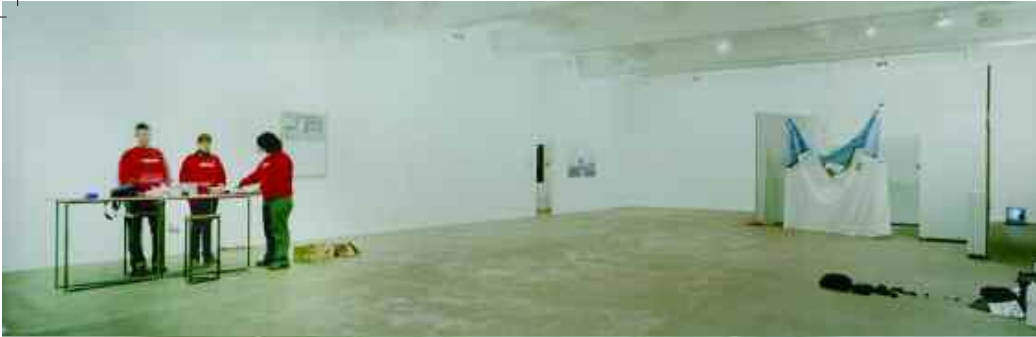


Things

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Support Structure Chisenhale Gallery and Economist Plaza, London

Artist: Gavin Wade

Architect: Celine Condorelli

2003–ongoing

Opposite and below Support Structure,
Chisenhale Gallery, London, 2003

The structure was used as an adaptable
display system for the exhibition *I am a
Curator*

The term artist/curator is applied to an ever expanding number of artists currently working across international borders. Gavin Wade (along with others such as Philippe Parreno, Pablo Leon de la Barra and Liam Gillick) is one such artist: he is both a practitioner and a catalyst for activity in the field of non-gallery based art. He is what Clare Doherty refers to in her book *From Studio to Situation* a “New Situationist”: an artist who uses a situation or context as a starting point to make work. Wade regularly collaborates with other artists, architects and people outside of the visual arts to make work which questions the role of art and loosens its shackles to the subject of authorship. Many of his projects have no definable end point or take on a different guise in a series of venues.



Gavin Wade, drawing for the curtain system for Support Structure at the Economist Building, 2004

