

STRANGELY FAMILIAR

THE STRANGELY FAMILIAR GROUP

Strangely Familiar is a cultural and educational initiative which aims to explore, understand and communicate the complex intersection of architecture, cities and urban living. It does so in three ways:

- Publicly, by presenting and promoting new ideas about architecture and cities to the general public.
- Professionally, by presenting to architects and other urban design professionals new ideas about cities and urban living.
- Academically, through interdisciplinary enquires involving architectural history, art history, cultural studies, feminism, planning, sociology and urban geography.

Strangely Familiar is an affiliation of academics, journalists, designers, policy makers and other urbanists interested in the aims of the group. The group was formed in 1994 by Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Alicia Pivaro and Jane Rendell. Its first programme of events, also called Strangely Familiar, has been held over 1995-97. A second programme of events, "Close to Home: Architectural Interiors and Other Spaces of Intimacy", will take place in 1998-99.

THE STRANGELY FAMILIAR PROGRAMME

The initial Strangely Familiar programme consists of a touring multimedia exhibition, four symposia and three publications on the subject of architecture, urban space and urban narratives.

PROGRAMME SUMMARY

Exhibition	London (RIBA Architecture Centre), Manchester (Cornerhouse), Birmingham (The Angle Gallery), Edinburgh (Matthew Gallery), Naples (Istituto Universitario Orientale).
Symposia	RIBA Architecture Centre, London, 27 January 1996. Cornerhouse, Manchester, 20 May 1996. The Angle, Birmingham, 6 and 13 July 1996.
Publications	Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Alicia Pivaro & Jane Rendell (eds.), <u>Strangely Familiar</u> , 100pp exhibition catalogue, (Routledge, December 1995). "Talking Space with Strangely Familiar", special issue of <u>Scan</u> (Photographers' Gallery, London), n.1 (May 1996). Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Alicia Pivaro & Jane Rendell (eds.), <u>The Unknown City</u> , 400pp book, (1997).
Organisers	Iain Borden (University College London) Joe Kerr (University of North London) Alicia Pivaro (Arts Council) Jane Rendell (Birkbeck College)
Designers	Allford Hall Monaghan Morris Architects (exhibition design) Artec (multimedia) Strangely Familiar Studio Myerscough (graphic/exhibition design)

PURPOSE

In recent years, cities and architecture have become central to public and media debates about contemporary society. Questions as to what should constitute architecture and public spaces in cities, and who should dictate and control their character, are increasingly coming to the fore. Further, in academia, developments in urban geography, gender studies and cultural studies are increasingly influencing architecture, urban planning, planning history and architectural history. The Strangely Familiar programme provides the first opportunity for many of the most influential participants in this debate to come together and promote and discuss their ideas with particular relevance to *architecture and real city spaces*. The programme is targeted at the general public, academics, professional practitioners and students.

CONTENT

Strangely Familiar presents the notion that architecture and cities are far more than architects and planners often consider them to be. It is a cultural and educational initiative that focuses on architecture and urban design as they impact on a myriad of intriguing and unexpected urban conditions world-wide (Amsterdam, London, New York, Manchester, Paris, Naples, São Paulo, Berlin, Venice, Los Angeles).

Although contributors investigate a diverse range of different subjects and adopt a range of political, interpretative and analytical procedures, they share a number of presuppositions:

- That architecture and cities involve more than the design professions of architecture and planning.
- That acts of use/appropriation; changing meanings over time; issues of experience/identity; gender, race and class etc. can be used to re-think “architecture” and “urban space”.
- That understanding cities and architecture involves telling real stories about real places.

