Interview

On *Private Views*, Luxury, and Corruption

Andi Schmied interviewed by Tereza Østbø Kuldova

Despite the iconic nature of the Manhattan skyline, there are only four places the public can see it from and those are the Empire State Building, the Rockefeller Center, ONE World Trade Center and the recently opened EDGE at Hudson Yards. All other elevated views are a private privilege, only available to owners of luxury penthouses. Posing as an apartment-hunting Hungarian billionaire, Andi Schmied accessed and documented the views of over thirty of the city's most exclusive high-rise properties. Her book, *Private Views: A High-Rise Panorama of Manhattan*, offers a glimpse into this elite world. Showcasing the surreal strategies of persuasion used by real estate agents, the book allows readers to bypass the gatekeepers of luxury real estate; guiding them through the sunset from Trump Tower, dawn over Central Park from the tallest residential tower on Earth, and showing samples of the most luxurious materials, such as the Siberian marble, used in soaking tubs overlooking the Statue of Liberty. The skyscrapers visited by Schmied were carefully selected due to their representation of a new type of luxury. Those selected for their architectural interest include the MOMA Expansion Tower by Jean Nouvel, Gehry Tower, Jenga Tower, and 432 Park Avenue. Among the buildings visited for political reasons were the Trump Tower or Time Warner Centre, where recently more than a dozen owners have gone to prison, after anonymously buying an apartment through shell companies. For buildings of economic interest, Schmied visited 220 Central Park South, where its penthouse duplex has been sold for a record sales price. Other buildings selected ranged from reconstructed early American skyscrapers to luxury condos (such as the Woolworth Tower Residences, or 70 Pine) and penthouse suites for sale within luxury hotels (such as the Four Seasons, or Ritz Carlton). Schmied's project is an art and architecture project, but the outcome touches upon various professional fields, such as sociology, economy, urban studies, and anthropology.

TØK: Your art explores the architecture of affluence and luxury. How did you come to create an alter ego who could credibly inhabit this architecture?

AS: As an architect, *I have been interested in how architecture affects people*, so I started to work with the subject, but with an artistic approach I have been mostly focusing on highlighting things I find problematic but always trying to do this through an experiential approach, rather than telling that I have problems with this or that. I am interested in showing things that are hidden or not very obvious to the big audience. This is also how *Private Views* came about, while I was in New York during a three-month residency program at Triangle Arts Association, in 2016 and that's when I started to work on it. It all started with the biggest cliché: I was just curious of how the city looks from above but at the same time of course I have this history of being 'attracted' to ultra-luxury, so it somehow just made sense to try to research a bit more those spaces of privilege which I just cannot access in any way. So that's how I started to think of how I could get into

Photo: Dávid Biró. Courtesy of Trapéz Gallery.

those places and realise that there is practically no way to get in there as a Hungarian artist, especially because many of those places are not even lived in, which I didn't know at the beginning. So, I figured out that my best, and possibly only, choice is to pretend to be an apartment hunting Hungarian billionaire which proved to be a good choice because, as I experienced all these New York real estate agents cannot figure out what is *Hungarian*: it was somehow exotic enough to make them believe anything.

TØK: I think it is fascinating that in order to access the architecture of affluence, power and illicit wealth, you have to create a fictitious character.

AS: Right, it actually says a lot about this whole universe. Usually, the way you can access places says a lot about them. You see how open or closed anything is. One of the craziest things about these places is that they are really at the moment the tallest buildings in New York City, and the fact that they are the ones that you can see from every corner of the city yet practically no one can access it, I found really crazy.

TØK: Only a fictitious character, it would appear, could enter, and make sense of the world of fictions weaved by the luxury real estate marketing, where properties that largely remain empty, are sold as if they were for the living.

Andi Schmied.
Photo: Ava Lynam.
Courtesy of the artist.

Selfie taken in one of the upper floor bathrooms
during a viewing in Time Warner Center.
Courtesy of the artist.

