# 2001: AN ACADIA ODYSSEY

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ACADIA marked the dawn of its third decade last October, at its 21st annual conference, the 20th anniversary of its birth. If the numbers seem inconsistent at first, recall that the association was born at its 1st conference, its 0th anniversary, in 1981. Of the twenty-four founding members, only a few are still active. I joined at the third conference, in 1983, and I've never met half the founders. Perhaps they never expected the association to last two years, let alone two decades. In the meantime, an entire generation has come of age and begun to take the reins. ACADIA is alive and well, thank you very much.

It's hard to talk about any event last fall without some reference to September Eleven. The tragedy and ensuing sense of insecurity, particularly with regard to air travel, led nearly to the cancellation of ACADIA 2001. The conference planners and Steering Committee members discussed the possibility; it wasn't immediately clear how many of the registered participants would still be willing and able to travel. Many other meetings were cancelled or postponed, but thankfully, ACADIA decided to push through.

I hope I don't sound maudlin if I say that meetings such as ACADIA's are the best hope for civilization. It's not just technology. If it were, we could confer far more economically over the Internet. The ACADIA conference is a social event, where participants from nearly every continent, race, and



creed come together, meet face-to-face as peers, share insights, and form friendships. Those who insist on painting the world in shades of "us" and "them" just don't get it. Maybe through collegiate associations such as ours, some of them will, some day.

My colleague Selina Lam, a research assistant in our lab and a co-author of our paper, had prepared her PowerPoint™ presentation and was planning to visit the US consulate on September 12 to submit her visa application. The breaking news splashed onto Hong Kong television screens on the night of the eleventh. (Hong Kong time is 12 hours ahead of US Eastern Daylight-saving Time.) Her supervisor and co-author, Prof. Jin-yeu Tsou, told her in no uncertain terms to cancel her trip and advised me to cancel as well. Jin's concern was understandable. But, I had already fixed my itinerary, which as usual included some annual leave to visit family and friends in various States, and I didn't need a visa, so I chose to stay the course.

I departed Hong Kong on October 7 for the 18 hour journey to Detroit. If you add in the one-hour commute from my apartment to the Hong Kong airport, the three-hour lead time at the airport (to accommodate enhanced security), and the time to pick up the rental car in Detroit and drive into Ann Arbor, the whole trip, door-to-door, adds up to about 23 hours. (That's about the same time it takes university students to drive from Ann Arbor, Michigan, to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, for "Spring Break". But I digress.) After a few days stopover in my home state of Michigan, I took a short flight in a twin-prop 30-seat commuter plane, over the length of Lake Erie, from Detroit to Buffalo.

ACADIA 2001 convened at the State University of New York at Buffalo – a.k.a. the University at Buffalo, or UB for short – on Thursday, October Eleven. I arrived at the Hyatt Regency, with Selina's PowerPoint presentation in hand, shortly past noon. I checked into my room quietly, so as not to awaken my roommate, who was still jet-lagged from his own recent flight from Wellington, New Zealand. (We had never met before except over the 'net.)

I got down to the lobby in time to join the "Walking Tour of Buffalo Architecture," arranged by the ACADIA site coordinators and guided by "Friends of the School of Architecture". As a border city set strategically near the top of Niagara Falls and the entry to the Erie Canal, a gateway for Great Lakes shipping between Chicago and New York [1], Buffalo has a rich history reflected in notable architecture, including works by H. H. Richardson, Louis Sullivan, and Frank Lloyd Wright [2]. It also has a contemporary life and spirit, reflected in the festive, multicolored buffalo sculptures that unexpectedly adorn many front lawns around town.