MANIFESTATIONS

Exhibition

The Strangely Familiar exhibition is devised as a popular event to be attended not just by architects and design students but by other urban professionals and the general public. It utilises an inventive format, mixing video, three-dimensional objects and other imaging techniques, so that music, spoken words, things and moving images replicate the vibrancy of city life:

- a video display provides a montage of sights, sounds, music and images.
- 29 highly coloured plinths display both the entire text of each contributor’s tale and also a series of short aphorisms, extracts and quotations.
- a multimedia computer enacts a virtual Strangely Familiar city in which the visitor can navigate, finding contributors narrating and illustrating parts of their own tale of the city.
- 17 objects ranging from everyday to the artistic provide a series of provocative conceptual prompts.

Touring Venues

The exhibition is scheduled for the following venues:

- London (RIBA Architecture Centre), December 1995 - March 1996
- Manchester (Cornerhouse), April - May 1996
- Birmingham (The Angle Gallery), June 1996
- Edinburgh (The Matthew Gallery), November-December 1996
- Naples (Istituto Universitario Orientale), January-February 1997

Symposia

- “Strangely Familiar: Architecture in the City”, one day symposium, 27 January 1996. RIBA Architecture Centre, London. The event provided a forum for 250 academics, practitioners, students and the general public to discuss their ideas on cities, architecture and everyday life.
- “Tales of the City: Urban Living for a New Millennium” one day symposium, 20 May 1996. In conjunction with Cornerhouse, Manchester.
- “The Architecture of Risk”, one-day symposium, 6 July 1996. In conjunction with the Angle Gallery, Birmingham.
- “The Road to Oblivion” one-day symposium, 13 July 1996. In conjunction with the Angle Gallery, Birmingham

Publications

- Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Alicia Pivaro & Jane Rendell (eds.), Strangely Familiar: Narratives of Architecture and the City, Full colour, 100pp exhibition catalogue, (Routledge, December 1995, £10.99).
- “Talking Space with Strangely Familiar”, special issue of Scan (Photographers’ Gallery, London), n.1 (May 1996).
- Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Alicia Pivaro & Jane Rendell (eds.), The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space, 400pp book, (1997).

CONTRIBUTORS AND SUBJECTS

Strangely Familiar showcases the work of 15 writers who together form a multi-disciplinary team (including architectural, art and urban history, feminist theory, urban geography and planning, cultural theory and sociology). It also reflects the international dimensions of this work, with contributors from the EU & USA.

Elisabetta Andreoli (University of Westminster, UK)

The Visible Cities of São Paulo

Iain Borden (University College London, UK)

Beneath the Pavement, the Beach: Skateboarding, Architecture & the Urban Realm

M. Christine Boyer (Princeton, USA)

Twice Told Tales: Film Noir, Robert Stern and Times Square, New York

Iain Chambers (Istituto Universitario Orientale, Italy)

Naples – the Emergent Archaic

Jonathan Charley (Strathclyde University, UK)

Sentences Upon Architecture

Barry Curtis (Middlesex University, UK)

Venice Metro

Dolores Hayden (Yale, USA)

Power of Place: Public History and the Urban Landscape

Joe Kerr (University of North London, UK)

Lubetkin and Lenin's Bust: Unlikely Allies in Wartime London

Sandy McCreery (Winchester School of Art, UK)

Westway: Caught in the Speed Trap

Doreen Massey (Open University, UK)

My Mother Lives Now in a Nursing Home

William Menking (Pratt Institute, NY, USA)

Elected By Property Owners – “Cleaning Up” Manhattan with BIDs

Jane Rendell (Birkbeck College, UK)

Industrious Females and Professional Beauties, or, Fine Articles for Sale in the Burlington Arcade

Edward W. Soja (UCLA, USA)

The Stimulus of a Little Confusion: Spuistraat, Amsterdam

Lynne Walker (UK)

Well-Placed Women: the Spaces of the Women's Movement in Victorian London

Elizabeth Wilson (University of North London, UK)

Berlin Café: the Ultimate Bohemian Space

The Unknown City includes additional contributions by Adrian Forty, Stephen Johnstone and Graham Ellard, Henri Lefebvre, Paul Keiller, Alicia Pivaro, Steve Pile, Shirley Wong, Richard Wentworth, Helen Thomas.