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# Spoken-not-spoken, Written-not-written: From Gossip and Rumor to Architectural History

Troiani, Igea

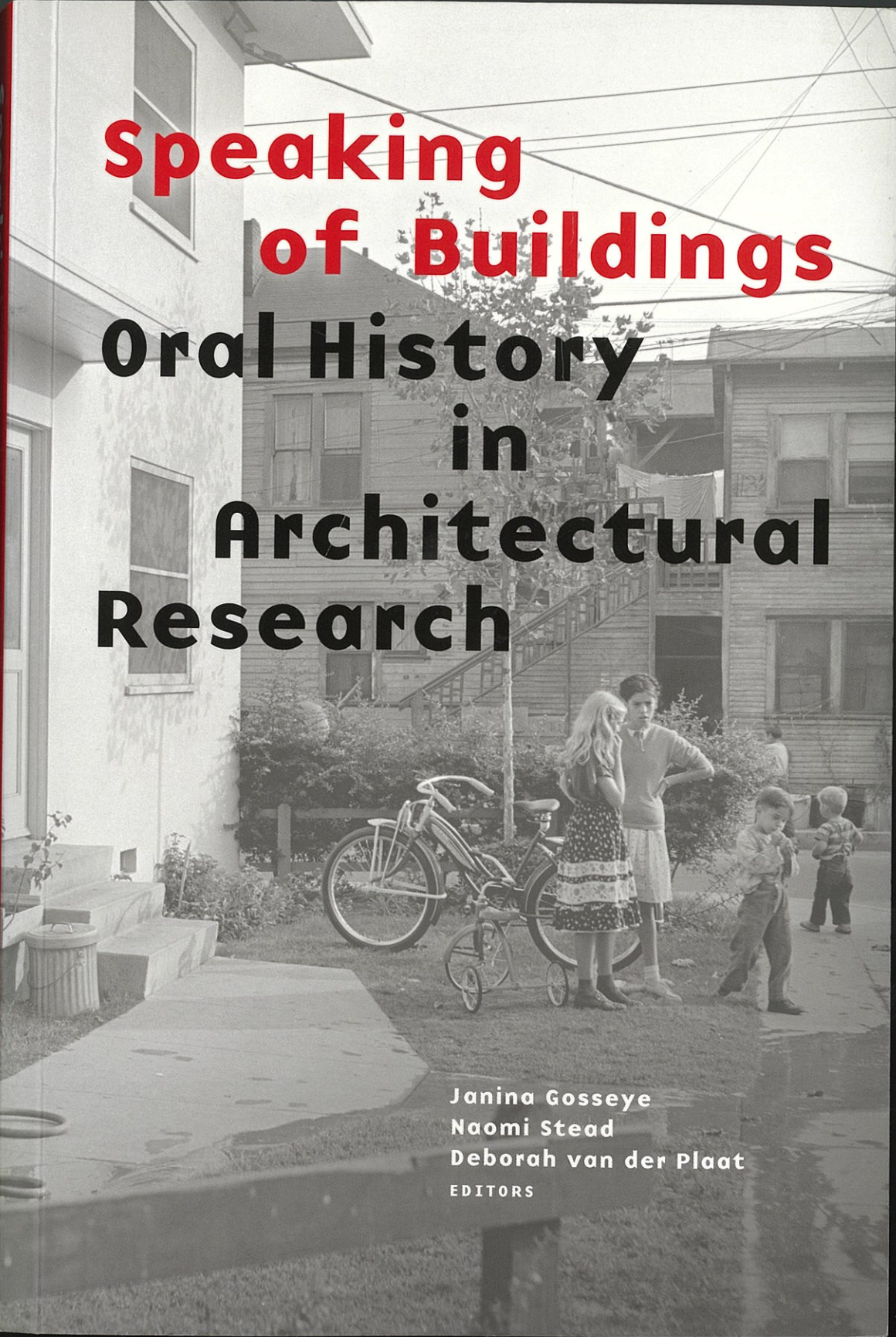
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A black and white photograph of a residential street scene. In the foreground, a young girl in a patterned dress and a young boy in a light-colored shirt and shorts stand near a bicycle. Two other children are visible further down the street. The background shows several houses, including a two-story wooden house with a porch and a smaller house to the left. Power lines are visible overhead. The title text is overlaid on the image.

# **Speaking of Buildings**

## **Oral History in Architectural Research**

Janina Gosseye  
Naomi Stead  
Deborah van der Plaatz  
EDITORS





rchitectural scholars tend to use texts, drawings, and photographs to craft their narratives. Oral testimony has rarely been taken seriously, and when it is, architects are given the platform to discuss buildings. However, there are others who can speak of architecture and tell their own stories of what it is like to construct, experience, and live within buildings. *Speaking of Buildings* examines how these other voices can be heard, revealing the radical potential of a research method that has historically been cast as subjective, inexpert, partial, and unreliable. Essays by an international group of scholars look at varied aspects of oral history in architectural research, from workers' accounts of building with concrete in midcentury London to a sound art piece that embeds the oral testimony of Los Angeles public housing residents within site-specific ambient sound recordings. In sum, the authors call for a renewed form of listening to enrich our understanding of what buildings are, what they do, and what they mean to people.

