

# We Talk About Architecture, Architecture Talks Back

A CHANCE TO INTERPRET A BUILDING;  
AN OPPORTUNITY TO DIALOGUE WITH A STYLE



Presented by the Knight Campus Art Gallery in partnership with the CCRI Art Department and CCRI Foundation

## PANEL DISCUSSION

4 p.m. Thursday, April 14, Room 4090, Knight Campus

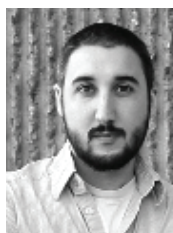
## PANELISTS



**IPEK TURELI** teaches in the Department of History of Art and Architecture at Brown University. Her research and scholarship focus on architectural urban history, visual culture and comparative urbanism. She received her doctorate in architecture at University of California, Berkeley. She has been a recipient of, among others, a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship at Brown, Middle

East Research Grant by the History Foundation of Tunisia and Ford Foundation, and a Citation of Special Recognition in the Carter Manny Award by the Graham Foundation. Prior to her doctoral studies, she obtained her professional degrees in architecture from the Architectural Association in London and Istanbul Technical University, and has experience in design practice in Turkey and the United Kingdom. She is the co-editor of "Orienting Istanbul: Cultural Capital of Europe?" and is working on her forthcoming book, "Istanbul, Open City: Exhibiting Anxieties of Urban Modernity."

“Regarded by its architects as an “educational megastructure,” the CCRI Knight Campus was conceived as a new type of college architecture that promotes diversity and interaction among its students, faculty and staff, in stark contrast to the sprawling campuses separated by disciplines and organized by hierarchy. Yet its architectural approach was already outdated when the building was opened in 1972. The Megastructuralists proposed a new type of integrated city as a complex network of social relations organized in total environments at a vast urban scale, rather than the functionalist one with separate zones allocated to dwelling, work, leisure, transportation. Responding to the post-war context, their projects sought to address population growth and rapid urbanization in a new process-based architecture that would serve as a framework containing mobile parts. The CCRI Knight Campus reflects some of these aspirations in the U.S. context. It is a late example of 1960s visionary architecture. For the current time period we are in, when public schools and public education have to bear down the weight of budget cuts, it reminds us of a time when investment in public education was a fundamental part of national and international development not only in Rhode Island, but also in the United States and throughout the world.”



**MICHAEL KUBO**, together with Chris Grimley and Mark Pasnik, is a curator of “Heroic,” an ongoing research project on late modernist concrete buildings in the Boston area that first was exhibited at pinkcomma gallery in 2009 (for more information, see [www.overcommander.com/heroic](http://www.overcommander.com/heroic)). Michael is pursuing a doctorate in history, theory and criticism of architecture at MIT. He holds a Master of

Architecture from the Harvard Graduate School of Design and a bachelor’s degree from the University of Massachusetts. He has taught studios and seminars at Pratt Institute in New York, the University of Texas at Austin and the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he was the Reyner Banham Fellow for 2008–09.

“Buildings like the Knight Campus of CCRI are important examples of the impact of Heroic modernism on new university campuses throughout the Northeast in this period. Its megastructural scale is comparable to other contemporary campuses in our survey, such as Paul Rudolph’s campus for the Southeastern Massachusetts Technological Institute in Dartmouth, Mass. (today the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth). But while the Rudolph campus emphasizes the articulation of individual spaces and elements within a larger framework, the long curves of CCRI emphasize the continuity and singularity of the whole.

Today we see a widespread disdain for concrete buildings. Many are in danger of being demolished or irrevocably and unwisely altered. Some already have been. Others are constantly being bandied about for demolition or equally destructive fates. What were once heralded as heroic visions in remaking a city have now become perceived as hubristic and brutal. With the vast amount and high quality of concrete architecture produced during the Heroic era of modernism, we feel the need to defend these often-misunderstood buildings, to insist on their quality and value to all of us today.”



**CHRISTOPHER “KIP” McMAHAN**, AIA, is a principal design architect for higher education, mission-driven organizations and real estate development in New England and New York City. Based in Providence, his experience ranges from the planning and design of large-scale commercial development sites to numerous buildings for universities, religious and arts organizations.

He served as the lead design architect for RGB in the 1999 additions and alterations to the CCRI Knight Campus megastructure. The project consisted of 97,000 square feet of additions and 43,000 square feet of renovations to the original 1968 concrete structure, expanding the facility to meet contemporary needs and standards. Key components included a distinctive new “front door” to the overall complex for Student Services, new distance-learning class rooms, a multimedia production

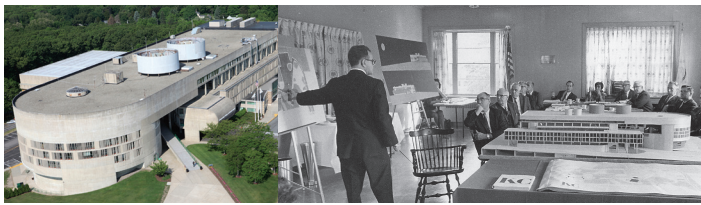
lab, board room, computer classrooms and an interactive presentation room to increase interactivity in the building and between satellite campuses. Recent assignments include a feasibility study to reorganize the Department of Art at the Knight Campus.

