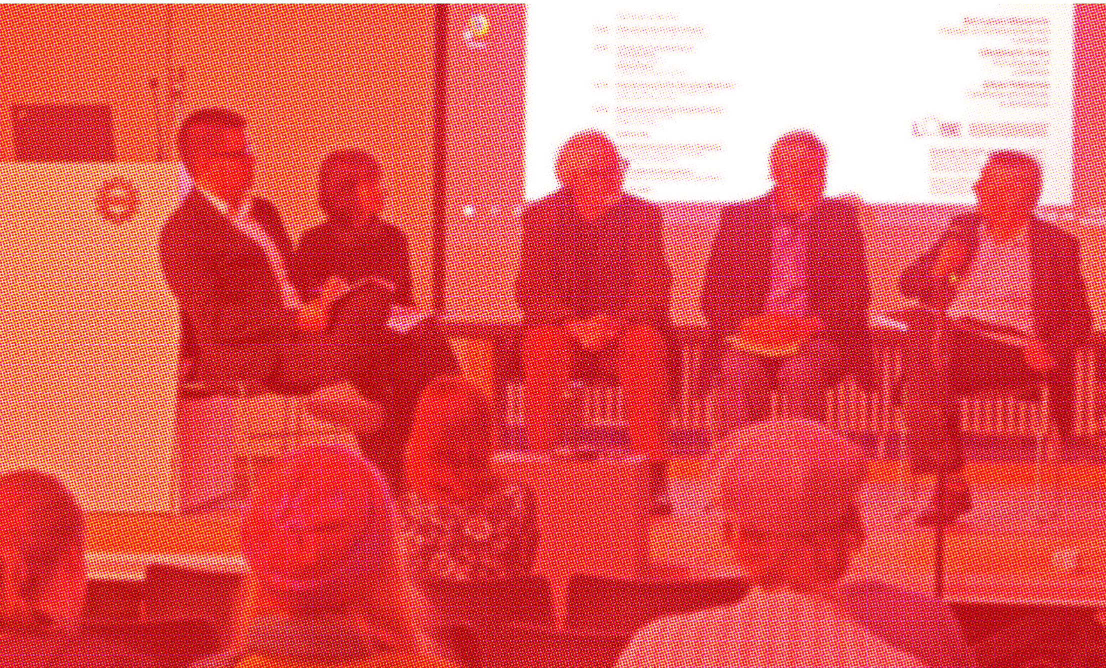

Discussion: Mediated Loneliness

Ben Lazare Mijuskovic, Christina R. Victor, Juhani Pallasmaa, Fernando Nieto, Rosana Rubio

Speakers:
BM = Ben Lazare Mijuskovic
CV = Christina R. Victor
JP = Juhani Pallasmaa
Hosts:
FN = Fernando Nieto
RR = Rosana Rubio

Audience A= sociologist Dr. Richard Pieper, University of Eastern Finland, Department of Social Sciences, Social Work
Audience B = architect and philosopher Gareth Griffiths

FN: Thank you very much for the interesting lectures we have had today. We will now have a sort of round table discussion, and we ask the audience to participate as well.

So, it's not easy to wrap up these topics, but we have tried to gather together in an interesting way a bunch of comments and questions for this discussion. To get the dialogue started, one possible framework is the topic of loneliness and its relation to the built environment; it's a distinction on three levels, which has to do with three different scopes and, at the same time, three different scales.

The first level is *the outside,* representing the 'strange', the 'unknown', the place for 'estrangement'; for us architects, it is the 'city' in its broadest sense. The second level would be *the community*, representing the 'nearby', the 'known', the place for 'proximate

relationships'; for us architects, it could be the 'neighbourhood', but also the 'communal spaces', both within and without the buildings. The third level would be *the inside*, representing the 'private', certainly the 'intimate', the place *par excellence* for 'loneliness' or 'solitude'; for us architects, it is the idea of 'home'.

So, we suggest that this conversation might have this distinction, perhaps not necessarily literally, but as a background or as a sort of spatial framework, where many of the associated issues may arise: but without having to make very strict environmentally related taxonomies. So, the first question can be associated with this distinction, and it could have to do with the people you have interviewed or patients you have formerly treated. Have these people ever mentioned or described their living environment as something that might enhance or palliate their feeling of loneliness? Do they use spatial metaphors to describe the feeling of loneliness?

BM: I was interested in Professor Pallasmaa's concept of 'mediation' and his discussion on art as mediating things. Historians of aesthetics distinguish three ages of art. Aristotle and Plato were committed to imitation as a form of art; Kant and the 18th century thought of the imagination as art – it had an element of freedom as well as sensuousness; and Benedetto Croce, the famous Italian aesthetician, thought of art as expression.

I was sort of following Professor Pallasmaa's theme of 'mediation'. Oddly enough, Arthur Schopenhauer, in *The World as Will and Representation*, takes up architecture as a basic form that mediates between *the thing in itself*, the irrational will, the subconscious, with the mediating ability of architecture and design to connect this subconscious, lower noumenal level with the most basic structure of architecture, because it incorporates or rests in gravity. We have to remember about Schopenhauer's time, that the

incredible feat of science was Newton's theory of gravity. So, the architecture and buildings would, somehow, fuse this lower level of subconscious with the phenomenal reality that we all share in a basically very superficial way.