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# **Speaking of Buildings**

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**Janina Gosseye, Naomi Stead,  
and Deborah van der Plaats, editors**

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NEW YORK**

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# Spoken-not-spoken, Written-not-written

## FROM GOSSIP AND RUMOR TO ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY BETWEEN MARGIN AND CENTER

Igea Troiani

### Evidence and Modern Architectural History

In this essay, I examine the communication of professional practitioners in architecture, understood here as language in action,<sup>1</sup> and explore the space that scholarship leaves between informal/oral and formal/written accounts of history or between what is spoken and not spoken and written and not written by those working within and beyond the discipline. While formal interviews are acceptable methods used in historiographic research, informal conversations are often seen as spurious. But this need not be the case. I will show in this essay how I positively employed gossip and rumor—sources often dismissed because they are deemed subjective, sensationalist, and unverifiable—in my own practice of recording stories about architectural history. Gossip here is understood as off-the-record information that can contain salacious details about professional politics and the internal battles between practitioners within a profession.

More often than not, formal accounts of modern architectural history circulate stories of heroic architects and their building successes. Gossip can counterpoint such mainstream narratives and lead to stories of project battles, losses, and even failure to build. This is possible because gossip is one of the few modes of communication able to expose poor professional performance or practices in architecture, including “ganging up” or bullying. Information circulated privately through gossip grapevines can explain, for instance, how an architect’s socialization and social networks impact their architectural career. As gossip is uncontrolled, it does not offer the protection of formal interviews and can thus reveal architectural “family secrets.”

Gossip informed two of my alternative critical histories of modern architecture, which exposed unprofessional behavior surrounding famous architects and their buildings. In 2004, I produced an architectural history documentary film on the failure to build the Great Hall—a 1,250-seat auditorium, later named Mayne Hall—at the University of Queensland in Brisbane (Australia), designed by the relatively unknown Australian architect, Stuart McIntosh. Three years later, I wrote a book chapter that documented the rocky journey to build the Florey Building in Oxford, a housing building for around one hundred undergraduate students, by the British architect, James Stirling.

This essay opens with a discussion of McIntosh's and Stirling's genealogical disciplinary family circles or architectural tribes. Having set the sociological context for the architects and their university building designs, the chapter then discusses how the exposing of family secrets (professional, not biological) is a growing form of modern architectural history. Beatriz Colomina contends "the secrets of modern architecture are like those of a family, where everybody knows about things that are never acknowledged."<sup>2</sup> The essay details how the unacknowledged secrets I learned of, through gossip and rumor, prompted me to document the histories of both McIntosh's failure to build Mayne Hall and Stirling's problematic building of the Florey Building. The chapter concludes by demonstrating how gossip and rumor can be used positively in writing architectural history. It is inspired by theories of the engineer (rather than trained architect) by historian and critic Reyner Banham; German sociologist Georg Simmel; and feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, whose writings speculate on the advantages and disadvantages of operating inside and outside a discipline.

### Architectural Tribes: Inside and Outside

In his essay, "A Black Box: The Secret Profession of Architecture,"<sup>3</sup> Banham describes the architectural profession as a pedagogical tribe, acculturated into a specific ideological discourse that is unlike any other design discipline. Banham sees the architectural profession as a body "closing ranks and continuing [a] conspiracy of secrecy."<sup>4</sup> In all countries, the architectural profession consists of not one architectural tribe but many. These are generally initiated by significant male architect-educators who acculturate followers in the architecture schools or practices in which they work. From other research I have done on the transmitting of architectural ideology along network family trees or genograms,<sup>5</sup> "architectural families" differ depending on their pedagogical origins—elite or otherwise—so that to move from one part of the world to another means leaving one's genealogical tribe to enter into the professional



Figure 11.1: Screenshot taken from the documentary *Building Mayne Hall*, directed by the author, of the model of Stuart McIntosh's Great Hall (later renamed Mayne Hall) competition design for a 1,250-seat auditorium at the University of Queensland.

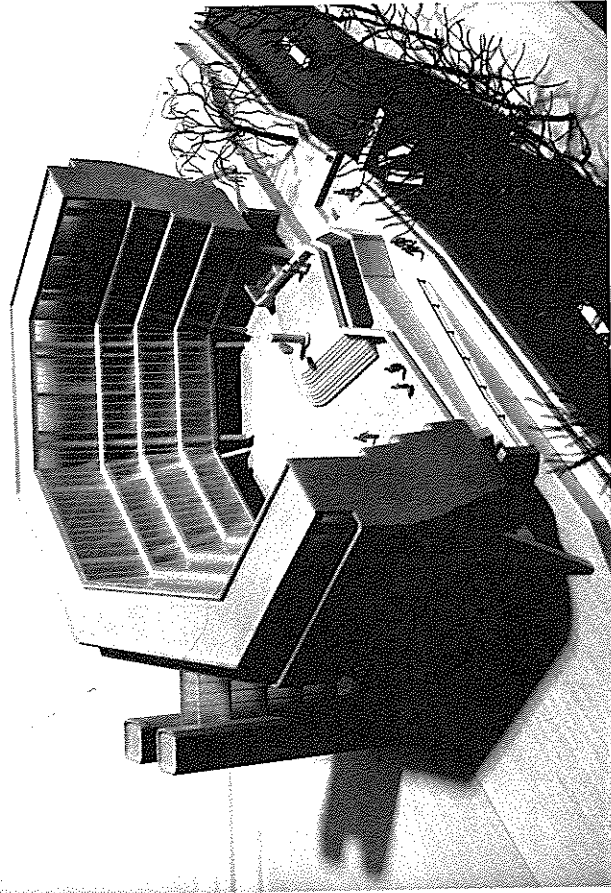


Figure 11.2: Photograph of the model of the Florey Building in the Queen's College Archive dated 1968. Photographer unknown. Reproduced by permission of the Provost and Fellows of the Queen's College, Oxford.

and social circle of another, thereby becoming "the stranger" within that group. The sociological concept of a stranger in a profession is relevant here because it enables me to reframe a historical subject (McIntosh) and an architectural historian (me) within a sociological, historiographic framework.