“Le Corbusier (1887–1965) was a Swiss-born French modernist architect whose culminating text “Almanach d’architecture modern” (Paris, 1926) calls for standardized principals for the new spirit of the Industrial Age in the “Five Points of a New Architecture”:

1. les pilotis [columns];
2. roof gardens;
3. free plan;
4. ribbon windows;
- and 5. free façade.

These early architectural elements and the mature, artisanal versions of them found in the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University, circa 1962, greatly influenced post-war architects in the “Béton Brut” style deriving from the use of cast-in-place concrete found in the Maisons de gros béton at Troyes (1919) and the Citrohan studies (1922–27), among others.

Many forms of the Carpenter Center are directly echoed in the CCRI megastructure, such as the ondulateurs applied to the second- and third-floor north face as vertical concrete mullions along the window plane, the brise soleil on the west side, rounded forms, pilotis and ramped pathways. There is, however, an inflated scale in the megastructure that Le Corbusier may not necessarily have endorsed or approved.”



**ANDREW THURLOW** is both a partner at Thurlow Small Architecture and tenured associate professor at Roger Williams University, where his research focuses on the reciprocities between digital technologies and architectural design.

His firm’s recent projects include a 1,186-acre centralized park design for Yinzhou, China, a transit-oriented development plan for Pawtucket

and a 3,000-square-foot interior design for a Web marketing company in Providence. He previously worked at Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates and Ballinger Architects. He completed his Master of Science in Advanced Architectural Design degree at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation and his Bachelor of Architecture degree at Syracuse University. He has held previous academic appointments at Columbia and the University of Tennessee.

“Anything but gentle, but everything to do with The Social: The now old New Brutalism.

Point/Counterpoint. You love it, you hate it.

It’s abstract, it’s bare, it’s heavy and it is ugly. But it is different – it is not like the others.

My admiration for serious architectural innovation – not simply aesthetic seduction – leading to meaningful and productive attempts at social infrastructure through new form, runs deep.”



**KATE DUNNIGAN** is professor of history and chair of the Department of Social Sciences at the Community College of Rhode Island. She holds degrees in social and cultural history from the University of Rhode Island and Brown University. She served as chair of the Knight Estate Restoration project and has lectured extensively on the Knight family, which gifted this site to the state for the

construction of the community college.

Although Kate has worked in this building for more than 25 years, she admits to still getting lost in it now and again.

“CCRI’s Warwick campus is situated on the former Knight Estate, once a 200-acre working gentleman’s farm, where 19th-century captains of industry lived as country squires. The estate was surrounded by the mill properties of brothers B.B. and R. Knight, two of Rhode Island’s premiere textile manufacturers, who originated the “Fruit of the Loom” brand. Estate pastures, fields, cider mill, chicken coop and carriage house were bucolic contrasts to the brick plants and towers that defined the industrialized Pawtucket Valley by the 1870s. Well into the 20th century, the estate was the private retreat of one of Rhode Island’s most prominent and powerful families.

In a century’s time, the mills, once the backbone of the region’s economy, shut their doors. Knight heirs gradually sold portions of the estate and donated the remaining acres to the state of Rhode Island. Farm and factory gave way to a landscape of post-industrial retail and service enterprises.

Construction of the CCRI megastructure on the property was part of this transformation. Ironically, the exclusive enclave of the elite became an all-inclusive community college; land use was, in a sense, democratized. Accordingly, the building’s architecture articulated the shifting social values of the time, which promoted broader opportunity and diversity in American society and culture.”

## MODERATOR

**MARC LEVITT** is an independent writer, storyteller and radio host and the author of the Corwin Press book “Putting Everyday Life on the Page.” Since 1996, Marc has been the creative director/host of “Action Speaks: Underappreciated Dates that Changed America,” a radio show produced by AS220 that has been heard on more than 250 stations throughout the United States. He is the co-director/co-producer of “Stories in Stone,” a documentary film about the Narragansett stone wall building tradition, and was the first recipient of the Tom Roberts Award from the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities. His work as an educator has taken him to more than 60 schools in 55 countries. He also contributed an art piece for this exhibition, “We Talk About Architecture, Architecture Talks Back.”

## INTRODUCTION

**VIERA LEVITT**, Knight Campus Art Gallery director and creator of the project, “We Talk About Architecture, Architecture Talks Back.”

**NATALIE COLETTA**, associate professor of art history and chair, CCRI Art Department



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