CV: I guess when I have been talking to people, the discourse has been very much around the inside of the community, rather than the city. So, a much smaller scale comes into discussions about the locality in which people are living and how that enables, or doesn't enable, social interactions. My participants have not been asked erudite questions by the interviewers and myself on art and other kinds of levels. It's much more around the lived experience and how the home is – not always – seen as the place of connectivity, but particularly how the changes in the external environment when one gets older – the loss of familiar landmarks, the changes in street patterns – makes navigating and therefore maintaining social relationships much more problematic, and my view is a bit more about lived experience than theoretical.

JP: I would continue with a couple of sentences about the importance of mediation. In today's architectural world, architecture has turned into aestheticization. But not only architecture – in today's commercial world everything is aestheticized: personality, behaviour, even war. The Gulf War was the first aestheticized war, which was broadcast as television entertainment. In today's architecture, I must say, I rarely ever experience 'sincerity' because of this calculated aestheticization that tries to appeal to public taste. But that is not the task of architecture at all. Architecture has a much more important task. I would also say, as I teach constantly in a number of countries, architecture schools have stepped into this same mind. They teach architecture as an aesthetics, which is now even reinforced by computers. So, I say nowadays, without

much doubt, that architecture as an art form is in its worst trouble since the beginning of Modernism at the beginning 20th century.

CV: Was there a golden age of architecture? When were you getting it right?

JP: Well, there are of course many golden ages. One of them clearly is the Renaissance, where the idea of harmonizing with the cosmos… was a very direct and conscious task.

BM: Man was more integrated into the universe.

JP: Yes, exactly. And then also I must say early Modernism always touches me emotionally, because there was so much good will, intention and confidence in the human capacity. Whereas in today's architecture I rarely experience this un-manipulated attitude.

BM: That is because we are nothing but computers nowadays.

JP: We are becoming more and more computerised because of our careless and uncritical use of technology. I would be a Luddite if I spoke against computers, but I would say very strongly that there is no technology that is innocent. All technologies always have a backside.

BM: And ulterior motives.

Audience B: Thank you all for your presentations. I have a theoretical point and a question. In the presentations there were discussions about both loneliness and solitude. And I was wondering whether a categorical distinction should be made between the two. In the first presentation, it was sort of a shock to me to hear that loneliness was described not so much as a medical condition yet as something so fundamental to our notion of what it is to be a human. But I saw it as different from the notion of solitude, because solitude in the history of philosophy is a kind of human aspiration or achievement. For instance, in Plato and also Montaigne, Rousseau and many others, who saw the whole

notion of human existence not in terms of a biological sense, as you were talking about, but more as something that gathers around the ultimate human achievement. There is also Aristotle's idea that the ultimate life is the contemplative life. So, I see a categorical distinction between the two. And my question: Professor Pallasmaa had a notion about solitude in a Barragán building, saying that you are experiencing it alone even when you are in a crowd. There is a whole series of scholarship looking at these ideas, but there is also a counter-example that comes from Wittgenstein – though he never discussed Barragán, of course. When it comes to art, are we really looking at it alone? He was trying to argue against the idea of a private language. His argument is that we see a pattern of mutual recognition that constitutes our self-consciousness. So in the Barragán case, it is not that you are alone: language is central to our existence and that is why you are not experiencing the world alone.

JP: My point was exactly to point out that there is a negative and positive connotation on being alone. Mental solitude really is an essential condition for certain creative work, for instance. One of my favourite poets, if not my favourite poet, Rilke, speaks so much about the importance of solitude.

BM: Generally speaking, solitude is positive, people enjoy solitude: the housewife that has gone crazy with the kids wants to go out and have some solitude. I think loneliness is generally, or at least I use it as, a negative thing. People don't want to be lonely. Sometimes you can even distinguish 'aloneness' as different from solitude and also different from loneliness. For example, I am not lonely that I have never met Immanuel Kant. I mean, I am alone and away and isolated from Kant. So, you can make those subtle decisions, but I think, for me and probably for us here, loneliness

is something to be addressed. For me, it is an incredible existential situation.

As I said, Existentialism is a post-World War II phenomenon. Nietzsche, Heidegger (not Heidegger!), Sartre, and Kierkegaard were lonely, they were talking about the sort of loneliness that I tried to give a talk on. For Wittgenstein there is no private language. I mean, this idea that only you know your own thoughts and no one else can access them, that you have some sort of privileged access to your own thoughts, for Wittgenstein is not possible. Language is consciousness. And if you cannot talk, even, at least, communicate at a very basic stage – like in St Augustine's example of the two men, one directing the other on how to build a wall by pointing and that sort of thing – that, at least, is an interaction.

CV: I am not a philosopher; I am a geographer. One of the things as academics that we need to be aware of is the constant drive of policy makers and practitioners and a range of other vested interests to try to categorize, define, and problematise particular human experiences. I'm sure there is a continuum from, on the one hand, loneliness and, on the other hand, solitude, with its positive connotations. I think we are not well served by debates that just try to categorize people into one box or another, without recognizing that we all exist in that continuum. We might be in different places in different times and we can move. It's a very reductionist argument, certainly in the UK, to try and limit the debate into this narrow kind of negative experience, which has now become a real problem, without really thinking it through.