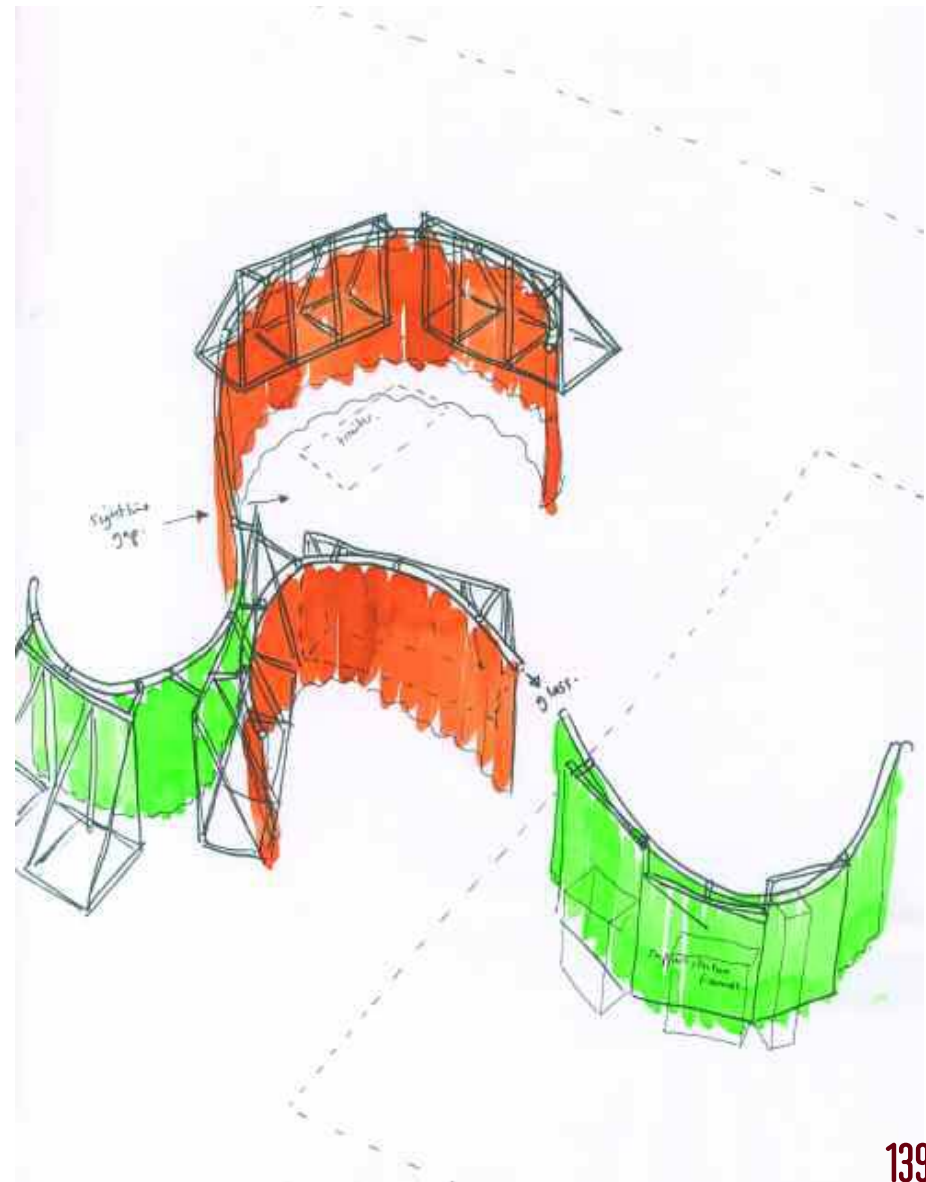
In his collaboration with architect Celine Condorelli, Wade has taken the literal and metaphorical associations with the words 'support structure' to make an endlessly adaptable universal system which houses art, archives and propositions. Like *Mobile Porch*, *Support Structure* is a space which can be continuously reinvented by its users to provoke action, thoughts, connections and strategies. To date, it has been realised in five places, the first of which was at Chisenhale Gallery in 2003. The ever-changing exhibition entitled *I Am a Curator* offered visitors the chance to become a curator for a day.² Using the flexible partitioning system provided by *Support Structure* to display a diverse selection of artworks, 30 'curators' installed unique exhibitions which related in varying ways to the industrial setting of Chisenhale Gallery.

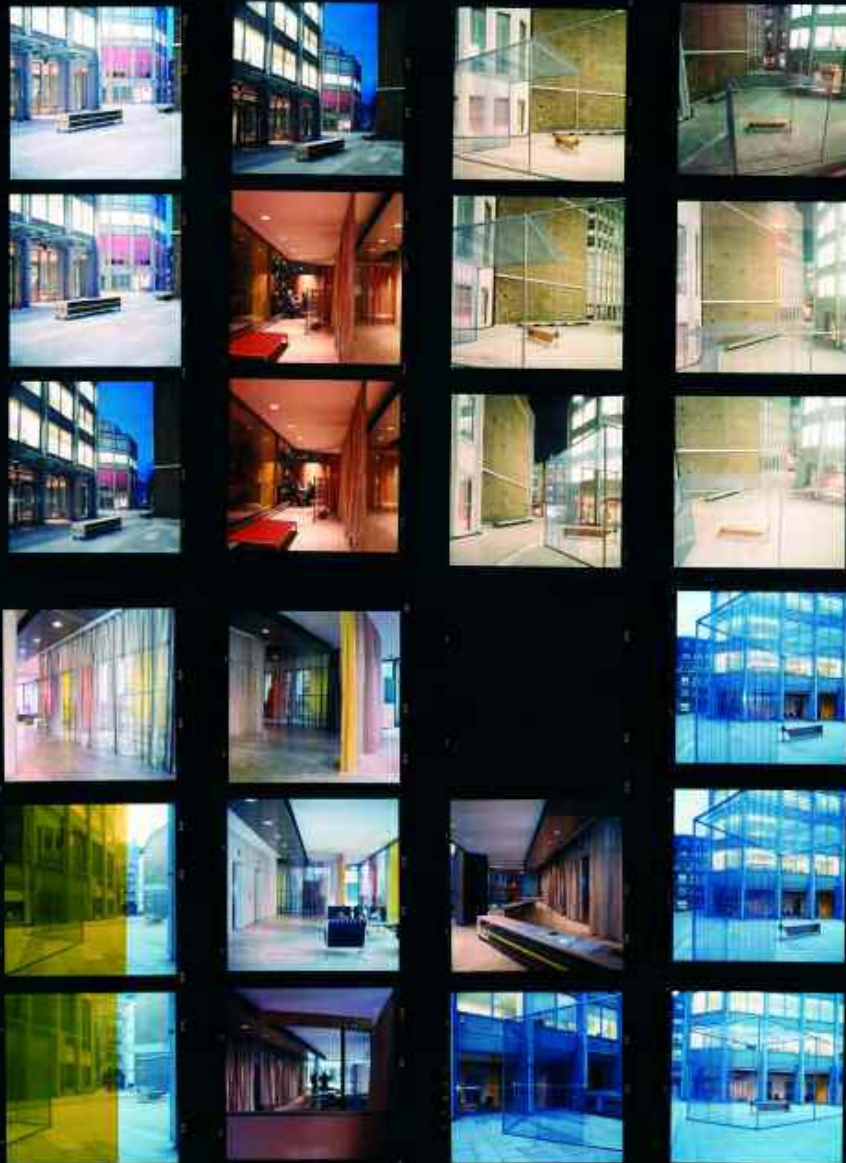
While designing *Support Structure*, Wade and Condorelli made no aesthetic decisions concerning the look and feel of the end product. Their concerns were always with practical issues, such as how it would be used, what system would work best and how they could introduce useful elements like stools, tables and plinths. Both Condorelli and Wade have said that this focus on function allowed them to make something that ultimately became art (because of the context in which it was placed and the questioning process which resulted in its realisation), but which was not labelled as such in the making.