AS: Yes, exactly, it is like you imagine yourself in the bathtub, but, even if you buy it, you are not going to be in the bathtub. I remember when I was interviewed by a journalist from The New Yorker, who was working there for 15 years, he told me that he wanted to write about these buildings for a long time, and he specifically reached out to some of these developments' management but was denied access in all.

TØK: Manhattan's luxury real estate has been associated with transnational flows of illicit wealth, with properties owned by shell companies – themselves characterised by a layering of contractual fictions and fictional ownership structures – and with money laundering, tax evasion, embezzlement and corruption, a market that boomed after the financial crisis. In January 2021 a new disclosure law came into force, which requires companies to reveal beneficial ownership of shell companies, but there are the usual loopholes, and the US remains one of the hotbeds of financial secrecy. This brings us both to the legal fictions and regulatory fictions that facilitate this market.

AS: The legal ways in which these buildings are sorted out are rather revealing. In New York, for example, historically, higher value apartments have been in cooperative based buildings. This means that prospective buyers don't buy an apartment but share in a building. For this, there is a lengthy interview procedure, and you are rarely allowed to

Northern view from one of the penthouse terraces at Kohn Pedersen Fox
Associates' 111 Murray.
Photo: Andi Schmied. Courtesy of the artist.

sublet your apartment afterwards. This still works in many high-value buildings in New York. But these deluxe supertalls are condominiums, which means that you simply buy an apartment, and a certain percentage of the common areas. This is what we know in Europe. Then, you do whatever you please with your property. So this gave a huge space for shell companies, or other forms of unclear ownership to happen, which is a key to understanding why the ultra-high-net-worth individuals started to buy in New York's ultra-luxury supertalls.

TØK: What about the other regulations, such as the zoning regulations, air rights, mechanical and structural voids, and the exploitation of loopholes that enabled the construction of ultra-luxury supertall towers? In a way, void, air and (loop)holes, emptiness, and vacuity, appear to be central to the construction of wealth.

AS: Totally, it's always a bit of playing around the regulations and finding loopholes that allow you to do what you want. One of the crazy things is the 421-a tax incentive, which originated in the 70s, and was a way to motivate developers to build, at a time when real estate wasn't 'a thing'. It is extremely outdated, but because of it, ultra-luxury developments are even getting billions yearly in public funding! Developers are way too powerful, and they would simply never let regulation changes happen. That is also something very strange, because I think they are considered to build living space—and

Central Park view from the 100th floor Private Ballroom of Central Park Club. With 1550 feet, Central Park Tower, designed by Adrian Smith and Gordon Gill Architecture, upon completion, will be the tallest residential tower on the planet.
Photo: Andi Schmied. Courtesy of the artist.

lots of square meters of it—and that somehow qualifies for public benefits. But these spaces are not really meant for living.

TØK: How do the air rights work?

AS: Air rights are also very anachronistic, the way they are set. It started in the early 20th century, when they built the Equitable Building which was a super tall building back then, obviously not the tallest anymore today. It cast huge shadows in the neighbouring area, hundreds of meters, which was followed by a public outcry. So, the city started to think of ways how to regulate height, because before that, it was the *ad coelum* doctrine in vigour, which basically means, 'who owns the land, owns up to the sky, and down to the core of the earth'. But with engineering becoming way more sophisticated, they realised that actually even though it's your plot it's going to affect the neighbours and if it's a very tall building it's going to affect the entire neighbourhood. So, they regulated how high you can build on each plot in New York City. This already gave the pattern and rhythm to entire Manhattan because it regulated the residential areas, the higher office and work areas, and everything in between. Then in the 1960s they started to allow the transfer of these development rights between plots: this is what is colloquially called 'air rights'. Originally, the main goal of this, was historic preservation; they would allow protected, low-rise buildings to sell their unused air-rights, as a way for them to get financial support from neighbouring buildings, that wanted to build higher, but had no permission otherwise to

135 Questions for Those Who Shape and Those Who (Sometimes) Occupy New York City's Extreme Upper Skyline Samuel Stein

Why do these ultra-luxury extra-high-rise buildings exist?

