This paper will introduce the Digital Fabricators Exhibition, which I have had the pleasure of curating. The exhibition runs in parallel with the conference and was previously exhibited at the Royal Institute of British Architect's Architecture Pavilion, in Birmingham and the Building Centre, London, during the spring and summer of 2004. The exhibition explores the relationship between architecture, manufacturing techniques and digital technology. The case studies demonstrate the use of digital design to inform the built environment from citywide scale to component assemblies of current and future architecture. The emphasis within the exhibition is on experiential and tactile architecture. The exhibition features an shortlist of projects from international leaders. Each project has been selected for the excellence of the architecture and to illustrate the relevance of wide range of digital fabrication techniques. The exhibition is site specific and the design and content has evolved with each location.
The paper presents the potential of digital fabrication to transform contemporary architecture and in particular the role of the architect in the construction process. Michael Stacey will present a European perspective and in particular the observation that you do not need the budget of a major regional art centre or gallery to be a digital fabricator or to design smart components. In practice I have used three-dimensional digital models since 1989, starting with East Croydon Station. Part of the presentation will take the form of a debate with James Timberlake of KieranTimberlake whose paper will present a North American perspective on Fabrication and Architecture. The areas of agreement may prove more revealing than the zones of disagreement.

This paper proposes that it is now possible to discuss directly the manufacturing of architecture and that this is not simply product design as immutable architectural qualities are brought into consideration simulations with the means and methods of production. It will also suggest that the term industrial design should no longer be used as it places too great an importance on the means of production and almost omits the fundamental humanity that is essential in all well conceived architecture. The need for quality, the importance of the poetic in construction will also be discussed. The new Ballingdon Bridge in Suffolk England is one of the case studies, which demonstrates the potential of fast construction, but slow architecture. It is now possible to combine robust rapidly deployable contemporary technology and the immutable qualities of architecture to create slow architecture (analogous to the slow food of the slow food movement) an architecture of fine ingredients designed to be purposeful, savoured and enjoyed.
Michael Stacey’s professional life is a combination of practice, research, teaching and writing.

He is the author of Component Design and inventor of the Aspect 2 integrated composite cladding system, marketed in Europe by Corus. His interest in digital design led to development of the Digital Fabricators Research Group at London Metropolitan University, which focuses on the use of digital design tools to manufacture architecture.

Michael Stacey RIBA FRSA is Academic Leader at London Metropolitan University, Department of Architecture and Spatial Design and Research Professor at University of Waterloo, Ontario. Current research is centred on combining quality and affordability and thus informing the built environment. Themes within the research include: offsite manufacture, component based design, form finding in architecture, emergent materials and sustainability. He is also a member of the CABE/RIBA Building Futures Group.

He co-founded Brookes Stacey Randall Architects in 1987 and in 2004 formed a new practice Michael Stacey Architects, which works closely with his university research group.