Instigating change in social and professional environments as a way of creating situations for architectural practice

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Instigating change in social and professional environments as a way of creating situations for architectural practice

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

James McAdam
15 August 2014

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Introduction

This dissertation is a record of research undertaken on the Practice Research Program at RMIT University, over a period of three and a half years (April 2011–August 2014), which included participation in Practice Research Symposia (PRS) in Ghent and Barcelona. The title of this research is ‘Biculturalism in Architectural Practice: Instigating change in social and professional environments’, as a way of creating situations for architectural practice’.

The work is a reflection of 20 years of architectural practice between two countries (Britain and Russia) by two architects, James McAdam and Tanya Kalinina. It seeks to understand the workings of the bicultural practice McAdam Architects. Through our research, we explored our practice’s realisation of a diverse body of work, teaching and educational programs, and strategic activities to promote the architectural profession.

A large part of the dissertation relates to our actual practice and is common to both partners, thus demonstrating the joint underpinnings of our work. Other chapters relate specifically to areas of individual interest and research. These chapters are identified as common or individual in the contents page.

The research is organised into chapters, which can in turn be grouped under four general headings:

1. The bicultural practice: how two cultures can be linked through architectural practice
2. A reflection on the body of works and practice activities
3. The process of practice: essence of design, collaboration and role in the profession
4. Instigating change in social and professional environments

The bicultural practice

In these chapters we investigate the workings of biculturalism within the specific context of our practice. We imagine the practice as a microcosm of biculturalism where two individuals (Tanya and James) from two countries (Britain and Russia), have learned and adapted to each other’s cultures to practice architecture for many years, as one entity.

We reflect on how this interaction began with a student exchange at the time of Perestroika, and how this developed into a scenario we referred to as ‘the stranger and the host’. We describe specific bicultural events – the Project Imagination seminar, the Time for Change exhibition, and a number of collaborative projects

McAdam Architects, Diagram of PhD Dissertation Structure, Practice Research Symposium Five, in Ghent, April, 2013. This diagram shows the individual chapters of the partners, Tanya Kalinina to the left, James McAdam to the right, meshing with common chapters in the centre.

These chapters are identified in the Contents, marked (TK, JM) for common ones, and (JM) for individual ones.

For McAdam the research chapters are situated at the beginning of the dissertation, with a reflective study of context following.

For Kalinina the contextual chapters are deliberately situated at the beginning of the dissertation, to set the scene for the actual research.
1. Introduction

In architecture and education, and examine how these initiatives contributed to the development of the bicultural practice.

As part of this reflection, we consider the traits and benefits of biculturalism as a form of international exchange with local context. We argue that the bicultural practice can overcome both the banality of global practice and the restraints of local context, by being able to view from a distance and focus in close, combining cross-cultural knowledge with specific constraints of location and cultural context.

Reflection on the body of work

Structured analysis of the practice's work itself was essential for drawing broader conclusions. In our research, the reflection on 20 years of work began by mapping practice activities against time, political contexts, and social events. We used and developed this Practice Map throughout the research program as a tool for overview – to give clarity in complexities through identifying key moments, links, and developments. This overview revealed distinct streams of practice: strategic initiatives, competitions, and built projects.

These discoveries lead us to devise the Diagram of Endeavours, a tool for gauging works and activities in terms of intellectual satisfaction. We use this tool to measure our enjoyment of specific projects and to understand their position in the endeavours of practice.

The Practice Map also revealed the diversity and variety of architecture produced, instigating a study of architectural components evident in the work. We then investigated how key works can be very different while remaining clearly part of the same family. I plotted our projects and components in matrices in attempt to understand any patterns or relationships.

To establish a clearer picture of the drivers and methods engaged in the architecture, we dedicated a portion of the research to a detailed investigation of three seminal key projects: the Trubnaya Office Building, the Larch House, and the Univermag department store. We asked whether these fundamentally different projects are connected by common attributes, and whether there is a set of guiding principles informing the design process.

The process of practice

From the off set, our aim has been to understand the process of practice – the essence of design, the workings of the partnership, and our role in the profession. This begins with a series of conversations relying on intense collaboration between the partners. The main purpose of this is to establish the fundamental concern of the practice, which we identify as the creation and safeguarding of a principle idea or concept.

The interaction between the partners is the key to this articulation, which operates through the granting of a license to practice. We also explore how and where the process of practice takes place. We examine why the practice operates in this way and how it relates to the inbuilt characteristics of the partners. As a continuation of this introspective study, I have looked further into my partnership with Tanya Kalinina and how this collaboration operates without specific guidelines or a manifesto.

In attempt to understand the underpinnings of these characteristics we have considered our upbringings and mentors. We have identified the practice's key peripheral mentors, investigating their roles and influence on the practice. This part of the research also looks into how the partners accumulated their professional skills and have learned to effectively research, adapt, and respond to a variety of situations in the fast changing environment of Moscow in the 1990s.

Instigating change in social and professional environments

A substantial section of the research looks at the position of the practice in the profession and its role in society. We consider how the practice strives to be a conventional architect operating in unconventional circumstances. We categorise its activities as mainly collaborative. Our role is as lead consultant, similar to that of a ‘19th century architect’.

This study leads to the revelation that the partners endeavour to create situations in which to practice. We instigate projects, educate clients, and engage in public and professional activities. The Project Imagination seminar, described in Chapter 14, is as a powerful example of this: a single event which created the basis for years of future practice.

On this same theme, we examine our work on strategic planning to understand how an architectural practice can influence the direction of urbanism and city development. We discuss the practice's involvement in urban planning, brief writing, and designs for settlements, giant trading complexes, and city expansion plans.

Architectural education is an important practice activity and forms part of this investigation. Towards the end of this research, I began to explore ideas for a professional development program at a Russian university, and suggest how an architectural practice can instigate change through teaching. Inspiration for this speculative exercise is derived directly from the Practice Research Symposia (PRS) which we attended during this time.

In the dissertation’s final chapter – ‘New Directions in Practice’ – we focus on our recent work in Britain, describing how the practice develops through a series of residential commissions. We also speculate on future practice and how the Practice Research Program has directly influenced the opening of an Architectural Development company in London.

The research process crystallizes many aspects of the workings of the practice, and sets our questions which we see as the continuing quests that will inform our future practice.
2. The Bicultural Practice

How can two opposing cultures and places be linked through architecture, and what were the key bicultural moments in this process?
How can two opposing cultures and places be linked through architecture, and what were the key bicultural moments in this process?

‘Bicultural – having or combining the cultural attitudes and customs of two nations or peoples’. *Oxford English Dictionary*.  

As with many partnerships, the bicultural practice of McAdam and Kalinina was established through a series of coincidences.

The first coincidence occurred as a result of Perestroika, which enabled a student exchange between Moscow Architectural Institute and Canterbury School of Architecture in 1990. McAdam and Kalinina met and plotted extended exchange studies for a semester at each of their respective schools.

The bicultural stance was set from the beginning. Both partners began to learn about the other’s culture, by living, studying, and socializing in the other’s country. This allowed cross-cultural exchange and discussion, and an early understanding of cultural differences. Crucially, there evolved an immovable trust and mutual desire which was the foundation for practice, and later, a family.

The second coincidence was Project Imagination in 1992. This bicultural link enabled the initiation and organization of seminar workshops, where 20 well-known British architects visited Moscow to run workshops with professors and students from the Moscow Architectural Institute. The key to Project Imagination’s success was the direct link it created between the architectural professions of Britain and Russia, as a consequence of McAdam and Kalinina placing a foot in each other’s cultures.

The results of this bicultural activity led to a much-increased level of connection between the architects of Britain and Russia. It was the basis for multiple exchanges and the opening of a bicultural office, run by McAdam and Kalinina with patronage of William Alsop, in 1993.

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1. The definition of ‘bicultural’ invariably refers to combining of two cultures within nations, for example the French and English speaking peoples of Canada.
2. Perestroika: the political, social and economic changes that happened in the USSR during the late 1980s.
3. Moscow Architectural Institute: the main educational establishment for students of architecture in Moscow and Russia, with over 2,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students.
4. Canterbury School of Architecture: a small architectural school of 150 students. Now part of the University of Creative Arts.
2. The Bicultural Practice

Although the results of the work of foreign architects in Moscow are far from glorious, there is one architectural practice that forms an exception to the rule. The Moscow office of the British architectural firm William Alsop has managed to establish itself as a small but significant player in the Moscow architectural scene. The success of its recent projects is in part a combination of factors that make this firm different from other foreign firms that are active in Moscow.

To begin with, William Alsop is one of Europe’s leading architects, building not only in Britain but also elsewhere in Europe. Moscow, being a commercial hub, is a city that has been attracting international architects for years.

Secondly, the establishment of the Moscow office has not been the result of a sudden influx of foreign architects into Moscow. It is more like the start of a new office with the support of the British Architectural Council and the London-based company Alsop Architects. The practice has managed to operate relatively independently from the London office, whereas it can rely on the infrastructure of an established architectural practice.

Finally, the office has managed to operate successful...
The bicultural process is clearly essential to the practice’s key projects, such as Trubnaya (1999) and the Larch House (2006). The key projects involved cultural design approaches and elements suited to their locations, whilst utilizing imported design techniques and professional methods. On reflection, we can also see the impact of these bicultural projects on the architectural professions of the two countries.

In Russia, both projects won awards. They were complimented in architectural circles and by the press — as contextually-considered architecture, suited to their habitat, with attention to detail and quality — in terms normally associated with Western European cities. Back in Britain, these projects were held in positive light as subtle interpretations of new Russian architecture. These realised projects led to McAdam being one of the first ‘western’ architects to become a member of the Union of Moscow Architects (UMA).

In parallel to the practice of designing buildings, McAdam and Kalinina were anxious to progress the educational and professional links between the architects in Britain and Russia. They were closely involved with the British Council, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the Union of Moscow Architects (UMA), and the Central House of Artists. They initiated and participated in talks, seminars, and exhibitions which instigated connections between the countries and fostering the general promotion of contemporary architecture (of which there was a deficit at the time).

After about ten years of such activity, it became apparent that bicultural exchange dynamic was leaning heavily towards Russia. At the same time, it became clear that our Russian colleagues — a combination of young practices who emerged in the 1990s, and ‘Paper Architects’ who were no longer ‘Paper’ — had by now successfully completed a small number of buildings in and around Moscow. For example, the International Moscow Bank by AB Ostozhenka, and the RIA Novosti (Russian News & Information Agency) building by Sergey Kisselev & Partners. This group, which was affectionately nicknamed ‘The Architectural Resistance’, included McAdam and Kalinina. The group was recognised as a movement towards the re-invention of post-Soviet architecture.

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11 The British Council: the United Kingdom’s international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations.
12 Central House of Artists: Moscow’s main exhibition hall for contemporary art, located on the Moscow River
13 Paper Architects: group of Russian architects in the 1980s, who responded to the state building program by producing Utopian ideas which existed only on paper
14 Architectural Bureau, Ostozhenka: Moscow-based private architectural practice established in the early 1990s
15 Sergey Kisselev & Partners: Moscow-based private architectural practice established in the early 1990s
In light of this Russian bias, we decided to encourage exchange in the other direction. Ten Russian architects who had gained traction in the preceding ten years would exhibit their work and speak at a forum on Recent Developments in Russian Architecture, at the RIBA in London. The event, entitled ‘Time for Change’ (2002) gave the new Russian architects physical exposure and contact with their counterparts in Britain. It was an opportunity to discuss what was going on in Moscow with an established professional group. Away from their home environment, the architects were open and candid on difficult topics relating to the approval system, corruption in authority, and most concerningly, the plight of the city’s architectural heritage.

Catherine Cooke summarized the event in a feature article entitled ‘Great Divide’ – Building Design, Comments and Analysis, 15 March 2002:

‘Time for Change has been conceived by McAdam and Kalinina as ‘benchmarking the first ten years’. The aim was to bring architects over here, so the exhibition represents ten offices rather than showing the fifty or so ‘best buildings’. Diversity was intentional. It includes for example Mikhail Filippov, one of those who started in the protest movement of Paper Architecture which astonished the West in the mid-eighties.

As well as giving Russian architects the opportunity of exhibiting a modicum of work in the West, ‘Time for Change’ also gave them an opportunity to discuss the difficulties of practicing in Moscow at the time, and the burning issue of protecting the city’s architectural heritage.

As James McAdam noted in the Introduction to the ‘Time for Change’ exhibition catalogue, ‘The Beginning of a New Era’:

…the architectural treasures of the twenties and thirties, particularly in the capital, have been neglected, and in some cases fall victim to the requirements of economic developments. Many of these constructivist landmarks are in a state of complete disrepair and are not protected by local heritage laws. The impact of ‘Time for Change’ was that contemporary Russian architecture was (briefly) being discussed in the UK, for the first time since 1926.

As a result of their commitment to this cause, McAdam and Kalinina became more closely connected with the architects of this movement.
Perpetual motion: the pendulum between two cities

For the five years following ‘Time for Change’, the practice attempted to re-balance its activities between Russia and Britain on the basis that its position was in the centre with one leg in each country. This literal and physical form of bicultural practice is rather complicated. It involves a huge amount of flying, two offices, two apartments, two cars and two wardrobes. In retrospect, it is not an efficient method of practice and distracts from the important task of designing and building.

However, this ‘pendulum’ process did reinforce the practice’s bicultural image at large. It led to both partners being regularly invited to conferences, events, and talks, as experts of the other culture, in either country. During this time the practice would swing its attentions from one city to the other, becoming a substantial operation in Moscow in 2006–2007, and then re-focusing on growth in London at the end of 2007. This was due to the relocating of the partners, to coincide with the arrival of a new family member. The economic and political pressures which followed in 2008 exaggerated the magnitude of this swing.

Today the practice is small – just ten people. The pendulum has swung West, with the main activities and projects in London or nearby, with one-off commissions in France and Israel. The bicultural exchange continues to operate, and presently functions in two main areas.

The first of these is a joint venture with a Russian Development Group, where we act as the creative element of a real estate program for development of housing projects in London. In this instance bicultural exchange is critical. The practice acts as a creative bridge between the two diverse business cultures and real estate professions. The bicultural angle is realised through the partners’ understanding of the different parameters in each.

The second is a post-graduate course for tutors at Kuban State University in Krasnodar, where we are instigators and supervisors. This is a specific response to a chronic need for qualified tutors at the university. Here, the bicultural exchange works as a transfer of ‘know-how’ from our experience in Western education.

For critics and commentators, the practice is truly perceived as essentially bicultural. In London we are not British and in Moscow we are not Russian. The practice is often referred to as Anglo-Russian by the press of both countries.

Whilst practicing ‘internationally’, the practice is not global. It does not set out to export or promote a global or international style of architecture. We are not in support of the notion that an architect can be authentically responsive to a local situation via tourism, cultural overview, or metaphors.
3. The Practice Map

How can we begin to understand the complex workings of 20 years of practice?
How can we begin to understand the complex workings of 20 years of practice?

This is the first in a series of chapters that analyses the practice’s work through diagrams. The function of the Practice Map was inductive, as it allowed us to look at the practice activities as a whole, enabling us to draw motivation from reality. The Practice Map was developed through an interactive, iterative process. It was drawn and redrawn at various stages of the research.

When we began this research program in 2011 we were not quite sure where or how to begin. There were distinct areas of study: the accumulated work of 20 years, the bicultural and peripatetic nature of the practice, and the range of practice activities. Until then, we had seldom stopped to reflect on the body of work or to understand how our practice itself had evolved over time. As a practice of multifarious nature we also found it difficult to isolate specific traits in our work.

Our first step in this reflective process was to create a large, printed poster displaying the range and breadth of practice work and activities. Horizontal bands were used to represent different practice activities and project typologies. These were plotted against a timeline, with specific moments and political events identified. The poster is referred to as *Practice Map 1*, Practice Symposium One, Ghent, April 2011.

We found this to be a useful process, as it allowed us to stand back and view the body of work and practice activities as a coherent whole. It also gave panelists and supervisors the opportunity to comment and advise on the next steps of our research.

*Practice Map 2* (Practice Symposium Two, Ghent, November 2011) was a hand-drawn development of that first poster, where connections and links between the works and activities were detailed. Practice milestones and influences were added.

*Practice Map 3* (Practice Symposium Three, Ghent, April 2012) was a further development of the poster, where contemporaries, mentors and enchainments were added, along with further clarification of the links and connections in practice development.

By this stage, the Practice Map had helped us to clearly understand that the practice revolved around three clear streams of activity: strategic visions and initiatives, competitions, and built projects. With this in mind we developed the Diagram of Endeavours, which is described in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

As the research developed, we were able to add current works, and to understand where they were positioned and how they were connected to previous activities. By the time we arrived at *Practice Map 4* (Practice Research Symposium Five, April 2013) it had become a living tool for plotting practice activities and for discussing what might happen next; in other words, a tool for looking forwards as well as back.

Over the course of the research program, the practice underwent significant change. Its workload in Russia was significantly reduced as a result of the general economic and political situation, and the fact that since 2007 the partners had been located primarily in London.

The type of work became more focused, but the locations more disparate. The research process became a crucial medium for understanding and monitoring an atmosphere of internal change. There was undoubtedly a significant moment when the research was informing the future directions of the practice.

To capitalise on this development, we needed to understand not only the streams of work and connections between them, but also the exact routes, turns and crossovers for each specific project or activity. To this end we developed *Practice Map 5* as a linear diagram without illustration, similar to that of the ‘Tube Map’ (an underground railway or metro map). We identified the projects and activities as stations and intersections, whose interconnecting lines precisely plotted their trajectories and described their background and developments over time.

The results were fascinating and provided new angles for practice reflection. For example, the Practice Map confirmed the important starting point of the Project Imagination seminar (see Chapter 14), and was used as a basis for Kalinina’s Chapter on Working with the Prospectors, for which the route is identified in colour on *Practice Map 5*.

Overall, we conclude that the Practice Map was an essential tool for reflecting on the body of work, and understanding how the practice evolved over time. It was inductive as it allowed us to stand back and look at the practice activities as a whole, enabling us to draw motivation from reality. It gave clarity in complexities, and helped us to identify key moments, links and developments.

We believe that for established practices with a large body of work, complex or specific characteristics, the Practice Map is an extremely useful tool for illustrating and clarifying practice activities, influences and contexts in a single complex diagram.

1 Tube map: The London Underground map as drawn by Harry Beck in 1931.
McAdam Architects, *Practice Map 1*, Practice Research Symposium One, Ghent April 2011. This diagram shows practice activities plotted against a timeline with specific moments and political events identified.

