TANGIBLE - INTANGIBLE HERITAGE(S) – DESIGN, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CRITIQUES ON THE PAST, PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

• Paper / Proposal Title:
From Urban Idea to Museum Piece

• Author(s) Name:
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• Presentation Method. I would like to:
  i. present in person (with/without a written paper)

• Abstract (300 words):
The V&A’s acquisition of a section of Robin Hood Gardens, complete with front and back facades, will motivate new thinking and research into this highly experimental period of British architectural and urban history.¹
After years of heated debate about the qualities of the housing estate Robin Hood Gardens, designed by Alison & Peter Smithson, the complex was finally demolished last fall.
The attempts to have the buildings listed failed, and the housing estate reached a life span of only 45 years. That is, if we think of Robin Hood Gardens as a concrete, physical

¹ Dr Neil Bingham, Curator of Contemporary Architectural Collections at the Victoria & Albert Museum, quoted at https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/robin-hood-gardens (accessed January 22nd 2018)
phenomenon. But we could also think of this contested piece of architecture in a different way: as one of several representations of a particular idea about housing and urbanism whose presence reaches well beyond the period 1972 to 2017. In this presentation it will be argued that the demolition of Robin Hood Gardens and the V&A’s recovery of a fragment of the building have safeguarded the project in a way the proposed listing could never have done. The bulldozing secured the project a place in the virtual realm: a realm of architectural visions and conceptions that differs from the physical, economical and social context of a built work. The argument is based on the understanding that representations form an important part of architectural heritage. Representations possess a particular power that is different from the presence of physical buildings but no less valuable as architectural “matter”. The detached, provisional and projective character of representations allows us to treat them not only as precisely articulated visions of an architect’s ideas but also as a flexible and transformable material that can inform and inspire future practices of architecture.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Karen Olesen (born 1962) is an architect and since 2004 associate professor at the Aarhus School of Architecture in Denmark where she teaches building design and architecture theory. She is currently the program coordinator of the Aarhus School of Architecture’s teaching programme Territories, Architecture and Transformation. Her research focus is the unsteady relationship between programme and form thematised as open architecture and architecture on architecture. This research is developed in close connection with studio teaching. Furthermore, she has written and lectured about the architecture of Team X and has a special interest in the work of Alison and Peter Smithson.