

KNESS

BUILDING
TOWARDS AN
ARCHITECTURE OF
EXPLORATIVE
DIVERGENCE

By Pieter Mathews

NOT JUST
ANOTHER
BRICK IN THE WALL

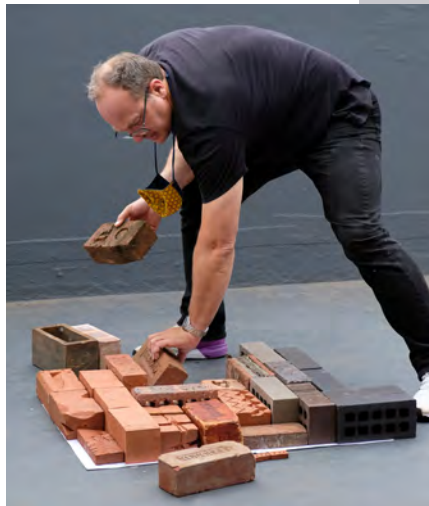
The School of Architecture at the University of the Free State introduced a new practice-based PhD with specialisation in design in 2018; a first for South Africa and the continent. What differentiates this programme from a conventional PhD, is that the candidate must demonstrate findings discovered in their oeuvre, distil the essence of their work to transform their practices, whilst crowning the research with an exhibition. In my case, three core divergencies (curation, sculpture, and cinematic architectural choreography) were the lenses used as practical application of explorative divergence (E-D). The theories of narrative depth and propositional density buttressed the study.

Whilst walking to work one morning and questioning why I was pursuing my PhD, the infamous lyric written by architecture dropout Roger Waters of Pink Floyd popped into my head: 'We don't need no education'. When the song was released in 1979, it was banned in South Africa under the strict censorship laws of the time. My friends and I, however, obtained pirated cassettes and listened to the line 'We don't need no thought control' on loop. While the first few lyrics were of no help (albeit explorative divergence is open-ended), my 'Aha!' moment was sparked by the title. This catalytic thought made me take a closer look at the brick: can a mundane brick or brick composition articulate our work?

Bricks curated as metaphors for recurring themes in our work include:

The following example illustrates (1) the curation of in-between spaces, (2) the notion of randomness, and (3) the composition of facades, of buildings designed for art, and of building complexes.

Curating a cover



When one considers the brick as (1) building block, (2) door stop, (3) paper weight, (4) protest weapon, etc., its propositional density becomes quite high. We aim to increase propositional density in our designs. E.g. a retaining wall can simultaneously act as a podium, planter, stairs, seating, and much more. What if a brick is placed on a pedestal and curated as part of an exhibition? Louis Kahn supposedly remarked, 'Even a brick wants to be something.' My thesis topic, explorative divergence, led me to the epiphany: my exhibition would be more than 'just another brick in the wall'.

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The collection I identified and categorised three types of bricks for the exhibition: archaeographic, theoretical (narrative depth and propositional density), and interpretative. This specific interpretative brick represents and alludes to the sculptural quality of our work.



Clay brick compositions became metaphors illustrating the recurring themes discovered in the oeuvre of Mathews and Associates Architects. These themes were extracted from my three selected core competencies: curation, sculpture, and cinematic architectural choreography. These divergencies show how tacit knowledge has informed our oeuvre and opened a way towards an architecture of explorative divergence.

The serendipity in this discovery is that I collected bricks on all my travels and even collected sculptures referencing bricks, not to mention that bricks were ubiquitous during my walk, surrounding me on all sides on route to the office. The brick exhibition made perfect sense, as it was adhocist to the core.



A reverse touchstone
The purpose of this object or light is to summarise the exhibition with one object.

During our raw-brick carving workshop I created a lamp that encompasses several of the theoretical concepts and divergencies as well as the core competencies explored in this study. The brick lamp was designed to be a functional object and sculpture in one, fulfilling the notions of narrative depth and propositional density. The unfired bricks were supplied and fired afterwards by Corobrik.