German sociologist Georg Simmel in *Sociologie* (1908) equates "the stranger" to the "outsider," who has no relation to the group, and to the "wanderer," who is perpetually transient.<sup>6</sup> According to Simmel, the stranger is a member of the group in which they live and participate and yet remain distant from other "native" members of the group as their "origins" differ. Importantly, they have not been long-term members of the group. In the context of the architectural profession and in my own translation of the concept to critique architectural networks, strangeness can come about due to differences in architectural breeding, class, race, gender, or ethics. The stranger in architectural circles is someone who has achieved appropriate professional standards but, because they are not bred in the local group, is sometimes perceived as a territorial threat to the dominant group. They often do not have the protection offered by the local group or architectural tribe because they are literally outsiders, subject to isolation and fewer in number. Their difference, as well as their indifference or inability to acculturate with the group, can prohibit them from obtaining real power. Stories about their successes and failures often circulate as gossip. It was the gossip and stories that surrounded Stuart McIntosh that inspired my writing about his work.

A well-established Melbourne architect, McIntosh moved north to Brisbane (Queensland) after winning a national design competition for the Great Hall run by the University of Queensland in 1963. In order to take up the commission, he became a stranger because he was not part of the local architectural tribe. When things go well, this is not necessarily a problem as there is no need for support from a network of established professional friends. However, when things do not go well, strangers without a professional network can be vulnerable. Unfortunately, McIntosh fell out with his client almost from the outset and, because he lacked the support of local professionals, he quickly became marginalized. When his design came in over budget, the university client became more dissatisfied with McIntosh's professional performance. Although McIntosh proposed another design, it was rejected and he was dismissed as architect for the project. While gossip heard in professional circles in Melbourne led me to become inquisitive about McIntosh's Great Hall experience, which I will return to later, my later fieldwork research unraveled a more curious version of events.

In my article "Deserved Exposure,"<sup>7</sup> I describe McIntosh as a member of a forgotten or "lost [Melbourne] tribe." McIntosh was trained at the University

of Melbourne, where he was taught by the prominent Australian modernist Robin Boyd, a descendant of the illustrious Boyd artistic dynasty. As a member of Boyd's architectural tribe, McIntosh accepted and replicated Boyd's architectural design ideologies. In a conversation with McIntosh at his home in 2004, he told me of the deep architectural legacies Boyd imparted to him.<sup>8</sup> Foremost among these was the conviction that architecture should be honest, free of motifs, and unconcealed in false materials, ideas openly discussed by Boyd in his now famous *The Australian Ugliness* (1963).<sup>9</sup> Boyd's "anti-featurist" ideas, McIntosh explained, underpinned his first Great Hall design (1963), and he attributed his loss of the commission to his unwillingness to compromise on these aesthetic ideals.<sup>10</sup> But when in 1963, McIntosh moved 1,100 miles north to Brisbane,<sup>11</sup> he became dissociated from his "anti-featurist" Melbourne roots.

In my chapter "Viva Stirling's Florey Building," prepared for the 2007 DOCOMOMO conference and published in *The Challenge of Change: Dealing with the Legacy of the Modern Movement*,<sup>12</sup> I discuss the complex reasons for preserving and listing the Florey Building in Queens College alongside the undocumented story of the architect-client problems that complicated its procurement. As was the case with McIntosh's, Stirling's design for the Florey Building was a product of his architectural training. Born in Glasgow, Stirling studied architecture from 1945 to 1950 at the University of Liverpool, where he became part of the architectural tribe of Colin Rowe, the renowned British-born American architectural historian. Critical of 1920s European modernist architecture, Rowe analyzed the work of Le Corbusier.<sup>13</sup> On his own and with James Gowan, Stirling continued his critique of Le Corbusier's "rationalism," aiming to advance it within Britain with improved architectural solutions that expanded Rowe's taught architectural philosophy.<sup>14</sup>

In *Big Jim: The Life and Work of James Stirling*,<sup>15</sup> architectural historian Mark Girouard argues that following Le Corbusier's death, Stirling was unofficially declared the "new god" of modern architecture. He was positioned within an elite architectural pedigree through his association with Rowe and Le Corbusier and built a successful international career that was facilitated by a social network of powerful establishment figures. To this day, Stirling remains highly regarded in the psyche of the British establishment despite being known by the mainstream media as "a very naughty boy."<sup>16</sup> Fitting seamlessly into English "lad" culture, Stirling's stereotypical macho behavior—womanizing, drinking with students, etc.—is common knowledge within architectural circles.

While McIntosh and Stirling both moved from one school and region to another and thus shifted architectural tribes, Stirling's association with



Le Corbusier, through Rowe, spoke of a pedigree that appears to have protected Stirling in a way that McIntosh's association with Boyd did not. If McIntosh's move left him vulnerable to gossip that ultimately affected his career, Stirling's career appears to have remained immune to gossip. In fact, local knowledge in England of family secrets about Stirling's rogue behavior only accentuated his status as an architectural hero.