Audience A: I would like to thank you for the inspiring lectures, but also I would like to make a critical comment. I experienced all the talks in an opposition; on the one side the self, maybe the existential self, the creative architect who kind of

solves his existential problems and, on the other hand, we have the world, and maybe the built environment, maybe even place. But what is kind of missing are the social relations on either side of the equation. The focus in all the talks was on the experience of loneliness and this is potentially always a self, the person and an undefined subject. Now, if you look at the social relations on the side of the world, it has been said that it takes a village to educate and raise a child. Now, if the village doesn't function, the child certainly has all the kind of problems you were mentioning. And it's no wonder, because the child is predisposed to be in the village, otherwise it doesn't work. And there has been no talk so far about whether any village will do. I think the village itself has to have a certain quality, it has to have social relations that are working to actually perform as the village for the child. So, I think we need to talk much more about the social relations that make a place than we have done so far. On the other side, what is also missing is the self of the architect, and if you are talking about architecture and built environments, I'm sorry architects, you are not alone! There happens to be, for example, social scientists, psychologists, medical people who know something about public health. There are teams! Architects who think they can build the architecture alone are missing a very vital point about the social relations that are necessary to make even architecture happen. And so, I think we have to look more at the team side, interdisciplinarity and cooperation on the architecture side, and more also at how the villages and communities are structured to be really functional for the people and, especially, our children.

BM: I think it's going in the wrong direction, that's why I stress loneliness. At first, the child is born into a family, within a couple: a child was born within an extended family, into a tribe. I think it's

going in the wrong direction; we are becoming more 'atomistic'. I wrote an article that appeared in the *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, where I contrasted the atomistic society – this comes from Plato, by the way – the atomistic society of the sophists and the politicians in Greek time, and the 'organic' community.

Audience A: But the atomistic society is also a society, either you have a society or not... There are relationships, but they might not be the ones you are thinking about.

BM: You are only thinking about one society – an organic one. But every meaningful concept has an opposite concept. This comes out of the father of sociology, Ferdinand Tönnies, who makes that distinction: *Gemeinschaft* and *Gessellschaft*. You're thinking that there's something wrong with our approach. But our approach, my approach at least, is to worry about the atomistic, the divorce, the collapse of the extended family, the collapse of the village. Look what's happening in the world; you have five or six dictators who have atomic weapons and they're getting crazier and crazier.

JP: I understand your point, but I would rather emphasize the institution of 'tradition' than, for instance, 'team work' and 'group work'. I think that as artists, architects and city planners, we need to internalise tradition much more than we're doing in today's world, which also means that we have to have a constant communication dialogue with the past. I always tell my students to be brave. Choose Michelangelo or Filippo Brunelleschi as your mentor! Because the wonderful quality of the artistic world is that everything is side by side in front of us, and you can really communicate with an artist or a thinker who has died 500 years ago. Tapio Wirkkala, the legendary Finnish designer, who was one of my closest friends, used to tell me that his real teacher was Piero della Francesca. Mind you, he died 476 years before my friend was

born, but yet Piero was his true mentor.

FN: That was a very good point, but I must say that it was on the list. So, that is perhaps why the idea of having the questions in the end was exactly in order to allow those topics to appear. But I have to say a few words about this, because Professor Christina Victor has mentioned the need for having a sense of connectedness as a palliative to loneliness, and we think that the built environment and architecture at its core has a lot to say there, since certain architectural typologies and environmental design studies can contribute to palliate loneliness. For instance, hybrid buildings, which are holding a mixture of users and therefore enhancing unexpected social encounters. But in a different way also in all universal design, design for all, in supporting people. But also in urban design; for instance, there is a renovation project in a neighbourhood in Barcelona where a sloped street had to be updated. The architects' answer was to create a very simple system of paved horizontal platforms along the slope, in order to allow people to place a chair, a table and to sit down to talk to their neighbours. So, I think that the solution had to do with the idea of taking over palliative spaces as well, and solving the problem with spatial thinking.

Audience A: Just a comment on your comment. I am a sociologist. I started teaching in social planning and architecture in the 1970s. So, the problem is, I was teaching, for example, together with Gerd Albers. He was a social planner, architect, and he had a distinct awareness of the need for architects' co-operation with other disciplines to really do their job. He saw it as very important how we structure the process of making architecture. It's not just about having great ideas or answers, but about how to do it. On the other hand, the question of what we shall do – *Apocalypse Now!*

is not really the problem. We also have climate change activists, so maybe there is more community developing than you allow for. What I find discomforting, for example, in your presentation [referring to CV] – which I liked very much, by the way – is that you show a slide on what we can do perhaps with older people, with them making coffee and all these nice little things like having pets. Sure it was ready. But then it stopped just being little lists of the connectedness of things and other people. It's certainly not enough to address the question about how older people are supposed to live in the near future, even in the society that doesn't pay their rent.

