# Program for the Hall of Risk
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(Developed for the *New York Times Magazine*, Sept 2002, on the first Anniversary of 9/11)

A sustainable society takes care of itself without putting future generations at risk. Modern society as we know it is not sustainable. To take care of ourselves we pollute the waters, foul the air, erode soils, waste irreplaceable resources and build weapons of mass destruction. Following the description of German sociologist Ulrich Beck, we can say that the 'first' modernity was concerned with the distribution of 'goods'. Our 'second' modernity is concerned with the distribution of 'bads'. The bads are the unforeseen consequences of building and maintaining the first modernity, everything from global warming to epidemic diseases to nuclear power. Modernity has generated a world at risk. Never was this more apparent to New Yorkers than after 9/11.

## Background

During the summer of 2002, Herbert Muschamp, the architectural critic of *The New York Times*, initiated a reimagining of downtown Manhattan. Pedestrian proposals for rebuilding the World Trade Towers were to be replaced by a series of new buildings across Lower Manhattan that genuinely responded to 9/11. Muschamp invited architect David Rockwell to redesign the New York Stock Exchange as a Hall of Risk. As part of the design team he recruited Parsons architectural historian Jean Gardner to articulate the contours of the world risk society. I was invited to conceptualize a program for the Hall of Risk. The fruit of our efforts appeared in *The New York Times Sunday Magazine* on September 8, 2002 and at the Venice Biennial.

In brief, our team proposed to transform the New York Stock Exchange Building, "the world's foremost securities marketplace", into a Hall of Risk devoted to inventing viable options for the future. We envisioned a tower receiving images, factual data and contextual information about risks identified by the public. These risks would be researched and evaluated by twelve teams of stakeholders. Four teams of stakeholders represent people immediately at risk; eight teams represent functional subsystems of modern society, -- law, science, economics, politics, media, religion, education, art. After research and evaluation, these twelve teams of stakeholders recombine into collaborative teams, each seeking the best response to the risk in question. These collaborative teams compete against each other in a "Tournament of Risk". A knowledgeable panel judges the contests. The Tower, powered by the energy of the sun and wind, broadcasts the tournaments, formatted as made-for-television events with a live audience and a sophisticated Internet component.

As intended, 'The Hall of Risk' functioned as an architectural feat of imagination that helped stimulate a richer architectural response to 9/11. As an actual architectural project the Hall of Risk remains unrealized, despite the elegant transformation of the stock market space envisioned by David Rockwell. In this article I will unpack the program for the Hall of Risk. I will provide a 'thick' description of the 'intellectual architecture'. Presenting the intellectual architecture is intended to help move the Hall of Risk from feat of imagination to realization in some setting.

## Program

Let me say that as the son of a New York City Fireman, I accepted *New York Times* critic Herbert Muschamp's invitation with a sense of vocation. Keying off architect David Rockwell's theater intelligence, I began thinking of the Hall of Risk as a kind of cyber-theater. Information flow would replace scripted dialogue. Circuitry would replace the presidium stage. Following Gregory Bateson's definition of information as 'a difference that makes a difference', the trading floor would become a theatre of operations in which the 'players' would be constantly generating a fecund 'play' of differences. This play of differences would generate a budget of flexibility for reckoning with the risk society. Players would imagine options and consider the outcome of untried choices in a formal and collaborative way.

The Hall of Risk is not to be confused with an insurance corporation of risk assessors. We envision a 'cosmopolitan community' of knowledgeable people capable of addressing the risks that insurance companies won't touch: AIDS, the Latin American economic crisis, the effects of global warming, war and so on. The Hall of Risk would house a community of people with the intelligence of a think tank, the verve of a Shakespearean troop and the esprit de corps of a firehouse.

At the heart of the Risk Company is a relational practice in which three players take turns playing three generic roles. These three roles are based on the three phenomenological categories of the American Philosopher Charles Peirce*: firstness, secondness* and *thirdness*.

*Firstness* is being such as you are without regard for any other. It is the category of mood, randomness, inventiveness, spontaneity, and freshness. Performing in firstness activates a whole range of creative skills called the first skill set. The player in this role is designated the initiator.

*Secondness* is the category of response to another, reaction without thought, even brute forcefulness. Performing in secondness puts into play a range of reactive skills that are based on attentiveness to another, the second skill set. The player in this role is designated as the respondent.

*Thirdness* is the category of combination, of mediation between firstness and secondness. Performing in thirdness requires attentiveness to both the player in firstness and the player in secondness as well as the pattern of interaction between them. The third skill set is the most complex, calling for maintaining attention to oneself as well as to two others. The player in this role is designated the mediator.