Who, exactly, demands them? Is it the residents—a mix of oligarchs, finance titans, modern-day robber barons, obscure inheritors, post-socialist privatizers, mafiosos, money launderers, and empty avatars for anonymous bank accounts—who demand to see more of these glass rectangles stretch higher toward the stars? Is it the developers and their investors, eyeing available swatches of land and sky to assemble—through countless others' labor, of course—into luxury skyscrapers, with each subdivision thereof selling in the millions? Is it the city, state, and federal politicians, planners,

and policy-makers who incentivize these stationary investment vehicles for mobile capital, hoping to grab some benefit—tax revenue, press buzz, the coveted "favorable investment climate"—from this proliferation of profitable properties? Is it the architects and designers seeking to put their stamp on the city, preferably at slightly higher altitudes than their competitors, and with slightly more flair (or coolness, if that's their calling card)? Is it the workers who build and service the buildings—and the union leaders who represent some of them—who understand the city's political economy better than most economists, and have pinned their futures to this asset class?

Exactly how many individuals actually desire this mode of development? How might that number compare to the massive majority of people who

demand—who desperately need—an entirely different built environment, meant to house them comfortably at costs commensurate with normal (i.e. pretty low) incomes? Does the demand for these ultra-luxury skyscrapers come primarily from people as such, or does it come more from capital in the aggregate? In other words, is it just that influential individuals desire absurdly unaffordable housing, or is it that the capitalist economy is currently configured in such a way as to require more of this mode of development? (It's both, right?)

I wonder, if all the money currently invested in real estate around the world—roughly \$217 trillion, seventy-five percent of which is in housing—were piled sky high in \$1 denominations, how tall would it reach? How many skyscrapers, stacked up end to end, would it encompass? At what point would it burst into flames from reaching too close to the sun? What would be its weight in gold, compared to its weight in glass, steel, concrete, and brick?

And why, exactly, is so much global capital pooled into urban real estate? People need housing, sure, but with affordability down and homelessness up, is that what this mode of investment really accomplishes? Is it the outcome of decades of financial deregulation, low interest rates, and quantitative easing, all creating opportunities for mobile capital to be sunk into high-return real estate? Is it part of various states' spatial fixes for both attracting and retaining surplus capital? Is it the result of predatory private equity firms scouring the globe for so-called "undervalued assets," and determining that our cities are worthy investment targets? Is it the economic polarization that continues to push billions into poverty while elevating a relatively tiny few to the status of the super-rich, who need to park (or hide) their profits somewhere and see real estate as a safe—maybe even fun!—place to put it? Is it just the predictable outcome of a global capitalist system in which capital gains are growing far faster than profits in traditional productive sectors?

Ultimately, who pays for these buildings? Besides the buyers, who are the investors? Just how much debt did the developers and owners take on to create this landscape? Who issued it? Imagine for a moment that all the outstanding debt on these ultra-luxury towers were called, all at once, could even one of the developers repay it? How many times has the debt on these developments been repackaged and resold? To whom? How long and how far does their string (or chain, or tangle, or web, or network, or Mutually Assured Destruction doomsday device, or whatever you want to picture it as) of mortgage-backed securities and collateralized debt obligations

stretch? Are my meager bank deposits invested in these towers? Are yours? What about my city or state's public pension funds?

How much public financing went into these luxury towers' construction? How large a tax break were the developers offered, "as of right," to erect these edifices? Were there any special levies or financing schemes specifically designed for any of these projects? How can New York justify the approximately \$2.5 billion in annual subsidies to developers known as "421-a" at a time when social spending is being slashed and public housing in this city needs roughly \$30 billion in repair funds? How much tax revenue can these buildings be expected to generate if we keep incentivizing their construction through tax breaks?

How many of these buildings relied on changes to the rules about what can be built where and at what size—namely the city's zoning code—in order to be built where they are? Was the rezoning part of a neighborhood plan, or was it just an ad hoc one-parcel variance? How much did the developer spend on lobbyists to ensure that a land use change, tax break or other public incentive was secured? Was there any opposition? What uses did the various opponents imagine for the space these buildings currently occupy? What would the city look like if fortunes had been reversed, and the community plans had been initiated instead of the developers?