CV: I think one of the big problems that we have in the UK – so I don't attribute it to my European cousins – is that the first thing is, people are interested in solving a problem. So, they want to know what we can do to provide older adults with meaningful social relationships, so that they will not be lonely. So, what they do is they study lonely people, who are five percent or maybe ten percent of the population, instead of looking at the ninety percent of older adults who are socially engaged, socially connected with relationships that are meaningful to them. Not necessarily to me or to us, but meaningful in their lives, and we don't spend any time, effort or interest in trying to understand what works. So, indeed, I have been trying to develop research in this sense. If there are any research funders in the audience, I have got a great research project called "Why are older people lonely?"

If you think about old age, perhaps you would have lost your employment roles, reduced income, increasing health problems, your children would have moved away and live somewhere else in the world, and your life-long partner would have died. And still ninety percent of people are not lonely. I think we could learn a

lot from older adults as experts by experience – what's meaningful to them? – and reframe our enterprise. For me, a lot of the interventions that are done in the UK are somebody's great idea: let's give them a hen or let's put men in sheds or let's get barbers to cut peoples' hair, or whatever it is, instead of going to the older people – this applies to the other groups as well – asking What would you like? What brings meaning to your life?

When I was a kid, I was a swimmer, a very keen swimmer. For me, what I want to do when I become deeply decrepit, I still want to be able to go swimming with my swimming buddies. That's what brings meaning to my life, just float around and enjoy the experience. I don't know if that answers the question, but a lot of the time we're asking the wrong question from the wrong people, and we don't take into the context that all of the research on loneliness in the UK is about bereavement or gender. It doesn't look at "Is there a bus service to take you to somewhere where you could meet your whist club or your Conservative Women's Association?" or whatever. Do we ask the people, Do they have enough money to get there? Do we ask if the pavement is walkable? All those kinds of things, those sort of contextual areas, we don't actually take into account.

My two big things for planning are benches – in the UK we don't have benches in public spaces, in case young people sit on them and get up to mischief, and we don't have public loos anymore either, because people might go in there and also get up to mischief. But both of those things really make the environment much more accessible for everybody.

BM: My own personal plan for continued non-loneliness is to hang around universities and talk to people like you.

CV: Or go to the library!

JP: I was going to comment on the same remark. I guess we two [referring to himself and to BM] would go for old people, but I don't believe either one of us feels lonely.

BM: No.

JP: Because the world gets more and more interesting every day.

BM: And keeping your intellectual abilities and talking to people, our interaction right now has made me a lot less lonely for the time that we converse.

RR: You have talked about place as a way not to be lonely, to be connected. Some thinkers have talked about the relationship of place and habits, and nowadays habits are changing so fast. So, that can also affect the way we inhabit and the way we make places. Thus, I want to ask you about the issue of habits and also about how technology is influencing our habits; for instance, how we take care of older people, introducing telecare and telehealth, and how this has transformed or can affect loneliness?

BM: Well, for me, habits are moving so fast. I have problems with the computer. My wife bought me a cell phone a number of years ago. It's a flip phone. Every time I opened it, it took pictures of me, and I couldn't stop it, so there were more selfies of me than of Kim Kardashian. I cannot log into these new habits, they alienate me. I will go with my colleague here, I will go to the old traditional things, the things that have been around forever and have survived. But I watch TV and every six weeks there's a brand-new car, and they're going faster and faster. It's just overwhelming. It's going in a wrong direction, that's all I can say.

CV: I don't entirely know how to answer the question; so, that's always a good start. In terms of ICT, Information and Communication Technology, I think there is good and bad. In

the UK, we periodically hear on the news about these Scrabble groups, so people can play Scrabble online with other people in the world, who are not spatially proximate, and can have an enjoyable experience playing a game they like, even if they cannot get out of the house, so they have an opportunity to do something they enjoy, facilitated by ICT, which is great. That perhaps enables people to have a better, meaningful old age, when perhaps their mobility is impaired, and they can't get out for whatever reason. So, that's really good. But I think as well that there are downsides to some of these things.

Perhaps if we think about families being dispersed around the world, Skype, Zoom or these conferencing systems are great. So, you can see your grandchildren in New Zealand, which will either make you feel very glad that you can see them, or make you feel desperately lonely because your grandchildren are not living down the road. So I think it perhaps depends on the individuals, and I guess probably, like all of these things, ICT is individual context specific, it's not a 100 percent good or bad thing.

BM: Are we becoming more dehumanised?

CV: I don't know. I guess another thing that I find interesting, certainly in the UK, is that we are desperate for telecare and telehealth to work. Again, it's like your social relationships: some things work really well. If you're an older adult who cannot get to a GP's [general practitioner] surgery, we can now do tele-consultations, so you can talk to your GP or your nurse and discuss what's going on: this is a great thing. But if that's then an excuse for the GP not to make a home visit, this is a bad thing. I am not saying that telecare isn't a good thing, but to say "it's good enough for old people, we will leave the doctors to deal with the young people, who are slightly less problematic"… And telehealthcare is

problematic as well, because most old people don't have only one thing wrong with them. The average 70-year old has at least five different comorbidities, and managing that kind of complexity at a distance is not easy. So, wearing my public health hat, I would rather say that we should think more sophisticatedly about managing multimorbidity than telecare; but I am biased.