McAdam Architects, *Practice Map 2*, Practice Research Symposium Two, Ghent November 2011. This diagram shows a development of Practice Map 1, with connections identified between projects and activities. Milestones and influences are also noted.
The Practice Map

McAdam Architects, Practice Map 5, Practice Research Symposium Five, Barcelona November 2013. This diagram shows the Practice Map converted into a 'Tube Map' where exact routes, connections, turns and intersections are identified for specific projects and activities.

McAdam Architects, Practice Map 3, Practice Research Symposium Three, Ghent April 2012. This diagram shows a development of Practice Map 2, with further detail on contemporaries, mentors and enchainments. At this stage the three streams of practice activity become clearly visible.
4. The Endeavours of Practice

What are the practice’s activities and aspirations and how do they combine to create the essence of the practice?
What are the practice’s activities and aspirations and how do they combine to create the essence of the practice?

This is the second in a series of essays that analyses the practice’s work through diagrams. The Endeavours of Practice was the undertaking of an introspective process. It was a detailed examination of the position of our works and activities in relation to one another, and in relation to the aspirations and satisfaction gained by the practice.

Every architectural practice has its own way of working, its own specific drivers and circumstances. Each has specific aims, objectives and aspirations for the future. We can generally refer to these matters as ‘endeavours’ in architectural practice.

Each practice’s endeavours are predicated on instances where components of practice interlock, entwine and separate in accordance with the ambition, strategy and everyday workings of that practice and its partners.

In the case of McAdam Architects, we have established through use of the Practice Map (Practice Map 3, Practice research Symposium Three, Ghent April 2012), that our work is clearly organized into three streams of activity:

A. Strategic visions and initiatives
B. Competitions
C. Built projects

To determine the exact nature of these categories we investigated what they entail and what importance they carry for the practice.

A. Strategic visions and initiatives
This activity stream covers the practice’s strategic involvement in urban planning visions, briefing documents, development strategies, teaching and consultations, workshops and seminars, exhibitions and publications.

During the research process, we realised that the practice consciously engages in these activities for both altruistic and strategic reasons, and thus that these activities could be classified as one or the other.

The motivation behind these activities can involve: the simple passing on of knowledge, assistance with educational programs, initiation of events beneficial to the architectural profession, open dialogue and exchange of ideas in public settings. These drivers are altruistic.

At the same time they can involve: an opportunity to have a degree of influence on social and professional behaviour, a possibility to broaden our knowledge base, a move to advance our position in the profession circles, and possibly be used as a stepping stone to procuring interesting commissions. These gains are more strategic.

Most of these activities have been in or related to Russia, but this is not exclusive.
B. Competitions
The second activity stream encompasses a vast and diverse range of unrealized projects which have not developed further than conceptual or schematic design. They comprise commissions for feasibility studies, design concepts, invited and occasional open competitions. They cover a diverse range of project types, as described in Chapter 12, ‘The Art of Elasticity’.

C. Built projects
The third activity stream is the most conventional in that it encompasses buildings which are designed in entirety, from inception to detail design, by the practice. In most cases these projects have been realized. They have included office buildings, private houses, pool pavilions, a church, and an incomplete department store for which construction was suspended. Most of these built projects are mentioned in this dissertation.

The Diagram of Endeavours
Following on from the inductive analysis of the practice through the Practice Map, we have continued to use diagrams to understand our practice.

In many instances, endeavours remain within a specific stream. For example, an initiative will not progress further than being a series of exhibitions or seminars. A competition will be confined to a minor publication, plan chest and model store. A built project will be restricted to a rigid brief and be realized as an architectural object not worthy of particular resonance.

The activities held within a specific stream may contain elements of both enjoyment and endurance but are often static in nature. But when the streams begin to cross, a new intensity is suddenly apparent in the dynamic of the practice. An initiative may suddenly move into the competition stream, a competition may move into the built projects stream, a built project may become catalyst for an initiative, and so on.
The Diagram of Endeavours focuses on this specific state of intensity. It is made up of three overlapping activity streams (rings) with a Circle of Enjoyment occupying the central area of the diagram and Fulfilled Architectural Enjoyment (Joy) at the very centre, where the three rings overlap.

Unfortunately, not all elements of architectural practice fall within the Circle of Enjoyment. Beyond this area is a resistant Line of Tolerance, where much of everyday practice takes place. Further over this line are Trials and Tribulations, and in the extreme, a prohibited area of Humiliation.

To further understand our work in this context we have selected four recent projects or activities which we consider as enjoyable, and positioned them into the diagram. These are: the Central House of Artists, Caesarea pool pavilion, the Nagatino Competition and the Regional Architectural Laboratory.

All four of these works are positioned well within the Circle of Enjoyment, some in the overlapping of two rings, where streams of work have crossed.
4. The Endeavours of Practice

The Central House of Artists

After careful consideration we have identified one project which could occupy the central position in the Diagram of Endeavours. This is the Central House of Artists, a project which has in fact existed in each of the three rings at different moments in time.

The Central House of Artists is an outstanding example of Soviet Brutalism. The 60,000sqm exhibition hall is positioned on the bank of the Moskva River and was completed in 1979, in time for the 1980 Olympic Games. It was designed by Nikolai Sukoyan, an architect at the state design institute, MosProject 2, and was opened in 1979.

The practice has been associated with this building since the 1990s. First we exhibited at the annual architecture exhibition Arch Moscow, and subsequently became members of the organizing committee for this event. During this time we became closely acquainted with the General Director, Vasily Bychkov, with whom we regularly discussed the future refurbishment and upgrade of the building.

In 2003, the practice was commissioned to prepare proposals for such a refurbishment project, to include additional exhibition spaces and a new museum of contemporary film. The scheme for this was very simple – the museum element was to be a freestanding L-shaped structure, carefully engineered into a redundant courtyard space, with a new entrance and piazza on the riverbank. Additional exhibition space was to be provided within the existing parapets and underground. Proposals were presented and well-received by the Russian Minister of Culture, Mikhail Schvydkoy, but did not come to fruition as there were too many parties involved for the purpose of positive decision-making.

Rather than losing momentum, the practice was then appointed to assist with minor re-planning works, the design of new gallery spaces and the main foyer.

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1 Soviet Brutalism: the Brutalist architecture movement which flourished in the Soviet Union from the 1960s to the early 1980s. It was particularly encouraged as the state style for public and administration buildings.


3 Arch-Moscow is an annual architecture exhibition held at the Central House of Artists. It is the main forum for private architectural practices to exhibit and discuss current architectural matters.

4 Vasily Bychkov: General Director of the Central House of Artists. Chairman of the Public Chamber on Preservation and Development of Social Culture.
The next episode of involvement was of a different nature, as the Central House of Artists was suddenly targeted for demolition. A development company owned by the wife of Mayor Luzhkov\(^1\), had seen the real-estate potential of a large site in the city centre. Knowing that many high-level figures detected the building, they successfully lobbied for political approval to demolish it – signed-off by President Putin in 2008. They proposed to replace it with a Norman Foster-designed, mixed-use development known as ‘The Orange’.

The architectural and arts communities were up in arms. This was one of the best examples of Soviet Brutalism and the building was well-suited for its use as a gallery. To counter the threat, we set out with a group of architects and colleagues, including Vasily Bychkov, David Sarkisyan\(^2\) and Eugene Asse\(^3\), to protect this building and to denounce any proposals for its demolition and replacement.

In a Building Design report by Rory Olcay, James McAdam was bluntly quoted: “It’s the best building in Moscow and absolutely needs protecting. Foster should go and have a look at it. He shouldn’t be designing a building to replace this one.”

In the same article, Eugene Asse was quoted saying: “It’s totally wrong. Starchitects such as Norman Foster consider themselves free of obligation when it comes to the consideration of local heritage.”

The battle which ensued was lengthy and complicated, with much debate spreading through the architectural community. On this occasion the Intelligenzia – artists, writers and architects – actively objected, and there was wide support to save the building, including a number of actions and installations on location.

Eventually the demolition order was revoked by President Medvedev\(^4\), on the basis that the previous decision was not legally-founded. The life of the Central House of Artists continued again as normal. This episode was seen as a turning point in the protection of architectural heritage in Moscow.

In 2011, the practice was again commissioned to prepare proposals for the refurbishment and expansion of the building. This time it involved a complex development of new exhibition spaces, art cinemas, galleries and public amenities. The plan was to upgrade the Central House of Artists and its surroundings as the ‘National Centre for Contemporary Arts’. The scheme for this was prepared as a development strategy, in collaboration with economic advisers Happold Consulting and landscape architect Martha Schwartz\(^5\). The concept had the support of Federal Government and the financial backing of a wealthy private individual.

The problems encountered were a repeat of the previous scheme, where the three stakeholders – The Central House of Artists, The Tretyakov Gallery\(^6\) and Moscow City Government – were unable to reach agreement on a way forward. On a positive note, the proposals for recreational areas and landscaping on the riverbank, which had featured in both the 2003 and 2011 concepts, were recently detailed and implemented by our colleagues Oleg Shapiro and Dmitri Likin\(^7\).

In 2013, the practice was again appointed to undertake the re-planning and design of the main foyer and associated support spaces. This work is presently ongoing.

Using the Diagram of Endeavours we have been able to assess the position and status of each particular project/practice activity, and therefore consider its value to the future of the practice.

We have also noticed through the Diagram of Endeavours that our endeavours run on a cycle, where intensities in the activity rings shift approximately every two or three years, enabling us to understand the practice development phase at a particular moment in time.

We believe that such a diagram or similar approach to examine practice endeavours could be beneficially applied to other architectural practices and in other creative professions.

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\(^1\) Yuri Luzhkov: Mayor of Moscow from 1992–2010. During his office a large number of historical buildings were indiscriminately demolished, including some examples of Constructivism.

\(^2\) David Sarkisyan (1956 – 2009): director of the Russian State Museum of Architecture, One of the most significant figures on the Russian architectural scene.

\(^3\) Eugene Asse: Russia’s best known architectural critic and Rector of Moscow Architectural School.

\(^4\) Dmitriy Medvedev: President of Russia between 2008-2012.

\(^5\) Happold Consulting: London-based consultant for Economic Strategies, part of Buro Happold engineering group.

\(^6\) Martha Schwartz: well-known American landscape architec / landscape artist.

\(^7\) Oleg Shapiro and Dmitri Likin: Directors of Wolhaus Design, Moscow. Colleagues of McAdam and Kalinina.
4. The Endeavours of Practice

McAdam Architects, visualisation, the National Centre for Contemporary Arts, 2011.

5. Trubnaya, Larch House and Univermag

What are the practice’s seminal key projects and what are the drivers behind the approaches engaged?
What are the practice’s seminal key projects and what are the drivers behind the approaches engaged?

Through a combination of sub-conscious recognition, implementation of the Practice Map and Diagram of Endeavours, we have isolated three key projects which were and are fundamental to our practice methods and ambitions. These projects represent the level of professional and architectural satisfaction to which we aspire.

These three key projects have been identified at points of overlap on the Diagram of Endeavours. Their selection has also been reinforced through an analytical matrix, where a study of architectural components has shown them to have similar characteristics. We describe this in Chapter 8, Happy Families.

The key projects are:

A. Trubnaya Office Building (1999)
B. The Larch House (2006)

The projects are all in Moscow. They were built or designed between 1997 and 2006, in the period when practice activities were concentrated in Russia. Interestingly, they are completely different in function, type, materials and appearance, and were subject to different design parameters and external influences. We have studied these three buildings in detail in an attempt to understand the design drivers at work and the mental space involved in their creation.

Having chosen these three key projects, we examined them through two central questions:

Why are these projects successful in terms of practice aspirations? What are the drivers behind the design and how has the mental space influenced their development?
5. Trubnaya, Larch House and Univermag

A. Trubnaya Office Building, 1999

The Trubnaya Office Building was commissioned to Alsop Architects in 1997. The brief was for a standard, corporate office building of 9000sqm, which would be rented to Western corporations involved in Russia’s oil and gas industry. The site was positioned on the corner of two backstreets in a hilly part of central Moscow. Its surroundings were mainly low-rise 19th century buildings – servants’ quarters with the occasional element of Soviet Brutalism nearby. The building was to be functional and contemporary in nature, but had to be realizable using local building methods and available materials. In Russia in the late nineties this was a serious challenge!

The eight-storey building was designed as a green-rendered, boat-like object, raised on a black stone plinth with cylindrical ‘bow’ at the lower front end, and standalone ‘rudder’ tower at the higher ‘stern’ end. The upper and lower parts of the building were separated by a continuous strip of horizontal glazing, and strip windows were staggered across the bulk of the green façade in an accelerating spiral effect around the cylinder.

After approval of the initial concept design, we invited an established local practice – AB ‘Ostrozhanka’ – to work with us on design development and submission to the city authorities for the planning permission.

The project was approved just months before Mayor Lushkov’s repression of contemporary architecture took hold in the centre of Moscow.

Without doubt, the building contains references to Constructivist architecture. Whilst this was not the initial stylistic intent of the architect – more a consequence of the contextual nature of the location, the design process and building materials available at the time – Constructivist traits have definitely informed the resultant architecture.

1 Architectural Bureau Ostozhenka was a successful, Moscow-based private practice founded by Alexander Skokan in 1992. They were part of the movement to promote contemporary architecture in Moscow during the 1990s.

2 Constructivist architecture was a form of modernism which flourished in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and early 1930s. Many works of this movement are internationally renowned and its effects on later developments in architecture have been marked.
When exhibited at Arch Moscow in 1999, an elderly visitor commented: ‘I remember this building from my childhood (1930s). They don’t build them like that anymore. Well done for refurbishing it!’

The Trubnaya Office Building featured in World Architecture by Elaine Knutt, who wrote:

‘Trubnaya is very much of the city it belongs to. McAdam and Kalinina hope that it could mark the start of a new interest in modernism in the city. They pride may seem out of proportion to what would seem to be seen elsewhere as a neatly executed, modernist office block. But in the middle of Moscow’s architectural politics and its contextual bays, towers and cornices, Trubnaya is a real Russian revolution.

It was voted Building of the Year at the Annual Architecture Exhibition in 1999, and the architects were awarded the first prize by the Russian Academy of Architecture.

In terms of practice aspirations, at the time this project was close to ideal. We had successfully realised a contemporary building in central Moscow, making clear reference to its context and surroundings, whilst utilising local building methods and materials.

3. Contemporary: this term is used in the specific context of Moscow, where anything other than the neo-classical/neo-vernacular was described using this generalisation.
Trubnaya Office Building
(Alsop Architects)

Typical and Ground Floor Plans

B. The Larch House, 2006

The Larch House was commissioned to McAdam Architects in 2004. It was as a sequel to the Nikolokaya Sloboda settlement, which was reaching completion at the time. The brief was for a large private house with internal swimming pool for a wealthy Russian family.

The site for this was a modest plot, in bog land, which had been part of a collective farm. The site was now designated for suburban development to the north-west of Moscow.

The story behind this commission is outlined in Chapter 6 of Kalinina’s dissertation, Working with the Prospectors. At the time, Moscow’s new wealthy population was growing, and was already well-travelled in Western Europe. A select few adventurous clients were becoming cautiously interested in building houses reminiscent of those they had seen in Switzerland and on the French Riviera.

Not satisfied with the idea of simply importing such contemporary architecture, we set out a contradictory approach – to work on a typology for a new Russian house. Our design would allude to local culture and traditions whilst providing a home for modern living. Again, it was crucial that we stay within the parameters of local building methods and materials.

The resultant design makes reference to the traditional Russian farmhouse, set out as a U-shaped plan, with closed volume wrapping around a central space. Minimal fenestration was used on the ‘back to the wind’ exterior façades, whilst internal south-orientated courtyard elevations were fully-glazed and could be opened in summer.

4 Siberian Larch is a conifer which was traditionally used for construction of dwellings throughout Russia, and was noted for its strength and durability against the harsh climate.
The house is clad in a traditional Russian building material: Siberian Larch planks. These are stained light grey and set in horizontal arrangement across the gently sloping form of the building. This, together with occasional accents of protruding red canopies and an entrance porch, give a contemporary feeling in the snow-covered environment.

The Larch House was vaunted as Russia's first sustainable home. It featured in the publication *Sustainable Home* by Cathy Strongman, who wrote:

*McAdam and Kalinina have demonstrated how Russia's architectural heritage can be adapted to provide contemporary environmentally conscious and comfortable homes. Such projects as this are essential if Russia's traditions are to be preserved in the construction frenzy that is currently transforming the country.*

The developer who commissioned the Larch House liked it so much that he and his family moved in themselves on completion of the building. He then immediately commissioned another similar project to the practice.

In terms of practice aspirations at the time this project, too, was close to ideal. We had successfully realised a contemporary house in Moscow Region, based on some of the ideas and principles of the traditional Russian farmhouse, whilst maintaining the standards required for modern living and again utilising local building methods and materials.
5. Trubnaya, Larch House and Univermag

Ground floor plan

1. Living room
2. Sitting room
3. Stair
4. Entrance hall
5. cloak room
6. utility storage
7. store & shower
8. service stairs
9. serving pit
10. garage

First floor plan

1. master bedroom
2. northside room
3. bedroom
4. study
5. office

South elevation showing glazed courtyard area.

Section through entrance hall and courtyard showing living room and bedroom wing.

West elevation showing "back to wind" facade with external fenestration.
5. Trubnaya, Larch House and Univermag

*Larch House* (McAdam Architects). View of west “back to wind” façade with minimal fenestration.

Photo by Wallpaper, 2006.

View of north-west façade (exposed corner) and red brick main entrance arch and porch.

Photo by Richard Bonniwell.
Swimming pool interior showing glazed elevation to courtyard
Photo by Project Russia.

Living room and raised dining area
Photo by Project Russia.

Study, window to courtyard

View to roof terrace, from first floor study

Main entrance hall, looking towards entrance

Main staircase, from entrance
Photos by Wallpaper.
C. Univermag Department Store, 2004

Following the success of the Trubnaya Office Building, the practice gained the approving attentions of Russia’s architectural circle – in particular, those opposed to the approach of the city authorities. We were invited to give talks, sit on juries and organization committees, and even to participate in TV shows.

During this time the practice was asked by a French retail developer to prepare design proposals for a new flagship department store. It was to be built in a most significant architectural location in central Moscow. The site is at the junction of Moscow’s inner ring-road, the Garden Ring, and Prospekt Sakarova. In its immediate surroundings were a number of well-known 19C edifices, not least Tsentrosoyuz (Le Corbusier), The Peoples Commissariat for Agriculture (Shchusev), and the Gosplan Computing Centre (Pavlov). The location is dominated by public architecture, and the Garden Ring at this point is 16 lanes wide. It is representative of Soviet urban planning in terms of scale and imposition.