#### Recording "Family Secrets" in Architectural History

Modern architectural history initially reiterated the significance of male modernist "greats" at the expense of their less powerful collaborators. Up until the late 1980s, these histories were generally positive; in-house secrets remained undisclosed publicly. Private conversations that speak of buildings often involve speaking about the personal relations among the project participants, their social networks, and the project procurement "climate." To support her contention that "the secrets of modern architecture are like those of a family,"<sup>17</sup> known inside the family but not outside, Colomina recounts her dinner conversation with some prominent male Spanish architects about their agreement on the unrecognized, seminal influence that German modernist designer Lilly Reich had on the early architecture of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Colomina writes of her surprise that something she had long thought but not dared make public was, among her male peers, a well-known "dirty little secret that we—all architects—keep. Something that we all know, that we all see, but we don't bring ourselves to talk about it."<sup>18</sup> When Colomina wrote this article, almost twenty years ago, it was not common for architectural history to be critical of powerful male architects. It was also not common for architectural historians to rely on gossip among architects as a form of source material.

Colomina told family secrets in modern architectural history as a form of feminist practice to locate the contribution of women who collaborated with and influenced great male architects. Other feminist and activist historians and theoreticians such as Jennifer Bloomer intuitively interrogated "the spaces of institutions and the soft, chummy violence that circulates within them" in order to expose how this violence is "silenced."<sup>19</sup> Bloomer argues that her own writing seeks to make public "the tiniest, nearly invisible, interstitial moments"<sup>20</sup> where institutional violence is permitted to occur in private. However, depending on the subject, the severity of the scandal being exposed, and the reputations of the people involved, a hidden backstory of what actually happened can carry through spoken word.

In the case of McIntosh, rumors about how he lost or might have been "robbed" of the commission circulated in Melbourne architectural circles, the

locale of McIntosh's architectural tribe, for decades. I first heard of McIntosh in the late 1980s in a conversation with friend and office colleague Ron Prisk. At the time, Prisk was doing research on the bank buildings designed by McIntosh between 1954 and 1960.<sup>21</sup> Gossip about McIntosh, a leading bank architect in Melbourne from 1953 to 1963 who vanished from public architectural life after moving to Brisbane, circulated in my office. While it was well known that McIntosh had won the commission in Queensland and moved to Brisbane to procure the project, there was considerable disquiet in Melbourne surrounding his loss of the commission.

Only in 1995, upon returning to Brisbane,<sup>22</sup> did I meet McIntosh in person. Over the course of a year, I visited him regularly in his home studio to research his architectural oeuvre. I had earlier completed my PhD entitled *The Politics of Friends in Modern Architecture 1949–1987*,<sup>23</sup> inspired in part by *The Favored Circle*.<sup>24</sup> Initially, I had wanted to write a PhD on McIntosh, but my then Director of Studies, a former professor at the University of Sydney from yet another Australian architectural tribe, had concerns about McIntosh's significance as the basis for a doctoral dissertation. Because I had access to McIntosh after completion of my PhD, I began to interview those involved in his story, the first being James Birrell.

Architect James Birrell studied with McIntosh at the University of Melbourne under Boyd and had also moved to Brisbane to take up the post of Brisbane City Architect, later becoming University of Queensland Staff Architect. He described McIntosh as a "gentle man."<sup>25</sup> My own interactions with McIntosh confirmed Birrell's statement. McIntosh was a modest, well read, intellectual architectural practitioner and theorist: astute, critical, and articulate. He was generous in sharing stories about his architectural training, career, and practice. Through my visits I became friends with him. When our conversations became more relaxed, McIntosh agreed to be filmed in his studio. I elected to test the boundaries of writing architectural history through documentary storytelling rather than conventional textual architectural history because the medium could include physical and vocal expressions—voices, sighs, gasps—of interviewees.<sup>26</sup> I had also become acquainted with scriptwriter and editor Shaun Charles, with whom I was interested in collaborating. At the time, I was unfamiliar with methods used in filmmaking or oral history, having had no experience with either, but I had already undertaken oral interviews with other local architects.<sup>27</sup> From my interview experience, I was still dissatisfied with how a transcript removed the personality and mannerisms of the interviewee, reducing key expressions of voice and emotion to extracts and words on a page. I wanted the spectator of the film to experience the story just as I had, firsthand through the voices and mannerisms

of McIntosh and others I interviewed, with my voice as historian/narrator in the background.

Initially, I interviewed McIntosh to understand his biography and architectural oeuvre. When I first mentioned the Great Hall, he hesitated in his response. In his measured explanation, McIntosh reaffirmed the rumors about fairly winning the competition, being ostracized by the Brisbane set, and losing the commission despite his best efforts. At the outset, I recorded his responses as handwritten notes but after he agreed to be videoed, the record of events was documented in film. McIntosh's first informal oral account appears to have been his most genuine, though his filmed, more formal answers to my questions (which I had given him beforehand) corroborated the sequence of events. No matter how many times we discussed the project, McIntosh's account of this sequence never changed.