Audience A: I would be a little bit careful about demonising modern technology. I mean, we have, on the one hand, the fact that young people are able to organize worldwide for climate-change programmes exactly with that kind of technology that people of our age may not be so used to anymore. But, on the other hand – a totally different example – one of the most rewarding experiences I had in my research was when a demented person was in a project that we had on using touch screens. There were very simple kinds of computer material, music and so on, and they could then choose just by touching the screen. When you see the demented person for the first time in their life sitting in front of a touch screen, and then kind of discovering that when you touch a certain part of the screen, things happen – which are just wonderful to look at – then, I think you get second thoughts about the technology. Blame the people who are using the technology incorrectly, but blaming the technology is too easy.

CV: And for people with disabilities; it's fantastic. If it can promote engagement!

JP: I'm not demonising technology. I'm just saying that we should be a bit more concerned and careful about the consequences. Also, in other kinds of things; for instance, at least the Finns here know that in Finnish schools teaching longhand writing was stopped two years ago, which is, I think, a catastrophic change, based on a complete lack of understanding of how the body is

engaged in language, writing, and speaking. Scientists argue today that language originates in hand gestures, which makes a lot of sense. So I'm just saying, that in the name of progress, we are doing rather serious changes. In today's newspaper there was a piece of news that I have mentioned in a couple of my essays: that is, the importance of making notes by hand, instead of making them on a machine. The news was that the memory capacity of those who did it by hand was much higher, which is very easy to understand because it goes through the muscular system. So, I'm just suggesting that we should be a little bit more careful.

BM: Recently, the system I came up with… the University of Chicago had a Great Books Program, and you read the texts of Aristotle, Plato and Newton and all, and you had to really kind of think and struggle with them. I just retired from teaching about a year ago, but gave a course where people had to buy or, at least, order the book, or they could order it online, which was fine. Books I used to read I would underline over and over again in different colours.

There are different exams you can give; you can give a true or false exam – that's not very sophisticated – or you can give multiple choice, but I liked to give essay exams. So, I put the three essay questions on the board and then everyone went to their computers and *googled* in the question, and what I got was a Google product.

Audience A: Just a note; he is talking in Finland, where computers are brought into schools at a rate Germany can only dream of. We [in Finland] had the best ratings in Pisa [Programme for International Student Assessment]. And the children are reading much more – and the parents with the children – than in any other European country. Is that now a case for you or against you?

BM: Well it depends where you live. For example, we have problems in the United States, as you must realise. Something is going wrong. I'm not political. I'm not nationalistic. I was actually from Europe, my parents were Montenegrins. I lived in Europe from 1937 to 1945 during World War II. So I'm not political, I'm not nationalistic, I'm not religious. I stay out of all that. But it depends where you live. In the United States now, I'm ready to give up my citizenship. I'm a nationalized citizen now but what they are doing is unethical because of Trump. I don't vote for him, or against him, I am out of that. I don't care about his politics but as a human being, ethically, I think things are going bad.

Audience A: But you have to vote against Trump.

BM: No, I stay out of it! I'm purely philosophical. There's a group of philosophers they used to call Stoics. They were cosmopolitans of the world, in other words, they were citizens of the world: all men are brothers, no man is born a slave and all that nonsense, and that's who I go with.

FN: Maybe we can leave politics out. Now that teaching and learning has come up, perhaps I would return to the idea of 'empathy', which has appeared in the talks. Especially we architects are centred in the built environment, are searching for expression rather than developing what professor Pallasmaa calls 'emphatic thinking', and making places for all. Now that we're in an academic environment, how can we teach empathy or empathic thinking to students?

JP: I'm glad to start by saying that architecture is the art form that is closest to choreography. Architecture choreographs human movements, not only physically but also mentally: it choreographs emotions, it scripts human behaviour very fundamentally. What I wish to say is that when a designer designs a house for another

person, it's not possible to do it for you as a separate self. I have to internalise you as a client and I design it for myself and then, at the end of the process, I give it as a gift to you. But that is the only way empathy works: there is no imagination hovering between two persons. It has to be located somewhere: the designer and artist has to locate and feel everything by herself.

I see empathy as a really important, essential, central quality for designers of anything. But I don't know of any school in the world where empathy would be taught, which is a very strange thing. Well, there are many other things that are missing in education. I think it's completely wrong to start architecture education or design education by teaching what architecture is or what design is. The first two years should be teaching *who you are*, *who you are*, *who you are*, because only around the core of the self can knowledge accumulate into something fruitful, in creative work. So, there are fundamental things that are missing in education today.

FN: Professor Mijuskovic, you have approached empathy with the idea of 'intimacy' as well, and you have said that a fairer definition for loneliness might be a new definition for empathy.

BM: One of the really serious revolutions in philosophy was initiated by Descartes. He changed everything that went before him and everything that went after. But in his statement "I think, therefore I am" the problem was: how do I know other selves? Not only how do we know the world, because it's a distortion of our sensations, but how do we know anyone else? That's why I talk about empathy. Empathy is the road to intimacy. But I think it can only be done on a very concrete and limited level.

I met my wife in a South Side bar in Chicago, and we drank for four straight nights; we drank really heavily. On the fourth night, I asked her to marry me and she said yes. I would have asked her on

the first night, but I was afraid she might think that I was rushing it. That was in 1965. We have an emphatic, intense relationship, and what holds it together is an ethical commitment to each other, and continuous communication. I suffered from loneliness as an only child during World War II. From 1937 to 1939, I moved from Budapest to Croatia to Montenegro to Palestine to Cairo in Egypt and, finally, to Ankara, before going to the United States. So, I struggled with loneliness on such an intense level that finally I figured out I better think this through. But the empathy was through emotion, through affective means, not through intellectually trying to see how.

