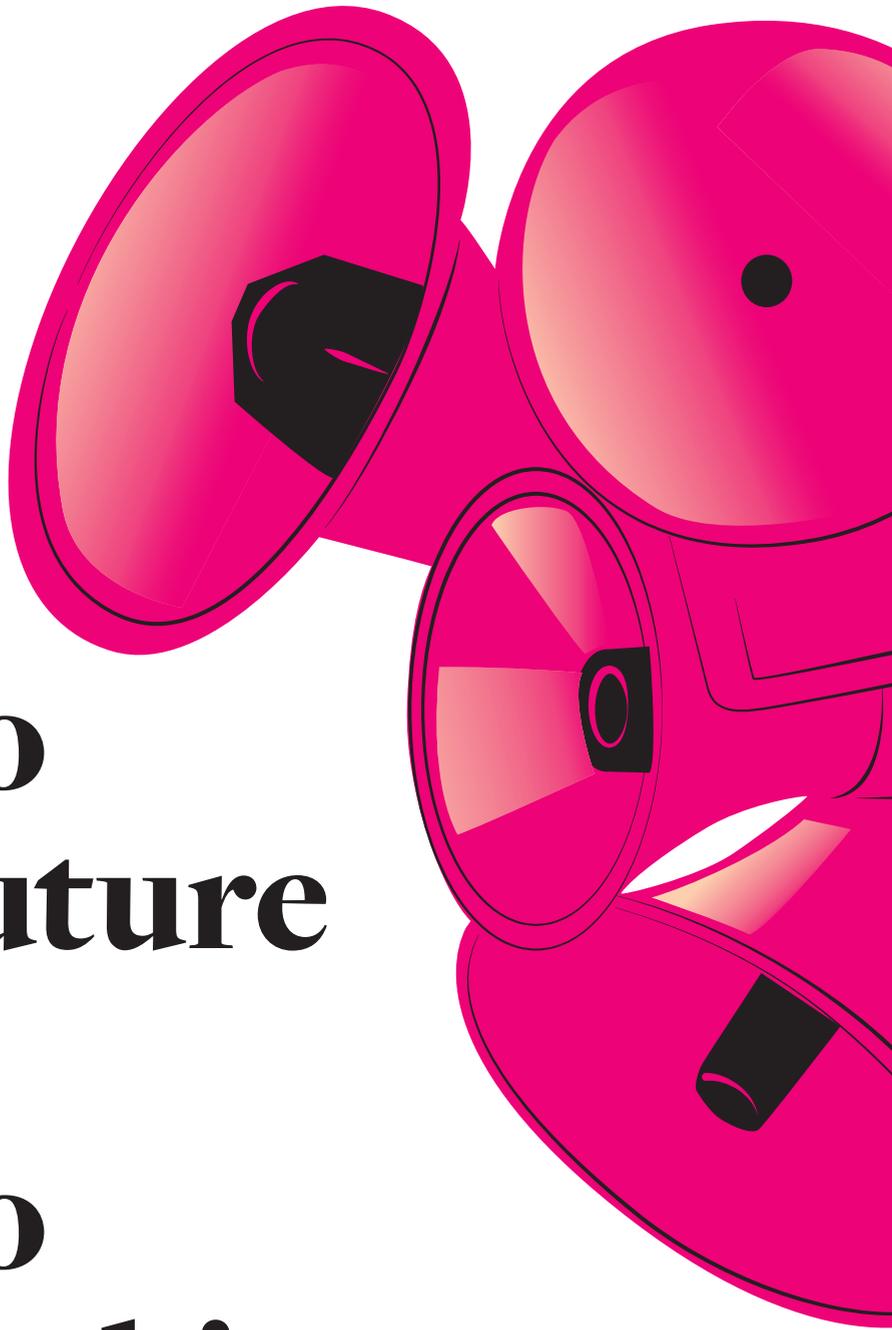


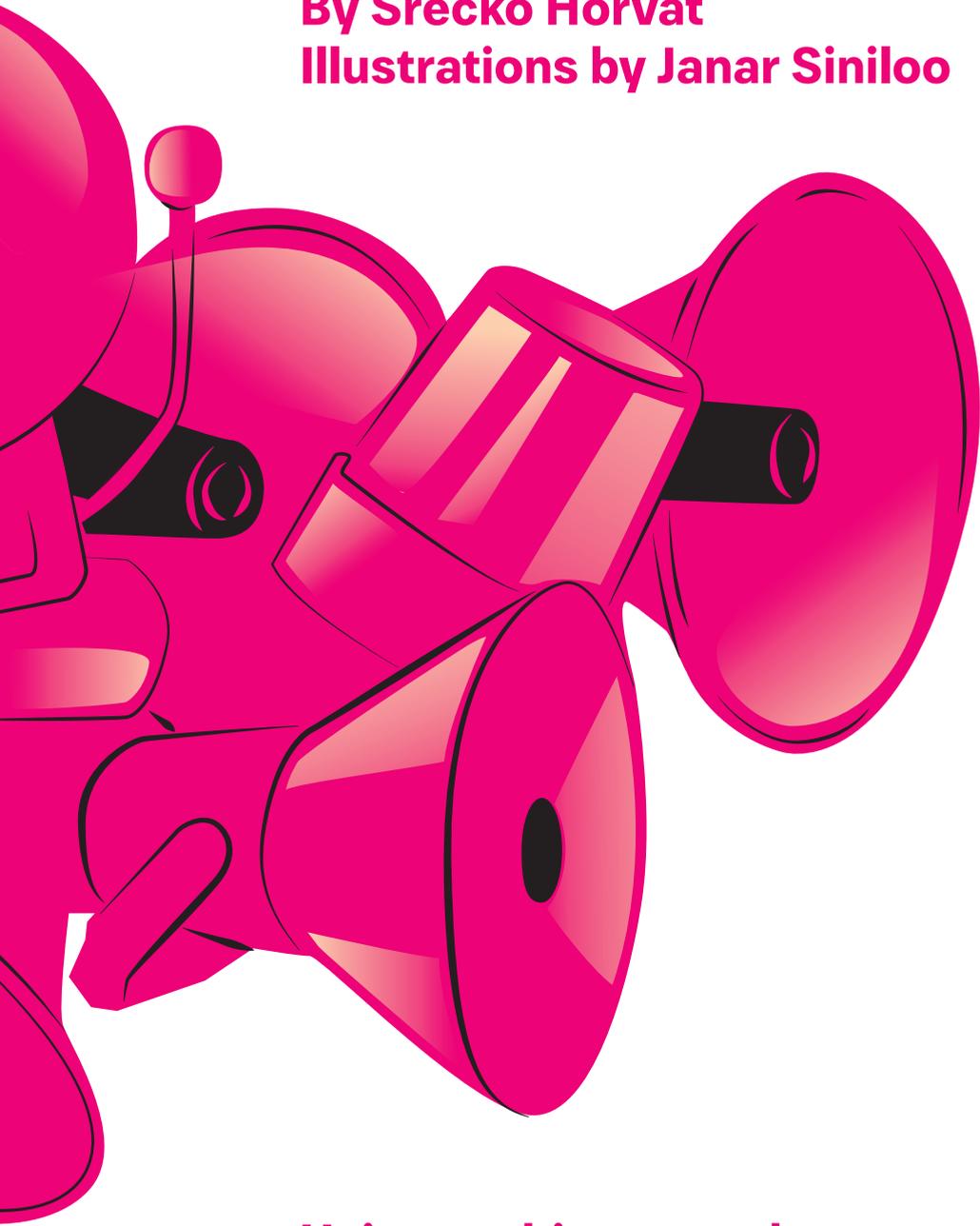
**No
Future**

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**No
Architecture**



By Srećko Horvat
Illustrations by Janar Siniloo



Using architecture theory
to think about our common future

No Future = No Architecture
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No Future = No Architecture

Everyday End of the World

“The responsibility for architects today is not just to be reactive but also to construct a different future.”

The Croatian philosopher Srećko Horvat was invited to give one of the opening lectures of the Future Architecture 2018 Creative Exchange conference at the MAO in Ljubljana. This essay is an adaptation of that lecture and provides a fitting opening to set the theme of this volume of Archifutures.

We are living in an era in which there is a certain pre-apocalyptic feeling floating around. We are bombarded daily by scenes of new walls or borders, detention camps and boats full of refugees, climate change and the possibility of a nuclear war. Our reality increasingly resembles Alfonso Cuarón's film *Children of Men*, for example, depicted a world where refugees are in cages in the centres of Western cities and acts of terrorism occur every week. If we look at Europe today, we can see an increasing retreat towards a dangerous concept of sovereignty. Other dystopian scenarios of how the world might end include the growing effects of climate change. On top of this increasing pre-apocalyptic narrative, we also have the very real possibility that a crazy guy with orange hair could post a tweet and provoke a nuclear war. So, on the one hand, we are dealing with a narrative that is trying to create an atmosphere of fear, but on the other, we are facing something much more dangerous, namely that this narrative is becoming inscribed into our reality, which means that today we are genuinely facing an apocalypse.