What futures are foreclosed when a city goes all in on ultra-luxury development as a core feature of its development practice? What more widely and urgently needed uses are pushed aside, to another location or to another time, when these kinds of projects are prioritized? Are the YIMBYs—the "Yes in My Backyard" activists who promote a market-oriented supply-side solution to urban gentrification—right that if we don't build these insanely high-priced dwellings in ever-growing quantities, the super-rich will simply outbid the rest of us for the existing housing stock? If so, how can we make that untrue? In other words, what third option exists beyond two iterations of the status quo—the ongoing multiplication of vertical mansions amid growing homelessness, or a lifeless locked-in amber preservation of the city as it exists in a given time and place?

What else could be done with buildings of this size? If the super-prime market sags (or does it explode?), could we convert these buildings to any other use? As they age, can they "filter" through the market, like other housing typologies sometimes do? How many people of more modest means could be housed in them if the apartments they contain were reconfigured for average New Yorkers—for the household sizes (families, roommates, loners) more typical of the rest of the city and at prices that

Photo: Dávid Biró. Courtesy of Trapéz Gallery.

do so. The first precedence of this was the old Penn Station, which is a low rise building but it was in a bad shape, so the neighbour offered that it's going to buy its air rights. This deal could have saved the old structure of Penn Station, and as an exchange the neighbour could have built a 7-story building. At the end this specific transaction did not come across and they renewed the entire Penn Station with other funds, but this was the first precedent of air rights being part of a financial transaction. But as capitalism progressed, air rights became a way for billion-dollar constructions to be able to go as high as the sky. So, for example this area of the Billionaires' Row, the section below the Central Park where most of supertalls are, is technically zoned out. This means that there are no more air rights left because they bought all of them. This is also a kind of good thing for the developers, because on one hand you're extremely tall but you own all those air rights around you. On the other hand, you can be certain that no one is going to block your views, or be higher than you, because there are no more air rights on the market to be purchased. Certainly no one is going to be higher than you and they're never going to block your view in the future. So that's also a plus when you sell the property that you can assure your buyer that the views and the sunshine is never going to be blocked. Whereas in other places, when you buy something, they always can build in front of you. On the other hand, of course, some argue that with one pen stroke they can always correct, and the department of city planning could always just add air rights to any area in the city; it is a bit like printing money.

Possible configurations on a hypothetical lot with FAR = 2,0 (top).
Transferable Development Rights (TDRs) (left bottom).
Diagram of 432 Park Avenue, showing the use of the above mentioned zoning loopholes (right bottom).
Diagrams: Andi Schmied. Courtesy of the artist.

TØK: You can make regulations out of thin air, that's the 'beauty' and luxury of governance.

AS: And a fun fact, the very first building that was using this technique was Trump Tower, where Trump actually lives now on the 5th Ave, and that was the very first tall luxury residential tower which got to be that high thanks to these a lot of transferred air rights.

TØK: What about these mechanical and structural voids?

AS: Yeah, that's a proper loophole shamelessly used by developers. So, the way it works is that when you construct, there are certain type of elements that do not count into your total height, for example the mechanical floors; in these huge buildings there are enormous spaces dedicated to plumbing, elevator systems, and so on. Because they are supertall and superslim, they need certain mechanical things to keep them stable and straight. These floors which are there for these purposes, do not count into the overall height, so basically you can add as many mechanical floors as you want and obviously the only reason to use this loophole is to break the records of being the tallest. This is a bit more regulated now and the mechanical void cannot be taller than 30 feet or so. But there was a 5–7-year period when this was not regulated and was used as a loophole. In

Eastern and Southern views from one of the upper floor guest rooms at
Cetra Ruddy's One Madison.
Photo: Andi Schmied. Courtesy of the artist.