The conference proper started that evening. A short walk from the hotel to a transit station and a few minutes on a comfortable commuter train brought us to the UB campus for the reception, opening speeches, and the first technical session. From 6:30 PM on Thursday, through 12:30 PM on Sunday, ACADIAns presented nearly 40 works. The Proceedings list 25 technical papers, 5 digital media compositions, and 13 works in progress; thankfully, there were very
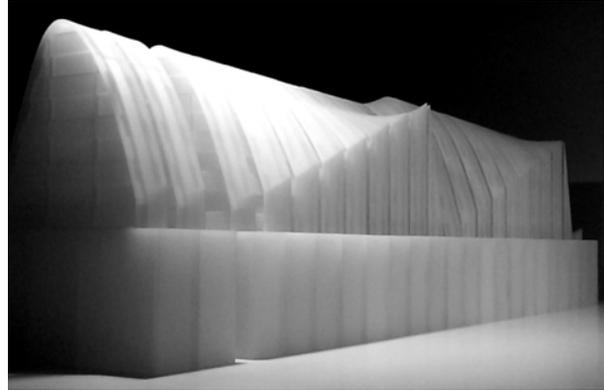
few cancellations. In addition, there was William Mitchell's keynote speech on Friday evening, and a panel discussion on Saturday morning featuring most of ACADIA's presidents from the past 20 years. B. J. Novitski, a long-time ACADIA member and managing editor for ArchitectureWeek, provides a commentary on the conference's technical program in the 31 October edition of the weekly web publication [3].

We weren't confined to the lecture hall all weekend. A generous break on Friday afternoon offered a tour of UB's Center for Computational Research, with an impressive installation of virtual reality interfaces backed up by clusters of powerful parallel processors [4]. Another break on Saturday morning featured a tour of Frank Lloyd Wright's Darwin D. Martin House Complex.

On Friday night, following William Mitchell's keynote speech in the hotel ballroom, Chris Yessios – co-founder and former president of ACADIA and founder of AutoDesSys – again hosted the enjoyable annual dinner featuring presentations of award-winning Form•Z™ creations. AutoDesSys Inc. and Revit Technology Corporation also provided vendor exhibits, adjacent to the technical sessions at the UB campus [5, 6].

On Saturday evening, busses carried us from UB to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery for a cocktail reception and private viewing of its collection of paintings and sculptures. Juergen Czerner managed to assemble us in an outer courtyard under the setting sun long enough to capture a 360-degree panoramic portrait, which he has posted on his web site [7]. Getting us to pose was, as the saying goes, "like herding cats" – especially since it was dinner time. Once the portrait was safely saved to disk, the ACADIA banquet awaited us in the lower gallery and sculpture court. After an excellent meal, we adjourned to the auditorium for the annual general meeting.

To mark ACADIA's 20th birthday, the committee had planned a presentation to the presidents – a token to each that represented his or her year of office. One of the pleasant surprises of this conference was the presentation of how these tokens were designed and manufactured. You won't find it in the Proceedings, alas – you had to be there. Wassim Jabi started by explaining the genesis of the idea – how they had used the numeric values of each of the four digits, of each of the twenty years, as an array of elevations for a three-dimensional sur-



face that they sliced into twenty sections. Through a series of associations that I can't recall, they had arranged for the final computer-aided design and manufacturing with Fisher Price Toys. Dave Miller and Henry Schmidt of Fisher Price then presented their company's CAD-CAM process for rapid prototyping, with notes on the available technologies and comparisons with traditional non-computerized methods. It could have been a technical paper on the state of the art, or a short keynote speech – which means it went a bit longer than expected, but in my opinion, it was worth it.

There were also two special awards, for outstanding teaching and research in computer-aided architectural design, to William Mitchell and Charles Eastman.

The annual general meeting also marks the start of a new presidency. Mark Clayton (Texas A&M University) passed the baton to Ganapathy Mahalingam (North Dakota State University).

We got back to the hotel late on Saturday night, but thanks to the schedule of the Buffalo Metro Rail, we had an extra two hours for sleep or other activities on Sunday morning. The final session was scheduled from 10:30 AM to 12:15 PM. The conference closed at about 12:30 PM on Sunday, October 14.

It was a well-planned and orchestrated affair. Wassim Jabi (technical chair), Bruce Majkowski (site coordinator), and Shahin Vassigh (digital media exhibit coordinator) are to be commended for producing an excellent, memorable conference.

References on the Web
1] http://www.canals.state.ny.us/maps/
2] http://www.buffalocvb.org/Architecture_0.html
3] http://www.ArchitectureWeek.com/2001/1031/tools_1-1.html
4] http://www.ccr.buffalo.edu/
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