

**SWC PARTY OPENING SPEECH
SAINSBURY WELLCOME CENTRE**

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Both science and art are a search for truth, and share a deep suspicion of absolutes.

What makes a good scientist – and a good architect – is someone who can see and is prepared to search beyond the obvious.

Automatic, non thought-through solutions were never an option if the building was going fulfil its purpose.

Never mind answers - what were the questions?

How you search dictates the answers you get.

Often it's a wiser strategy to observe first, to try to understand, and only then to try to come up with answers.

And there is never a single right answer. There is always *a context and we are all central to it.* The interpretation of the context, combined with knowledge, and the fluidity of the imagination at the time will deliver the concepts and answers.

I think you can afford to have good design and a good concept on a tight budget. Once you have it, everything else becomes much more effective and evident.

PHYSICAL PATHWAYS:

The natural behaviour among people shows you where the optimal path should be.

If you want to affect a culture, getting the physical space to match the body language is crucial.

We have done the same with the SWC – working with the neuroscientists first to find out how they really behave in their labs rather than some idealised goal or preconceived notion.

And importantly not forgetting the intermediate connecting and social spaces– and designing to **allow THEIR perceived and actual needs to be met.**

WHAT WE FOUND:

Meeting neuroscientists across the world I became acutely aware of their pan-disciplinary skills - physics, biology, electronics, chemistry, electro-mechanical engineering...

A surprising quirkiness, flexibility of thought, commitment, perseverance and yet a sense of the playfulness that so often comes with great intelligence. **I began to think of the building as becoming a metaphorical sandpit for them to play in...** I really enjoyed these people!

LANGUAGE AND THE PROCESS:

We first had to find a way to learn their language – and they ours – in order to collaborate properly.

The process was very exciting.

We learned about neuroscience, they learned about architecture. And we learned how to explain ideas to each other with a common language about space and how it is perceived, how it can become appropriate, latent with potential, and inspiring.

We had to embrace the idea that the scientists needed a range of settings; that there are significant differences between various individual's disciplines and requirements.

There was no single lab model to follow, or lab set up. This was not about endless space with rows of lab benches.

We ended up taking each other on a journey.

It was an open collaboration with others far beyond the normal frame of architecture and our experience – a mixing of cultures to create a ferment of inventive creativity.

It's much easier to come up with creative solutions to questions when collaborating with other disciplines – one of the reasons I've always worked that way!

Looking at the different faces of a problem provided us with the desired solutions, often unexpected, surprising and fresh.

The intelligence and commitment required of all parties were seminal to the way the SWC was realised. **Our work simultaneously and seamlessly embraced neuroscience, engineering, architecture, industrial design, and research into materials - all in the service of realising the meaning and purpose behind the building:-**

an adaptable and flexible arrangement of serviced spaces that could be tailored by the scientists themselves to meet their needs now and well into the future. A 'plug & play' environment.

And beauty, sensations and emotions were parts of the equation - the human side is quite important for humans!

THE BUILDING:

Connexity – connectedness – is what both the building and the science are about – seamless integration of physical and mental research into

behavioural space and in the relation of the scientists to THEIR building.

Collaboration permitted us to design the building as a whole, as a balanced network of streams and flows, each of them with a specific sense and function.

Together we have created a spatial 'eco-system' to suit the work to be done within the building that connects people and mobilises the potential collective genius David Sainsbury envisioned.

The communication between the building and the users is something dynamic, a non-stop relationship.

The building, as I mentioned was designed to be adaptable – and we have already had the opportunity to help adapt it even as the scientists were moving in, and will no doubt continue to in the near future as they continue to arrive each with their own particular technical and spatial demands.

HAS THE DESIGN WORKED?

Good architects have always been able to design environments that generate desired reactions in the people who use the space: awe in cathedrals, powerlessness in totalitarian architecture, calm and contemplative intimacy with nature in a Japanese teahouse.

But the specifics of HOW the design of architectural space influences humans is still in its infancy.

This is one of the first buildings ever designed to deliberately incorporate knowledge from neuroscience into its fabric from inception, and a rare building where the prospective inhabitants were consulted so thoroughly before a single line was drawn on paper.

A key design ambition was to create an open structure - principal floor circulation routes with sightlines through the entire building. And we sought vertical connectivity.

The opportunity for SWC members to eavesdrop on seminars has already been mentioned to us: a distinguished visitor to the SWC was soon surrounded by scientists from other parts of the building – as naturally as would our ancestors on the veldt have congregated to check out a matter of interest.

We learned the idea of supporting ‘thought-graffiti’ extensive glass surfaces on which the scientists can explore ideas and which allow the two-way transmission of light such that this building is one of light by day and by night.

SPEAKING FOR MYSELF AND THE PRACTICE:

It's been a privilege – a fascinating journey for all of us into terra not-quite-incognita.

The SWC has had many parents – from its conception by David Sainsbury and his advisors to its gestation in the minds of everyone involved – a creative journey in keeping with the building's purpose.

Perhaps it is not a building that one would recognise as radical internally, nor do I suspect, externally.

However, the unique subtleties of its design are perhaps just now being grasped by those who really matter – the scientists and their support colleagues.

I would like to think we've done the groundwork for a new way of building - a new, completely adaptive architecture and the Sainsbury Wellcome Centre will deliver not only spatial enjoyment to those working *and playing* within it, but demonstrate its adaptability to meet the scientists' needs for many decades to come.

THANKS:

David Sainsbury

John O'Keefe

The members of the Governing Council

The design team

(in particular Gordon, Anthony, Chris & Karl and David Kelly, and the Arup team over the road.

And those appointed to manage the process.

...and Gatsby for the party this evening in UCL's latest research centre.

I will now hand the mic to neuroscientist Adam Kampff, who can tell you what it's like for him being and working in this building.

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