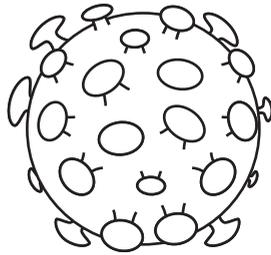


Introduction

Archifutures



Under normal conditions, when writing the introduction to a book you wouldn't give it a timestamp. Starting with a date immediately puts the reader in the past. There is even more reason not to do so when said book is supposed to be about the future. But this is being written on Thursday, July 15, 2020; we are no longer living under normal conditions and have not been for quite some time.

Between February 12-14, 2020, the Future Architecture (FA) platform held its 2020 Creative Exchange conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Twenty five shortlisted emerging practitioners presented their projects to representatives of the 22 museums and organisations that make up the platform. There were also thought-provoking talks by leading architecture critics, curators and authors such as Marina Otero Verzier, Léa-Catherine Szacka and platform members and advisory board members such as James Taylor-Foster, not to mention countless in-depth discussions, both off and on-stage, relating to architecture and beyond. Diana Portela and I, as representatives of the &beyond collective, were there too, collecting inspiration and material for this, our sixth volume of the *Archifutures* series.

For each book in the series since its inception in 2016, the &beyond collective has sampled the prevailing mood in the room at these annual conferences, compared it with our own recent experiences as writers and critics in the field of architecture, urbanism, and design, and come up with a volume that, in our view, reflects the zeitgeist of that moment – expressed through selected projects submitted to the platform as well as contributions by invited external experts. As the series developed,

each new volume has also reflected a feeling of growing urgency relating to the need for deep, universal, systemic change. A shift in the sense of responsibility amongst architects over the past years has become palpable. Young architects, in particular, no longer concern themselves with individual buildings, so much as the systems within which they are embedded and arise: materials, social structures, environments, life cycles, history, economic and political systems are now commonly understood to be as much part of practice as function, structure and site. Further, architects, along with many other professionals are coming to realise that many perspectives and parameters they had previously accepted as given for their own practices are not only deeply flawed but downright damaging.

Clearly, now is not a time for metaphorical sticking plasters or vanity projects, it is a time for change and a time for action. It focuses upon emerging narratives and strategies that can help architects adapt their practice towards more effective agency in order to meet the greater, more universal tasks that are upon us.

It is also worth mentioning that in the struggle to shift from extractive economies and practices towards communal regenerative responsibility, politics no longer appears to be an optional aspect of agency. There seems to be a growing understanding amongst Future Architecture platform members, fellows, alumni and applicants that architects and urbanists have a job to do: changing behaviour, influencing and impacting policy, and building bottom-up agency with new understandings of *value*, justice and cultural production. And that job is best achieved by sharing not just strategies but also practice – completely openly and freely. In other words: yes, our “house” is on fire, but there is no point in waiting for a fire brigade that may not even come. The flames need to be extinguished collectively and then a different kind of house needs to be built collectively – one that is fairer, kinder, better for our planet, and better for all humankind.

Little did the participants realise during that conference in February 2020 that the world was already hurtling towards a global pandemic that was to

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shift the human paradigm and accelerate calls for change. But it probably would not have changed the subject matter much had they known – only increased the sense of urgency. As we, the editors, began to commission material for the book during the lockdown in March, some contributors adapted their material slightly to reflect the new circumstances, but most projects already reflected their authors' assumptions that the need for essential change was a clear given.

We structured *Archifutures Vol. 6: Agency* according to a set of themes which, to a certain extent, paralleled those identified by Marina Otero Verzier in her Annual Reflection Summary lecture and that she has kindly adapted as an essay for us in this volume (pp. 36–55). Like her, we saw how artificial lines of division, power and wealth imbalances and perceptions of the value of decay were key drivers of how the most interesting emerging practitioners were thinking and working. Another issue was how to facilitate communication between communities and architects in order to share ideas and develop mechanisms for change. And then, of course, the most immediate and direct question: “What can be done and how?”

To build agency and create solid foundations for an adapted landscape of practice, the first necessity is reflection, followed by new narratives that can then progress into action. So in the first chapter, **Reflection**, I talk to the director and founder of Future Architecture Matevž Čelik (pp. 22–33) about the first five years of the platform and how this extraordinary collective entity has gathered momentum and sharpened its mission towards one of greater critical production and becoming an agent of change.

The second chapter addresses rectifying imbalance, by turning the **Tables (of power)**, Marina Otero Verzier's essay (pp. 36–55) highlights a shift in architectural practice away from commodities and a “nostalgia for a position at the table” towards commons-oriented strategies, politicization and redistribution of power. It is joined by two selected projects: Miguel Braceli's *Biblioteca Abierta* (Free Library) (pp. 56–59) in Venezuela which transforms public space with access to free, uncensored knowledge in the form of books, and the Office of Human Resources' *Agro Commune*

proposal, designed to challenge the colonial hegemony of architecture production in countries such as Kenya.

