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**Sarah Wigglesworth's (ed.)  
'Around & About Stock Orchard Street'**

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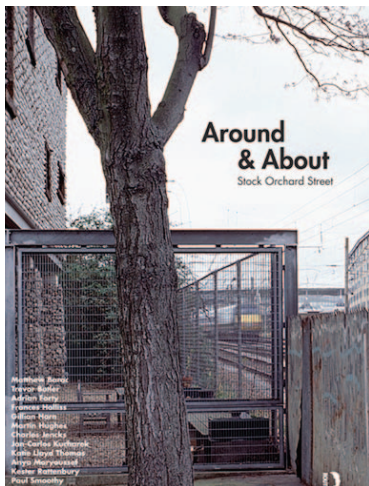
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Around & About Stock Orchard Street by Sarah Wigglesworth (ed.) published by Routledge in 2011 is a book about the design, realisation and dissemination of the editors house and architects' office at 9/10 Stock Orchard Street in London. The editor of the book is also the co-author of *Desiring Practices, Architecture, Gender and the Interdisciplinary* (Black Dog Press 1996) and *Architectural Design, The Everyday and Architecture* (Academy Editions, 1998).

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**Figure 1. Cover: *Around & About Stock Orchard Street*. [e-source: < <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415575294/> >]**

The book is divided into three parts that are sequenced in a roughly chronological order. Part 1 offers a personal insight into the design and construction process. The text, written by Wigglesworth and Till, the architects, authors and occupants of the building is supplemented by Paul Smoothy's photographic tour of the house after it was completed in 2000. This section introduces the idea that architecture is a process rather than an object. Personal preferences, financial constraints and accidental discoveries have contributed as much to the ultimate form of the building as distinct design decisions.

Part 2 discusses typology, materiality and construction process. Frances Holliss' essay 'House with associated office?' provides a fascinating anthology of live-work space since the 19th century. Martin Hughes' contribution, 'Getting it built' introduces a non-linear programming model, which was used to build SOS. Trevor Butler traces the history of sustainable construction since the house was designed. Jan-Carlos Kucharek's amusing anecdotal text continues the personal narrative that dominates part 1. Katie Lloyd Thomas' essay sets up a feminist argument by relating the material practice employed in the construction of SOS to the building regulations. This is followed by a fascinating selection of the construction drawings of the house.

Part 3 reflects on the house ten years after its completion. Gillian Horn's essay '10 years on' outlines the dramatic shifts in architectural practice and procurement of buildings that have occurred since the house was built. Trevor Butler's analysis of the building's energy performance follows a similar strategy by highlighting how sustainable thinking has had an impact on construction in recent years. It is difficult to spot the difference between Paul Smoothy's photographs of the house after completion reproduced in part 1 and the ones taken on the tenth anniversary of the house reproduced in part 3. Kester Rattenbury is probably the most daring addition to the editor's list of authors. In a genuine tone Rattenbury gets to the very heart of the controversy around SOS. It questions why the house has attained such an elevated status if in fact many of its ambitions are apparently ordinary. Adrian Forty's essay 'To make wonders plain: the ethics of Stock Orchard Street' is one of those rare pieces of writing that makes you smile after reading it. Forty categorizes the building as a *sylva*, a type of writing, if translated into architecture, is most reminiscent of SOS's hairy southern wall that extends its rough and frilly fibres across the high speed rail tracks.

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Aligning the book with other books on architecture is a tricky undertaking. Contemporary buildings are commonly disseminated via the professional press, in architectural monographs or alongside other buildings of the same type in a compilation. Theoretical writing on contemporary buildings is rare. How would one categorize *Around & About*? Next to which other architecture book in the library shelf will it be placed? Lifestyle for its experiential content? Building Technologies for the environmental systems that it explains? Theory for its reflections on ethics? History for its evaluation of building types? Sustainable Architecture for its reproduction of straw bale construction details? There is only one classification which comprises all of these elements: Architectural Practice. Maybe it should come as no surprise that the book's editor runs a successful architectural practice from the very premises that the book disseminates. Yet, this does not make the book any less innovative. Architects commonly write about their work, but the novelty here is the use of the practising architects' working method to edit a book. Contemporary architects work in a team. Whilst drawing and writing are both essential tools to evolve and communicate a design, it is often the architect's ability to engage and direct that asserts their status in the design team. In her book, Wigglesworth takes on the role of the design team leader, collating and editing the contributions from a diverse range of specialists that all work together to evolve the book (building) into a coherent whole. The thirteen members of the book's design team that Wigglesworth has chosen comprise academics and practitioners; some well known, some with more obscure relationships to the building on Stock Orchard Street.

The building review is an established format of discourse amongst the architectural profession. Reviews of contemporary buildings are common. Often, the method of review involves the author sequentially taking on the role of the user, the architect, the contractor, the town planner and the environmental technologist to assess the building's failure or success. The title *Around & About* suggests a more loose relationship between the author and the building. Whilst some contributors discuss one particular aspect about the building in depth, other authors have chosen to evaluate the wider consequences for architecture that arise from the building's context. This 'around & about' relationship between author and subject defines the work of the practising architect. A successful ar-

chitect is able to mediate between the needs of the user as an individual and the wider social, political and urban context surrounding their project.

Having established that *Around & About* is really about architectural practice, it becomes vital to consider the book alongside Jeremy Till's book *Architecture Depends* (MIT, 2009). *Architecture Depends* is probably the most acclaimed book about architectural practice published in the last thirty years and it was apparently written in the small fifth floor study in the tower above the roof of Stock Orchard Street. Till's book establishes the idea that architecture depends on a variety of outside factors that are not controlled by the architect. A successful architect engages in spatial agency to mediate a complex network of social relationships, hidden agendas and clashing interests. Whereas Till's book makes the claim, Wigglesworth actually takes the time to prove the point. *Around & About* is a much quieter book than *Architecture Depends*. Even though strong and sometimes conflicting views are expressed, Wigglesworth stays skilfully clear of some of the murky waters of generalisation and rough justice. In my view, three ideas raised in the book could have informed the overall argument further. Charles Jencks' foreword is rather brief and does not engage with the house in a meaningful way. One wonders whether he has ever been to SOS. His contribution to the book could have been used to establish a connection between Adhocism (Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver, *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation*, 1972) and Wigglesworth's working method, which is presumably why the editor commissioned Jencks in the first place.

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Wigglesworth's essay 'Ordinariness and Perfection' in part 1 of the book relates the origin of the plan layout design of the house back to a dining experience that she recorded in plan. This translation process appears rather literal and the failure to discuss the implications of a scale shift from dining to house layout somewhat undermines the credibility of the design.

In the context of urban design and general reasonableness, Kester Rattenbury's criticism that the house is too big may be considered a matter of personal opinion or architectural taste. However, in the context of sustainability, the fact that a two-bedroom house has twice the internal floor area of the average five-person household in London (ref. 'CABE Dwelling Size Survey' by Scott Wilson, April 2010) should have been picked up by Trevor Butler's sustainability assessment. The per capita internal area of SOS undermines its credibility as a sustainable form of urban dwelling. It also makes Butler's observation that change in response to environmental issues needs to be brought about by altering our living patterns sound almost like an exclamation into thin air.

This is a significant and engaging type of book about architectural practice that captures well the complexity of issues that influence on the design and construction process of the building. Individually, some of the contributions may be tainted by a lack of professional distance between author and editor. As a whole I hope that the book will serve as a blueprint for a new kind of writing on architecture that helps to open up the profession to a much wider public audience.

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