In feedback forms filled in by each curator at the end of their shift, little mention is made of the project. It formed the foundation for everything the curators did and yet it was invisible. This beguiled Condorelli: "How could anyone ignore it? As a system it conditioned, created, manifested and articulated the process as well as its results (on a both functional and aesthetic level), and it was such a big, bold, eccentric monster."³ The infrastructure of *Support Structure* seemed to disappear while the objects remained visible.

The second phase of *Support Structure* was held at the Economist Building in central London in 2004, the 40th anniversary of the Smithsons' landmark building. Wade and Condorelli readjusted and extended the original *Support Structure* to make a system which responded to the Smithsons' proposition of the Plaza as a micro city containing a cluster of public and commercial spaces, corporate offices and private residences. Playing with the Smithsons' didactic aims (teaching the inhabitants and users of the building how to live in a city), and attempting to draw the attention of *The Economist* employees to the original ambitions for their work place, Wade and Condorelli set about building a discourse with, and a meeting point for, users of the building.

Support Structure at the Economist Building took the form of two offices (located in the foyer) which Wade and Condorelli used as a base throughout the event. These offices contained desks, tables and benches, silk curtains, corrugated plastic roofing and scaffolding (all used to declare a change of function and divide spaces).⁴ Benches containing *The Economist* archive were placed in the centre of one of the offices and later became the focal point for the proposal of a new waiting room. A rotating bench located in the Plaza was used by visitors to position themselves in the square (horizontally, vertically and metaphorically) and films which presented practical and unrealisable proposals for the site were projected in the foyer along with a presentation of Antonioni's 1966 film *Blow Up*, whose opening sequence takes place in the Economist Plaza.





Support Structure at The Economist Building showing rotating bench in the plaza, scaffolding, curtaining and The Economist archive

Wade and Condorelli are stunned by what they have made together and are emphatic about the fact that neither of them could make such a bizarre and liberating 'thing' alone:

Condorelli: One of the most shocking and revelatory things about making *Support Structure* was the fact that, at the end, we knew what each of us had decided along the way... but then looking at it we just couldn't recognise it.

Wade: That was when we realised we'd created something else. *Support Structure* was another entity.⁵

Wade's interest in collaboration as a mode of practice stems from a desire to avoid specialisation. Without collaboration, he says, his work would become too internalised. He develops propositions by working with others; filtering their ideas and seeing his thoughts come back to him, transformed and often unrecognisable. Condorelli, on the other hand, sees collaboration as an opportunity to define what it is that she does and what she can offer to a creative process.