## Threeing

All players in the Risk Company learn all three roles for the relational practice, which is called *Threeing*. Each player practices *Threeing* with every other player in the company. The subprogram for recombining all with all keys off the relative strength of each player in the three different roles as well as the expertise of each player.

The practice of *Threeing* at the core of the Risk Company insures a pattern of communication common to all players. This shared pattern of communication prevents the relational tangles that eat up the flexibility of many organizations. To date, *Threeing* has proven viable in art, education,

conference breakout groups, and worker training. Elsewhere, I have described how this formal practice precludes five specific relational problems: 1) disagreement as to the who 'started' a confused interaction 2) vicious cycles of reactive interactions 3) the confusion between symmetric and complementary relationships 4) double binds and 5) the master/slave dynamic. The addition of a fourth player to facilitate the interaction of the three role players makes it possible to implement protocols for the fair division of goods and tasks among the three as well as protocols for three-person decision making. Given the importance of fair division and decision making, all players divide into teams of four, three role players and a facilitator. The role players take turns performing the role of facilitator.

Each player in the Risk Company would simultaneously be a member of three different teams: One team would focus entirely on the caring for its members, a second team would focus on analyzing risks and the third team would focus on inventing options.

The practice of *Threeing* used by the care teams would include a nonverbal yoga of relationships. This yoga of relationships would help support the psyche of players being asked to think the unthinkable and address danger on an ongoing basis. Players in these care teams will rotate periodically to keep this support system fresh. In theater terms, members would role-play with each other, in support of each other, off stage. The staging area would be for the risk analysis teams and the teams organized to invent options.

The risk analysis teams would combine four teams of people actually engaging the risks in question and eight teams representing subsystems of modern society as described by communication sociologist, Niklas Luhmann. A premium would be placed on successful communication within and among the four member teams. Luhmann argues that all communication is coded in rules. Language makes it possible for two people to agree they are talking about the same information and, based on that agreement, to go on and create more successful communication. With the exception of art, which is grounded in perception, not language, modern society differentiates itself into functional "subsystems" on the basis of such yes/no agreements. These subsystems operate according to codified binary distinctions: the economy distinguishes profit from loss, the law distinguishes the legal from the illegal, science distinguishes the true from the false, politics distinguishes those in power from those not in power, religion distinguishes between believers and non-believers, education distinguishes passing from failing. These subsystems are autopoietic, i.e., organized to produce and reproduce themselves. While they might develop structural coupling with other subsystems around common themes, such as when science and religion enter into a dialogue to address ethical issues in medicine, operationally, these subsystems are closed. In order to work, these subsystems must maintain autonomy and their boundaries must be respected. Using profits gained in commerce to bribe judges appointed by the government is not allowed.

Given this operational closure, each autonomous subsystem can react to risk conditions for society at large- such as environmental degradation-only within the terms of its own binary code. Political leaders cannot enact environmental legislation without a constituency. A religion based on transcendence must see environmental problems in terms of its beliefs or it cannot respond. A business must be profitable, even when it seeks to account for environmental consequences, or there is no business.

Respecting this functional differentiation of modern society, the Risk Company would include eight expert teams of four members each representing law, science, economics, politics, media, religion, education, and art. These teams would have fixed membership and use a verbal version of *Threeing* to guide their interaction. They would rotate through the roles of initiator, respondent and mediator as experts seeking expert knowledge of the risks being addressed.

## Transdisciplinary Knowledge

The role descriptions presented above concerned interaction among players, however, the roles of *firstness, secondness* and *thirdness* also correspond to categories of knowledge. In the Hall of Risk, Peirce's categories become operative as categories for collaborative learning in semiotic terms. Semiotics is the study of signs. Taken abstractly, signs (firsts) represent something (seconds) to somebody (thirds) in some respect. Signs can be made about anything. According to Peirce all knowledge comes through signs and he offers a comprehensive signs system that is, in effect, a theory of everything. *Firstness* generates iconic knowledge about likeness, quality, texture; *secondness* indexical knowledge about evidence, fact, specificity; and *thirdness* symbolic knowledge about reason, habit, and law. Icon, index and symbol exfoliate into a tenfold sign system. This tenfold sign system further exfoliates into a twenty-eight and a sixty-six fold sign systems. Indeed, Peirce saw semiotic differentials taking place exponentially from the number three. This capacity indicates that the complexity of our world risk society can be addressed with Peirce's semiotic system.

This semiotic system of knowledge intersects the eight fields of expertise in a transdisciplinary way. Knowledge within the function subsystem can be analyzed in terms of icon, index and symbol and then related to knowledge in other subsystems using the same terms. The Risk Company itself would require a minimum of ten teams of four, eight to engage the subsystems and two to train the temporary teams of people actually at risk. These forty members would need a support staff that could do research, administration and media production. In David Rockwell's design for the Hall of Risk these expert risk analysis teams operate in semi-public stationary kiosks on the trading floor, while the four teams representing people at risk are in mobile kiosks on the same trading floor. The walls of the trading floor carry ongoing images and contextual information about the risks being engaged. (See Drawings.)