The design of the building was to emulate the scale and force of the location. There would be subtle use of similar elements from, and conversations with, its lauded neighbours. As with most modern-day department stores, the main volume of the project was to be a six-storey 100 x 40m closed box raised above a transparent ground floor shop smelling of perfume. But the main façade on the Garden Ring there would be a huge 40 x 35m display window, completely glazed, with open escalators and circulation space creating intense interaction between thousands of cars and hundreds of department store shoppers.

The blank box façades were to be pixilated with a regular sequence of shop window displays, and random metallic patterns which would shimmer at the passer-by. From the top floor of the building would protrude a panoramic café in converse, echoing a similar element on the roof of the Tsentrosoyuz.

According to Project Russia in their issue ‘Aliens’ 4/2004, featuring Univermag:

The department store is a simple but elegant building: a box opening up towards the Sadovye Kol’tso is hanging over the buried ground floor and its glass veil, that surrounds the structural columns, reminds of the suppressed in the process of completion ‘pilotis’ of the Tsentrosoyus building.

The department store was designed in a frantic 12-month period, with regular visits to Paris and the set-up of a small satellite office in London.
The project was watched carefully by the international press – as a potential breakthrough for contemporary architecture in Moscow.

In her article ‘View from Moscow’ in the Architectural Review of April 2003, Catherine Cooke gives a detailed overview of energetic, but not always thoughtful (and often questionable in appearance) developments in Moscow architecture of that period (2000–2004). She embraces a few rare examples of new Modernist buildings, including the Univermag department store. In that spirit, the buoyant little Anglo-Russian office of James McAdam and Tanya Kalinina, former directors of Will Alsop’s Moscow operation, has a major new department store about to go on site between the famous complexes of Le Corbusier’s Tsentrosoyuz and Shchusev’s Agriculture Ministry.

But at the same time, the site was also being watched by the conservative planning authorities. They had by now regained control on the city’s architectural program and had been ordered by Mayor Luzhkov to develop the city in the Moscow Style – a form of vernacular neo-classicism.

Project Russia decided to include the Univermag Department Store to their 2004 special issue entitled ‘Aliens’ (Chuzhie), dedicated to the work of foreign architects in Moscow. In his foreword to the issue Bart Goldhoorn, Editor-in-Chief explained the reasons behind it:

It is therefore no coincidence that it is only with this issue, dealing with foreign architects in Russia, that we felt confident in our ability to produce an issue featuring exclusively projects. Besides, there was no alternative: none of the works by foreign architects have yet been realized, so there are simply no finished buildings to be published.

And whether or not this will ever happen, and in what form, remains to be seen. Recent events in St Petersburg concerning the realization of Dominique Perrault’s design for the Mariinsky Opera House do not leave much hope. (Even the representative of the Ministry of Culture – the client for the building – states that the architect is only there to design the façade and the interior, then it seems plausible that in other cases too, where the clients are developers, building will be realized without the participation of their foreign architects.

This in itself gives additional value to the publication of projects in this issue of PROJECT RUSSIA: this is the only way in which we shall have a chance to see these projects in their pristine, unobscured, and ‘uncensored’ form.

Four storeys of underground parking were constructed in 2004 at a cost of $12 million, after which point building works were suspended by the city authorities. The site remains empty.

As a project, the Univermag department store could have been a major breakthrough for the practice, and for contemporary architecture in Moscow. Whilst we were optimistic about its realisation, we had foreseen that there could be difficulties with this project. Unlike the Trubnaya Office Building and The Larch House, Univermag was on a major development site in a prominent location, attracting the interests of the city authorities and the architectural establishment at large.
Univermag Department Store (McAdam Architects)

South-east elevation showing pixelated façade with protruding box café on Prospekt Sakharova.

South-west elevation showing display window onto Garden Ring.

Univermag Department Store, central Moscow (McAdam Architects). Photo montage of building from across the Garden Ring, showing 35 x 40m display window with exposed circulation.

Sixth (top) floor plan showing restaurant.

Ground floor plan showing open shopping floor.
What common attributes do these key projects have?

Why do they differ in appearance and style, whilst they still appear to be from the same practice?

Most of the components at work in these projects are in fact contextual. All of the three buildings studied:

- strive for suitability to a particular location or site.
- make sensitive / considered reference to cultural or architectural context.
- display an understanding of local building methods and choice of materials.
- subtly introduce a range of dynamic elements (as described in Chapter 8, Happy Families).

These three projects are considered among the partners to most clearly represent the practice does best. It is also interesting to note that for these projects:

- the practice was completely empowered as architects and lead designers for the whole of the design process.
- the partners had full control of the design process and were continuously involved.
- the initial sketches for the Larch House and Univermag Department Store were made in a regularly-frequented Paris hotel (as described in Chapter 10, The Black Spot).
- the resultant buildings (or projects) are very similar to their initial sketches.

We conclude that there are definitive formulae at work in the specific task of designing buildings, where a location, context or specific parameters form the basis for a series of steps in the design process.

This could be described as an in-built manifesto or set of rules operating at a subconscious level. Through the process of research and examination, these shared, subconscious rules double as our guiding principles. The result in our case is that whilst the realized buildings are very different to one another, they are all related due to the common formulae being applied.

We are confident that similar formulae are at work in many established practices and that understanding those dynamics via in-depth study of key projects is a useful way of clarifying and developing a manifesto or set of rules from which to practice.
Who are the practice mentors and what enchainments are apparent in its work?

Today, the majority of new architectural partnerships arise from other more established practices. Young architects work alongside colleagues for several years, before winning a private commission which allows them to ‘go it alone’. Working as juniors, in the relative safety of an established practice, they learn skills and techniques which enable them to practice with some degree of confidence and efficiency. Along their journey to practice they will often have mentors – normally particular tutors or employers, who have influenced their development and future course.

By contrast, McAdam and Kalinina are rather unusual. Neither of the partners has ever spent a substantial period of time in another architect’s practice, nor have they completed a lengthy apprenticeship where practice systems and methods are learned and carried forward. Aside from a few short spells of experience with Alison and Peter Smithson, Theo Crosby, and a long-distance relationship with Will Alsop, McAdam and Kalinina have practically managed their own architectural practice since the age of 25. We have had to reinvent the bicycle!

However, along this journey, a number of specific ‘outside’ individuals have been critical to the development of the practice. We believe that these peripheral mentors have contributed a powerful combination of influences and enchainments to the work. We have identified each player using epithets for their particular roles: The Provocateur; The Enthusiast; The Advocator; The Entertainer; The Chess Player; The Ambassador; The Educator. These individuals and roles are briefly described below, with the essence of their influence highlighted in bold:

1. The Provocateur – Alison Smithson

Alison Smithson (1928–1993) was a British architect of international renown. McAdam worked for Alison and Peter Smithson for six months after completing his Diploma in 1991. During that time they gave him a clear insight of architectural ethos and the architect’s role in society. Alison was a ferocious critic of poor quality architectural and urban decisions. Her direct approach was to provoke debate and action on this. She was the first serious figure to take an interest in the Project Imagination seminar of 1992, in which instance she challenged the motivation behind the idea and basically provoked it into reality! With the Smithson’s support and participation the rest followed.

A basic understanding of the complex role of a serious architect – one who could not only design buildings, but also influence developments in society.

2. The Enthusiast – Theo Crosby

Theo Crosby (1925–1994) was an architect, editor and writer, and co-founder of Pentagram.

Kalinina worked briefly for Theo at Pentagram1 in 1991 when she first arrived in the UK to study. During this time she worked on small-scale interventions at the Barbican Centre2. In contrast to what she had learned at Moscow Architectural Institute, a key learning point of this time was that no subject or detail was too small to be designed. Theo was an enthusiast in this respect, and along with the Smithsons, he was one of the first supporters and confirmed participants of the Project Imagination seminar of 1992.

Retaining passion and enthusiasm for these insights is critical in achieving good solutions at any scale, as well as high quality design results.

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1 Reinvent the Bicycle: Russian version of phrase ‘reinvent the wheel’. Also suggesting that reinvention is key to the context of bicultural practice.
3 Barbican Centre, City of London: multi-functional performing arts centre, with adjacent housing, Chamberlin, Powell and Bon.
6. Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy

3. The Advocator – Catherine Cooke
Catherine Cooke (1942–2004) was a specialist in Russian Avant-Garde\(^4\) and Modernist architecture.

Catherine appeared in the practice’s life during the initiation of the Project Imagination Seminar. She became an advisor and co-organiser, along with McAdam, Kalinina and Nick Bell. Her drive and involvement gave the event much needed status, press coverage and contacts. Catherine’s support and advice was a continuous feature to the early life of the practice. Any activities involving British/Russian relations in the profession received her undivided support.

If you believe in, and are dedicated to, a particular idea or way of doing something, support and promote it positively at any opportunity.

4. The Entertainer – William Alsop
William Alsop is a well-known, practicing British architect noted for a flamboyant approach to design.

Will was one of the participants at the Project Imagination seminar in 1992. Following this, he suggested that McAdam and Kalinina set up a branch office for then Alsop and Stormer\(^5\) in 1993, where they would remain until 2001. Will was extremely supportive and encouraged McAdam and Kalinina to practice with little interference. We learned much from Will in terms of how to present conceptual ideas and how to communicate with clients – with flamboyance but also with clarity.

The entertainment of clients and colleagues is a very useful asset in the establishment and development of practice.

5. The Chess Player – Valery Goloverov
Valery Goloverov is Head of School at the Faculty of Architecture & Design at Kuban State University, in Krasnodar, Russia. He is also Tanya Kalinina’s father.

Besides being an immediate family member, Goloverov became an inspirational mentor to McAdam over the years, as he observed him establish the School of Architecture within Kuban State University (Krasnodar). Over the past ten years McAdam and Kalinina have advised, lectured and taught at the school on a regular basis, and now run a six-monthly program for tutors (as described in Chapter 17, The Rise of Kubanism).

As in chess, even the most ambitious goal can be achieved through a complicated series of sequential moves. You need a full understanding of the parameters and conditions at work (and a lot of patience).

6. The Ambassador – Eugene Asse
Eugene Asse is Russia’s best-known architectural critic and Rector of Moscow Architectural School\(^6\).

Eugene established a practice partnership, ASK Architects, with McAdam and Kalinina from 1998–2001. A great protagonist for reform of the architectural profession, he showed steadfast integrity in his aim to promote contemporary architecture in Moscow, change the course of architectural education and the perception of architects in Russia. Eugene is one of the only Russian architects who is known and can converse on the international scene.

A set of defined principles, discipline, and refusal to compromise on important matters is a very useful asset in the development of a practice.

7. The Educator – Leon van Schaik
Leon van Schaik is Professor of Architecture, Innovation Chair – Design Practice Research at RMIT University.

In 2005, Leon joined McAdam and Kalinina as advisor and jury member for the Kommunarka Masterplan competition (as mentioned in Chapter 16, Being on the Mega Projects and in Kalinina’s Chapter 6, Working with the Prospectors). This led to an ongoing conversation about Practice Research and the architect’s role in creating social and professional environments. These discussions were the beginning of a crucial reflective process and took place in London at regular six-monthly intervals. As a natural progression of this McAdam and Kalinina joined the PhD Program – Design Practice Research at RMIT University in 2011.

After many years of intense practice it is essential to step back, reflect and analyse what one has been practicing. This way we can begin to understand what to do next.

We believe that when combined, the essence of influence from each of these peripheral mentors gives a comprehensive overview of the main external influences on the practice. These influences compliment and contrast with the innate nature of the bicultural partnership, where influence is drawn from an exchange of culture. The mentors guide the accumulation of skills, and support learning by trial and error.

Our conjecture is that overall, these components encapsulate the ethos of the practice, or at least encapsulate what we would like it to be!

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\(^4\) Russian Avant Garde: influential wave of modern art and architecture between 1900 and the 1930s.

\(^5\) Alsop and Stormer: architectural partnership between William Alsop (London) and Jan Stormer (Hamburg) from 1990–2000.

\(^6\) Moscow Architectural School (MARSH): small, private school of architecture in Moscow, linked to the Cass School of Architecture and Design at London Metropolitan University.
7. The Accumulation of Skills

How did the practice develop professionally to become what it is today?
How did the practice develop professionally to become what it is today?

As explained in Chapter 6, ‘Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy’, we have never spent a substantial period of time in one single practice except for our own. In fact prior to opening a Moscow office for Will Alsop in 1993, we had barely clocked 24 months of total practice experience, most of which could be classified as student internships. So at 25 years of age we set up and ran what was in effect our own practice. We threw ourselves in at the deep end.

Circumstances in Russia in 1993 were ideally suited to this scenario. It was the beginning of a new era and across the nation graduates were walking out of universities, and together with their peers, starting their own businesses. In architecture this was an especially popular course of action – the state design institutes were in disarray due to changes in the political system, and there were no established private practices. None of these graduates knew what they were doing but that was the only way – to learn by trial and error. The negligible 24 months of work experience in Britain made us look like masters from day one.

We rapidly learned a range of skills by intuition and experimentation. Over nearly three years we taught ourselves professional practice: how to find work, how to deliver projects, and how to run a business. Not knowing any better, we divided this process into four areas: design, the building process, business management, and public activities. For many subsequent years these four elements dictated the structure for our weekly agenda.

Over the years, the learning process has continued as the practice has grown into a serious professional outfit. It has become more detailed and focused as we have tackled new types of work, new challenges, and new territories. Recent efforts to develop the London base have taken this learning process to another level, where even more specific knowledge and techniques are required in professional practice, business management, communications, and project delivery. This accumulation of further information is an intense but fascinating challenge, and always reminds us of a note in Matthew Frederick’s booklet: 101 Things I Learned in Architecture School (2007): An engineer knows everything about one thing, whereas an architect knows something about everything.

The building process

Designing buildings, urban areas, and interiors are skills in which we are both very confident. Even when we have lacked experience in a typology, we have relied on Intuitive Rationale to overcome difficulties. It is most likely that we learned the basics at Architecture School (or even earlier) and they were then developed through practice and the constant engagement in new design challenges. This learning is an ongoing process.

Details concerning the practice’s design approach and methods underpin all chapters in this dissertation.

Shepkina Office Development, Moscow (Alsop Architects). On completion, this building was occupied by Deutsche Bank. Photo by Yury Palmin, 1997.
Business management
As with many architects, business management is not our strong suit. We began the practice knowing absolutely nothing in this respect. How to find clients, calculate fees, agree terms and run an efficient office was a complete mystery. Achieving clarity in these things was a slow process, and initially came from working with very corporate organizations, such as Deutsche Bank and BP.

Through working with these companies and their other consultants, such as Ove Arup and Partners, we learned how to be professional, competent and efficient in the delivery of services. As a result, we were able to market our experience to a wider client group.

The development of client relationships has been key to this process. It goes without saying that without this the practice would never have got off the ground. The practice has over time developed two discrete streams of commissions – the first through social acquaintance (where business people and individuals have also been part of the learning process in Russia’s new era) and the second through large, international corporations who require trustworthy hands on the ground and where remote electronic contact will suffice for project execution.

Broadly speaking, the practice still operates within these frameworks today, regardless of location.

Public activities
The practice was involved with public activities since inception, with the Project Imagination seminar. Since then, both partners have been involved with a steady flow of lectures, teaching, exhibitions, conferences, judging and even TV shows. These activities are indicated as a strip on the Practice Map.

For both McAdam and Kalinina, our first public activities involved occasional teaching at Moscow Architectural Institute and annual participation in the Arch Moscow exhibition at the Central House of Artists. As the practice developed, projects were realized and published, this role expanded to include more participation in the media at large.

The first major breakthrough followed the success and press coverage for the Trubnaya Office Building. At this time, McAdam specifically was invited as speaker to numerous events and debates. These included talks at the Union of Moscow Architects and the British Embassy, concerning the future of architecture in both Britain and Russia. The Practice also featured in a Russian TV documentary, in a weekly series ‘Architectural Gallery’, presented on the Culture Channel by Irina Korobyina. The program focused on the life of a foreign architect in Moscow and on the recently completed Trubnaya Office Building.
In 1999, McAdam was invited to become a member of the Union of Moscow Architects, and in 2000-01 he was asked to teach a diploma unit at Moscow Architectural Institute.

Kalinina’s public activity was of a similar nature. After the success and press coverage of the Larch House, she was invited regularly as a designer on the TV show – ‘Kvartirny Vopros’ (Russia’s version of Britain’s ‘Changing Rooms’). This experience was very rewarding as it would normally involve the refurbishment of apartments for struggling families and people who were very grateful for the design implemented. Furthermore, the experience was an important moment in understanding how to present and talk about designs on television. The shows were a huge success, repeated several times, and resulted in multiple requests for Kalinina’s involvement in other media engagements.

In 2005, Kalinina was invited to take a substantial role in a TV documentary about Russians living in Britain. This was for the English language channel of Russia Today, which was to produce a series of ten films, entitled ‘The Chosen Ones’, under the direction of documentary filmmaker, journalist and friend, Mike Payne. One of the films, ‘The Architect’, was filmed in London and featured the lives of three Russian architects.

As well as starring in the documentary, both Kalinina and McAdam consulted on the contents of the film and assisted the director with a historical biography of the life and work of the architect, Berthold Lubetkin. This gave the documentary contextual depth. Lubetkin was a Russian émigré who lived and worked in London from the early 1930s. He was very successful in Britain, realising a number of renowned buildings including Highpoint and the Penguin Pool at London Zoo. Sadly, even today Lubetkin is virtually unknown to the architects of Russia. The film was shown on numerous occasions to an international audience and is now used as an exemplar for documentary filmmaking in Russia.

The scale of public activities has expanded for both partners in recent years. They are regularly invited to speak at conferences, judge competitions and awards, and give talks and lectures. They are often invited to consult, judge and speak at the World Architecture Festival (Barcelona, Singapore) and Kalinina is a regular member of the Awards Jury for World Architecture News.

6 Changing Rooms: weekly TV show for interior design and DIY to living rooms.  
8 Berthold Lubetkin: Russian émigré who was a renowned architect in Britain in the 1930s. 
9 Highpoint: Housing project realised in Highgate, London by Berthold Lubetkin.  
10 World Architecture News: online architectural news feed which runs an annual awards programme.
Alongside these public activities, both McAdam and Kalinina have a continuing involvement with architectural education. Together, they have consulted on the developments of the new Architectural School in Krasnodar¹¹, and jointly supervise a professional development program there for tutors.