432 Park Avenue there is an empty floor for every 10th floor, where the wind just blows through. So, there is just the core column going through and besides there is nothing; many engineers argue that it is unnecessary, and it is just to make the building that much higher. In the case of 432 Park, there are 19 mechanical floors all together. The problem is that below the 30th floor, they struggle to sell the apartments, because below the 30th floor you are basically in an average building, and you cannot ask those crazy square footage prices. Normally you put amenities there, swimming pools and mechanical things. The higher the more valuable. There is such fascination with the view.

TØK: These luxury properties tend to be highly securitized and gated properties, keeping the unworthy, and dispossessed outside, this is also why it took a fictional character to get inside. These gated luxury properties also tend to offer all the amenities and services that one needs and desires within their gates, why step outside when one can watch the world below from the top? Simultaneously, many of the properties are empty, ghost homes. What are the ultra-rich haunted by, what are they so afraid of?

AS: That is a really good question. I do not know. At the entrance there is this guy at the revolving door and two security guards outside, it is not very inviting. What are they afraid of? Is it that people see it, even if it is not really possible to get inside for any outsiders?

Western view from “her” bathroom from one of the upper floor staged apartments at Rafael Viñoly’s 432 Park Avenue.
Photo: Andi Schmied. Courtesy of the artist.

Not even the lobby is accessible to anyone. That is already about that other people would see what they have, versus what is on the streets.

TØK: Maybe they are hiding the emptiness and hiding the hiding of wealth?

AS: I remember I was in one of the apartments and it was a resale. So, it was after 5 years of purchasing it by the original owner and the agent said that they never actually lived there, maybe they stayed there a few times and they used it more as a storage and as we were going around the apartment it was packed with art pieces, huge paintings, sculptures, but all of them packed. It was basically just a storage.

TØK: Yes, this speaks to the financialization of art and luxury.

AS: Yes, exactly.

TØK: It is a bit like a private freeport.

Northern view from one of the upper floor master bathrooms at Time Warner Center designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.
Photo: Andi Schmied. Courtesy of the artist.

AS: The apartments are also constructed in such a way that art has a crucial part in it. In all of the buildings there are huge wall spaces dedicated for paintings, in some there are corridors for sculptures. This actually is quite a big challenge for the interior designers, since most of these spaces are all glass facade, so the 'big white wall' is really specifically made for the display of the owner's art collection. And in some developments, they even have art services, either lending, so you can impress your guests, or they help you to build your own art collection. But at the same time, of course, they assume that buyers have their own anyway.

TØK: Some years ago, Johann Rupert, the billionaire owner of Cartier, worth \$7.3 billion mentioned that he was terrified of robots replacing workers and the poor rising to bring down the rich. Is there increasingly an aesthetic of fear embedded in the aesthetic of luxury – the luxury doomsday and apocalypse bunkers seem to be another hot real estate, have you been thinking about these as well?

AS: I don't see those actual bunkers too differently from these 'bunkers in the sky'. There is a sense of control in both architectures; either you are hidden from below, or from above. But you are never with the rest of society.

Northern view of the Empire State Building from the hot tub of one of the penthouse's terrace at Rafael Viñoly's 277 Fifth.
Photo: Andi Schmied. Courtesy of the artist

TØK: What is the key to understanding the aesthetics of power and affluence in Manhattan and the extreme urban inequalities? Is it the view from the top, the power to look down upon those below, given that property prices correspond closely to heights?

AS: It is roughly one million extra for each floor higher you go. You are in your soaking tub, looking down at those outside. In quite a few viewings I remember there were binoculars lying around, and the agents would tell me to use them and observe the streets. It is a bit like playing god, with the overview on the rest of the city.

TØK: The luxury high-rises do cast their shadows, public spaces, once sunny, are cast into darkness, and residents lose their view, their apartments turned into dark caves, while the ultra-rich or their ghosts enjoy the sunny view. There are discussions about laws protecting the right to sunlight in public spaces, but is this not just an evasion of the real problem at the core?

Northern and eastern views from the staged living room of the largest penthouse at Zaha Hadid's 520 West 28th Street.
Photo: Andi Schmied. Courtesy of the artist.