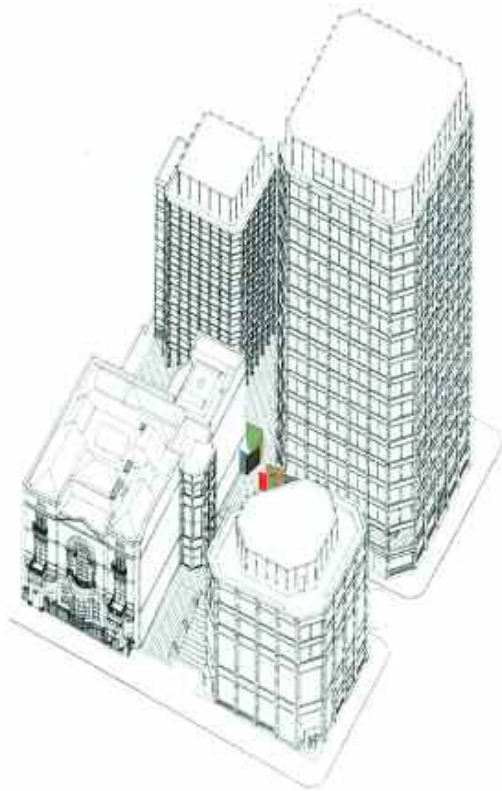
Broadly speaking, the dynamics of this collaboration can be described as follows: while Wade wanted to do more, Condorelli wanted to do less. As a theorist and architect interested in resolution, Condorelli wants to narrow things down and follow a line of thought through to a conclusion. Wade, on the other hand, is interested in expansion and is seduced by the concept that ideas can be generators for other ideas. Condorelli was astounded by Wade's consistently positive outlook, particularly in potentially gloomy moments. For example, while Condorelli felt concerned that a client-group had not understood their proposal, Wade was excited by their response and took the view that it was an opportunity to expand the project further. Condorelli feels that her response was a direct outcome of her conditioning as an architect who is trained to fulfil a brief.

Condorelli's frustration with the perceived limits of architectural training and practice has led her to work almost exclusively in the art world, which she says is more tolerant and challenging than the architectural establishment.⁶ Where the architecture world has a tendency to look for outcomes and icons, art institutions seem more interested in supporting spatial experimentation and research. As a woman in a male-dominated profession who is interested in expanding the accepted definition of the term 'architect', the main options open to her are academia and collaborations with practitioners working in other disciplines. Her area of interest is focused on issues relating to urban inhabitation and the invisible networks that exist between architectural, political and social structures. When they first met (at a workshop organised by Wade to which the artist Kathrin Böhm invited Condorelli), Wade and Condorelli saw in each other the opportunity to engage in an intellectual and practical discussion concerning the invisible and visible nature of 'support structures', along with the chance to develop a dialogue over a number of sites and years. Wade admits that he was also expecting engineering input from Condorelli, something she quickly dissuaded him was in the offing.

Celine Condorelli, drawing of the Smithsons' Economist complex with initial ideas for plaza intervention

Support Structure took on new guises at a Multicultural Centre in Portsmouth in 2004, Greenham Common in 2004 and Essex University in 2005. It is due to travel to Birmingham in 2006 and is being continually re-considered by its creators.

- 1 From *Studio to Situation*, Clare Doherty ed., London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004, p. 7.
- 2 Curated by Per Huttner, Chisenhale Gallery, 2003.
- 3 Conorelli, Celine, from an unpublished RSA report on *Support Structure*, RSA Archive, London, 2003.
- 4 The curtains were a reference to Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich's *The Velvet and Silk Café*, Women's Fashion Exhibition, Berlin, 1927. Plastic sheeting by the artist Lothar Gerz was stuck on the ground floor windows.



Multicultural Centre in Portsmouth

Support Structure, Portsmouth, 2004
The archive was placed at the centre of a plan for a multicultural festival in the city

Phase III of *Support Structure* was held under the auspices of the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Multicultural Group. This phase pushed the project outside the physical realm into a methodological one with Wade and Condorelli taking on the roles of provocateurs rather than makers of objects. Employees of the organisation were asked a series of questions concerning the fundamental tenets of the Centre: their understanding of the term 'multicultural' and the rationale for the existence of their organisation. The drastic consequences which ensued (two members of the small team resigned when they realised that their ambitions for the organisation would never be realised) indicates the powerful level at which the questions were pitched. The only trace of Condorelli and Wade's involvement in the project is the existence of a constantly updated archive made up of books and periodicals donated by local people on the subject of multiculturalism. The archive was placed at the centre of a plan for a multicultural festival, drawn out in a field in Portsmouth.