McAdam was involved in the establishment of the new Moscow School of Architecture (MARSH), where he advised on the structure of the course and assisted communications with the Cass School of Architecture, at London Metropolitan University.

Kalinina is presently an external examiner at the University of East London.

The Accumulation of Skills was discussed at Practice Research Symposium Four, Ghent, November 2012. The understanding of this process was an important moment in our research.

This understanding highlighted to us that the struggles experienced in developing the practice were directly related to the arduous process of self-learning. It also confirmed that the four groups of skills identified are fundamental to the practice’s development, and they continue to be used today as a method of understanding activities.

¹¹ Part of Kuban State University, Krasnodar

8. Happy Families

What are the prevalent architectural components in the practice’s work?
What are the prevalent architectural components in the practice’s work?

This Chapter describes an analytical study of the practice’s body of work. This study was generated following a review of Practice Map 1, at Practice Symposium One, Ghent, April 2011, where it was noted that the body of works can seem strikingly different in appearance and form.

In the course of 20 years of practice, McAdam and Kalinina have accumulated a substantial portfolio of more than 150 architectural works. This includes over 20 realized projects, at least 50 competitions and a number of initiatives and consultations. The body of work is multifarious and covers a wide range of typologies, functions, sizes, budgets and programmes. No particular practice style, use of form, or material is immediately dominant, yet when viewed together as a set of photographs the projects have a symbiosis, whereby they form a coherent body of work.

To gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, in workshop arrangement with Leon van Schaik, we grouped our works into visually similar projects, identifying the groups through recurring elements or particular traits in the designs. For this purpose we used printed project cards which make up desktop calendars and are printed by the practice on an annual basis. Examining the works through this medium, we realised that the works are easily divided into ‘Happy Families’. Each ‘family’ has dominant elements in form and appearance from the following:

- Interlocking boxes
- Cylindrical forms
- Pixilated facades
- Urban mega-blocks
- Spirals
- Organic forms

1 Leon van Schaik: Professor of Architecture, Innovative Chair, Design Practice Research at RMIT University.
2 Happy Families: card game where the players collect families of animals or professions from a mixed pack of cards.
When the ‘Happy Families’ are viewed as separate groups, a coherent design approach becomes apparent. Interlocking boxes are the largest family and are particularly evident in the practice’s residential work. A good example of this is House 203, where four volumes of different material interlock to form a single composition. Pixelated façades and cylindrical forms also feature heavily: the former is prevalent in the practice’s larger commercial and public buildings, such as the Univermag Department Store4 and the latter in free-standing objects, e.g. the Trubnaya Office Building5. Occasional rogue families are apparent in organic forms and spirals, where shape or symbolic statement is dominant in a brief, location or approach. This can be seen at work in the competition for the Oslo Opera House6.

The results of this exercise were discussed at Practice Research Symposium Two, Ghent in November 2011. There, it was noted that this exercise was enlightening in terms of grouping the works and understanding which architectural elements and forms were in operation.

However, this still left open the question, of how the works are different and yet part of one extended family – the practice. It is worth pointing out that, later, at his final examination for the Practice Research program (Ghent, April 2014) Tom Holbrook talked about the similar notion of ‘Continuity behind Variety’.

Though informative, the ‘Happy Families’ exercise was essentially reductive, in that viewing these traits as static, contained elements did not reveal how a multitude of elements, design techniques, or external pressures may combine or move across varying project works. For this purpose we pursued different and more detailed investigations.
9. Belonging to the Emperor

What are the specific patterns and formulas at work in the architecture produced?
What are the specific patterns and formulas at work in the architecture produced?

As a continuation of the analytical study described in Chapter 8, ‘Happy Families’, a more detailed study was implemented.

This second study took the form of a classification matrix, where the practice’s work was plotted against a series of criteria concerning architectural form and appearance. Added to this list were planning restraints, specific typologies and acknowledgements. The aim was to identify any significant patterns in the matrix, and to understand the practice’s approach to particular scenarios. We asked ourselves:

- Are competitions / built projects dominated by particular forms or façade designs?
- Do particular project types influence forms or façade design?
- How does the building process or planning restraints impact forms or façade design?

Criteria groups used for this process:

A. Forms / Volumes
1. Symbolic
2. Pure form / simplistic
3. Cylindrical
4. Organic
5. Spiral
6. Interlocking boxes
7. Protruding boxes
8. Structural

B. Appearance / Façades
9. Scales / pixels
10. Planes
11. Random
12. Movement
13. Repetitive
14. Transparent
15. Natural materials
16. Jagged

C. Planning Restraints
17. Functional
18. Pragmatic
19. Flexible
20. Restrained
21. Traditional
22. Contextual
23. Local

D. Specific Typologies
24. Refurbishment
25. Interior
26. Urban
27. Social
28. Political
29. Briefing
30. Development

E. Acknowledgements
31. Exhibition
32. Publication
33. Awards

The matrix shows practice works down the left side and architectural components along the top. The number of component hits are marked for each work. Competitions are marked in purple and built works in orange. Dominant categories for each work are noted in the right column.
The classification matrix simply marks the criteria against the projects in which they first occurred. It enabled us to identify the dominant groups and to look for any patterns.

For example, if we take one of the built projects – House 20 – and mark the relevant criteria, the result is as follows:

A. Forms / volumes – interlocking boxes (1 hit)
B. Appearance / façades – planes, random, transparency, natural materials (4 hits)
C. Planning / restraints – contextual (1 hit)
D. Specific typologies – interior (1 hit)
E. Acknowledgements – publication (1 hit)

The project, House 20, is dominant in B only.

If we now look at a closed competition – The Rochdelskaya Apart Hotel – and mark the relevant criteria the result is as follows:

A. Forms / volumes - protruding boxes (1 hit)
B. Appearance / façades – planes, movement, repetitive, transparency, jagged (5 hits)
C. Planning / restraints – restrained (1 hit)
D. Specific typologies – (0 hits)
E. Acknowledgements – exhibition (1 hit)

The Rochdelskaya Apart Hotel is also dominant in B.

Not surprisingly, when we look at the body of work it is clear that competitions are dominant in forms, volumes, and appearance / façades, whereas built projects are more influenced by planning and restraints. To highlight this general pattern, competitions are shown in purple and built projects in orange on the classification matrix. When we stand back, we see more purple on the left and more orange on the right.
Project Relationships Matrix

The second matrix (and perhaps the more revealing) is the Project Relationship Matrix, where the practice's works are plotted against each other and scored by the number of common criteria (hits). This worked very well as a way of identifying the relationships between the practice's most prevalent and revered works. It revealed that whilst little common ground exists in terms of brief, location, function, typology or size, there are a high number of common architectural elements from the criteria in the classification matrix.

The key projects, which include an office building, a department store and a private house, which have no visibly common forms or use of materials, all shared nine common elements.

This matrix proved to be a very useful tool with which to overview the body of work and gain a clear understanding of the architectural components and language used by the practice. It was very informative to the study of Key projects (as described in Chapter 5, 'Trubnaya, Larch House, Univermag') and could be used a method of verifying project positions in the Diagram of Endeavours (as described in Chapter 4, 'The Endeavours of Practice').

These investigations were presented at Practice Research Symposium Two, Ghent, in 2011. The panel's response was rather subdued. As commented by our second supervisor Martyn Hook: "This is an incredible piece of data collection. The question is, what to do with it next?" The presentation developed into a detailed discussion on classification systems, with Johan Verbeke suggesting that, "the problem is usually in the selection of criteria, and in this case the choice of criteria is subjective, so we can never be sure of the results".

A number of questions arose on the validity of such methods of classification:

- How is a classification system defined or created?
- How can we avoid subjective criteria and analysis?
- How can the results of such a process be used to understand the workings of a practice?

This situation was crystallized by David Porter, who suggested that the issue here was not necessarily in classification but "how to make sense of..." or "how to understand the order of...". He suggested that we read The Order of Things by Michel Foucault (1966) and the collection of short stories, Labyrinths by Jorge Luis Borges (1962).
In light of these questions and doubts, we studied the publications suggested and made a brief study of the background of classification systems. In this process we were amused to find reference to a fictitious taxonomy of animals described by Jorge Luis Borges, who refers to a Chinese Encyclopedia entitled the Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge, in which animals are divided into:

a) Belonging to the Emperor  
b) Embalmed  
c) Tame  
d) Suckling pigs  
e) Sirens  
f) Fabulous  
g) Stray dogs  
h) Included in the present classification  
i) Frenzied  
j) Innumerable  
k) Drawn with a very fine camel hair brush  
l) Et cetera  
m) Having just broken the water pitcher  
n) That from a distance look like flies\(^1\)

Acknowledging that our use of classification systems for architectural components may somewhat resemble this scenario, we decided not to go further with the matrices.

Nevertheless, the results of this study were beneficial. It gave us an even deeper understanding of the body of work and the architectural components used. It enabled us to stand back and look objectively at the works and to see dominant tendencies. It also reinforced and reconfirmed our selection of the key projects and the main elements of the ‘Happy Families’ exercise.

The matrices were not developed further but have been used as a reference point throughout the research. For example, when a project needed to be positioned on the Diagram of Endeavours, specific detail from the matrices would inform this positioning.

Whilst the task of assembling a detailed matrix may seem mundane, we are of the conviction that for a practice with a large and varied body of work, this is a very useful tool for the collection of data and the ordering or understanding of the architecture at work.

\(^1\) Jorge Luis Borges refers to this in his 1942 essay “The analytic language of John Wilkes”.

Project relationship matrix  
See next spread.
What is the essence of the design process?
What is the essence of the design process?

This essay looks directly at the workings of the practice – how it operates, how we design, and the spaces in which that design takes place. We investigated these workings through a series of intense internal conversations, with regular input and questioning from our supervisor, Leon van Schaik. This conversational process developed over Practice Research Symposiums Three, Four and Five, in Ghent from April 2012 to April 2013.

Our process of collaboration is based directly on the notion of biculturalism – combining the cultural attitudes and customs of the partners in practice. In this way, the practice as a microcosm of biculturalism, where two individuals from different cultures have learned alongside and adapted to each other, and practiced as one entity for many years. This format works through a continuous exchange of information, ideas, and opinions between the partners – Conversations. It gives us the luxury of being able to stand back and view from a distance, as well as being able to focus at close range. We can combine cross-cultural knowledge with specifics of a location or context, achieving an international architecture infused with a sense of local culture.

The key to articulating this exchange is the interaction between the partners. As individuals, we have many different and opposing characteristics. But underpinning these is a core of common traits and values, with a dynamic licensing process positioned at the threshold, in which each partner empowers the other to pursue distinctive and individual design pathways. Supplementing this, a relay process operates between us to optimise our complementary skills.

To elaborate on this collaboration, it is important to understand the processes of practice – what is important to us and how we work. All topics begin with conversations between the partners. These conversations range from high-energy discourse and arguments to pragmatic question-and-answer discussions. They can last for five minutes or two hours and can yield immediate result or require a repeat episode. This hub of conversations between the partners produces multiple off-shoots of activity. These off-shoots (or sub-conversations) concern ideas, initiatives, future practice, and everyday problem-solving. They often engage input from others – mentors, advisors, partners, and colleagues. In turn, these sub-conversations feed back into further discourse between the partners.

There is a self-perpetuating cycle of development at all levels. This mechanism alleviates the need to wait for something to happen in the traditional sense of a commission. Instead, our own momentum allows us to plan ahead and move forward with initiatives and programs which form the base of the practice.

Collaboration with others is focused on specific activities. This usually is arranged on a project-by-project basis, where relationships with partners (clients, consultants, other architects) are specifically developed in joint venture format. This generally fosters a creative and incentivised atmosphere for those involved. The actual practice also works in this way, with the two partners at the centre of a close group of colleagues, who are engaged for their specific skillsets and desires. There is no particular hierarchy or structure, with all members working directly with the partners and interacting with each other on a daily basis. Some of these colleagues have remained within the practice for many years, reaching a position of associate or senior architect, where they are given limited license to practice within the practice. There is no formula or stage process in this licensing – it is simply based on trust and years of collaborating with a particular individual. Over 20 years of practice there have only been two or three such instances. In reality, the two-partner bicultural core does not allow full access to the central conversation hub, as this is based on a personal and longstanding interaction.

As described in the previous chapters, this is a practice where design formulae and specific practice methods are intuitively rather than consciously defined. In this situation, there is always a danger that external (and more experienced) forces may wield powerful influence on project development.

To retain creative control in these situations, we believe that there is a subconscious but sophisticated ‘security system’ at work within the practice. The primary function of this system is to ensure the protection of any original main idea or concept. It is possibly the most crucial architectural action undertaken by the practice partners. During development, we refer to this main idea as the Black Spot, as it holds the key to a success or failure in terms of architectural results.
How does the design process take place?

The Black Spot almost always originates from either McAdam or Kalinina. Normally in isolation, one of the partners will generate an idea and then consult with the other. Reaching a consensus is then a mutual and open process, with logical reasoning and little debate. No stylistic preferences or egotistic desires are allowed to pollute this process. The idea is then either developed by the originator, or will become part of a ‘relay sequence’, where it is handed back and forth over a short period of time.

The process of protection could be described as ‘architectural policing’. The partners will set a carefully defined ‘field of resistance’ around the Black Spot. The distance between this ring-fence and the Black Spot will depend on the project. Apart from the occasional nudge, our close colleagues and consultant team will normally stay within this ring. Occasionally, we will elicit input from the wider circle of characters involved – a discerning client, an imaginative engineer or someone in authority who supports a conscientious approach.

The level and complexity of protection required will depend on the particular project, its susceptibility to external forces, the number of people involved, and the status of the practice in the project. It will also vary at different project stages. For example, the amount of protection the Black Spot requires in the design development stage of a private dwelling, such as the Larch House, will normally be limited to dealing with a discerning client and a handful of trustworthy colleagues and consultants. However, during the building process this policing often increases, due to the level of coordination and detail that is required during construction to achieve a high quality result.

On the other hand, a new building project in a city centre, such as the Univermag Department Store, will be subject to attack from the early stages of design from the city authorities, conservationists, rival developers, and even other architects. Once the project is approved and there is legal basis for construction, the policing can be reduced to a sensible monitoring role, as the building process has fewer complications.

The Black Spot changes, evolves and mutates throughout the process. For us, it is never static – it travels in space and time and can even move between projects. In this state it is fragile and susceptible to attack, and so must be given maximum attention.
architects have been taught since the 1960s. This is described in the chapter on Kalinina’s childhood, Made in the USSR when ‘the rustle of tracing paper could be heard from the kitchen’.

When the Black Spot is fully-conceived and the partners are satisfied with its integrity, the material is passed on to a trusted associate or project architect in the studio. From here it can safely be developed into an architectural concept with the essence of the idea intact. This shaping and development of the Black Spot is still monitored on a daily basis by one of the partners.

Where does the design process take place?

This origination of the Black Spot normally takes place in isolation. This process very rarely takes place in the office, where the distraction of phone calls, e-mails, meetings, and interruptions by others are all too frequent. This is not to say that the process needs any fixed location. It tends to occur in transit or in completely uninspiring places – at the kitchen table, in a basic hotel room, on a train or aeroplane.

Having studied this phenomenon, we can confirm that the origin of the Black Spot takes place most productively when one is able to spend uninterrupted time, usually in a totally familiar environment, and alone. Subsequent development of these ideas and concepts also progress best in such locations. Depending on the level and complexity of the project, the Black Spot will return to the same isolated locations several times, before being released into the studio.

Some surprising locations have become a venue for this process and for key discussions on practice development. For example, The Hotel Aramis on Rue de Rennes in Paris, where initial ideas for both the Larch House and the Univermag Department Store were conceived. This hotel is a most uninspiring place, with basic rooms and backstreet views. Yet it was the perfect crucible for the origination of the Black Spot.

Obviously not all of the practice’s work can be described in this vein. Much of it involves straightforward analysis, pragmatic solutions and technical advice, where an all-consuming creative idea – a Black Spot – is not a pre-requisite. But for most works in the competitions stream, and a number of built projects, the Black Spot is a vital element.

One particular project which epitomizes this process is the Church of St Barbara and the Holy Rosary in Krasnodar, where the resultant building is almost identical to the original designs proposed.
The Church of St Barbara & the Holy Rosary

This was a rather unusual commission. It materialized from the unrelenting efforts of an Armenian Catholic Community which desired, more than anything, to have its own church in Krasnodar, in the south of Russia. To effect this plan, the local priest Father Andrzej Moravski approached Valery Goloverov for assistance in locating a suitable land plot and finding an architect who knew how to design a Catholic church.

It was to be a traditional church next to a small lake on the edge of the city. It was to have a main church hall with seating for an 800-strong congregation, a belltower, entrance lobby, choir loft and usual raised apse area. Adjoining the church would be a modest residence for the local priest and occasional visitors.

Following an initial site visit and review of the brief, McAdam and Kalinina set about the task of preparing an initial design proposal. The idea was very clear and simple – a clean, white, boat-shaped volume floating towards the lake, with narrow slots of fenestration to create atmospheric lighting conditions, and a central belltower which would allow a shaft of light to play against the backdrop of the altar. Father Moravski was ecstatic when presented this concept, and despite concerns about budget and building capabilities, he was determined to hold on to it.

The boat-shaped space extended back as a simple rectangle, the actual church occupying two thirds of the volume, with the lower level residential block at the rear. At the centre of the church, the belltower was half of an ellipse in plan and continued down through the building to form a niche in the apse behind the altar. Elevations were to be white-painted render with occasional horizontal bands of glazing. Above the entrance was to be a cross-shaped window, which cast light onto a double height, semi-circular entrance hall with open stairs either side, leading up to a choir loft. Entry to the nave was either through a low central passage or around the perimeter to the side aisles – depending on ceremony and events. In the apse behind the altar, the niche which formed the base of the bell tower allowed a gentle shaft of light to flood in from the glazing above.
The next step was for McAdam and Kalinina to present the architectural concept to the Papal Envoy, Father John Bukovsky, at the Holy See (Vatican) Embassy in Moscow. There had been no major deviations from the original ideas, which now had the full support and protection of the Papal Envoy, the local priest Father Moravski, the Chief City Architect Valery Goloverov, and the Catholic Community involved.

Over the 18 months that followed, the church was built by the local Catholic community. Local architects assisted with the approval process and sourcing of local materials. Finance was self-generated by the community.

Any and all local people who were even remotely connected to building took a hands-on role in the construction process. McAdam and Kalinina made occasional site visits where they approved important design decisions, such as the shape of the entrance steps and the position of glazing slots.