To ascertain more information beyond McIntosh's account, I searched the University of Queensland archives to locate others who participated in the competition in the hope of interviewing them. In the archive, I found transcripts with the names of three key players who still lived in Brisbane—architects James Birrell, Robin Gibson, and James Maccormick<sup>28</sup>—and approached them for interviews. Birrell and Maccormick welcomed the idea of being interviewed more than did than Gibson. My husband, Andrew Dawson, was at the time working for Gibson as a site architect. This may have contributed to Gibson's eventually agreeing to an informal conversation with me about the project. Birrell, who served as University Architect at the University of Queensland from 1961 to 1966 and as a member of the Buildings and Grounds committee for the client, provided the most detail about the professional and personal impact that losing the commission had on McIntosh, including McIntosh's experiencing a breakdown. It is unclear why McIntosh stayed in Brisbane rather than returning to his own architectural tribe where his reputation was still strong, although he had a young family and may not have wanted to relocate again so soon. McIntosh's relocation to Brisbane and decision to stay resulted in his evolution from a successful architect in a Melbourne tribe to a peripheral architect doing small-scale projects. But one architect's loss can be another's gain.

In the archive, I learned that six years after McIntosh was dismissed, architect Robin Gibson—Brisbane-born and locally trained—was appointed outright to design the Great Hall, which was then renamed the James and Mary Emelia Mayne Centre, or Mayne Hall (1973). In our only informal conversation on the project, which was not filmed, Gibson relayed his fond memories of the procurement of Mayne Hall, a building he produced in collaboration with and under the patronage of the newly appointed Vice Chancellor Zelma

Cowen.<sup>29</sup> For Gibson, building Mayne Hall was as much a story of the production of one of his most important buildings as it was the story of his close and long friendship with Cowen. Gibson spoke with ease until I broached the subject of McIntosh and his Great Hall competition design. Gibson told me he had personally welcomed McIntosh to Brisbane and had been one in a group of local architects who took the newcomer out to lunch. He revealed that he had also helped McIntosh purchase a house in Brisbane.<sup>30</sup> In fact, McIntosh's house was next door to Gibson's. Gibson's verbal testimony about how he treated and helped McIntosh was later corroborated by McIntosh.<sup>31</sup>

When I asked Gibson how he came to receive the commission—I learned from my archival research that Gibson had entered the 1963 Great Hall competition but had not received a place—he explained he was unsure but thought that one of the competition judges, Robin Boyd, was a close friend of Cowen's and had recommended him.<sup>32</sup> While McIntosh was one of Boyd's tribe, Boyd's friendship with Cowen was arguably stronger and more powerful in deciding on the architect of Mayne Hall. I could see how Gibson's modern design for the Mayne Hall would have appealed to Boyd since it resembled in many ways the architectural form and minimalist style of McIntosh's original design. Soon after, I secured an interview with Cowen, which Gibson had recommended, to hear his version of the story. Then director general of Australia, Cowen generously offered me the opportunity to have an informal conversation about the project. In our talk, he verified all that Gibson had told me.

But Maccormick, the University Architect appointed after Birrell, saw Gibson's success in a different way.<sup>33</sup> He described the social network and story behind Gibson being *given*, rather than *winning*, the Mayne Hall commission. According to Maccormick, it was private socialization among prospective architect, client representative, and client that happened outside the office that led to Gibson's obtaining the commission. This was the family secret that he conveyed to me. Maccormick explained how he saw Gibson socially after they met and that Gibson invited him to his home regularly, adding, "Gibson, as you know, is a go-getter."<sup>34</sup> Maccormick claimed that he introduced Gibson to Cowen and stated, "As soon as that first introduction took place... Cowen... took a shine to Gibson and said, 'Okay, I want him to be my architect for Mayne Hall.'" Maccormick explained:

To what extent they talked about design, as they may well have done over dinner at the Cowens' quite independently of me, and the rest of the University, I have no idea. But it's highly likely, I can imagine, Zelma, who raised all the money anyway for the construction of Mayne Hall... was having intimate discussion off the campus with

Robin.... That's all good stuff. A close relationship between a patron and the artist is the way it should be.<sup>35</sup>

In my documentary film *Building Mayne Hall* (2004), I outline just how important the commission was to Gibson's career. After Cowen found all the money for the project, he and Gibson successfully collaborated to build Mayne Hall, after which Gibson was given two other prominent University of Queensland commissions by Cowen: the Central Library (1973) and the Biological Sciences Library (late 1970s). These university buildings, along with other major public buildings, including the Queensland Art Gallery (1975) and the Queensland Cultural Centre (1982), contributed to Gibson's being named Queensland of the Year in 1982, winning the Sir Zelman Cowen Award for Architecture in 1982, earning the Canberra Medallion in 1982, attaining the Order of Australia in 1983, and securing the Australian Institute of Architects' Gold Medal in 1989. Having the support of an influential client and friend like Cowen significantly bolstered Gibson's professional reputation.

After producing *Building Mayne Hall* in 2004, I screened the film at a conference held at University College London in 2004 before moving to Oxford in 2005 to take up a new academic post. Because I had uncovered considerable material from my conversations with McIntosh and built up my own extensive archive on the architect, I published an article on his bank buildings in the Australian journal *Fabrications: Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand*.<sup>36</sup> My interest in using documentary film to record architectural history led me to publish further articles on my filmmaking practice in *The Journal of Architecture* (2005) and in *Critical Architecture* (2007). However, soon after, my filmmaking practice was put on the back burner as my relocation to England meant that I could no longer collaborate with Charles.

