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Boredom in the Architecture of Will Alsop

To Will Alsop, one of the most irreverent and playful architects of recent decades, boredom was a creative force. Tendering buildings as urban attractions, in demand of attention, his work features colourful surfaces and original spatial arrangements that required clever engineering. Behind this creativity and innovation, his approach to design was characterised by procuring boredom and slowness. He conceived projects when sitting in his kitchen table for hours, particularly during the weekends and on holidays, or by pouring paint on a wall in his office and watching it dry. These actions, he confessed, permitted ‘the world to enter into [his] head’ and display ‘noise on the table’ – ‘that’s when everything starts’; the observation of the unnoticed and minuscule demanded a lengthy process of circling around the same ideas, until a lead was recognised. This moment was followed by drawing and writing to test the validity of what had been found, pondering if it was worth further exploration, and by waiting, putting canvases and texts to rest for extended periods before continuing. Based on an interview from November 2017, six months before Alsop’s death, this paper explores his boredom as a mode of architectural knowledge. Unlike design methods inculcated by educational institutions and validated by academia, boredom as an instigator of design capitalises a commonly shared condition, a tacit component of modernity that is usually negated and avoided in the contemporary practice of architecture. Boredom is emotional and instinctual rather than rational and logical, permitting the critical identification of limits to transgress and thus promoting the ideation of what is yet to be constructed.