Audience A: You needed a village.

BM: Well, it was a village of two. I mean, you can call it a village, it was a relationship. There was no village, it was all chaos. My mother was from Croatia. Croatians went with the Nazis. My father was from Montenegro, and they allied with the British and the Americans. They fought with the British 8th army against Rommel and the Nazis. You know, it was all chaos. The concentration camps! Jasenovac was one of the worst concentration camps. Even the Nazis were startled by what was going on in Croatia. Jesus Christ! I need a beer, I don't know about you!

RR: I'm interested in this capacity of architecture to convey meanings without an intellectual meaning behind it; about its emotional capacity. Professor Pallasmaa has talked extensively about 'atmospheres'. I was wondering if you could tell more about how these environments can help us to live with a temporary feeling of loneliness and create this empathy and unity.

BM: Professor Pallasmaa used the word 'mediation'. I kept talking about separation, but mediation is how you connect. I go along with that key word: how do we mediate with each other? But

I think, to do it successfully, you can't do it as a nation, we're too fragmented.

CV: I think that in a lot of the planning decisions in the UK we've looked at the plans and not at the people, and so we have very carelessly destroyed communities not, I don't think, deliberately, but inadvertently. We need to put people much more into the planning process and try and think about how we can promote connections at a number of different levels.

BM: You talked about a village, but unfortunately the United States is a nation. They had a Civil War, where they actually had slaves, and now this is another 'civil war'. We are not a village in the United States: it's just chaos.

CV: I want to offer a small ray of hope, based on my late mum – and it's always good to extrapolate from one's own family. It's kind of a simple thing that can build connections and bring people together. We lived in a town just outside of London. They built a big new supermarket, and for lot of the older people it was difficult to get there. The bus ride involved two busses and if you didn't have a car it was problematic. The local authority organized a bus – a coach, a mini-bus – to take older adults from a particular locality and take them shopping. This was not an intervention aimed at community building, or any kind of network building. It was merely a transport activity, so that the older adults could do their shopping and get back without having to spend four hours on a bus going somewhere.

This started off with a group of elderly women and a few men who were brave, going on this bus, maybe 25 people who did not know each other, and that ran for about two or three years, and at the end of which this group had formed a little… well, several communities. So, what went from "going shopping", to

"after shopping we'll have some coffee" to "we'll exchange phone numbers", and then build a network based around a common problem and a solution to a common problem. Sometimes, we think in terms of loneliness interventions, we label some visual cure to loneliness, "I will give you a hen", when, actually, if I give you a bus and you can go and meet people who are in a similar kind of position to you, we might be able to grow networks. Isn't it Think Global, Act Local?

JP: Just one example, a personal example, of how to recognise or address the user from my own practice. I did a number of projects for the City of Helsinki, and I was always reminded that you should design things that are vandal-proof. I always refused to do it. Because if you design something that is vandal-proof, it makes everyone a vandal. Because it reminds you of violence. So, to do things which are fragile, they respect everybody's character, and they have – quoting a sentence from Joseph Brodsky – "Be like me". He says that of a poem, but also architecture has the same capacity to alter, unconsciously or subconsciously, human behaviour. None of my fragile projects have ever been vandalised.

BM: Lesson learned!

FN: I would like to bring up another topic that has appeared here, the issue of language. Professor Mijuskovic and Professor Victor have dealt with this limitation of language to express the feeling of loneliness, how problematic it may be when used as a parameter to measure loneliness, as well its potential capacity to influence, negatively or positively, and create stereotypes about feelings. In addition, it is also known that architecture has its own language as well, that, as with spoken or written language, includes its own elements, its phonemes, its own structure and syntax. Professor Pallasmaa has broadly written about the capacity of

architecture to convey symbolic meanings, as Rosana was referring to before. But to what extent can language contribute to the elimination of social stigma or, put the other way around, to really enhance it?

BM: Well, it is one of the critical arguments for the past fifty years: you mentioned Wittgenstein. Apocritical philosophers have claimed they have substituted language for consciousness. Husserl in the *Cartesian Meditations* argues that consciousness is primary, language is secondary. The analytic philosophers have turned that around, backwards, that's why I have been arguing on behalf of Subjective Idealism. There is Objective Idealism, that is, Hegelianism. For Hegel, the self is mutually conditioned by other selves. There is no such thing for Hegel as a single self, conscious self, there is always a social reference, which could appeal to you sociologically. For Kant, by contrast, the self is mutually conditioned by objects.