In Oxford, I took an interest in the university buildings of other modern architects but was most fascinated by James Stirling's Florey Building.<sup>37</sup> I spent time taking my architecture students to the building or going on my own. While viewing the building, I spoke to members of the Buildings and Grounds staff (not architects), who shared with me a number of private stories about why the college had lost affection for Stirling's building. These stories had circulated privately since the building's completion in 1971. Through such gossip, I discovered a family secret concerning the building's drawn-out procurement process and a collapse in Stirling's relationship with his Queen's College client. This was arguably withheld for reasons of discretion by the Queens College as Stirling was considered a world-famous architect at the time. Just as I had been intuitively drawn to research

McIntosh's work, I wondered if this hearsay about the Florey Building was gossip and visited the university archive to locate the names of key players in the project.

Most architects who come to Oxford visit and admire Stirling's Florey Building. We are taught that he is one of the most famous and reputable architects in our field and had Stirling been alive at the time during my research on the Florey Building, I would have surely tried to make contact to hear his version of events. As he was no longer living, I sought out others to interview who were involved in the project. While I found the names of the project architect, Roy Cameron; members of the Building Committee that chose Stirling's design; members of the Buildings and Grounds Committee; and the foreman for the building contractor, W. H. Chivers & Sons, I could not locate any of these individuals. Unable to obtain oral testimonies, I reverted to relying on written source material in the university library archive. The popular architectural press offered abundant flattering publicity that contrasted markedly to the client's account of their experience of working with Stirling. I quickly realized from one document in the archive that the client for the Florey Building did not value it as highly as the British architectural establishment, and so I began to study Stirling's professional performance in relation to the project.

The document in the archive that records the client's experience in the procurement of the building is the unpublished report entitled *The Florey Building: A Narrative Account of the Project*, written in 1981, ten years after the Florey Building was completed.<sup>38</sup> This uncommissioned, self-initiated narrative account was written by Arthur A. Williams, bursar at the Queen's College from 1958 to 1977. Williams had been a member of the Buildings and Grounds Committee that selected and appointed Stirling as architect in 1964, and he worked closely with Stirling on the project. Compiled to record the undocumented failures that plagued the construction of the Florey Building from the client's perspective, I speculate this document was likely written in response to Stirling's being awarded the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 1981—the same year that the report was written—to demonstrate an opposing image of Stirling. As a client representative, Williams describes a record of events that corresponded with the gossip I had heard. I am of the opinion that Williams's account formally documents Stirling's professional behavior and was produced as a record for others to know what actually took place.

As Williams tells it, the project was beset by a number of significant problems. The first challenge was a site change from that used in the original design, that delayed the project's commencement date. A second obstacle was the inability of the project's junior architect, Roy Cameron, to make on-site



decisions—Stirling had to be consulted to make a decision even when he was teaching overseas or working on projects elsewhere, further stringing out the construction process. A third strain on the architect-contractor relationship was Stirling's tiling and glazing specifications, which had to be changed after failure of the initial system specified. The combined effects of these challenges led to an overrun of seventeen months and a 50 percent cost escalation. In all, the project was completed on a sour note.<sup>39</sup> Legal action was taken by Queen's College against Stirling's office for unprofessional practice,<sup>40</sup> resulting in an out-of-court settlement of £25,000 to the college. The story of the procurement of the Florey Building ends with a client traumatized by a "disastrous"<sup>41</sup> experience and so unhappy with the quality of the final building<sup>42</sup> that he encouraged the university provost to stipulate that Stirling should not "have any part in any new university building."<sup>43</sup> This information was not public knowledge but rather was a family secret kept within English university circles.

In Australia, my research on McIntosh was condoned and supported by those in the architectural establishment, who willingly published it in academic publications primarily, I suspect, because I was undertaking important biographical research on a little-known but worthy modernist Australian architect. In England, my history of Stirling's client relationship, which I presented at conferences and published in books,<sup>44</sup> was met with antagonism, mostly by former students and devout followers of Stirling. After receiving what can only be described as denigrating emails by a handful of now older, well-established, powerful architectural practitioners and historians in Britain, my chapter was rejected for the book *Jim Stirling and the Red Trilogy: Three Radical Buildings* (2010).<sup>45</sup> Soon after, I ceased my critique of powerful architectural establishment figures and changed my research trajectory to focus on alternative modes of architectural scholarship in film and feminist practice. Only through the encouragement of the editors of this volume, who invited me to reflect on my use of gossip and oral interviews in writing architectural histories, and with my maturing in architectural thinking and confidence, did I realize the importance of my engagement with gossip and rumor in my historiographic practice.

### Gossip as Evidence for Modern Architectural History

How I came to learn of and then relay McIntosh's and Stirling's histories of the problematic issues of university buildings was, by accident, through gossip and rumor that was shared innocently. Gossip led me to use modes of feminist historiographic practice to expose family secrets about McIntosh and Stirling that were formerly unknown to the general public. Following in the

mode of Colomina and Bloomer, I exposed the behavior and actions of select prominent male architects to allow us to better see "heroic" architects such as Gibson and Stirling, warts and all. In my historiographic practice, gossip is used discerningly as a valuable method of feminist activist research to bring into question the enactment of power relations between dominant and marginal figures and their networks and between a powerful insider and a powerless outsider.

