheena Wagstaff the chief curator of the Tate. And the idea is, if I reflect on one of the limitations of my part of the Biennale for a moment, is that in this effort to describe these social and economic processes, with the exception of the films, it was very difficult to get under the skin of the city, to make visitors feel like being there. That's a classic problem, because you're not there. The films

did quite well, but probably not well enough, so what the Tate is going to do is to commission artists who actually work in the city or work on the themes of cities to give greater depth, human depth, cultural depth. So the issue of cultural diversity for example will probably come up in a more profound way. How do people inhabit cities in different ways? There is a sort of multi-layeredness to cities in a way which we are going to look at, by artists specific to and outside of the ten cities. Artists that are working in Istanbul or Johannesburg that will reflect on their cities or it will be some artists that work on some of the core themes of the Exhibition like density and diversity. Cairo will be a beautiful film of just taking a bus ride around the city. That's the thing that was missing in my Biennale…

GJ: So the Exhibition becomes kind of organic which seems appropriate to its themes. And from the Tate?

RB: Well, there is already interest for it to go to Berlin, as long as I tell a happier story of Berlin itself. Maybe I shouldn't say that … but Berlin really comes across as quite a sad place in my show and I don't think I'm alone in thinking that. Of course, the research on which part of Venice was based continues. The first part of The Urban Age project ended in 2006 in Berlin but we now have sponsorship for a further three and a half years … specifically to look at cities in different cultural settings in much greater depth than before. We will begin with India and Mumbai, and in the second year we will be Brazil and Sao Paolo.

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