Overall the finished building – volume, appearance and spatial qualities included – was almost exactly in accordance with our original designs. The community building team made all efforts to achieve this. However, as is often the case, some questionable details were implemented on-site: the belltower was six metres too short because the scaffolding used was unstable at the required height; the random asymmetric arrangement of horizontal glazing was given symmetry as it was believed to be a mistake on the drawings; external shiny zinc rainwater pipes with decorative hoppers were installed to the elevations rather than the internal pipes specified. Although this was frustrating, these deviations were simply caused by technical limitations and inexperience.

The Church of St Barbara and the Holy Rosary was inaugurated by Father Bukovsky in November 1999.

It featured in Project Russia no. 22 ‘Religion’ in 2001.

Within the context of the Black Spot, the significance of this project is that it is almost a literal representation of the original idea and concept proposed. It is a realization of the purity of the Black Spot – a community project, fully supported and protected by those involved, and only minimally diluted by technical limitations and construction skills.

From this introspective part of the research we gained a better understanding of how the practice process works and in particular the operating methods engaged by the partners.

The main subject of this process is the conception and protection of a project idea or essence. We have referred to this as the Black Spot. Through this investigation we had a number of revelations: that we are the sole guardians of the Black Spot; that the inception of the Black Spot involves both partners working in a ‘relay’ fashion; that the Black Spot is developed in locations of isolation; that after release to the studio for development, the Black Spot is still monitored by the partners.

We found these discoveries enlightening and believe that the questions posed could be used as a prompt for understanding the inner workings of other practices and creative professions.
10. The Black Spot

The Church of St Barbara and the Holy Rosary (McAdam Architects).

Completed building from across lake. Main entrance doors, high-level cross window, horizontal glazing slots and glazing to belltower all visible. Photo by James McAdam, 1999.

Day of Inauguration, November 1999. Interior view from choir loft. Altar with shaft of light shining from above to illuminate the Apse behind. Seated to right of Altar are Papal Envoy Father Bukovsky, local priest Father Moravski, and three regional representatives of the Catholic Church.
11. Coalition Government and the Importance of the Relay

How can a partnership operate without specific guidelines or a manifesto?
How can a partnership operate without specific guidelines or a manifesto?

Guidelines for this partnership were settled and subconsciously agreed in a moment of decision at the time of setting up a student exchange in 1990. Circumstances were such that an exchange would only work with each partner’s complete trust in and reliance on the other. It was a straightforward arrangement. The exchange was staggered: Tanya would study in Canterbury for a term, and I would then study in Moscow for a term (semester). I would provide accommodation and any support necessary in the UK and she would do the same for me in Russia. It was a private arrangement, endorsed by our respective schools on the basis of ongoing cooperation.

The reasons that we decided to set-up the exchange remain a mystery. Perhaps a combined sense of adventure, ambition, similar interests and backgrounds, and a general feeling of trust and reliance. We were on the same wavelength!

The Stranger and the Host

This arrangement lead to a great friendship, and a bond was created by experience and achievement whilst working together in each other’s country. As surmised by Paul Carter during Practice Research Symposium Penultimate Presentation, Ghent in April 2014 – this scenario led to the unique partnership of the Stranger and the Host.

This arrangement formed the basis of further joint activities. There was a desire and drive to increase the scale of exchanges and to use the stranger / host format to create a bridge between two cultures. This began with the Project Imagination seminar and lead to the opening of a practice in Moscow, where in both cases Tanya played the role of host, and I the role of stranger. It was a useful dynamic and neither of these ventures would have been possible without our use of opposing roles and a bicultural approach. Through this equation, each of us had an international calling card.

A License to Practice

We are not the same people. We have different skills, different interests and different ways of doing things. In many respects our characters are contrasting or complementary. Many of these are described Chapter 10 – ‘The Black Spot’. But between these opposing features, we believe there is a list of fundamental principles which form the core of our partnership. These are basic traits which are common to both our backgrounds – integrity, dedication, honesty, ambition and perseverance.

As again noted by Paul Carter during Practice Research Symposium Penultimate Presentation, an accurate summation of this is that each partner gives license to practice to the other. This is the freedom to operate, design and practice, on the basis that we both generally know what the other will do, and that it will be sensible and of high quality. In many instances this license will be passed back and forth using a relay technique, to maximise the skills of the partners in different situations. This license-giving is so developed within the practice that it has long been a natural condition, and in some cases might even involve telepathy. This matter was questioned by fellow research candidate Deborah Saunt during Practice Research Symposium Four, Ghent in November 2012 – in the context of her own partnership with David Hills, she was intrigued to understand how the practice operates on a daily basis, how the partners practise together, and how the design process works between us.

Coalition Government

We do not agree on everything. On the contrary we often disagree, and through this tension conversations and debate are ignited. This is usually productive, and helps us to efficiently deal with practice matters relating to design, project coordination, and the everyday business of practice. While the majority of decisions are passed by Intuitive Rationale, we settle our differences through mutual analysis and reasoning. Normally Tanya is right, but not always.

Our practice is a democracy, where there is an open flow of information and the input of all colleagues and staff is welcome and appreciated. It has two leaders
11. Coalition Government and the Importance of the Relay

who can be approached together or as individuals, for different purposes, but often on the same project. In many ways this is our version of a Coalition Government, where a sensible balance is achieved in decisions made by two leaders through a process of open discourse. This means that all the main policies are debated thoroughly before implementation.

The Relay

The notion of the relay has arisen on several occasions during this research. It is a key to the successful development and realization of practice works and it’s used to greater or lesser extent in all substantial projects. A particularly good example of this is the refurbishment of our own house, South Winchcombe Manor in Kent. This project engaged the two partners for the duration, with negligible input from others. This is how the relay worked in this instance:

- Inception and feasibility (JM)
- Initial ideas and plans for refurbishment (TK)
- Preparation of planning submission (JM)  
- Interior design plans (TK)
- Details for construction (JM)
- Selection of materials, finishes, lights and furnishings (TK)
- Contract administration (JM)
- Detailed material and furnishing orders (TK)
- On-site operations for base-build refurbishment (JM)
- On-site operations for interior finishes (TK)

During the stages of a relay the second partner is not inactive, but takes a supporting role in the stage.

The logic in this arrangement is undeniable. Our skills, design instincts and character traits are different, but together we can efficiently execute an entire building project.

Family business

My relationship with Tanya naturally goes further than architecture and the practice. We are partners in all areas of life. This is an integral family set-up. Our children (Polina and Misha), houses, holidays, weekends, and problems, are all shared and discussed on a daily basis. This intensity does not hinder our relationship. We work as a team on all aspects and rely on each other’s judgment and willingness to work for the common cause.

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3 South Winchcombe Manor is a listed building of historical significance. It was built, altered, and extended over several centuries dating back to an original Medieval Hall in 1320.

4 The planning application for South Winchcombe Manor was a complicated procedure. It involved commissioning of a detailed survey by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust and assistance from Conservation Architect, Charles Bain-Smith (Cyma Architecture). It took almost two years to obtain Listed Building Consent.

5 Details for construction – a number of structural interventions were needed for this project. This involved the surgical installation of special steel elements, designed by structural engineer Jonathan Rogers (Miller Rogers Partnership).
What does the body of work comprise and what are the reasons behind it?

This is one of a series of chapters which reflects on the practice’s body of work as a whole. It has been generated via a review of Practice Map 1, where it was noted that the type and scale of works was diverse.

When looking at the body of work en masse, one of the most striking factors is the multifarious nature of the buildings and projects viewed. It is immediately apparent that there is no particular specialization in a building typology or architectural technique.

Over the 20 years of practice the body of work has included: office buildings, mixed-use complexes, public buildings, petrol stations, retail centres, sports facilities, private houses, urban planning consultation, and development strategies. These project and building types also vary widely in size and scale – from a small pool pavilion and two-bedroom apartment, to a 6 million sqm trading and expo centre, and even the expansion of a city.

This diversity is a key consequence of working in Russia (an emerging market), at the moment when a new era was just beginning, where broad-based skills were required rather than specialization. Due to its professional origins in Britain, the practice was considered experienced in the field – we had access to information and contacts with many of the specialists required in the building design process. Together with an understanding of language, culture and working methods, the practice boldly established itself as an organization with ‘know-how’. These circumstantial advantages more than compensated for our youth and relative lack of practical experience in the beginning.

From its inception, the practice was bombarded with requests and commissions, some of which were quite unusual. In 1994, we were asked to design a ‘high security motorway service station’. The client’s request was to design a facility on the main highway, where truck and car drivers break their journey for a rest and something to eat. A familiar brief, except... the service station would be surrounded by a 4 metre high wall, and have a single guarded access point. It would not advertise itself to the highway, for fear of being targeted by the criminal aspect of society – it was only to be used by those who knew about it.

Each month would bring a new set of design challenges: over time this became the normal condition of the practice. We developed the ability to adapt, research, and respond to a wide range of demands. This in turn led to more expansion in project and building typologies.

1 Chapters reflecting on the practice’s body of work: Chapter 3 ‘The Practice Map’, Chapter 7 ‘The Accumulation of Skills’ and Chapter 8 ‘Happy Families’.
While this range and diversity was initially a necessity, it also became a desirable attribute to our work. The practice built a reputation for being highly capable, and able to tackle a multitude of varying design tasks.

This subject was discussed at length at Practice Research Symposium Two, Ghent, November 2011, where this quality was labeled ‘Elasticity’ by Kate Heron.

Elasticity has been a perpetual feature of the practice’s work. Apart from the basic list of typologies mentioned at the beginning of this essay, we have also completed designs for a major passenger air terminal, a hockey stadium and sports complex, a Catholic church, and temporary structures for an international film festival.

The film festival, planned to be directed by Andrey Konchalovsky, was to be held on Dvortsovaya Ploschad, the main square in front of the Hermitage. For the practice, it was a most extreme project in terms of adaptability and research, as it diverted focus away from architecture into the spheres of fast moving events and complex logistics. We were fortunate to be able to draw on the advice and input of a friend and colleague, Mark Fisher, who had unprecedented experience in these fields. The design was completed in 2005, but the event was suspended as the city authorities would not approve the location. The director of the Hermitage, Mikhail Piotrovsky emotionally pronounced: “beer-swilling filmgoers should not be allowed to party in the living room of St Petersburg.”

This idea of this Elasticity has much in common with the notion of the role of the ‘Generalist’. This has been discussed on numerous levels throughout the research process. At his final examination for the Practice Research program, Ghent in April 2014, Tom Holbrook described the work of his own practice as diverse and varied. He alluded to the fact that they “were Generalists rather than Specialists, and that as Generalists it was difficult for [our] practice to progress with its main interests in large-scale initiatives and infrastructural projects in the UK.” He went on to discuss how the role of the architect should be re-imagined to return the profession to one of its original roles as purveyor of visions for the built environment.

We considered these observations both astute and accurate. In light of Tom’s words, and our own experiences, we surmise that Elasticity is the key point of interest, where the ability to adapt, research and respond allows the practice to quickly turn its attentions to a variety of situations. We do not believe that this is a common trait, but one formed by a set of conditions in a specific environment.

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2 Kate Heron: Professor and Head of the Department of Architecture, University of Westminster, London. Panel member, Practice Research Symposia, Ghent, Barcelona, 2011–present.
3 Andrey Konchalovsky: Russian-American film director and producer, who worked in Hollywood before returning to Russia in the 1990s. Important political and cultural figure in Russia.
4 Dvortsovaya Ploschad – main square in front of Hermitage in St Petersburg. Location where infamous film and images of 1917 Revolution were shot.
5 Hermitage: Russian State Art Museum, St Petersburg.
7 Tom Holbrook: practicing architect, Director of 5th Studio. Candidate of Practice Research program, RMIT University.
How can the practice be categorized and positioned in the architectural profession?

Thinking about the practice’s activities and the body of work, and considering the findings of our research, we must pose a basic question: What type of architect are we?

The practice is involved in a wide range of buildings and project typologies with no particular specialization. It has operated in a number of locations, taking into account different localities, but with an international base or approach. Yet it is not a global or international business where services are simply exported or sold via a branch office.

At Practice Research Symposium Six, Barcelona, November 2013, Kester Rattenbury (viewing the work for the first time) hit the nail on the head, surmising that: “the practice was one which strived to be conventional but operated in very unconventional circumstances”.

In many ways we strive to be a conventional practice, where architectural commissions are received and professional services carried out in a studio producing designs for building projects. However, due to our background, our specific circumstances and location of work, a straightforward conventional practice is far from attainable. Consequently, we often find ourselves trying to engineer situations in which to practice ‘in a normal way’ – by instigating projects, educating clients, or initiating a grand plan which will influence change in years to come. This theme of creating a ‘normal’ situation in which to practice is a trait in the practice’s activity, and is analogous to that of creating our ‘own culture’, and our own unique professional environment.

In an attempt to create this ‘normal situation’ as a precursor to project work, we often engage in structured activities like brief-writing, development strategies, consultations, educational programs, seminars, exhibitions and publications. It is an entrepreneurial approach, where we intuitively identify opportunities and set out a specific road map or strategy to move them forward. Not all of these ideas materialize, but some do, and they will often develop into serious undertakings and sometimes assist in enabling conventional practice.
The 19th century architect

In consideration of our preferred activities and professional techniques, we have realized that in many ways the practice aspires to that of the 19th century architect: an entrusted professional who stands at the centre of a project team and design process – the master architect and the lead consultant for the project. We prefer to develop relationships with our clients (individuals) who will treat us almost as business partners, and will entrust control of the whole process to the architect.

A good example of this desirable partnership was the new pool pavilion and additions to a private house in Caesarea, Israel (2011–2012). A site, verbal brief and budget were expressed at the beginning of the project, with monthly updates during the process, and a hand-over of keys at the end. The client – with whom we have worked on four occasions – was trusting, virtually absent, and ultimately very happy with the results.

Part of this project was for a swimming pool and pavilion in the garden of a large house in a small coastal city in Israel. The pavilion is a rectangular, single-storey volume, 25 metres long and four metres wide, and is positioned parallel to a new pool, with views directly west towards the Mediterranean Sea. Half of the pavilion is open pergola structure for external dining, while the other half contains an enclosed fitness room, showers and changing facilities. The materials used are a simple combination of local Jerusalem stone, cedarwood shutters, and retractable glazed doors.

We have worked in this (19th century) manner on numerous occasions. Following discussions at Practice Symposium Four, Ghent, in November 2012, we realised that this was a practice specialisation. We have subsequently taken this role further, forging a partnership with a real estate fund. This partnership, known as MBBK Developments, allows us to creatively select sites and properties for development in London, as well as being in control of the design process.
13. What Architect?

Plan: Pool pavilion, Caesarea

Photos by James McAdam, 2012.

Pool pavilion, Caesarea. Pergola on west elevation, showing Jerusalem stone cladding.

Photo by James McAdam, 2012.
Collaboration

In further investigation of our preferred activities and professional techniques, we have also realized that we have a preference for collaboration as opposed to competition. The reason for this is a combination of the desire to foster exchange and relationships in the profession, and the pursuit of common sense practicalities. For example, when the practice is involved in a large-scale urban project, if a specialist is required, or if it is clear that the project would benefit from a varied design input, we will readily involve other architects. Equally, where we are involved in initiatives, seminars, and events, we will often invite other architects to participate. Besides making a richer contribution by involving others, we find that collaboration is of huge benefit to the practice in terms of social and professional development.

A good example of this sort of collaboration was the reconstruction of the Red October Chocolate Factory in central Moscow, where the practice was appointed to propose a master plan and development strategy in 2006. For this project the practice prepared a general plans, briefing documents and invitations to eight European architects to design buildings for the Red October site.

The project was for a large residential development on the site of a 19th century chocolate factory, located on an island immediately south-west of the Kremlin. The development was to become the most desired and prestigious place to live in Moscow, and would represent a landmark in architecture and modern living. The brief was to provide 500 high-spec residential units, totalling around 100,000 square metres, including 150 loft-style apartments and 350 new flats, along with shops, cafes, galleries and private sports facilities, along a central boulevard.

We were initially given an open brief, as master planner and advisor, assisting the client to formulate a development strategy and to understand the best way forward with this high-profile project. First we commissioned two surveys – one to establish which buildings on the site were of historical value (and to make sure they were listed), and the other to address transport and parking issues which were an inherent problem of Moscow development. As diagrams for the master plan concept evolved, we divided the site into eight building plots.

The plots were based on the existing pattern of the factory layout and incorporated nine existing buildings. We then proposed to invite eight selected architects to design the buildings, and went through a logical pre-qualification and negotiation process with the client. We chose a combination of practices from Britain, Russia, France, and Germany to design the buildings. Subsequently we prepared detailed briefing documents and assisted the client with the appointment of each participant.

This was a ground-breaking moment for Moscow real estate development. It brought Red October and the city at large to the attention of the international press and instigated positive discourse on the subject of ‘regeneration’ within the Russian architectural profession. We benefited from this in two ways; firstly by forging contact with other architects, in particular Jean Nouvel and Jean-Michel Wilmotte, with whom we have continued discourse today; secondly by furthering the notion of collaboration, where the exchange of ideas and varied contributions were crucial to a sensitive development of the urban environment.
On further reflection we have found that collaboration, and the Communities of Practice\textsuperscript{7} that form through collaboration, are essential features of our practice. Besides the example of Red October, we have collaborated as partners on projects with a number of architects, friends, and colleagues. These include: Eugene Asse, Valery Goloverov and Irina Goloverova\textsuperscript{8}, Alexander Skokan (AB Ostozhenka); Jan Stormer\textsuperscript{9}, Aleksey Ginzburg\textsuperscript{10}, and Will Alsop. We have found this process to be enjoyable and rewarding in almost all cases.

The subject – What Architect? – was investigated and discussed at Practice Research Symposium Four, Ghent in November 2012. There, we recognized that the two dominant roles of the practice were that of the 19th century architect and the Collaborator. On reflection we can see that there is a coherent link between these roles and the practice work. Logically, the private residential projects are normally the work of the 19th century architect, whereas the larger urban planning or regeneration projects are done in collaboration.

However, the main revelation from this process was to understand that in either case, the practice strives to be conventional. We endeavour to create ‘normal’ situations and social environments within which to practice.

We would suggest that such investigation can give clarity to the operating modes of an architectural practice, and that in the course of research this is worthwhile exercise in understanding its role in the context of a professional environment.

New directions in practice

Prior to 2007, practice activities were focused on Russia. A full-blown architectural office of 15 or more staff worked intensely out of a studio in central Moscow. We also ran a small fly-in office in London, intermittently staffed by an architect and a secretary. This office had three main purposes:

• To signify to Russian clients and businesses that the practice was international, with a headquarters in London.
• To serve as a hub for international clients (in particular corporate organisations) looking for an architect with a presence in Russia.
• To act as a foothold in Britain for possible future practice.