In *Architecture from the Outside*, Elizabeth Grosz presents the argument that "to be outside (something) is to afford oneself the possibility of a perspective, to look upon this inside, which is made difficult, if not impossible, from the inside."<sup>46</sup> Grosz acknowledges that this reflective distance comes at "a cost: to see what cannot be seen is to be unable to experience this inside in its own terms," and argues that "something is lost—the immediate intimacy of an inside position; and something is gained—the ability to critically evaluate that position and to possibly compare it with others."<sup>47</sup> Following Grosz's logic and in relation to what is presented here, historical reflections produced from material outside the conventional historiographic sources, such as gossip, offer alternative perspectives of the inside that are otherwise not possible.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to operating outside disciplinary conventions of suitable source material for constructing architectural history, it is important to acknowledge the advantage of the distance of being outside local architectural circles and the temporal distance from the actual events. Gossip can circulate more easily when the person being gossiped about has passed away. It can be easier to see unmediated correspondence if the historian can look at letters in an archive. Constructing histories produced at a later time can allow the historian to present damaging material about an influential architect more easily and, arguably, without or with less fear of backlash. Most importantly here is the original contribution that the use of gossip offers to redefine the research methods used in architectural historiography.

Through challenging the limits of traditional evidencing and research methods in architectural history to incorporate the use of gossip, my research praxis has brought into question the scholar's position and obligations "within a complex web of relationships, loyalties and demands."<sup>49</sup> In terms of the labor of oral historiography, American activists, oral historians, and authors Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai contend that feminist scholars who are usually "impeded by traditional historical methodology" can choose to "collect oral narratives" to build inclusivity for the outsider or the stranger.<sup>50</sup> In *In a Different Voice*, Carol Gilligan, Berger Gluck, and Patai argue that "the phenomenon of feminist oral history may thus provide support for Gilligan's

hypothesis that women's moral development in this society leads them to value "attachment that creates and sustains the human community"<sup>51</sup> rather than separation and detachment, as men characteristically do.<sup>52</sup> Because language and communication between the narrator and the listener is shaped by gender and race, women researchers are able to engage in and value different conversations and source materials so that, in this instance, gossip can take on a new positive role in historiography. This mode of working allows the "opportunity to document the experience that lies outside the boundaries of acceptability."<sup>53</sup> In this way of speaking about buildings by listening, absorbing, and ratifying gossip and rumor, I am able to include stories of strangers or insider/outside, such as McIntosh and the clients of the Florey Building, who would normally be excluded from traditional architectural history accounts within the disciplinary discourse. Histories that had only circulated orally through gossip and rumor were, through my desire to corroborate facts through interview conversations and archival material, concretized within conventional textual historiography and less conventional audiovisual history documentary.

By valuing gossip as a potential source of evidence for constructing new architectural histories, I have also been able to expose how losing favor with a client can be career and life changing for some architectural practitioners but not for others. This, in turn, accentuates the need for social network support from one's architectural tribe to overcome adversity. In the case of Stirling, I unveiled weak professional practices, including arrogant disregard for client requests and poor project management as documented in Williams's *The Florey Building: A Narrative Account of the Project*. Issues of opportunism, competitive spirit, coercive architectural charm, social bias, sociability, and rivalry are as important factors in building and career development as the design style in which the architect works.

The types of cities and buildings that are realized are the direct consequence of positive and productive relationships between influential architectural tribespeople and their clients. For every history written that perpetuates the myth that buildings are produced by noble, talented, heroic, and ethical architects, without moments and degrees of political rivalry and upheaval, there are equivalent lessons to be learned by architectural practitioners about professional failure. Professor of English literature and prolific feminist author of academic studies Carolyn Heilbrun urges "biographers to search for the choices, the pain, the stories" that lie beyond the "constraints of acceptable discussion."<sup>54</sup> Following in the growing swirl of brave public oral testimonies that has created the recent Me Too movement in many sectors of work worldwide, feminist whisper networks in architecture provide an

opportunity to expose professional misbehavior. In addition, by exposing the messy interiority of architectural production, architects are given the opportunity to reflect on and improve what ethical practice and architectural professionalism can mean today and in the future.

## Notes

- 1 Stephanie Schnurr, *Exploring Professional Communication: Language in Action* (London: Routledge, 2013).
- 2 Beatriz Colomina, "Collaborations: The Private Life of Modern Architecture," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58, 3 (1999 September): 462–71.
- 3 Reynier Banham, "A Black Box: The Secret Profession of Architecture," in *A Critic Writes: Essays by Reynier Banham* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 292–99.
- 4 Banham, "A Black Box," 292–99.
- 5 Igea Troiani, "An Architectural Genogram: Writing Architectural History Based on the Transfer of Social Capital," *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* 5, no. 7 (2010): 347–64.
- 6 Georg Simmel, *Sociologie* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1908), 143–50.
- 7 Igea Troiani, "Deserved Exposure," *Fabrications: Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand* 16, no. 2 (2006): 28–43.
- 8 Stuart McIntosh, interview with author, Brisbane, August 16, 2004.
- 9 Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, foreword by John Betjeman (Mitcham, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1963).
- 10 This point was reiterated to me in a conversation with James Birrell.
- 11 Philip Goad, "One of the Lost Tribe: James Birrell and that Other Tradition," in *Birrell: Work from the office of James Birrell*, eds. Andrew Wilson and John Macarthur (Melbourne: NMBW Publications, 1997), 23.
- 12 Igea Troiani, "Viva Stirling's Florey Building," in *The Challenge of Change: Dealing with the Legacy of the Modern Movement*, eds. Dirk Van den Heuvel, Maarten Mesman, Wido Quist, and Bert Lemmens (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2008), 121–26.
- 13 Colin Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa, and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1976).
- 14 James Stirling, "Le Corbusier's Chapel and the Crisis of Rationalism," *The Architectural Review* 119 (March 1956): 160–61.
- 15 Mark Girouard, *Big Jim: The Life and Work of James Stirling* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998), 92.
- 16 Rowan Moore, "James Stirling: Visionary Architect, and a Very Naughty Boy," *The Observer*, March 20, 2011, accessed January 14, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/mar/20/james-stirling>.
- 17 Colomina, "Collaborations," 462–71.
- 18 Colomina, "Collaborations," 462.
- 19 Jennifer Bloomer, "Not Now," *Assemblage*, no. 20, *Violence, Space* (April 1993): 18–19.
- 20 Bloomer, "Not Now," 19.
- 21 Ron Prisk, "Malvern Bank: Stuart MacIntosh [sic]" (undergraduate paper, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, 1988); Ron Prisk, "An Architecture of Critical Deviance: Stuart MacIntosh [sic] and the ES&A Bank 1954–1960," (BArch thesis, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, 1988).
- 22 I was born in Queensland and studied my first architecture degree in Brisbane (1985–1989), where I was taught mostly by men. Afterward, I moved to study my