AS: What I know is that on average an ultra-high-net-worth individual owns 5 of these properties globally, so they do not live in at least 4 of them. One of the regulations that may be changed, is that if you do not live in the property, you do not pay a certain tax. This is why they don't even bother to rent these places, because that would make them liable for more taxes. The whole thing is about evading. There was one building from the early 2000s that publicised itself in advertising by stating outright that they do not care where your money comes from; owners in that building ended up in prison when beneficial ownership was revealed - at the beginning they were even advertising this secrecy.

TØK: The art market is as efficient at hiding and moving illicit wealth as the luxury real estate market. What functions does art serve in these buildings, and what is the role of artists and star architects?

AS: This has to do with the cultural capital of what is surrounding this ultra-luxury. Be it Zaha Hadid or Frank Gehry, their names are adding a lot to the value of the building. It adds to your value as well, in addition to storing your money. There were some buildings where the architecture was conservative, they look almost like clean old buildings, while others are ultra-contemporary. It is important for the ultra-wealthy to show their taste and

Northern view of the Empire State Building and western view of the Hudson River from one of the upper floor staged living rooms at Cetra Ruddy's One Madison.
Photo: Andi Schmied. Courtesy of the artist.

where they belong in this scheme. In a few of these buildings they have sculptures and art pieces in the entrance, like 56 Leonard is 'laying on top of' an Anish Kapoor sculpture. It shows that you have good taste, it is a value. Especially so, when people from the street start to take selfies in this huge, mirrored surface, and hashtag your building. In some places they even told me that 'it is like living in a museum'.

TØK: It seems, however, like staging capital for an invisible Other, by an absent owner. For whom is the illusion staged?

AS: Even though now you should know beneficial ownership, they still keep everything secretive. The agents would say they cannot say who the neighbours are, but they would assure me they were high-level people, often some diplomats, give me some nationality proportions, usually 80% Americans.

TØK: You also mentioned in the book that many of the owners are the real estate agents themselves?

AS: That is so very often. Someone who rises in the profession, has those skills of selling, a very small range of people, probably not more than 2-300 people in this segment. If you sell one of these apartments, you get around 1-2 million dollars, so after

Southern and western views from one of the upper floor master bedrooms
at Rafael Viñoly's 432 Park
Avenue. Photo: Andi Schmied. Courtesy of the artist.

15 sales in 2 years, you can already buy one of these. So, they would tell me that they would have an apartment in the same building or elsewhere. Some of the are real celebrities; with their own tv-shows, like Million Dollar Listing, books, millions of Instagram followers, and so on. The funny thing about them is that they are not just selling this lifestyle, but they are living it too.

TØK: The interiors appear very repetitive and sterile, the layouts similar, with the obligatory free-standing soaking tub in front of a glass window. Why does luxury always tend to look the same, at least to the outsider, while making a claim to uniqueness?

AS: Yes! Like the only difference I found among these places was the type of marble. Within one building, 100 apartments, even the layout is the same, everything is the same. This is not exactly how you imagine being unique and these people wanting to stand out. That is a strange thing. People with this kind of wealth would historically contract designers, have custom made apartments, something special. This just really shows you that they are not really meant to be lived in by their buyer.

Southern and eastern corner views of the Hudson River, New Jersey and downtown from the sitting room at Cetra Ruddy's One Madison.
Photo: Andi Schmied. Courtesy of the artist.

TØK: And yet these buildings maintain the illusion of life, through all these amenities, staff, restaurants, pools and so forth. Is it not kind of a zombie life, empty of life?

AS: Yes, they would always show me the amenities and there would maybe be one person doing something there, but mostly it was just a guard sitting at the end of the swimming pool, another one sitting in the gym. Some restaurants, there I think I never saw anyone; it is really bizarre.

TØK: You write that 'brochures speak the same language as these apartments and their agents: a totally absurd description of an absurd lifestyle'. Why is it, what is the nature of this absurdity? Is it life purified of life itself? Are we dealing with a zombification by luxury (and security)?