I was telling Rosana about one of the cases that is in the paper, but is also in a book that I have just published titled *Consciousness in Loneliness: Theoria and Praxis*, published by Brill in 2018. There is a case that I discuss, it was actually in the *Tampa Bay Times*, a newspaper. They discovered in Florida this little girl, six years old, who had been absolutely neglected by her mother and two older male siblings, so that she couldn't talk. A woman was walking by one day and saw her face in the window – actually, that's the name on a Google search, 'The girl in the window'. She saw this little girl that was staring beyond her, instead of looking at her, like the animals in the zoo – you know how they kind of look beyond you, they do not look at you, they are looking into the distance, somewhere. So, it was reported to child protective services – this is now 2005. The child protective service comes and removes the

child from parental custody. They examine her, she does not seem autistic, she does not seem developmentally delayed or anything like that, but she will not make contact. She was a minor was still adopted after a few years, and she has some sort of minor response to the father, the adopted father, but she only relates to objects. I would say she is self-conscious. Whether she is lonely or not, she has no language to express it. So, they had to lock the refrigerator because she keeps eating everything herself; you know, she is nurturing herself or that sort of thing. Goofily enough, Oprah Winfrey gets involved, gets a contract with the parents so that only she and her staff can interact. So the reporter who had discovered this, wrote this stuff and got a Pulitzer Prize for it, can't even visit the girl. Now she is ten years older, 2015 was the last time, and she still can't talk.

So loneliness is crippling; it destroys you physically, emotionally and intellectually. Those are some of the things about loneliness. My problem with a lot of the violence from dictators, all the way down to the kids that bully and things like that, is that it's loneliness that drives this kind of narcissism; it drives us to the worst things in human beings. Obviously, I am very pessimistic, but not cynical. I think there are saints, I've known human saints, but it only takes one real thug to ruin happiness for a lot of people.

JP: You used the word 'symbolisation' or 'symbol'. Symbols are very often mentioned in relation to rituals and habits and also in art and architecture. I, myself, don't believe too much in the value of symbols, because symbols are agreements. The artistic world and the architectural world need to deal with more deeply grounded phenomena, and there is plenty of language of *materia*, the existential language of space, and distances and illumination, and up and down, and left and right, which are part of our physical

bodily being-in-the-world, and the real language of architecture arises from those, not from social or cultural agreements. I'm not suggesting that symbols should be eliminated, but we shouldn't be giving too much emphasis to those.

BM: Language is artificial, that is one problem. There is a difference with meaning that's rich with intentions, what Husserl calls "horizons and halos of meaning". But language itself is very artificial. Some cultures have one word with twenty different meanings, so to speak.

CV: I just had one minor point, which is once again, perhaps less erudite and more down to earth. Certainly, again from the UK context, I worry about the law of unintended consequences, that the reputation of statements such as "older adults are over-consuming health care services, because they are lonely" will result in older people – who we know in the UK are less likely to consult than other age groups – will stop people going to consult their GP because they don't want to be seen as either undeserving or stigmatised as lonely. And I think more problematically is that we have many locally run groups that bring older adults together.

So, forget all my kind of grumpy-old-lady kind of whinges about going to stroke chickens. If people like to stroke chickens, that's fine, go and do it. But we are increasingly finding that small groups like those who want to have befriending groups, or bring people together, when they are being asked to evaluate the effectiveness of their service in order to qualify for continued funding, it's no longer OK to say "we had 120 people come", or whatever it is. They are being asked now to demonstrate that their service will reduce health care consultations, because this idea has now taken such a grip in the minds of funders, that they are requiring local organizations to be able to show that they can

reduce GP consultations, which they will never be able to do, partly because there is no link, and partly because they are too small. I do think we need to be careful in how we perpetuate some of these tropes that could well end up having negative consequences for service provision in use.

BM: I actually was serious about the dogs that are bred to be kind and gentle, and that sort of thing. Theoretically, Plato thought that human beings could be genetically improved and made into philosopher kings and queens.

But let me just mention this. I have worked in so many different settings, from psychiatric wards to crisis and locked facilities and so forth, and also worked in day treatment. I remember there was a woman who was struggling in day treatment. Then one of the things that happened on a beach there in California, there was an oil spill and seabirds were covered with oil. So, the day treatment team went out there and they started cleaning these birds up, so they could fly again. She was terribly lonely, was in a process of getting a divorce; her husband, I guess, had had enough. She really got into these pelicans. Then one day she did not show up, then on the second day she did not show up, and on the third day she did not show up, and it turned out she had hanged herself. One of the best things if you are lonely: try to help somebody else: it will get you out of yourself. Whatever depression is, it's internal, it's reflexive, you keep brooding on the damn thing over and over again. If you can get out of yourself, you got it, and it just makes you feel better: it makes you feel like a community, right?

Audience A: I think, obviously, that one of the first things we have to do is to listen to other people, to what they have to say. I think you just brought out some good examples of how you tried to listen. What's necessary is that you trust that those people really

have something meaningful and important to say. That's the reason why you listen.

And strangely enough, you [referring to CV] have been apologising twice already now for not being able to talk about Plato or whatever. But I think you also have something to say, and those people talking about Plato should listen. I mean you are like twice-removed already from those people who are there in the streets. So, if we really don't develop this strategy of seriously listening to other people then it will not work. And this has to go through all strata. This needs empathy, that's right – I agree with you [referring to JP]. But you made a typical mistake when you again refer to empathy. You said: *as an architect* you have to show empathy, and listen to *me*, to trust in me, but what about *my* empathy talking to you? I also start understanding what you are saying and thinking as an architect. What happens if all of a sudden in the empathy I have a very good architectural idea? It's not that you have to just listen to me and then do your thing, it's also really expecting and trusting in my empathy for you. We get places when we all listen to each other and try to break into our thinking and communicate again on what this world's problem is about. We do not communicate anymore, we're not together, and we should.