Straight lines as impositions of order and separation are a legacy from the past that still very much define our present: supply chains, commodity flows, lines of travel, division, connection and occupation all embody exclusion to a greater or lesser extent. With two case studies from shortlisted emerging practitioners and a newly commissioned essay, chapter three, **Lines**, challenges certain hegemonies, showing that thinking and responses need to be more non-linear, more interconnected, holistic, complex and inclusive. In her essay *Out of Line* (pp. 76–89), Marie-Louise Richards from the Royal Institute of Arts in Stockholm traces threads of narratives that have been omitted or erased through discriminatory structures and asks what would happen if the materialities of the body were placed at the centre of architectural discourse. This is followed by *35 Meridians of Radical Rituals* (pp. 90–93), with which 45° takes the 45°N parallel as a site from which to help architecture revolutionise the ways in which communal space is managed and envisioned. The Institute of Linear Research (pp. 94–99), on the other hand, uses walking a geographical straight line to actively explore and engage with communities and landscapes through (almost) random encounter.

Our fourth chapter covers a topic that has interested the &beyond collective for some time. “**Ruin**” is a familiar term and one that has fascinated architects for centuries, but now it is starting to be seen in a different context to the usual romantic nostalgia for the past. In the first of two essays in this chapter by selected emerging practitioners, Will Jennings (pp. 102–119) takes the reader on a journey through the trope of the city in ruins to today’s “rendertecture” and asks: “what will the ruins of neoliberalism look like?” With his *An Anticipatory Theory of Ruin Ecology*, on the other hand, Jason Rhys-Parry (pp. 120–129), takes a pragmatic approach to the inevitability of the progress of climate change and states that with shifting geographies, ruins will become the architecture of default rather than the exception and that architects should, therefore, anticipate this by designing them to be biodiversity hotspots for the future.

The “building” is increasingly being viewed as just one product of architectural practice by emerging architects, seeking to make improvements to places and spaces without detriment to either its environment or other human beings. Yet this new understanding and positioning of practice requires new narratives to be understood and shared by others outside the discipline (and within it). And equally for stories to be shared from those who have no voice or who did not know they had one. So part of architectural practice today is about a kind of canvassing for the future by practitioners, needing to reach people and include them – and be changed by them, by sharing better stories.

For the fifth chapter, **Storytelling**, we engineered an exchange (pp. 132–147) between selected emerging practitioners Mies.TV and new platform members Architectūros Fondas, which then became a conversation about story-making for accessibility and empowerment between two groups working with video and text respectively. Here too, emerging practitioners Un-war Space Lab share their love letter to the Neretva River (pp. 148–151), which flows through the ancient city of Mostar, and is the subject of their research on ecologies of violent spatial transformation. And the melancholic illustrations of another emerging practitioner, Constantinos Marcou, form part of his narrative “The Great Island of Replicas”, which serve as *Poetics for the Uncertain* (pp. 152–155) on the site of the divided island of Cyprus.

The voices calling for action are getting louder. Agency, as the capacity to act and exert power or influence, comes through engagement. The final chapter of this volume, **Engage**, is about how to achieve that. It is also about beginning – beginning to bring about change through direct action. Here, emerging practitioners ACAN (Architects Climate Action Network) (pp. 160–169) and Dark Matter Labs (pp. 186–191) share their strategies for engagement. Here too is another pairing we made between emerging practitioners Critical Practice and Unfolding Pavilion (pp. 192–199). We asked them to get together and come up with a form of mixed media manifesto for better practice. In response, under the heading *Unfolding Practice*, they curated a “guerilla collaboration” and, to our delight,

invited six further practices known for their radical forms of collective engagement (Arturo Franco and Ana Román, Recetas Urbanas, Coloco, Point Supreme, ateliermob and BC Architects and Studies) and gave each of them a double-page spread to share their own strategies and tactics in the form of “takeaway manifestos” (pp. 198–209). All of these examples employ transparency of method and results, the sharing of methodologies and responses, and provision of practical support as well as blueprints for change. In this chapter we also have an interview with Thomas Aquilina (pp.170–185), co-director of the London-based New Architecture Writers, about race and space, and how the N.A.W. are developing the journalistic skills, editorial connections and critical skills of Black and minority ethnic emerging writers in order to generate tools for alternative forms of architecture-making.

It is sometimes hard to have hope in the face of the enormous problems the world is facing right now, but the projects and practices featured in this and the five previous volumes of *Archifutures*, along with countless other projects in the making, do indicate that the ideas and skills to make the necessary changes are already out there – it is just that the means for achieving them are unevenly distributed. They show that human beings are driven by a will to care for one another, to help one another, to make life better and that our understanding of how best to do that is improving every day as more and more experiences are told and shared. Architects have a big role to play in this more caring future we all are striving towards and we, the editors of this book, have no doubt that the Future Architecture platform has, and will continue to work on the agency necessary to better connect the discipline to those it is intended to serve: everyone.

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&beyond collective

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