

## A living archive | Possibilities for/through the DEGW archive

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What is a 'living archive'? The symposium called for an exploration of the possibilities for the DEGW archive as a 'living archive'. One of the ways in which the archive can be conceived as 'living', is through its possibilities to connect to current issues of built environment and provoke new challenges. Take for example this quote from a paper by Frank Duffy, from Frank Duffy Collection, titled "Briefing in the Private Sector" presented at a Building Research Establishment symposium in 1981.

*"Architectural Research in the Universities should study how people use buildings and above all how to measure the capacity of various building forms for different kinds of use. This means partly opening out architectural research to Social Scientists but much more importantly inventing measures of building capacity, **ways of describing** not just how buildings are built but how buildings can be used."*(p.6, emphasis added)<sup>1</sup>

A building, in DEGW's worldview, is not static. The different elements of a building change at differing rates. The vocabulary of 'shell, services, scenery, sets' offers one way of describing how buildings are used. The need for ways of describing buildings in use immediately resonated with me. I have been influenced by the academic field of Science and Technology studies, where Bruno Latour and Alena Yaneva<sup>2</sup> have problematised the static nature of buildings and made a case for conceptualizing buildings in flux. Using the analogy of photography to study flight of a gull, they posit the need for theoretical tools to study transformations of buildings.

In my PhD research, I explored the vocabulary of 'enactment' inspired by Annemarie Mol<sup>3</sup>. It enabled to describe a library building as made and re-made in the practices of using the building. Such a building consisted of heterogeneous materials in addition to the physicality of the building. With this vocabulary, tables, users and their possessions such as laptops and bags, staff, library policies, comparative statistics of academic library buildings, student halls, and so on were brought together into the discussion. The argument developed in my thesis has led me to question the politics of casting and representing a user and the pop-up exhibition curated today aims to explore a related question through the DEGW archive - 'what is a client?'. Thirty six years later, Frank's suggestion to develop ways of describing how buildings are used seems so relevant. This is how I imagine the archive to be 'living'; learning from the archive to respond and reframe current concerns.

This kind of learning also involves asking new questions or reinstating old questions. One such question, which puzzles me the most, is the separation between research and practice. While Frank

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Duffy (1981) "Briefing in the Private Sector". Paper presented at the Building Research Establishment Symposium *Briefing and Initial Design*, 03 February 1981. Frank Duffy Collection, University of Reading Special Collections.

<sup>2</sup> Latour, B. and Yaneva, A. (2008). Give Me A Gun and I will Make All the Buildings Move: An ANT's view on Architecture. In R. Geiser (ed.) *Explorations in Architecture: Teaching, Design, Research*. Basel: Birkhäuser, 80–89.

<sup>3</sup> Mol, A. (2002). *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*. Durham: Duke University Press.

suggested architectural researchers to take up the task of developing ways of describing the buildings in use, he had a different suggestion for architects in practice:

*“Architects in practice must learn how to listen more closely to their clients, how to cope with the phenomena of organisational politics and with the expanding client, how to involve the user in the design process without ceding any control over budget and timetable. This new approach involves a kind of jujitsu – an aggressive step forward taking architecture deep into the client’s decision making, into the board room, combined with a new humility, a novel willingness to open our decision processes to all users.” (p.6)*

However, Frank has also lamented the consequences of division of labour between practice and research<sup>4</sup>. But more importantly, he has suggested the criticality of relevance, of both architects and researchers, to users and clients:

*“This is my final point: contact with real users and real clients with real purposes in real contexts is critical in the conduct of architectural research. ... In my world clients and users are both drivers and audience. They provide the motive, the matter, the money and the means. Above all, their interest, intelligence and involvement are essential to keeping both Architects and Researchers thinking together.”(p.10)<sup>5</sup>*

How might then we undertake responsive research and practice? The archive enlivens as a site for such exploration. What worked and not worked in multi-client studies? Who/what are the constituencies of ‘Supply’ and ‘Demand’? How can DEGW methods be developed further to study buildings in use<sup>6</sup>? What is the role of built environment in dispersed yet located work, carried out with ubiquitous yet uneven access to technology, in ambidextrous organisations oscillating between exploration and exploitation? I recall John Worthington’s point from the DEGW Foundation Lecture last year at the University of Reading – we are living in a world of paradoxes.

The contributions to this symposium have opened an exchange between research and practice. The contributors are situated on the continuum between these two positions. The two positions are indeed burdened with different objectives<sup>7</sup>. Research interests and practical concerns are all interwoven within these accounts, along with personal associations and life journeys. These contributions have not just opened up a dialogue around the archive, but in turn, they will enrich the archive and make it live.

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<sup>4</sup> Frank Duffy (2008) Forum Linking theory back to practice, Building Research & Information, 36:6, pp.655-658.

<sup>5</sup> Duffy, F. (2005). Research , practice and architectural knowledge. Retrieved May 25, 2016, from <https://www.architecture.com/Files/RIBAProfessionalServices/ResearchAndDevelopment/Symposium/FrankDuffy.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> DEGW design methods exhibition, based on the DEGW Archive, was curated on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2016 at the University of Reading. The exhibition unravelled the development of the methods by analysing project reports and linking them to the two conceptual models of DEGW: ‘Supply and Demand’ and ‘4S’.

<sup>7</sup> A vivid description of DEGW’s work at the interface of research and practice discussing the conflicts between these two positions can be found in Martin Symes, Frank Duffy, Peter Ellis (1985) Research and Practice: A Case History, Environment and Behaviour, Volume 17, number 1, January 1985, Frank Duffy Collection, University of Reading Special Collections.