After the risk analysis teams have completed their work and engaged in dialogue with other risk analysis teams, the members of all teams will be recombined in ways that do not repeat membership in either the current care teams or the expert teams. The task of these newly configured teams, as mentioned, is to invent viable options in the face of identified risks. Techniques for problem solving and nurturing creativity will be deployed to support this task. Via expert participation in the inventive process, expert knowledge will be integrated into efforts to understand society at risk as a whole system. The whole will not be understood in terms of some abstract unifying concept, but as the living articulation of differences growing out of the multiplicity of relationships among the teams inventing options. As each team completes its task of inventing a viable option, a multimedia production team will render the options for a competitive tournament, judged by a knowledgeable panel. In Rockwell's design this tournament is broadcast from a bowl shaped arena on the second floor of the Hall of Risk.

The objective is that the options invented will address the particulars of those at risk, reference all subsystems and help sustain the entire society. Luhmann argues that addressing the sustainability of

the whole society is particularly problematic since we cannot know the society as a whole. The autopoietic subsystems of modern society operate completely in their own interests. Hence the difficulty for modern society of addressing the environment. As subdivided by operative distinctions, there is no over-system to develop comprehensive operations that insure sustainability.

Luhmann's description of society uses G. Spencer Brown's *Laws of Form*. Brown argues that we cannot know without making the 'first distinction' and we cannot know the first distinction while we are making it. This creates a blind spot. The first distinction takes what is outside and inscribes in within the person making the distinction. This leaves the 'outside' unmarked and unknowable. For Luhmann this epistemological problem translates into a modern society of autopoietic subsystems unable to know the unmarked environment.

Within the terms set out by Luhmann's autopoietic description of social subsystems, there is the possibility of cross talk among subsystems based on various themes. Thus the environment can become a legitimate theme in this cross talk or 'structural coupling' of subsystems. Given this possibility, the Hall of Risk becomes a locus of structural coupling for subsystems around the theme of risk and sustainability. No modification of Luhmann's analysis is needed and the Program for the Hall of Risk gains a viability and legitimacy within Luhmann's description.

## The Relational Circuit

Luhmann's description, however, is limited because it is based on 'drawing' the first distinction. Neither he nor Brown offers a way to accept 'found' distinctions. Indeed, Brown might deny such an act is possible. Yet as poet Chuck Stein notes, it is possible to sense differences among the undistinguished, on the other side of the first distinction (unpublished correspondence 2004). This is the task of art, and art- as Luhmann says- operates in terms of perception, not the yes/no binary code of language.

Out of my work as a video artist, I have constructed a circuit that operates in terms of perception. I call this circuit the 'relational circuit'. Rather than state propositions subject to agreement (yes) or disagreement (no), the relational circuit offers six perceptible positions in a bounded continuum (Ryan 1991, 2004). Each position is unambiguous. The practice of *Threeing* uses the positions in this circuit to maintain clarity about which roles are being played by which players. In effect, these six unambiguous positions constitute a triadic logic that renders Peirce's phenomenological categories consistent with cybernetics. In principle, this triadic logic can be encoded in an operating system capable of constructing sustainable societies.

It is important to understand that Peirce's three phenomenological categories are not distinguished from each other by 'cuts'; rather they are differentiated by prescinding. 'Prescind' literally means 'before the cut'. You can pay attention to your hand without paying attention to your arm. You do not need to cut off your hand from your arm. You can pay attention to the color of an object (*firstness*) without paying attention to the fact of the object (*secondness*). You can pay attention to the fact of an object as you bump into it in the dark without paying attention to the classification of the object (*thirdness*). These are not acts of distinguishing; they are acts of prescinding differences. The differential triadic logic encoded in the continuous relational circuit organizes these acts of prescinding prior to any 'cut' or 'first distinction'.

This triadic logic generates a consistency that overturns of the limits of Luhmann's binary descriptions. By building up a process of differentiation based on *firstness, secondness* and *thirdness* within a bounded circuit, players can sense found differences in the unmarked domain beyond the boundary, that is, on the other side of the first distinction. The only assumption is that *firstness, secondness* and *thirdness*, the three phenomenological categories of Peirce's theory of everything, do, in fact, exist on the other side of any first distinction. Referencing these sensed differences the Risk Company can build up a coherent semiotic knowledge of the environment. Based on this knowledge, the Risk Company can generate options for sustainability that address the whole of society.