second degree in architecture at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (1989–1993). My influential teachers at RMIT were Karen Burns, Harriet Edquist, Peter Kohane, Rosemary Burne, and Stephen O'Connor.

23 Igea Troiani, *The Politics of Friends in Modern Architecture 1949–1987* (unpublished PhD thesis, The Queensland University of Technology, 2005).

24 Garry Stevens, *The Favored Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1998).

25 James Birrell, interview with author, Brisbane, May 21, 2004.

26 *Building Mayne Hall*, copyright 2004, Produced by HAPPENinc, research/narration/script by Igea Troiani; film/editing/music by Shaun Charles.

27 Igea Troiani, "From Bauhaus to the Queensland House: Legacies of Hayes and Scott," in *Hayes & Scott Post-war Houses*, ed. Andrew Wilson (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2005), 92–101.

28 James McCormick MBE graduated from the University of Melbourne in 1950 and was Associate Architect for Grounds, Romberg, and Boyd. Roy Grounds, Frederick Romberg, and Robin Boyd were in practice from 1953 to 1962 and won many key commissions in Victoria, including additions to the National Gallery of Victoria (1959–1962).

29 My conversation with Gibson took place at Gibson's office premises at 130 Mary Street, Brisbane on March 31, 2004. Cowen was Vice-Chancellor at the University of Queensland from 1970 to 1977.

30 Author conversation with Gibson, 2004.

31 This was confirmed by McIntosh in our conversation at his home on June 7, 2004.

32 Boyd was McIntosh and Birrell's second-year lecturer. Cowen commissioned Grounds, Romberg, and Boyd to design an unrealized law school at the University of Melbourne, 1953, and his residence at Kew, 1956–59. Cowen refers to Boyd as his "friend" in Zelman Cowen,

"Homage to Robin Boyd," *Architecture in Australia* 62, no. 2 (April 1973): 54.

33 On July 2, 2004, I interviewed Cowen in his Treasury Place office in East Melbourne. Cowen agreed to have the interview tape recorded but not filmed.

34 McCormick, *Building Mayne Hall*, filmed in McCormick's residence on September 3, 2004.

35 McCormick, *Building Mayne Hall*.

36 Troiani, "Deserved Exposure," 28–43.

37 During this period I also began research on the Smithsons' Garden Building at St. Hilda's College.

38 Arthur Williams, *The Florey Building: A Narrative Account of the Project*, Queen's College Archive, 2W. 135, 1–29.

39 There was no evidence in the popular architectural press at the time that I found to suggest that Queens College's successful suit was made public.

40 Williams, *The Florey Building*, 26.

41 Williams, *The Florey Building*, 29.

42 Refer Igea Troiani, "Stirling's Worth: The Quality of the Florey Building, Oxford," in *Quality out of Control: Standards for Measuring Architecture*, eds. Allison Dutoit, Jo Odgers, and Adam Sharr (London: Routledge, 2010), 137–47.

43 Letter by Provost Lord Blake, FBA, JP, to Folliot, The Registrar, The University Registry, Clarendon Building, Broad Street, Oxford, June 26, 1972.

44 My research on Stirling was presented at the "Quality" conference at the Welsh School of Architecture at the University of Cardiff in 2007 and at the 10th International Docomomo conference "The Challenge of Change" in Rotterdam in 2008. It was published in Troiani, "Stirling's Worth," 137–147; and Troiani, "Viva Stirling's Florey building," 121–126.

45 Alan Berman and Quintin Lake, eds., *Jim Stirling and the Red Trilogy: Three Radical Buildings* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2010).

46 Elizabeth Grosz, introduction to *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on*

*Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), xv.

47 Grosz, introduction to *Architecture from the Outside*, xv.

48 Grosz, xv.

49 Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 2.

50 Berger Gluck and Patai, eds., *Women's Words*, 9.

51 Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 156.

52 Berger Gluck and Patai, eds., *Women's Words*, 5.

53 Anderson and Jack in Berger Gluck and Patai, eds., *Women's Words*, 11.

54 Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1988), 30–31.