On the January 13, 2018 at 8:07 a.m. the people of Hawaii woke up to the following message: "Emergency Alert: BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL". I happened to be in Belgrade at the time. It was almost evening and Serbians were getting ready to celebrate the Orthodox New Year. This is the reality we live in today:

Srećko Horvat

Srećko Horvat (b. 1983) is a Croatian philosopher, author and political activist. He has published widely in Croatian, German, English and French. He is the author of *What Does Europe Want? The Union and its Discontents* (with Slavoj Žižek) and *The Radicality of Love*. He was also involved in setting up the *Democracy in Europe Movement 2025* (DiEM 2025) along with Yanis Varoufakis.

in one corner of the world people wake up thinking they have 15 minutes until the end of the world and in another people are celebrating New Year's Eve.

The Hollywood actor Jim Carey commented on the experience on his Twitter account: "I woke up this morning in Hawaii with ten minutes to live. It was a false alarm, but a real psychic warning. If we allow this one-man Gomorrah and his corrupt Republican congress to continue alienating the world we are headed for suffering beyond all imagination. ;^\".¹ Others at that time had different reactions. A guy called Joshua Keoki Versola was home alone, and he decided that the best thing to do was open an expensive bottle of Japanese Hibiki 21 whisky. He said: "I was about to start pouring drinks and go out in style", adding: "What are we going to do in this situation? We really can't do anything but just try and make the best of it."² What should we do? It is a good question. It took 38 minutes (an eternity for anybody living through such a situation) for the authorities in Hawaii to send a new message saying that this was in fact a drill. They said: "It was a mistake made during a standard procedure at the change of a shift and an employee pushed the wrong button."³

At the same time as all this was happening, the CIA, who are supposed to know about and be tracking nuclear threats, published something on Twitter about pandas while President Trump was playing golf. Maybe the reason the world did not end in a nuclear war on January 13, 2018 has less to do with the Cold War logic of MAD (mutual assured destruction) but far more to do with contingency. If the CIA had not been obsessed with panda diplomacy and if Donald Trump had not been playing golf, maybe somebody would have pushed the "right" button. Or, even if they had done nothing, what if Kim Jong-un

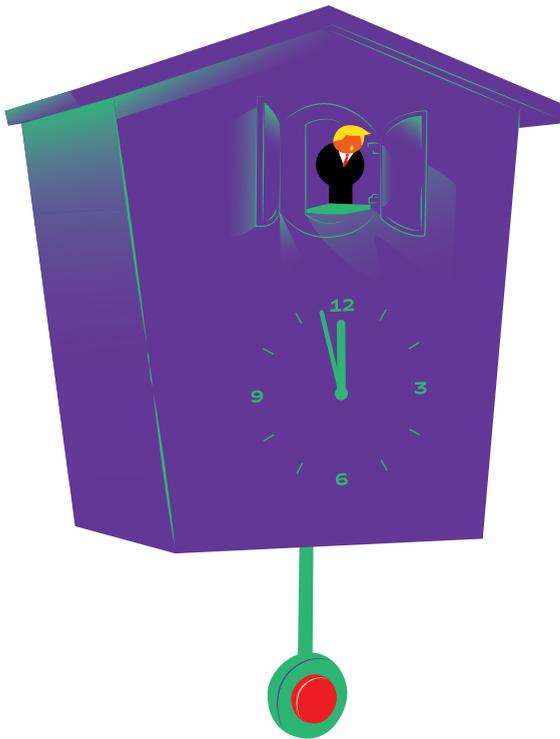
¹ twitter.com/jimcarrey/status/952284494257508352?lang=en (accessed August 16, 2018)

² "Hawaii ballistic missile false alarm results in panic", Julia Carrie Wong and Liz Barney, *The Guardian*, January 14, 2018. [theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jan/13/hawaii-ballistic-missile-threat-alert-false-alarm](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jan/13/hawaii-ballistic-missile-threat-alert-false-alarm) (accessed August 16, 2018)

³ "Missile threat alert for Hawaii a false alarm; officials blame employee who pushed 'wrong button'", Zachary Cohen, *CNN*, January 13, 2018. edition.cnn.com/2018/01/13/politics/hawaii-missile-threat-false-alarm/index.html (accessed August 16, 2018)

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in North Korea had believed that the alarm was real and pushed the actual button? In either case the people in Hawaii or the people celebrating New Year's Eve in Serbia would not have survived the day.



The point of this introduction is to show that the apocalypse could happen anywhere and at any time. If it happens in Hawaii today, it will probably also happen in Slovenia or in any other part of the world.