At this time, we saw actual practice in Britain as a complex and time-consuming endeavour which would probably take years to develop, so, apart from a handful of feasibility studies and small-scale planning applications, little effort was afforded to this. However, maintaining a fly-in London office was key to future practice as it allowed us to maintain and develop contacts and partners: the community of practice of which we are part today. Whilst we were not physically practising in Britain, we had a presence and could be considered part of ‘the scene’.

Since 2007, the practice has slowly upscaled its activities in Britain. This development began with a series of commissions for residential projects through existing Russian contacts. The projects generally involved refurbishment and interior design of high-spec apartments and houses in and around London – two large apartments in Maida Vale, a pool and pavilion in Surrey, alterations to a house in Kent, and so on. Whilst this work did not fulfil the architectural ambitions of the practice, these projects were substantial and unrestrictive in design. Most importantly, they provided the opportunity to learn and understand the nuances of practice in Britain. We experienced no major surprises in this learning process – planning, design methods, contractual matters, and project coordination were generally as expected, and we were unfazed by minor bureaucracies and niggles in the building process. After some of our Moscow experiences, it was a delight to be able to concentrate on design, quality, and project delivery with only negligible hindrances. Furthermore, these works enabled the practice to settle into a wider community of consultants, builders, and suppliers involved in high-spec residential projects. We began to employ more architects and designers in the field, having eight staff members working on such residential projects in the London office in 2012.

Our activities in London were focussed and specialised, in contrast to our work in Moscow, but our processes of learning and adaptation had not changed. The scope of practice was broadening and we were providing a total service: from initial ideas through refurbishment to completion. In some cases this even involved assistance with property acquisition and procurement of furniture and accessories.
13. What Architect?

When we began the research program in 2011, the practice had reached a watershed in our activities in Russia were dwindling and we desperately required a change of trajectory. This need was at the forefront of our minds during the Practice Research Symposia (PRS), so as we reflected on the work and essence of our practice, we also utilised the process as a theoretical testing ground for future activity. The Practice Map and Diagram of Endeavours proved to be especially useful tools for this purpose. They revealed clues to the next steps in practice development in the cycle of activities identified as practice traits.

Reflecting academically on our recent experience in residential projects, and its coincidence with the PRS process, enabled us to pre-empt an adventurous new step in practice development. In 2013, we decided to extend our role in residential projects to encompass property or land acquisition at the beginning, and marketing and sales at the end of the process – to engage in development with vision, led by architectural practice. This natural progression was directly informed by the PRS process (see diagram of practice trajectory). This activity is now ‘live’ in the form of MBBK Developments, and as an architectural developer we will complete our first project in 2015. Once again, we have achieved progress through creating a situation in which to practice.

In parallel to this new path of practice activity, we are maintaining our interests in urban planning and city development strategies. We continue to participate in debates and broad-based discussions about the urban environment and are presently focused on the challenges faced for the future development of London. We are involved in two particular forums for this exchange: the Academy of Urbanism and the Institute of Economic Development. Our thoughts on this process to date are that, whilst comprehensive studies and professional detail abound, there is a lack of cohesive vision and overview in strategic planning for the city. We have also noticed that these discussions are often led by politicians, economists, and real estate consultants, resulting in fragmented and contradictory opinions. We feel that surely the architect should play a major role in these discussions – as a visionary and strategic overseer for the future development of London and other cities.

14. Project Imagination

How can one single event create the basis of practice for years to come?
14. Project Imagination

How can one single event create the basis of practice for years to come?

In Outliers – The Story of Success (2008), Malcolm Gladwell describes how important it is to be in the right place at a specific moment in time, and how a series of events and happenings conspire in the development of any professional career and any success story. Very rarely, a set of circumstances comes together at a particular moment to make something extraordinary possible.

The Berlin Wall had fallen in November 1989. Mikhail Gorbachev¹, then General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, had opened the USSR to international possibilities. Then in August 1991, Boris Yeltsin² had taken over the reins and announced that the Soviet Union would no longer exist.

It was a moment of great excitement. A new, democratic Russia was about to emerge. Everyone in Russia was excited to make international connections and everyone outside was intrigued and eager to be involved. Seminars, conferences and exchanges were abundant, with both Western organizations and Russian institutions keen to capitalise on the new, tenuous contacts.

Having completed a student exchange in 1991, McAdam and Kalinina were in the perfect position to participate in and contribute to this collaborative mood. They had spent several months at Moscow Architectural Institute and Canterbury School of Architecture, respectively, and so had an understanding of what was going on in architecture in both Britain and Russia.

In contrast to the optimistic backdrop, the early nineties had been a difficult time for graduating architectural students³. There was very little work. For McAdam in particular, having graduated in 1991, it was a time of low-paid intermittent employment with various practices. Ironically, this was a hugely positive situation. Through days of anxiety and austerity, there was time to sit and strategise. Without the recession of the early nineties, McAdam and Kalinina would probably have moved unquestioningly into jobs in large practices, and never seen the light of day. Project Imagination happened instead.

¹Mikhail Gorbachev: last leader and the only President of the Soviet Union 1985–1991.
³UK recession of 1990–92: caused by high interest rates and falling house prices. The recession followed a boom period in the late 1980s.
The idea was very simple, but logistically daunting: take a group of leading British architects to Moscow, run workshops and give lectures at Moscow Architectural Institute.

For several months, the idea was discussed and deliberated when the two young architects spent weekends together in Canterbury. At the time, McAdam worked for Alison and Peter Smithson⁴ and Kalinina was completing her diploma at Canterbury School of Architecture. Whilst everyone generally agreed that it was a good idea, the timing and details of the proposition were only understood when discussed with Alison Smithson. Alison (who rejected small talk with anyone, let alone the office junior) took an active interest in the proposed Moscow venture. With raised eyebrows, Alison confirmed that, if the initiative came to fruition, both she and Peter would participate. As arrangements developed, Alison began to suggest and communicate with other suitable participants.

From there, the operation gathered momentum. McAdam and Kalinina were joined by fellow graduate, Nick Bell⁵. The event was given a name – Project Imagination Moscow. Notepaper and a homemade leaflet were printed, and invitations to take part were sent to a number of well-known British architects.

News of Project Imagination reached Catherine Cooke⁶, the leading scholar in Russian Avant-Garde⁷. On hearing the details of the proposition, she committed to lift the status of event. Catherine encouraged coverage in the architectural press, attended meetings with participants and sponsors, and advised on the content of the ensuing workshops and seminar program. Catherine thereby became a partner and co-organiser of Project Imagination, giving much impetus to the tasks at hand. Her involvement was full and hands-on. She worked until four in the morning with McAdam and Bell at her house in Cambridge, writing briefs for workshops, press releases, and making posters and leaflets for the event.

⁴ Alison and Peter Smithson: British architectural practice of international renown. Associated with Brutalism of the 1950s and 1960s.
⁵ Nick Bell: fellow student of McAdam and Kalinina, at Canterbury School of Architecture.
⁷ Russian Avant-Garde: influential wave of modern art and architecture between 1900 and the 1930s.
The dates were set for 2–7 November, 1992. Twenty British architects and a group of students of the Architectural Association* were confirmed as participants. Sponsorship to cover flights and expenses was in place from The British Council* and Ove Arup and Partners*. Project Imagination had been announced in the British architectural press. The only drawback was that the team had little idea of what was happening at the other end in Moscow—and how the second part of the operation would materialize.

Kalinina had completed her studies in Canterbury and been forced to return to Moscow under threat of deportation. McAdam had visited in early autumn, and together they had announced Project Imagination to the Rector (Alexander Kudriavtsev) and other contacts at Moscow Architectural Institute. Working with the bureaucracy of a Soviet Institute was unclear and complicated, but since an order had been signed by the Rector, and tasks clearly distributed, preliminary arrangements within the Institute moved forward with relative ease.

The plan was for the entire fifth year to suspend its regular studies in order to engage in Project Imagination for a week. The professors, along with their student groups, were to team up with their British counterparts to run the workshops. Accommodation would be provided in shared rooms, in the student hostel at Leninsky Prospekt. This, and other practical matters, including preparation of work spaces, provision of food, transport and entertainment, was arranged directly by Kalinina with some little support from the International Department* of the Institute. This was an unimaginable undertaking at the time, but through her superhuman efforts all practical matters passed without incident.

Finally, after months of organization, Alison & Peter Smithson, Theo Crosby and Polly Hope, Ivo Richards, Will Alsop, Ian Ritchie, Mark Fisher, Richard Horden, Jeremy Pracicki, Christine Hawley, C J Lim, Nat Chard, Raoul Bunschoten, Robert Mull, Simon Heron, George Katroditis, Melanie Hey, Christopher McCarthy, Mick Strumell, Patricia Hilbrandt, a journalist from the Architects Journal, a journalist from Germany, nine students from the Architectural Association and one from the Bartlett (University College London), arrived in a cold, grey, snowy Moscow for the first week of November 1992.

It was a bizarre week. To set the surreal tone, the night before the opening, there was a rock concert in the main hall at the Institute. Besides making it difficult to prepare spaces for the next day, windows were broken and the main entrance foyer was trashed!
evening after a dinner in one of Moscow’s obscure new restaurants, a group of at least ten participants climbed onto the back of a snow truck in lieu of more traditional transport back to the hostel.

Project Imagination was a huge and exhausting task for the organisers, who alongside engaging with chosen workshops as assistant tutors, were constantly resolving logistical problems, and running back and forth between the various buildings and spaces of the Institute. Kalinina was most distracted by this, and as a fluent bilingual architect she translated all of the major lectures at the event. This in itself was some feat!

Against the joyful atmosphere, press coverage was surprisingly serious, in that it approached the event in straightforward political and educational contexts, with little mention of the ‘festival’ enjoyed by participants. The Architects Journal released an article entitled: ‘After Six Years of Thinking Big, What Next for Russia?’ Whereas the Russian journal Architekturny Vestnik labelled the event ‘The Invasion from London’ – a moniker which Project Imagination still retains today in Moscow architectural circles.

Ruth Owens described the events in The Architects Journal, 25 November 1992:

Many of the visitors’ projects sought to divert the Russians from their broad-brush approach to one with more relevance to the world which students will have to cope with when they graduate. Raoul Bunschoten and Robert Mull from the AA set up small groups of AA and Russian students to design joint ventures as models of collaboration.

Somewhat more pragmatically, Ian Ritchie and Mark Fisher’s 24-hour design project to transform existing buildings yielded a high-tech toilet block for the institute on a minimal floor area.

As part of a project to relate building interiors to human movement, Nat Chard and C J Lim from the University of East London recorded the movement of students acting out various situations by attaching fairy lights to their limbs and taking long exposure photographs.

Refurbishments and small scale improvements were considered by Theo Crosby’s group. Simon Heron and George Katrodutis from the AA invited students to explore the ideas of individuality in design by responding to a given image of a building or site with slides, objects and photographs of their own. Melanie Hey took her students sketching to help consider the contexts of proposed buildings.
Perhaps most interesting of all, the Smithsons analyzed the monastic forts which ringed Moscow, exploring a Russian architecture which pre-dated influences from the west. Going right back to basics, they were carrying a sun path diagram for 55° North – the same latitude as Edinburgh and Stockholm – as one of several tools used to understand how buildings were organized to cope with Moscow’s severe climate.

Project Imagination Moscow forged the first real connections between the architects of Britain and the new Russia, at a time when it was most needed and when both sides were interested in such exchange. It changed lives and directions for a number of young Russian architects and students, giving them tangible contacts with the British participants, and vice versa.

The results of Project Imagination were made into an exhibition which was shown at the Royal Institute of British Architects in November 1993. As a reciprocal arrangement, a handful of professors from the Institute were invited to the opening in London.

McAdam and Kalinina were 25 years old. They had instantly become well-known and accepted in architectural circles in both Britain and Russia. In the summer of 1993, they opened a Moscow office for Will Alsop. The exhibition now hangs in the Museum of Moscow Architectural Institute, alongside drawings by the heroes of Vkhutemas and the Constructivist movement, Ivan Leonidov and Konstantin Melnikov.

Over the next few years there were further Project Imagination events, which took the form of workshops, seminars and other initiatives. In 1996 McAdam and Kalinina organised Project Imagination at Tbilisi Academy of Art, with Georgian architect Niko Djaparidze. Whilst smaller in scale, the format of this event was similar to the original – Tbilisi was unknown territory and at the time, and difficult to get to. Along with McAdam and Kalinina, a group of international architects including Eugene Asse (Russia), Mike Russum (UK), Avie Rahaminov (Israel), and Sotiris Papadopoulos (Greece) attended the event. They gave lectures and ran workshops alongside Georgian professors at the academy. As with Project Imagination Moscow, this is a recognised moment in recent Georgian architectural history, and was filled with memorable events and incidents.

The most recent initiative under the Project Imagination label was ‘Action: Housing’ which first began at the Arch Moscow exhibition of 2002. This was an interactive event, where the public were invited to consult with exhibiting architects on the designs of their private projects – houses, apartments, shops and studios. The underlying idea of this was to increase awareness of the profession to the general population. ‘Action: Housing’ remains a feature of the annual exhibition today.

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14 Project Imagination panels were designed and put together by Tanya Kalinina, James McAdam, Alexandra Goloverova, Ilia Mouline and Anastasya Zlatkovskaia.
15 Vkhutemas: State Art and Technical School founded in Moscow in 1920. Noted as the birthplace of Constructivism. Most famous Constructivist architects studied there.
16 Ivan Leonidov (1902-1959): Constructivist architect of international renown.
17 Konstantin Melnikov (1890-1974): Constructivist architect of international renown.
18 Niko Djaparidze: Georgian architect. Colleague and employee of McAdam and Kalinina in 1990s.
19 Eugene Asse: Russia’s best-known architectural critic, then professor at Moscow Architectural Institute.
20 ‘Action: Housing’: free event where members of the public can bring their projects to discuss with a practicing architect.
14. Project Imagination

Project Imagination was a celebration which took place at the end of the Cold War and the opening of borders between Russia and the West.

The principles engaged through this event formed the core of the Bicultural Practice: the balanced input of two individuals and two cultures; the process of learning through exchange; the role of public activities in the creation of communities of practice; the acceptance of social responsibility; and the conviction that a good debate is often the best way to begin professional relationships.

15. Dark Satanic Mills

How important is the life background to the mental space of the future practitioner?
How important is the life background to the mental space of the future practitioner?

The following is a brief synopsis of my background. This simple biographic exercise was a significant part of the research program and was discussed and presented at Practice Research Symposium 3, Ghent in April 2012. The purpose of this was to establish any links between personal background and subsequent architectural practice, which was outlined in the Practice Maps (as described in Chapter 3). In parallel, my partner (and fellow research candidate) Tanya Kalinina, carried out a similar exercise so that we could see if there were any underlying hints at the trajectory of our ensuing practice.

In conference with our supervisor, Leon van Schaik, during the course of discussing this aspect of research, inspiration was drawn from the early sections of Memories, Dreams, Reflections by C. G. Jung.

I was born in Huddersfield, England, in 1967. My father, Alistair McAdam, was a painter and ceramicist, and the Professor of Fine Art at Batley Art College. My mother, Gloria McAdam, was a psychologist, writer and researcher. Though both were creative types, neither were architects.

The area in which we lived had risen to prominence during Britain’s Industrial Revolution. The towns were an amalgam of sandstone buildings set in a moorland environment. The 19th century textile mills which dominated the landscape brought to mind the paintings of Lowry and Blake’s ‘Jerusalem’. The last was a haunting thread through my life and my school hymn. The area also boasted a few favourite sons, amongst them Prime Minister Harold Wilson and James Mason, the Hollywood star of the 1930s.

Our house was in an area built specifically for mill owners. It was a large rambling Victorian property with attics and cellars for long-gone servants. It had wooden floors, high ceilings, and bay windows, including a magnificent stained-glass window on the half landing. This last depicted the high street of Clovelly in Devon, after which the house was named.

Because my father’s family was in Aberdeen, we tended to spend time in Scotland. I developed a fascination with the Forth Rail Bridge, which in turn led to an interest in viaducts, towers and other feats of engineering, in particular the work of Brunel and Eiffel.

I was educated at local private schools, and at secondary level attended Batley Boys Grammar School. At A level I chose art as one of my subjects. I became intrigued by architecture and my A level thesis (1985) was on Charles Rennie Mackintosh. This was the beginning and from there I moved on to study for the BA(hons) at Canterbury School of Architecture. In these early days I became fascinated by the work of Archigram, Cedric Price and Buckminster Fuller.

During 1988-89 I interned with Gerald Allen & Associates in New York. This was an exciting time. I enjoyed New York City and its urban scale and grandeur, and ironically developed a passion for detailed work on small projects and cabinet design.

I returned to Canterbury School of Architecture in 1989-91 to study for my diploma. Things were happening in the wider world which would influence my path in an unforeseen way. In 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the advent of Perestroika were of international significance. The easing of international relations allowed Canterbury School of Architecture to partake in a student exchange with Moscow Architectural Institute. I was part of this exchange and through it I met Tanya Kalinina (as described in Chapter 2 – ‘The Bicultural Practice’). Then in 1991 I served as apprentice to Alison & Peter Smithson, and through this, and

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4 ‘Jerusalem’ – short poem by William Blake (1808). Turned into an anthem by Hubert Parry in 1916, one of England’s most revered and popular hymns.
5 Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928) – Glasgow-based architect and designer who had considerable influence on modern architecture in Britain.
8 Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983) – American neo-futuristic architect, systems theorist, designer and inventor.
my experience of Moscow, the Project Imagination seminar was conceived. In retrospect this was the starting point of our practice. There were further events and moments which impacted on the early developments of our practice and these are described in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

The results of this particular biographical study cannot be ignored. Without doubt, background, upbringing, and surroundings have had a bearing on our subsequent practice. This process revealed a number of important moments in pre-practice life:

- A general collection of information about arts, crafts, engineering
- Passive surroundings encouraging thought and dreams
- No specific career path or direct connections to particular professions
- Being kicked out of the family home at 18 years old (in traditional sense)

Looking back, there were three particularly important moments of personal architectural development:

New York
I travelled to New York on a quest to experience the new world, skyscrapers and the ultimate experience of an exciting modern city. This seemed infinitely better than my alternative prospects in Britain. A year-out job in a commercial practice in London during the late 1980s building boom, with a touch of post-modernism thrown in, did not appeal. Ironically, in this world of wide avenues and tall buildings, the internship offered was for a small practice which mainly specialized in the refurbishment of small old buildings – churches and theatres – including the design of small objects, such as cabinets and light fittings.

