



## **Ilana Razbash**

### **Registered architect, Director at Studio Razbash**

*Ilana Razbash is a registered architect from Melbourne, Australia and the Director of Studio Razbash, where she brings nearly a decade of experience creating environments that enrich communities and promote wellbeing. Having worked on public, education, community, and health projects ranging from \$3M to \$500M, Ilana now offers a bespoke design experience through Studio Razbash, ensuring clients feel truly heard. She is deeply committed to designing spaces that prioritise comfortable acoustics, clarity, and a holistic sensory experience.*

*As a Teaching Associate at Monash Art, Design & Architecture, Ilana mentors the next generation of architects, helping them discover their unique voices and embrace innovative design. She also hosts Radio Architecture, a weekly plain-language show on Radio Carrum that engages a broad audience in accessible conversations about architecture and design.*

*Ilana's academic journey includes a Bachelor and Master of Architecture with Distinction from RMIT University, complemented*

***by international study, Ph.D. research assistance, public speaking, speculative project research, and exhibition curation. Known for her forward-thinking approach, Ilana integrates sensory design, innovative procurement methods, and radical listening to create spaces that are both functional and transformative.***

***A thought leader in her field, Ilana frequently contributes to industry panels and publications. She is an active member of the Parlour Collective and the Australian Institute of Architects, continuously pushing the boundaries of what architecture can achieve.***

# **Restructuring the Spoken Language of Design: A Framework for the New Sound of Architecture**

*Ilana Razbash*

## **Abstract**

**This paper reflects and critically analyses the intentional process and systems employed by our practice, Studio Razbash, to establish a research framework for live radio broadcasting and academic pedagogy.**

**Now more than ever, complex global challenges require strategic design thinking and creative problem solving. Yet without accessible, inclusive language and clear communication, the value and urgent necessity of good design is seldom conveyed to the general public, stakeholders, decision makers and, importantly, governments. In June 2023, we commenced weekly broadcasts on local community internet radio station, Radio Carrum. The show titled *Radio Architecture with Ilana Razbash* was conceptualised with the intention of holding space for accessible plain-language conversations about architecture and design. It sought to advocate for the value of good design by discussing matters of civic interest about the public, for the public. Following 76 live to air broadcasts (and counting), it has become evident that the framework for these candid conversations communicates the importance of design, art and architecture by entirely unexpected means. This is achieved through personal history narrative, whereby the audience's emotional connection to the weekly guest fosters a deep appreciation for their creative practice.**

**Keywords: *live radio, public speaking, design conversations, framework***

## Introduction

Founded in 2024, Studio Razbash is an architecture practice and a consultancy which uniquely combines architecture, acoustics and audio. The practice is concerned with integrating both creative and technical solutions, collaboratively producing multidisciplinary projects and holistic services<sup>2</sup>. Central to the discussion in this paper is the understanding of the importance of a rigorous framework. These systems and structures formulated by our practice offers an armature for design conversation and education.

The praxis of redesigning design language begins with banning archi-speak (Bernstone, 2021) or jargon on the program. *Radio Architecture with Ilana Razbash* was conceptualised with the intention of holding space for accessible plain-language conversations about architecture and design. It seeks to advocate for the value of good design by discussing matters of civic interest about the public, for the public in a manner that is accessible and inclusive for broad audiences. Indeed, the audience of Radio Carrum is organically very broad - members of the local community; supporters and players of the Carrum Cowboys Football Club; residents of the local City of Kingston; along with general audiences across Australia and the globe. Interestingly, the metadata reveals a consistent listener base in remote communities in North America and Eastern Europe. In addition to this regular contingent across both podcast and live internet radio, *Radio Architecture* has attracted the attention of students, graduates, industry professionals, builders and suppliers, local, interstate and international listeners. Some engage with the live studio text message line and send in questions whilst live on air, while others prefer to listen at their own pace via podcast. *Radio Architecture*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.studiorazbash.com>

*with Ilana Razbash* fills the urgent need for accessible and engaging conversation about architecture and design whilst returning architecture discourse to the radio for the first time since *The Architects* concluded their 10 year residency on Triple R<sup>3</sup>.