Just a few days after Trump became President of the United States, on January 20, 2017, *The New Yorker* published an article entitled “Doomsday Prep for the Super-Rich”.⁴ On the one hand, we have what psychoanalysts would call “fetishist disavowal”, or denial, which means that we know

4 “Doomsday Prep for the Super-Rich”, Evan Osnos, *The New Yorker*, January 30, 2017. [newyorker.com/magazine/2017/01/30/doomsday-prep-for-the-super-rich](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/01/30/doomsday-prep-for-the-super-rich) (accessed August 16, 2018)

“This is not a joke anymore, this is mainstream.”



the apocalypse is happening but we still keep driving our big cars and polluting the world. But on the other, and which this article illustrated nicely, we also have a sense of acceptance of the apocalypse. And something more than acceptance; the super-rich are even preparing for it. For instance, according to the same article the CEO of Reddit, Steve Huffman, even went through laser eye surgery because: “If the world ends – and not even if the world ends, but if we have trouble – getting contacts or glasses is going to be a huge pain in the ass.” He later adds that he is prepared for the aftermath and event of “the temporary collapse of our government and structures... I own a couple of motorcycles. I have a bunch of guns and ammo. Food. I figure that, with that, I can hole up in my house for some amount of time.” The article goes on to explain that García Martínez, author of the book *Chaos Monkeys*, “bought five wooded acres on an island in the Pacific Northwest”. Other examples include Peter Thiel,

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one of Facebook's first investors, a Trump supporter and CEO of Palantir, which deals with big data. He was one of the first of this group to get New Zealand citizenship. In the first 48 hours after Trump's election, the New Zealand immigration website had a 2,500 percent increase in traffic.⁵ This is not a joke anymore, this is mainstream.



Another article published by CNN presents photographs of billionaires' apocalypse-proof luxury bunkers.⁶ And in an even more interesting article, *Forbes* magazine has commissioned maps projecting how the post-apocalyptic

5 "Why Silicon Valley billionaires are prepping for the apocalypse in New Zealand", Mark O'Connell, *The Guardian*, February 15, 2018. [theguardian.com/technology/2017/jan/29/silicon-valley-new-zealand-apocalypse-escape](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jan/29/silicon-valley-new-zealand-apocalypse-escape) (accessed August 16, 2018)

6 "Billionaire bunkers: How the 1% are preparing for the apocalypse", Elizabeth Stamp, *CNN*, October 17, 2017. edition.cnn.com/style/article/doomsday-luxury-bunkers/index.html (accessed August 16, 2018)

7 “The Shocking Doomsday Maps Of The World And The Billionaire Escape Plans”, Jim Dobson, *Forbes*, June 10, 2017. forbes.com/sites/jimdobson/2017/06/10/the-shocking-doomsday-maps-of-the-world-and-the-billionaire-escape-plans/#22e4acdf4047 (accessed August 16, 2018)

“What if the apocalypse has actually already happened?”

world will look in a rapid climate change situation.⁷ It describes how wealthy individuals are buying up millions of acres of land in “dry territories in the United States such as Montana, New Mexico, Wyoming and Texas”. This is the reality: a pre- or post-apocalyptic narrative and the super-rich preparing for it. Or another example: the aforementioned Thiel was the one who developed and invested in the idea of a floating city called “Seastead”, reminiscent the 1995 post-apocalyptic Kevin Costner movie *Waterworld* that had precisely the same scenario, namely that water levels will rise and people like Thiel will build these kinds of libertarian utopias to live in.

The point of all these dystopian examples is not to scare you into believing that the apocalypse is coming – although it probably is. The point is to deconstruct this particular apocalyptic narrative. What if the apocalypse has actually already happened? In the sense that it has already happened for the majority of people in the world. The fact that the super-rich or many others have not yet experienced this kind of apocalyptic situation doesn’t mean that it has not already taken place in Somalia, in Bangladesh or at the border between Mexico and the US.

So what responsibility does architecture and urbanism have in this? An article published in the *Los Angeles Times* by the architecture critic Christopher Hawthorne compares eight prototypes for Trump’s wall to the work of Peter Zumthor and calls it a kind of “accidental minimalism”.⁸ The projected length of this wall is around 2,000 miles but today nearly 700 miles of the border are already covered by walls and fences. Again, the apocalypse has already happened for someone trying to make their way from Mexico to the United States. And it is the responsibility of the architect to design this apocalypse.