This experience had a huge impact on my approach to architectural practice. This was the first time that I came across an architectural practice which was so dedicated to achieving a beautiful, detailed aesthetic solution. Most memorable in this was working through a set of detailed drawings for the Columbarium in St. Thomas’ Church on Fifth Avenue. At this time I was also encouraged to study a book – The Place of Houses – which the owner of the practice, Gerald Allen had co-written with Charles Moore and Donlyn Lyndon.

In New York, I learned about the careful design of cabinets and light fittings, and studied the serious matter of vernacular house design.

RIBA student competition 1991. New Consumerism super-imposed onto Red Square. The proposal was that private vendors would use a shopping trolley which would open into a mini-stall complete with a foldaway canopy in the handle. This in effect happened as Moscow was inundated by makeshift kiosks in 1992.


Manhattan skyline where McAdam worked, 1988-89

Columbarium, St. Thomas’ Church, Fifth Avenue, New York. Gerald Allen & Associates, 1989

The Place of Houses – three architects suggest ways to build and inhabit houses. Charles Moore, Gerald Allen, Donlyn Lyndon, 1974.

Moscow Architectural Institute
My experience on the student exchange at Moscow Architectural Institute was quite unusual. I was placed into the fifth year course at the Faculty of Industrial Architecture – firstly due to my interest in the subject, secondly because the renowned Professor Alexei Khrustalev, who had been an architect at the United Nations for many years, was there and spoke fluent English (at the time I did not speak a word of Russian).

The coursework was for the design of a truly Soviet project – an Aircraft Assembly Plant for Ilyushin 96 – a gigantic hanger structure and assembly building. Professor Khrustalev was an avid supporter of high-tech architecture and I had arrived from England with first-hand knowledge of the works of Richard Rogers. So under enthusiastic supervision I put together the elaborate design of an exposed super-structure with pneumatic envelope and plug-in building services. This was presented on two boards of 1sqm stretched cartridge paper, rendered in water colour – a method dating back to the time of Constructivism.

In Moscow, I learned how to design a high-tech super-structure, ironically similar to those being built in the UK at the time.

Alison & Peter Smithson
By the time I began working with the Smithsons, their practice was in its latter stages and occupied the basement of their home in Chelsea, London. Work involved drawings of past projects for publication and the occasional international competition. It was a quiet and studious time, when I learned about Alison and Peter’s work and listened daily to their opinions and thoughts on architecture, urban matters and education.

For the first time, I was given direct access to what was going on in London: talks at the Architectural Association, shows at the Royal College of Art, numerous visits to the RIBA library. I met other architects who were acquainted with the Smithsons, and experienced first-hand that the Community of Practice which I had learned about as a student.

Alison and Peter gave me a stoic overview of the architectural profession and provided the moral support and contacts needed to kick-start Project Imagination (as described in Chapter 14 – ‘Project Imagination’).

11 Ilyushin 96 – large Russian passenger aeroplane – similar to the Boeing 767.
12 Richard Rogers – British architect well-known for high-tech architecture, where structures and services are exposed on the outside of the building.
How can an architectural practice influence the direction of urbanism and development strategies?
How can an architectural practice influence the direction of urbanism and development strategies?

As a direct consequence of the Accumulation of Skills the Art of Elasticity during the 2000s, the practice moved into new areas and expanded its knowledge even further. The size and complexity of our projects became greater and greater, gathering momentum with the Russian economy. As the building boom developed, local architects progressed and international architects appeared. Real estate requirements became more sophisticated and an indigenous appetite for architecture emerged.

In 2005, new discussions on land use and ownership were beginning to take hold in Russia. Large areas of green field land were being identified for development. This was a horrifying prospect: Moscow was heading for Suburbia! Any form of urban planning theory or education had been discarded in the 1960s, and thousands of hectares of collective farms were up for privatisation.

Until then, the technique with smaller areas of land (hundreds of hectares) had been to simply divide fields into square plots and sell them for individual development with no particular restraint or planning guidelines. The result of this was quite shocking. Many different architectural styles of cheap available materials were awkwardly positioned within gridded Moscow road patterns without centres, focal points or amenities.

Fortunately, as with the development of private houses, we encountered a handful of clients and organisations who were concerned about these tendencies. Things were moving to an urban scale and there was an opportunity to re-address the subject of suburbia to suit Moscow’s evolving population. As was often the case in new areas of design, McAdam and Kalinina were the first in line to advise on what to do.

The Kommunarka master plan

The first such approach was for the Kommunarka Master Plan – a selection of over a hundred fields, totalling 6000 hectares, spread over a 20 square kilometres, to the south-west of Moscow. The brief was straightforward: to isolate strategies to create an environment suitable for the new Moscow suburbs. The subject matter was extremely challenging and brought to mind no end of failed examples and resultant dystopias – the Garden Cities, Croydon, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Sprawl. Almost all existing solutions seemed flawed, and driven primarily by political intent, geography and statistics.

This was not just an architectural matter. It involved the environment, infrastructure, transport, economics, sociology, and landscaping. The practice’s self-defined role was to write a brief and to select ten suitable organisations from around the world to visit Moscow, exchange ideas, and discuss their approach to the new Moscow suburbia. This in itself was an interesting task, as it involved research into the global matter of urbanism. It allowed us to develop a repertoire and general understanding of today’s urban trends.

1 The Garden Cities, Letchworth, Harlow, Welwyn Garden City. New Towns built in Britain in the early 20th century on principles set out by Ebenezer Howard. Their main purpose was to relieve population density in London, from which they were accessible via rail.
2 Croydon, town directly south of London, which has been engulfed by city expansion and is now part of the same urban mass. Amalgamated to Greater London in 1965.
4 Sprawl, Robert Bruegmann, 2005. A study into complexity of vast urban and suburban areas with a logical argument on the consequence of economic growth and the democratization of society, with benefits that urban planners have failed to recognize.
Three teams were shortlisted from this process: URS Corporation/Maxwan, John Thompson / BuroHappold and Albert Speer. They were asked to prepare a ‘concept for urban strategy’ over a three month period. After three months they presented their proposals to the client team and a select international jury of Professor Leon van Schaik, Jim Meikle, Terry Ealey, and Michael Timpson.

The proposals presented were all very conservative in approach. The commission was awarded to URS Corporation / Maxwan, who seemed to have an understanding of how to phase the development of a vast area utilising private finance.

**The Nikolo-Khovanskoye master plan**

Most importantly, the process was a rewarding experience. As with previous collaborations it brought the practice into new professional, architectural, and social circles. It also lead the practice to a new commission with the same client: the design of a new residential settlement for 15,000 people – the Nikolo-Khovanskoye master plan. This was to be a pilot project for the Kommunarka area. It was a green field site of 78 hectares just outside the city ringroad. The only condition was that we should invite as team members a group of experienced consultants who had collectively done similar things before. So together with our old friend and colleague Jan Stormer, and a few other German consultants we made attempts to prepare a logical and realisable proposal for a ‘New Town for Moscow’s new suburbia’.

The trajectory of this project was rather strange – as we worked it seemed that we were re-inventing (or even re-living) a process of development akin to that of Victorian England, where industrialists built new residential areas with hotels, offices, schools, social amenities and even railways. This situation was almost identical to ours and it was fascinating to understand how the capitalist model must be repeating its stages. But there were underlying differences. This was real suburbia and our studies showed that the Utopian idea of a well-balanced, autonomous settlement with housing, schools, amenities and workplaces, was unrealistic. We estimated the demand for such a product to be quite serious – about 500,000 people desired to live in a green suburban environment and could afford a mortgage of $250,000.
Unfortunately, the reality was that the upper middle class would move into the new settlement, pushing the value of real estate beyond reason. Every morning they would commute to Moscow, making the traffic problem worse and defeating the object of the scheme!

The master plan concept was well thought-out and the actual work spanned an 18-month period. It followed a very strict and detailed brief based on stringent analysis of the situation and population requirements. It involved an overall vision, economic strategy, transport, infrastructure, landscape and ecology, phasing, and cash flow for construction. It integrated with existing villages, maintained streams, lakes, and contours, and enhanced existing vegetation patterns. It involved detailed statistics and calculations for living units, commercial functions, and social amenities. Building blocks, streets, squares, boulevards; all were modestly and pragmatically designed in a catalogue fashion. It was non-architectural!

The Nikolo-Khovanskoye master plan was revered by client bodies, financiers, developers, and city authorities alike. It was viewed as a major breakthrough for urban planning in Russia. It was published in the architectural press in the UK and Germany, and was exhibited at MIPIM in Cannes in 2007.

Subsequent political and technical stages of the master plan ran into complications, as the Design Institutes and larger local architectural firms became intrigued and determined to be involved. For the practice it was a similar situation to that experienced on the Univermag Department Store, where connections had been more important for getting a project through planning, than getting the concept or strategy right. The project came to a halt in the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, and those involved in finance and development disbanded and went their separate ways.

We see this work as an important moment. It established the practice in a professional area of master planning and strategic development. It gave us the opportunity to discuss urbanism and cities at an international level. Our input at debates on urban regeneration was considered of value. I spoke at related conferences and was invited to be a member of the Academy of Urbanism.
17. Bring on the Mega Projects

The International Trade and Expo Centre (ITEC)

Whilst the Financial Crisis of 2008 led to the swift postponement of all such projects in Russia, we continued to talk about Urbanism – strategic development and master planning – in an international context. Practice work at this time (2009–10) was confined to ongoing residential projects in London and Moscow Region and there were very few opportunities for new commissions.

Out of the blue, there was a phone call from Paris. It was the French retail developer who had been our client five years before on the Univermag Department Store in central Moscow. He was now concentrating on China and had picked up a Hong Kong-based journal with an article on Nikolo-Khovanskoye. It was a strange coincidence, as he had just been asked to prepare a rather unusual proposal and did not know which way to turn. He described the situation thus:

The Chinese want to have more control of their export market. Rather than companies arriving in China to export goods, they want to go out to the world on a giant marketing and sales campaign. The idea is that they will build huge trading satellites around the world – the first of which should be in the centre of Western Europe.

Can you prepare a brief and an outline concept for a six million sqm trading and logistics centre in a field, near Metz, in the north of France?

Our initial reaction was one of horror! What an absurd idea. Such a development would be against all principles of responsible and sustainable design. Six million sqm of retail and logistics in Metz— it couldn’t be a serious proposition.

11 Metz: city in northern France, capital of the Lorraine region and Moselle department, close to borders with Germany and Luxembourg.
However, it appeared that those involved were serious players with government support and financial means. This was a great dilemma – should we be involved or not? On one hand we could walk away from a serious commission with knowledge that a giant engineering group or contractor could cover this field with arbitrary sheds and shopping mall volumes. On the other hand perhaps we could influence the process, design something well-thought out and analysed, and at least bring to the project environmental issues and impact on local population.

So in we jumped! Initially it reminded me of ‘Fhloston Paradise’ in the Luc Besson film The Fifth Element (a hovering holiday resort with “twelve swimming pools – two on the rooftop. All the restaurants are between level two and level ten. The planet Fhloston has 400 beaches, all accessible until 5pm etc) but as we began to work on the master plan in detail it became more akin to electronics or circuit board design. Our plan was all about the movement and flow of different media (visitors, staff, deliveries, trucks, cars, trolleys, trains) which each had specific requirements and should not cross.

It was a very complex planning task. The central eight-storey volume comprised three million sqm open-plan retail and expo space, which was divided into four zones. Each zone had a large central courtyard space acting as entrance and orientation point for the complex. This was set over a giant car-parking facility and 500,000 sqm logistics centre with a customs clearance terminal, as well as incoming passenger railway shuttle. All elements were interconnected by a complex network of vertical and horizontal circulation. A series of hotels and accommodation for up to 40,000 visitors, office buildings and staff housing, were positioned as stand-alone buildings around the perimeter.

Trade agreements were signed between France and China. President Sarkozy gave his support as it would be a job creator in an impoverished industrial region, and the head of the regional council was in the limelight.

The design process was intense and lasted for over a year. Meetings were held in Paris with the French side and in Dubai with the Chinese (they are very fond of Dubai). In terms of master planning and strategic development the client listened and accepted almost all of our proposals and arguments. For them everything was about statistics. The script ran something like this:

*Client organisation: How many shops? How many visitors? How many trucks, escalators, and hotel rooms? When can we start building?*

*Our response: Sorry – this is a master plan concept, a vision, an initial idea. It has not been tested, or reviewed or detailed in any way!*

*Client organisation: This is great. We could build a few of these in China.*

To make matters more complicated, a first phase of development was commissioned to the practice. This was for a “temporary” single-storey building of a mere 200,000 sqm, with retail and expo frontage and the deliveries round the back. This proposal was for a simple waved façade with landscape roof garden.

We believe that this phase is already under construction in Metz today. As with the Nikolo-Khovansky master plan, we found it very difficult to maintain involvement beyond the initial strategic planning stage – as clients, engineering groups and building contractors had the connections and persuasion to intervene.
16. Bring on The Mega Projects

The Moscow Agglomeration

Political decisions can be quite baffling. In 2011, under the presidency of Dmitri Medvedev15, plans were announced to extend the city of Moscow to the south-west by attaching a land area of 148,000 hectares. Apart from a general concern for population density and a clear red boundary line drawn on a plan, the grand plan relied on the idea of moving federal government offices out of central Moscow to encourage new development in the area.

To validate this decision a competition was announced, calling for international architects and urban planners to submit credentials for a shortlist procedure. Frankly, at the time we did not have the energy or optimism to look at this. Collating a multi-disciplinary team and preparing a submission in the usual way would be complicated and time consuming, and did not appeal. We dismissed this opportunity as a political farce.

However, only a few days before the submission deadline for the shortlist, we were contacted by our colleague, Aleksey Ginzburg16. He asked if we would join a Russian design consortium, to advise on urban matters and the development strategy. Our experience with master planning, large-scale projects and knowledge of Russian practice was considered essential to complete the team. This consortium was to lead by Andrey Chernikhov17, and comprised a long list of Russian and international components, including McAdam Architects, Happold Consulting18, Tower 151 Architects19, and a number of local specialists from Moscow State University. We were chosen for the shortlist without hesitation – the team’s connections and experience were irresistible to the organisers.

In all, nine teams were shortlisted20. This process was most tedious. Teams were asked to prepare proposals over a six month period and attend monthly, conference-style presentations on a monthly basis in Moscow. For our particular team, which was spread across Europe, this was complicated. The work was essentially divided amongst the members by subject matter and then collated in three days of frantic discussions before each presentation.

As the competition progressed it became clear that the decision to extend the city in this way was not rational in terms of urban planning and city development. There were 18,000 hectares of disused industrial sites and railway land within the existing city boundaries, and some of it was prime real estate along the Moscow river. Surely these areas should be looked at before expanding into green fields and forests. Although in contradiction to the brief, at the presentation of April 2012 we presented this notion clearly:

‘We have not found any significant economical, political or social arguments for the relocation of the Russian Federation government beyond the Moscow Ring Road except for the coincidence of interests of certain oligarchy sectors and state bureaucracy.’

Our intrepid suggestions were met with a defensive response from the organisers. However, fellow participants and many of the jury members applauded us. A heated but open debate ensued. As a final conclusion the Chernikhov team was scored winner of the design stage.

Whilst our team continued this line of approach, developing the competition scheme became increasingly difficult. On one hand we had successfully challenged the brief, but on the other the task requested had to be completed. The result was that rather than presenting a coherent urban strategy, we outlined a general approach and proposed a series of hypothetical scenarios on what could be done in future.

We understand that, whilst two teams were commissioned to work further on the Moscow Agglomeration, this process fizzled away within months of the competition.

The International Trade and Expo Centre and the Moscow Agglomeration projects overlapped with the Practice Research. This meant that they were both presented and discussed at Practice Research Symposium Four, in Ghent (November 2012).

We have identified that this work is a major part of the Initiatives and Strategic Visions stream, in that it involved prioritising an approach before a design. This way of working often gives us the opportunity to steer a brief or urban vision in a certain direction, setting out principles and parameters for further development.

This kind of work is a key component to practice development as it focuses on the creation of environments, and the possibility to influence social behaviour patterns. We also surmise that this work broadens our insight of peripheral subjects, enhances the position and status of the practice in many areas, and can be used as a stepping stone to gaining interesting commissions.

17. Andrey Chernikhov – practicing architect, Moscow Grandson of Constructivist architect, Yakov Chernikhov.
20. Shortlisted teams for the Moscow Agglomeration competition – Ostozhenka (Russia), Chernikhov (Russia), Nikken Sekkei (Japan), Antoine Grumbach (France), L’AUC (France), OMA (The Netherlands), Ricardo Bofill (Spain), Studio Ass Secchi (Italy), Urban Design Associates (USA).
16. Bring on The Mega Projects

Moscow Agglomeration, 2012.
Plan showing large areas of unused industrial sites, along the Moskva River. The main argument of the consortium was that surely these brown field sites should be looked at before building on green field sites outside the city.

17. The Rise of Kubanism

How can we instigate change through teaching and educational programs?
17. The Rise of Kubanism

How can we instigate change through teaching and educational programs?

From the beginning the practice has been involved in teaching. Even before Project Imagination, McAdam was involved in sporadic workshop tuition at various architecture schools, with fellow graduate architect, Stephen Williams.

This workshop ethos formed the genesis of Project Imagination (1992) and provided a structure for the event, where participants were divided into groups to work on diverse architectural topics. Here, in addition to organizational responsibilities, I worked alongside Will Alsop, Vsevolod Kulish, and a group of twelve students, on proposals for stations on a new electro-magnetic railway. This gave me first-hand experience of working with inspirational architects. Project Imagination led to numerous invitations to lecture and participate in crits and consultations at various architecture schools in Britain and Russia.

In 2000-01, Moscow Architectural Institute extended an invitation to run a diploma unit with Vsevolod Kulish in the Faculty of Industrial Architecture. This was a strange experience. The institute remained in disarray after the political upheaval in Russia during the 1990s. Many students were busy with work, and as a result course attendance was intermittent. However this teaching partnership successfully enthused the group, and at the end of the year eight students were awarded first class diplomas, one of whom won the annual National Student Prize.

Fellow professors and tutors were a fine bunch. On many occasions we joined them to drink vodka (modestly) and discuss the demise of architectural education. In this context I recall a touching and amusing incident – on arrival to the Institute one morning I found them solemnly discussing what they could do to ensure my safety and freedom. It had been announced on the news that an American professor was arrested for spying, discovered in possession of design plans for a submarine. As the Faculty of Industrial Architecture was housing similar sensitive material, this was a real concern!