I have spent like two years of my life with Aristotle, trying to catch up from the very beginning. And I went to history and so on. But I also tried to listen to modern philosophers. What about people *after* Heidegger? We still have a living philosophy, for example, the neo-pragmatists: Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor, Jürgen Habermas if you like, and Bruno Latour. There are so many philosophers and social scientists out there right now. We also have to listen to those people who may already have a better understanding of what is happening in modern society and whether everything now

is simply going down the drain, or whether in society there actually are signs of a better future, new movements, which make for hope rather than just despair.

You [referring to BM] described wonderfully and touchingly what happened when you did not have a village that protected you in those years in the 1930s and 1940s. So, you know very well what can happen, and how crucial it is to experience loneliness, and these kinds of influences. OK, but not everybody has these experiences, and I'm always proud to say it and I say it again now: I'm a 68-movement guy. I was one of those who went into the streets and told their parents what kinds of things they did, which you experienced, and that we want to have a better world. It didn't really work out. Maybe we still have hope that it will.

JP: Let me give a personal example of a communication between the user and the designer. My last built project is a concert hall in Rovaniemi, and I decided from the very beginning, in addition to collaborating with an acoustician, to talk with the members of the orchestra and the conductor. I even had orchestra members go through the colour selections and we talked about them, because I had understood from our first meeting that the real problem in modern concert halls is not what the audience hears but what the musicians hear of their own music making. That's the biggest mistake in modern concert halls.

In their opening concert, after the concert, many of the musicians came with tears in their eyes to hug me for the acoustic qualities, which were a consequence of our conversations and communications about these issues. I'm not at all trying to say that the architect or designer or whoever should just ask and then turn away, but I mean to say that there is no way that I or anyone else can enter another person. It has to be an imaginary act and,

consequently, an architect needs also to be some sort of an actor.

BM: But I think to your point, communication is something that you feel is very, very strong, right? The communication between people, and that is something that's very important in terms of avoiding loneliness, if you communicate. I think, as I mentioned, what keeps my marriage strong is the constant communication. Frieda Fromm-Reichmann – she was a famous Freudian – was working in a psychiatric hospital in Maryland, and she was trying to break through to a catatonic woman – a woman who was not responding – and she was not getting anywhere. Then, suddenly she put up one finger and said, "that lonely", and that opened up the flood of communication. Communication is a critical thing in a relationship of intimacy. Another thing that is even more important is 'mutual trust'. If you want things to go bad, if you want loneliness to catch you by the ass, start doing things that are mistrustful to your partner. Trust is the key to all human decency – whether it is a student to a professor, a mother to a child – trust is the key to everything. Once that element of distrust enters in, it's gonna go bad.

Audience B: I would like to mention Iris Andersson's Master's Thesis at Aalto University in Helsinki. She wrote a thesis [now a book, *In the Author's House*] about the house of Göran and Christine Schildt on the Greek island of Leros. An essential part of writing her thesis is that she lived there for a while with Christine, who is now a widow, and she got to know her and her life there in Greece. Her house back home in Finland is one of the famous works by Alvar Aalto, Villa Skeppet in Tammisaari, and Iris asked her doesn't she like living there. Christine replied, however, that she hated that house, even though it was designed especially for them. So, why was that? Because of the expectations of how they

should live their lives. So, they had bought this rustic house on a Greek island, and whenever they had a chance, they rather lived in that house. They made themselves a courtyard and landscaping and even improved the local ecology. She said they preferred living there as a part of the community, rather than as they did in this architect-designed house. It seems that they would live with this guilt for the whole time they were living there, which is interesting to think about. Such a great architecture but they felt they could not really live with it.

FN: I think we should start thinking about closing, but perhaps there is still time for one last question or comment.

CV: I'm done, I have already said everything. Leave them wanting more!

FN: One thing that I wanted to add is the idea of artistic and architectural creation. Professor Pallasmaa defends architecture as a way to make us aware of our environmental solitude, but it does not mean that collaborative work is something we cannot do, definitely. But you have another sort of idea of collaborative work, the idea of working in collaboration with history and tradition. But perhaps this is a topic for another forum or discussion. Rosana, you wished to announce something, don't you?

RR: Yes, there is a conference in Poland on Loneliness coming up, maybe Professor Mijuskovic wants to say something about it.

BM: Different groups are organising. The British have instituted their Ministry of Loneliness. People are realising it is a huge problem. Loneliness only became a serious topic in the 1970s. Now Japan is having serious problems with older people, not because they are old but because they are not used to what's going on, so their families are taking care of them now. Poland organized a meeting in 2018 and has another arranged for 2020, at

the University of Szczecin. It is starting to spread out. One thing that would help your viewpoint is if people recognise they are lonely, then they will be more tempted to reach out. If they are more narcissistic and only want what they can get out of others, then it's not going to work out. My problem is narcissism, but I respect your positive viewpoint to realize that we're lonely and mutually meld with each other, fuse with each other, and so on.

FN: So, with Professor Mijuskovic's words we end the discussion. Thank you to the speakers for making this seminar possible, and on behalf of Rosana and myself thanks to the audience for your interest.