## **Designing Conversations: The research framework of Radio Architecture**

*Radio Architecture* shows are entirely unscripted and broadcast live-to-air. Guests are not provided with questions ahead of time however they are advised of the typical framework for the 1-hour conversation: the first 15-20 minutes are about early life memories and creative influence. This is where the conversation instantly launches into candid terrain as guests are asked the signature question - "What's your earliest memory of a building or place?" - settling the interviewees nerves while bringing them back to a personal time and space which they know best. In turn, they are humanised for the audience and listeners can begin to connect with the real person in conversation, not just the professional image or corporate brand. We have found that consistently for the majority of show guests, this first memory usually reveals the initial thread of their future creative practice or research enquiry. The exact data on this requires further investigation and would be a valid topic for future research. From this point onwards the conversation oscillates; sometimes spirals up or returns full circle, as these early memories intertwine with creative work. Guests are challenged to consider these perspectives live on air and often react with an expression of revelation. The main body of the interview is about their projects or opinions on design and related current affairs. This is of course not enough time to critically traverse a full body of

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<sup>3</sup> *Since writing this paper, they have regrouped for a short summer 2024/2025 series on the same station - RRR.*

work, yet listeners are offered detailed insights into career highlights, current exhibitions or recently completed seminal works. The final 5-10 minutes of the broadcast are focused on future outlook and predictions, concluding and elevating the conversation with a final signature closing question: "What gives you hope?"

Whilst the initial intention of the radio program was to communicate the value of good design to broad audiences through targeted and intentional discussion, the generative outcome in creating this platform and contextualising it as a personal history interview, has been unexpected. Rather than communicating creative value through blunt advocacy, *Radio Architecture* has revealed the power in personal history narratives to connect listeners with the live studio guest. By understanding the journey, influences and individual human beings behind the work, listeners are then to deeply perceive and engage with their creative practice. Following 76 live to air broadcasts (and counting), it has become evident that the framework for these candid conversations successfully communicates the importance of design, art and architecture through personal history narrative, whereby the audience's emotional connection to the weekly guest fosters a deep appreciation for their work. This is because individual stories strike us at the core of what it means to be human. This is where the power of design lies and these are the ideas which can be brought to the surface through the deployment of an effective structure.

### **Speaking architecture as pedagogy and process**

Through our work we have found that it is essential to not over design the process. Once an effective system or structure is in place, there must be enough scope for unexpected potential to occur and facilitate the emergence of new ideas. In designing

**pedagogy, as with curating a live radio show, the scaffolding should be relied upon to establish the necessary constraints. The rest is all outcome.**

**Following a commission by the Architecture Faculty at Monash University, an outline for a new Master of Architecture Studies Unit, an elective called *Speaking Architecture* was designed and delivered in Semester 2, 2024. This course covered more than 10 different public speaking styles, with all topics and themes strictly contained to architecture and the expanded field of the discipline. Each lesson the class explored, practiced and refined a range of presentation and public speaking styles including competitive debating, speeches, lectures, presentations, design jury defences, radio and podcast announcing, plain language conversations and stakeholder engagement.**

**The objectives of the course were as follows:**

- 1. Develop understanding and confidence with key speaking concepts and structures including Manner, Matter & Method.**
- 2. Develop a broad linguistic register and the ability to shift tone subject to the relevant audience.**
- 3. Expand knowledge of architectural ideas, issues and topics.**
- 4. Exercise critical thinking and consider all positions.**
- 5. Develop a personal and unique voice when speaking about architecture and communicating the value of (the student's) good design.**
- 6. Understanding and analysing audio and video precedent**

**New focus topics in the form of speaking styles were introduced to the students on a weekly basis with the opportunity for practice and critique held in the following lesson. To distract from the stressor of engaging with this regular new challenge, a concurrent**

round-robin style debating competition was scheduled. Students consistently identified debating as the most challenging aspect of the course for them and the greatest source of trepidation. This pedagogical framework offered a repeating challenge - a sophisticated topic requiring extensive critical thinking to establish relevant and compelling affirmative and negative cases, combined with the pressure of spontaneous reasoning and response; a reward - the prospect of being the weekly winning team on cumulative points or individual Best Speaker for the highest scorer of the day; and a common goal - progressing through each round of competition, semi-final and grand final as a team. Students were also diligent to fill in for each other's teams when classmates were absent, with the understanding that this was all essential practice and experience which would in turn make them a better public speaker and architectural communicator.

Both faculty and the inaugural cohort of students positively received the *Speaking Architecture* course which was designed to hone skills in public speaking, communication, and deep listening. These are all essential core skills for an architect but until this commission, have never been taught at tertiary level. Great design ideas demand great communication. With an ever constant and highly saturated flooding of media fighting for our attention, it has become widely understood that it is no longer sufficient for "design to speak for itself" - a commonly held mantra (excuse) in architectural circles. The *Speaking Architecture* course equipped students to better face this new set of challenges in the digital age.

## Conclusion

Now more than ever, complex global challenges require strategic design thinking and creative problem solving. Yet without accessible, inclusive language and clear communication, the value



**and urgent necessity of good design is seldom conveyed to the general public, stakeholders, decision makers and, importantly, governments. Through a rigorous curation framework, which establishes the armature for designing generative conversations, Studio Razbash engages in the wider expanded field of architectural practice and discourse to champion the value of good design. This body of work and knowledge generated through the process of live radio broadcasting and pedagogy is ultimately also shaping the soundscape of architecture and the wider public perception of the profession.**

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