8 “Trump’s border wall through the eyes of an architecture critic”, Christopher Hawthorne, *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 2018. scribd.com/article/368426029/Trump-s-Border-Wall-Through-The-Eyes-Of-An-Architecture-Critic (accessed August 16, 2018)

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Another way that the apocalypse and architecture are connected concerns what happens to buildings during earthquakes. It opens up an interesting discussion about the critique of ideology because the dystopian images of collapsed buildings in the tragic events you see from Puerto Rico, Haiti and Taiwan, for example, are presented as “natural disasters”, i.e. it is just something that happens and we humans do not have the capability to prevent it. But if we learned anything from Walter Benjamin, who was writing about it in the early twentieth century, or Roland Barthes in the mid-twentieth, something that is an historic political event. Peter Hallward, who is an inspiring philosopher, not an architect, said, for example, that the results of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti were not a natural catastrophe, but resulted from bad planning and bad infrastructure and affected mainly people from a specific class origin – the underdogs.

The June 2017 fire in the Grenfell Tower in London, in which 72 people lost their lives, is another clear example of the connection between class origin, bad politics and also, in a way, architecture. This residential tower block was situated in Kensington and Chelsea. Anyone who has been to London knows that Kensington and Chelsea is a borough where you can see all the contradictions of global capitalism in a very small area. Why did the Grenfell Tower fire happen? It happened because the super rich don't really care about those that don't have money. According to some data, the mean income in Kensington and Chelsea is 158,000 GBP⁹ – the highest in the UK, which is still not enough to buy a home in the area with an average house price of 1.5 million GBP. The result is that this tower, whose condition points back to Margaret Thatcher and austerity politics, was effectively just left to burn. Even in a luxurious neighbourhood in the middle

⁹ “Do you earn more or less than the average for your borough?”, Sam Brodbeck, *The Telegraph*, May 3, 2017. [telegraph.co.uk/money/consumer-affairs/do-earn-less-average-borough/](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/consumer-affairs/do-earn-less-average-borough/) (accessed September 3, 2018)

of a modern metropolis like London, the apocalypse is happening somewhere for someone.

There has always been a debate about whether architecture is political or not. Since Vitruvius there has been a tradition of saying architecture is never political, but that it has been used to pacify populations and avoid conflict, which is, to a certain degree, true. According to tradition, the role of the architect is to negotiate between different interests, which is also, to a certain extent, true. So basically the architect is a figure of consensus, rather than conflict. Then of course there is the famous Le Corbusier quote; “architecture or revolution”, which forces us to choose between architecture and social change. If you move forward to 1994, just two years after Francis Fukuyama’s *End of History and the Last Man*, Bernard Tschumi’s book *Architecture and Disjunction* was published, which does not have an “or” in the title, but an “and”. In the book Tschumi (influenced by the situationists Guy Debord and Jacques Derrida) shows that architecture is always political. He even says that sometimes you have to commit a murder in order to appreciate architecture, or sometimes you have to have sex on a street in order to understand what kind of urbanism or architecture exists there.¹⁰ It is enough to remember the role Baron Haussman played in in the design of Paris because the authorities wanted to stop the revolution by building very wide boulevards so the people could not build barricades – and it functioned to a certain degree. Then, of course, there is the most famous example from the twentieth century, the role of Albert Speer. His designs for Berlin and Germania showed clearly that architecture is not only connected to politics, in this case to Adolf Hitler, but that architecture actually produces social change – in this case, dystopian social change, namely: totalitarianism. The most recent examples are Trump’s wall or the Grenfell disaster.

¹⁰ See Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*, MIT Press, 1994

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This all brings us to the place where we are today. I was really intrigued by the initiative of this pan-European Future Architecture platform, not only because I too am part of a pan-European movement fighting for democracy at a European level along the lines of the idea that you cannot fight the current climate, energy and economic crisis at the level of the nation state. To quote Matevž Čelik, director of the Future Architecture platform:



“The architecture of the future will not only be a practice that necessarily leads just to the construction of buildings and artefacts, but will also lead us to new fields in which to operate.”

I think this is a highly important point since architects today are increasingly becoming slaves of big investors or autocratic regimes. They have to build what they have to build, but this does not annul their responsibilities. Maybe

I am being naïve, because I do not come from this field, but I think the situation has started to change. If the NSA, CIA, Palantir, Facebook and the like are making a topology of our own lives, let us make a topology about them. Let's leak some documents, let's make a topology of the "architecture" they are constructing and the kind of dystopian futures they are imagining. I think there has been a trend recently – and I hope it is more than a trend – for architects to focus more on this question. However, the responsibility for architects today is not just to be reactive but also to construct a different future. Let us not react to the refugee crisis by saying let's be smart like IKEA and design new homes for them. Let's try to act ahead in a way that will make a future with refugees, new walls and new wars, climate change and ecological disasters impossible. Even if it is not yet the end of the world, architects have the power and responsibility for building a different future. Because if there is no future, there is no architecture. ■