AS: Almost every viewing I went to, I got these crazy brochures, fanciest books I have seen in my life, golden stamping, hard cover, in some box, which had some laces on, all of it in a leather bag, with a logo of the development on it. They want to make you feel special. But the sentences that are in these brochures seem like a joke, like they were written in five minutes, they are so cliché. At the same time, you can see that there was a lot of work put into it. They try to sell you that this is life at the top, the best thing that you

Clouded northern view of the Met Life Tower from one of the upper floor living rooms at
Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates' Madison Square Park Tower.
Photo: Andi Schmied. Courtesy of the artist.

could ever imagine or dream of and they always list the architects, designers, psychologists of space, all collaborating to get you the best you can get from life. They buy even respected architectural critics and big names to back the projects, even those who are known to be critical. For example, in the brochure of 53 West 53, the tower above MoMA, Paul Goldberger wrote a text praising the building. They also try to sell the handcraftedness and uniqueness. If you would not see the images but just read the text, you would think that you are in a cottage in a village or something. 'It was made by artisans, in small workshop', and then they throw around names of locations, like Siberian marble, no longer Italian. It was just to make it sound like something else. This name dropping is huge, even marble from the same place as David statue came from, would be highlighted.

TØK: It is just a transfer of imaginary value, a sort of sympathetic magic, overlaid by power over labour power?

AS: Yes, so many people worked for you. There are even these images of dirty hands, working on something, in these brochures.

TØK: Do you see any overlaps between the architecture and aesthetics of affluence and the type of global governance endorsed by the ultra-rich?

Southern and western sunset views of One World Trade Center, the Hudson River and New Jersey from one of the upper floor master bedroom terraces at Herzog & de Meuron's 56 Leonard.
Photo: Andi Schmied. Courtesy of the artist.

AS: Just the fact that every single material is from somewhere else, even the glass, for example for 432 Park Avenue was an Austrian factory, tells you a great deal about the ideology.

TØK: Is the purpose of art and architecture corrupted by this?

AS: Yes, completely. I think that any normal architect would refuse such a task. It is so bad for the city. The logic of the developers is indeed corrupting architecture.

TØK: What about your art being treated as an investment?

AS: I think the difference is whether you make it for the purpose, or whether you are just bought, which you have little control over.

Andi Schmied is a visual artist and architect based in Budapest, Hungary. The focus of her installations, videos and printed work is the architectural framing of social space. She uncovers unexpected human behaviors and urban anomalies—places that, for one reason or another, do not follow conventional logic, yet remain part of our cityscape. These vary from areas that have deviated far from their originally planned function (Jing

Jin City), utopian architectures (Noguchi Town), or spaces of privilege (Private Views). Schmied graduated from the Bartlett School of Architecture in London and her work, among other places, has been shown in London (Daniel Blau Gallery, Schwartz Gallery, The White Building), Southampton (John Hansard Gallery), Sapporo (Salon Cojica, HUG Gallery), Beijing (Design Week), Rotterdam (International Architecture Biennale), Budapest (Trafó, Trapéz, OFF Biennale, Kunsthalle). She has been artist-in-resident at S-AIR, Sapporo (Japan), Triangle Arts, New York (U.S.), DordtYart, Dordrecht (Netherlands), Meetfactory, Prague (Czech Republic), Outpost, Norwich (UK), and MuseumQuartier, Vienna (Austria).

Tereza Østbø Kuldova is a Research Professor at the Work Research Institute, Oslo Metropolitan University. She is a social anthropologist and the author of [How Outlaws Win Friends and Influence People](#) (Palgrave, 2019), [Luxury Indian Fashion: A Social Critique](#) (Bloomsbury, 2016), co-editor of [Crime, Harm and Consumerism](#) (Routledge, 2020), [Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs and Street Gangs](#) (Palgrave, 2018), [Urban Utopias: Excess and Expulsion in Neoliberal South Asia](#) (Palgrave, 2017), in addition to numerous articles. She is currently working on algorithmic governance, surveillance, corruption and crime, and artificial intelligence in policing and the welfare state. She is the founder and editor-in-chief of the [Journal of Extreme Anthropology](#) and of the [Algorithmic Governance Research Network](#).

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