The success of the diploma course led to more involvement in academic circles. Of particular significance was a renewed discourse with Eugene Asse, with whom I exchanged ideas and thoughts over the coming years. Architectural education was in disarray. The methods and subjects discussed still belonged to the Soviet era. Students were engaged in utopian compositions for large complexes and were not being prepared for the contemporary situation. The whole system was in desperate need of reform and a fresh approach.

As commented by Aleksandr Rappaport in Project Russia 54 ‘Aliens’ (2004): “University departments of architecture in Russia inflict great harm on the spiritual and intellectual development of the student. There exists generally a cult of graphic dexterity and compositional mastery, whereas problems of the historical relativity of taste and the meaning of architecture in the sphere of contemporary philosophical culture are completely ignored.”
17. The Rise of Kubanism

At this time, Valery Goloverov (Kalinina’s father) was in the process of opening an architecture school in Krasnodar, as part of the Kuban State University (as described in Chapter 6, ‘Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy’). He consulted us about current educational trends in Europe and our direct experience of British architecture schools. We in turn investigated the situation on his behalf and arranged visits to schools. In 2005, he opened the school and we were asked to be involved, on a six-monthly basis, in lectures, workshops and consultation.

Extending this partnership, we offered work experience to students from the Krasnodar School and the tutoring of a small number of diploma students via internet distance learning.

The school now has 150 students and is awarding up to 20 diplomas per year. Teaching capabilities are limited to a small founding group of architects and supplemented by occasional master classes from overseas visitors. Unfortunately, there is little desire from practicing Krasnodar architects to be involved with the educational process and graduates from the school now involved in the teaching process, whilst enthusiastic, lack confidence and direction.

During this time we had also embarked on the Practice Research Program at RMIT University. We realized that the format of the six-monthly practice research symposium, that we encountered there, could be applied to the Krasnodar course. The proposal was to run similar workshops in Krasnodar, with young tutors and post-graduate students. The main aim being to enhance teaching methods, explore new ways of understanding architecture, and to encourage self-expression.

We followed the notion of Alvin Boyarsky: “Pile it up and smoke will come out”.

The first seminar took place in 2012. This entailed an introductory presentation by each candidate to a panel of senior staff and program supervisors, and fellow candidates. The purpose of the first presentation was for each candidate to outline who they are, what they do, and what is important to them. This reflected the biographical exercise of Practice Symposium Three, in Ghent, 2012, which had Jungian underpinnings and drew from his biographical text *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*.

We determined that the presentation format would include: student projects, practice work, interests within architecture, interests outside architecture, important moments, ideas about architecture, reasons for teaching, and aims and ambitions for the future.
17. The Rise of Kubanism

The panel of established staff, the tutors, and the post-graduate students all responded with enthusiasm. It was an ice-breaking moment in which those involved gained a clearer insight into the background and inspirations of others. It highlighted common concerns for the urban environment, lack of planning control, status of the architectural profession, and general disregard for social responsibility. This led to an increased sense of community which, in turn, led to the formation of the Regional Architectural Laboratory.

The purpose of the second seminar was to focus on each candidate’s specific interest in architecture, practice, and teaching. The brief was to research a particular architectural topic or type of practice activity identified in seminar one. This seminar was attended by visiting professor David Porter, who gave an introductory lecture and was also a member of the supervisory panel. The results of this seminar highlighted that, in general, the candidates had insufficient experience to tackle the brief effectively.

This led to a third seminar in which the candidates were asked to run student workshops involving the whole school. Supervisors were not directly involved in the running of workshops but acted as advisors to the candidates. The outcome was positive and the quality of material was comparable with that of any European architecture school.

Ultimately this series of seminars fostered an improved and more relaxed atmosphere within the school, informal and open relationships between younger tutors and senior staff, and a proactive engagement with the Regional Architectural Laboratory.

From our experience with the Kuban State University we can say that it is possible to move towards resolving a teaching deficit through a combination of practice and open discourse. We found that young tutors were enthused when given the opportunity to contribute to discourse, and to have their ideas taken into consideration. We might also say that our involvement here was altruistic in that it was a gratis passing-on of knowledge, assistance with educational programs, and initiation of events beneficial to the architectural profession.

18. A summary of research and findings

What did we discover through this research process and how might this be applicable to other practices?
What did the research entail, what did we discover, and how might this be applicable to other practices?

The following is a general summary of the research undertaken throughout the program, over a period of three years (April 2011–August 2014), including participation in Practice Research Symposia on a six-monthly basis in Ghent, and latterly, Barcelona.

We have resolved that the best term with which to describe McAdam and Kalinina is as a Bicultural Practice. We have discovered through this reflection that ours is a ‘pure’ form of biculturalism – where the 2 x 2 x 2 scenario is at work (2 individuals, 2 cultures, 2 locations). We believe that this quality grew from an initial exchange, where through the scenario of ‘the Stranger and the Host’, both partners benefited from a bicultural arrangement. Even today this exchange continues, in a similar format to its beginnings. We have described the specific events which took place on this bicultural level – the Project Imagination seminar, Time for Change exhibition, and a number of collaborative projects in architecture and education. These all contributed to the development of the bicultural practice. In the future, biculturalism in architectural practice will surely become more commonplace. It may not take such a literal form as McAdam and Kalinina, but is bound to develop as students of architecture move around the world, forming practices together. This meeting would normally take place during student years enabling the partners to know enough about the others culture, and to promote the link in architectural circles. What we have learned, and what others could too, is that we do not wait for a community of practice to eventuate, we instigate this from the outset.

We began the research process using The Practice Map. This was an essential tool for reflecting on the body of work and understanding how the practice had evolved over time. It was an inductive tool that allowed us to stand back and look at the practice activities as a whole, enabling us to draw motivation from reality. This Map was discussed and developed throughout the research, through overlays and enhancements. It gave clarity in complexities, and helped us to identify key moments, links, and developments. We believe that for established practices with a large body of work, complex or specific characteristics, a Practice Map is an extremely useful tool for illustrating and clarifying practice activities, influences and contexts in a single complex diagram.

From the Practice Map, we moved on to examine The Endeavours of Practice and clearly identified three streams of work in the practice: Strategic visions and initiatives, Competitions, and Built projects. We discovered that these three streams were often interconnected and to show this we proposed a Diagram of Endeavours. We added lines of resistance to represent levels of practice experience: Joy, Enjoyment, Tolerance, Trials and tribulations, Humiliation. Through these filters we could assess the position and quality of a particular project or practice activity, and thereby consider its value to the future of the practice. As a test, four current projects were positioned on this diagram, and through this test we were able to see that one particular project, The Central House of Artists, was potentially within the very centre of the diagram, enduring ‘Joy’. Our view is that such a diagram or similar approach to examine practice endeavours could be beneficially applied to other architectural practices and creative professions.

During the research three seminal projects were chosen as clear representations of practice drivers and design approach. These were: Trubnaya Office Building, The Larch House and Univermag Department Store. These projects were very different in type, function, volume, appearance and materials, and yet they emerged from the same practice. We studied these projects in detail – their locations, restrictions, forms, materials and the practice’s design approach to each. Through this process we determined that these projects were connected by common attributes: suitability to a particular location, considered reference to their architectural/cultural context, understanding local building methods and materials, and subtly introduced dynamic components. They were completely related by drivers, design approach and practice methodology. We went on to examine why these projects are considered successful and realised that in each case: we were the lead designer, the partners were continuously involved, and the resultant buildings were similar to initial sketches.

Looking at the life and history of the practice, we surmise that we have no specific mentors, but have taken influence from a broad collection of individuals – peripheral mentors: The Provocateur, The Enthusiast, The Entertainer, The Chess Player, The Ambassador, and The Educator. These characters have all contributed significantly to different areas of practice development. The ‘essence’ of influence from each of these peripheral mentors gives a comprehensive overview of the main external influences on the practice. Their influences complement and contrast with the innate nature of the bicultural partnership, where influence is drawn from an exchange of culture, and with the accumulation of skills through learning by trial and error. Overall, these components clearly encapsulate the ethos of the practice, or at least encapsulate what we would like it to be! We suspect that there are many practices which have relied on peripheral mentors or indirect influence for insight and encouragement. On conclusion of this exercise we are convinced that an abstract method of identifying these characters, roles, or influences is a good way of understanding the roots and components of practice.

Using similar principles, we have attempted to clarify how the practice’s skill set developed professionally. This is described in Chapter 6, The Accumulation of Skills. Investigating this subject we realised that almost all of our practice skills were consciously self-taught. From the beginning, these skills were divided into four professional areas: design, the building process, business management, and public activities. Here we have studied these areas and can summarise that the practice designs using intuition; has learned the building process by building; has learned
business management from a corporate culture; and has engaged in public activities to a greater extent, to further the Practice and as a form of Altruism. This confirmed to us that the struggles experienced in developing the Practice were directly related to the anxious process of self-learning, and that the four groups of skills identified were fundamental to the Practice’s development and continue to be used today as a method of practicing.

In a quest to understand more about the architecture of the practice, we embarked on an exercise where we divided the body of works into similar architectural groups: interlocking boxes, cylindrical forms, peeled facades, urban mega-blocks, spirals, organic forms. We entitled this exercise Happy Families. This allowed us to identify the architectural components in operation, but left open the question: how are the works different and yet part of the same family – ‘continuity behind variety’. In search for an answer we pursued different and more detailed investigations. However, we are of the conviction that for a practice with a large and varied body of work, there is benefit in using such a tool for the ordering and comprehension of the architecture involved.

One of these studies was a Project Classification Matrix, which is described in the essay Belonging to the Emperor. This involved plotting the Practice’s works against architectural components / criteria. The number of component hits is recorded for each project revealing the dominant architectural group to which the work belongs. A further Project Relationship Matrix was studied plotting the Practice’s works against each other and scored by the number of common hits. The main result of this exercise was that it confirmed the selection of key seminal projects as having similar architectural components. Other results were not clear and led to discussions about classification systems and criteria selection. Nevertheless, this study was beneficial as it gave a deeper understanding of the body of work – it allowed us to stand back and look objectively at the works and to see dominant tendencies and relationships between projects. Though we are not convinced that this is an objective process, we believe that for a practice with a large and varied body of work, it is a very useful tool for the collection of data and the ordering or understanding of architecture at work.

As part of this introspective process we looked to investigate the actual process of practice, to understand the operating methods of the partners – what, how and where practice takes place! The relevant essay is entitled The Black Spot, a metaphor for the main idea for a project. Through sketch diagrams and conversations we have suggested that there is a ‘security system’ in place which is policed by the partners. We have also described the isolated locations where designing takes place, and how the two partners use different work methods. We have highlighted a particular project – The Church of St Barbara and the Holy Rosary - where an almost literal representation of the Black Spot has been achieved through a community project, fully-supported and protected by all involved. We experienced a number of revelations at this point: the partners are sole guardians of the Black Spot, the inception of the Black Spot involved both working in ‘relay’ fashion, the Black Spot is developed in locations of isolation and on release to the studio; the Black Spot is monitored by the partners. We found these discoveries exciting and believe that the questions posed could be used as a prompt for understanding the workings of other practices and creative professions.

As a continuation of this introspective study of the process of practice, I have looked further into the workings of my partnership with Tanya Kalinina. This essay is entitled Coalition Government and the Importance of the Relay, and discusses the specific nature of the working relationship. It considers the beginning of the friendship and the roles of the ‘Stranger and the Host’, and goes on to describe how the partners grant ‘License to Practice’ to the other. The survey revealed how the decision making process works through a mechanism of ‘Coalition’ and in particular the recurrent theme of the ‘Relay’ which is an ever present characteristic of the practice process. Whilst the results of the study are ultimately specific to this intense working and living relationship, we would suggest that such an overview is beneficial to the research of partnerships.

A simple question remained: why is the body of work so multifarious? Our conjecture here is straightforward – we believe that it is because the practice beginnings coincided with the very beginning of a new era in Russia. The location required us to be ‘generalists’ – architects who could turn their hands to designing a range of project types. We refer to our adaptability as the Art of Elasticity – the ability to adapt, research and respond allows the practice to quickly turn its attentions to a variety of situations. We do not believe that this is a common trait, but one formed by a set of conditions at a specific moment.

These non-specific characteristics in turn led us to ask a further question: What Architect (are we)? How might we be classified? The most precise and straightforward answer to this is that we strive to be a ‘conventional practice’, but operate in unconventional circumstances. In this way we contrive ‘normal’ situations and social environments in which to practice. On detailed observation we believe that the Practice inhabits two roles in this respect – one of the ‘19th century architect’, where the architect stands at the centre of a project team, and the other of a ‘Collaborator’, where the architect is part of a larger project structure. For the former we have cited the example of the Red October master plan and brief. Such investigation of roles can give clarity to the operating modes of architectural practice. In the course of research it is a worthwhile exercise to understand its role in the context of a professional environment.

During the process of reflection, with use of The Practice Map, we have identified key moments in practice development. Besides the partners meeting as students during Perestroika, we have identified the Project Imagination seminar as an all-important single event which created the basis for the practice for years to come. This event, which was initiated at specific moment in time and history; took 20 British architects to run workshops at Moscow Architectural Institute. It was a ‘pure’ bicultural activity giving us immediate professional status and connecting us to architectural circles in both countries – Communities of Practice with which we are still involved today. The principles engaged through this event formed the core of the bicultural practice: the balanced input of two individuals, the process of learning through exchange, the role of public activities in the creation of communities of practice, the acceptance of social responsibility, and that good debate is often the best way to begin professional relationships.

To further understand the origins of the Practice and the mental space of the partners at work, we have undertaken brief biographical studies to establish any links between personal background and subsequent architectural practice. This is described in Chapter 15 – Dark Satanic Mills, which takes inspiration from Memories, Dreams, Reflections by C. G. Jung (1963). This gives a brief account of childhood and student
Furthermore, it is clear that new directions in practice have emerged throughout the research program, because reflection and analysis have formed the basis for speculation into new ventures. Two distinct new streams of activity have emerged –

In conclusion I would like to make the following statement:

The Practice Research Program was of enormous benefit to McAdam Architects and tacit knowledge, building instinctive action into consciously articulated and tested knowledge. This has given us a new understanding of the strengths and characteristics of our practice.

Biculturalism and its traits were fundamental to the establishment of the practice, and formed its underlying premise for many years. We now articulate the interactions between the partners as a dynamic ... in which each partner empowers the other to pursue distinctive and individual design pathways. This has informed the specific nature of our current bicultural practice, which we argue is a model overcoming the banality of global practice and the restraints of local context. We suggest that this notion is worthy of further research.

We have discovered that our architecture is contextual – not in the stylistic sense, but in that we foreground a considered approach to cultural, social, and historic contexts. We have uncovered guiding principles that drive our design with location-specific parameters forming the basis of the process.

Through the research we have contrived specific methods and tools with which to examine and understand the workings and complexities of the practice process – tools which we will continue to use for future practice. We suggest that other practitioners and creative professions could also learn from these methods.

Teaching and educational programs are an important part of the practice activities, and form a clear and consistent band in the Practice Map. McAdam in particular has been involved with teaching since graduating in 1991 – in workshops lectures and visiting critic at various schools in Britain and Russia. He ran a diploma unit at Moscow Architectural Institute in 2000-01 and has been heavily involved, along with Kalinina, in the establishment of a new architectural school in Krasnodar, south Russia. The latter has involved the initiation of a professional development program for tutors, as a response to a teaching deficit in the region. This program which was instigated as an element of the Practice Research has led to the proactive formation of the Regional Architectural Laboratory – where a group of young architects and tutors have created a community in which to discuss the problems of the urban environment. We refer to this fledging movement as The Rise of Kubanism. We have considered this in the context of biculturalism and would say that our involvement here was mainly altruistic in that it was a generous passing on of knowledge, assistance with educational programs and initiation of events beneficial to the architectural profession.

Our recent practice has concentrated on activities in Britain. This work largely involves private residential projects secured through existing Russian clients and contacts. These projects, which overlap with the beginning of the research, have reinforced certain specific discoveries from the reflective process: the enhancement of our preferred role as ‘19th century architect’, our core ability to research, adapt, and respond to new situations and professional procedures; the instigation of a new community of practice and its relevance to project work.

Furthermore, it is clear that new directions in practice have emerged throughout the research program, because reflection and analysis have formed the basis for speculation into new ventures. Two distinct new streams of activity have emerged – an architectural development initiative and an increasing participation in discourse on urban planning and city development strategies.

In conclusion I would like to make the following statement:

The Practice Research Program was of enormous benefit to McAdam Architects and its partners, James McAdam and Tanya Kalinina. The process was enlightening and we enjoyed working in a collegial atmosphere with supervisors and fellow candidates from RMIT University. Through it, we have uncovered much about our own previously tacit knowledge, building instinctive action into consciously articulated and tested knowledge. This has given us a new understanding of the strengths and characteristics of our practice.

Biculturalism and its traits were fundamental to the establishment of the practice, and formed its underlying premise for many years. We now articulate the interactions between the partners as a dynamic licensing process, in which each partner empowers the other to pursue distinctive and individual design pathways. This has informed the specific nature of our current bicultural practice, which we argue is a model overcoming the banality of global practice and the restraints of local context. We suggest that this notion is worthy of further research.

We have discovered that our architecture is contextual – not in the stylistic sense, but in that we foreground a considered approach to cultural, social, and historic contexts. We have uncovered guiding principles that drive our design with location-specific parameters forming the basis of the process.

Through the research we have contrived specific methods and tools with which to examine and understand the workings and complexities of the practice process – tools which we will continue to use for future practice. We suggest that other practitioners and creative professions could also learn from these methods.

We have established that the partners are self-taught practitioners, and have considered the benefits of not being apprenticed in the traditional ways. Instead, we have relied on intuition, the influence of peripheral mentors, and learning by experience. This inductive and adaptive approach manifests in our guiding principles and has been documented as part of the research process.

Where we began by focusing on a body of work (both built and un-built) the research has revealed that the practice is constantly focused on strategic initiatives, professional activities, and education. My personal research has revealed that I am primarily engaged in this process, focusing on urban development strategies and teaching programs as a way to instigate change in social and professional environments.

Most significantly, as a direct consequence of this Practice Research Program we have begun to reshape the trajectory of our practice. These new directions have been informed directly by the research process, which allows new ventures to be speculatively explored and then practically pursued. We have deduced that we do not wait for projects to eventuate – we plan ahead, initiate, and participate in the creation of situations in which to practice.

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