Archifutures

A field guide to the future of architecture

Compiled by Francisco Díaz
Contents

9
What Am I A Citizen Of?
The speculative futures of architect
Liam Young
Interview with Liam Young by Shumi Bose

23
In The Prison of the Present
A short guide to post-futurist design strategies
By Ana Jeinić
Illustrations by Andreas Töpfer

41
Architecture of Commons
How citizen-led action in Turkey reclaimed the notion of common(s)
By Merve Bedir

55
The Century that Never Happened
Was modernism just a glitch?
By Reinier de Graaf

81
Telling Tales
Storytelling as architectural representation
By Jana Čulek

95
Beyond the Biennial Bubble
Three festivals, three approaches
Interviews by Léa-Catherine Szacka

113
Hyper-supersurface
A collage conversation between Cristiano Toraldo di Francia & Guillermo López
Text by César Reyes Nájera
What Am I A Citizen Of?
The speculative futures of architect Liam Young

Interview with Liam Young
by Shumi Bose
“You can no longer talk about place as a singular point on the map, or a city as being a singular zone. A city is now atomised, distributed and mediated.”
Liam Young is an architect who doesn’t believe in architects. He operates in the spaces between design, fiction and futures. Working between any number of cities and non-places, he is usually located somewhere on the disembodied network. Shumi Bose was lucky to catch up with him (in London) for in one of his rare terrestrial moments.1

The reason my work has moved so far away from architecture in the traditional sense of making buildings is that it is such an inherently slow medium. When the city is evolving so quickly, it’s difficult to respond if you’re operating in a discourse that has a five- or ten-year project lifespan. Equally the forces that are shaping the city no longer exist within the physical spectrum; they’re more like technologies – cloud-computing connections, ubiquitous networks – so the architect, once the vital agent of change within cities is now being displaced by the technologist, strategist or network engineer.

Do you think it’s still useful to be working on speculative futures?

Liam Young is a speculative architect who operates in the spaces between design, fiction and futures. He is a founder of the think tank Tomorrows Thoughts Today, a group whose work explores the possibilities of fantastic, speculative and imaginary urbanisms. He also co-runs the Unknown Fields Division with Kate Davies, a nomadic studio that travels on annual expeditions to the ends of the earth to investigate unreal and forgotten landscapes, alien terrains and industrial ecologies. Liam’s projects develop fictional speculations as critical instruments to survey the consequences of emerging environmental and technological futures.

Previous page: LHR London Airport, 14 November 2016. © Liam Young

This page: SIN Singapore Airport 03 August 2016. © Liam Young

1 Interview first published in TANK Magazine, Volume 8 Issue 2, Autumn 2014. Reproduced with kind permission.
So how can the architect find ways to operate? We’re at a point now where the future is increasingly undefined. If you watch the pattern of, say, science fiction in the 1980s, it had this kind of lifespan of about 30 years, where you had a reliable present: the length of the *now* was long enough that you could make predictions and not look like an idiot. The length of now’s *now* is much, much shorter, to the extent where most science fiction – William Gibson’s recent novels, for instance – are written utterly in the present. There isn’t that period of certainty that you can bank on; there are so many balls in play – climate change, economic collapse, biotechnologies, ubiquitous computing – that the physical, cultural and societal landscape in five or ten years may be radically different from what it is now.

The position of the architect-as-advocate is gaining some currency. Do you think architects are trying to claw back a position in political activism? Listen, I advocate for an utter dissolution of the term architect. I think an architect’s skills are completely wasted on making buildings. But I don’t see it as weakening the profession, I see it as
Not at all, no. I mean I tried that. I learned how to do timber detailing for private beach houses on the Sunshine Coast in Australia; I worked for Zaha Hadid, designing science-museum-opera-art gallery-China-Dubai projects. All of which, in the context of making and shaping cities right now, is utterly fucking irrelevant. The notion of what cities are and how we define them as such is fundamentally different. Cities are popping up in all different forms, based around people’s interests or likes – maybe Justin Bieber’s fan club is just as much a city as London. A city used to be defined by the people who live in it: you’re in London, I’m in London, we’re in London together, that’s what London is – a bunch of people in London. Now, my experience of London is actually

Is it safe to say you don’t miss being a traditional architect?

Shumi Bose

Shumi Bose is a teacher, researcher, curator and writer about things related to architecture, cities and spatial practices. A lecturer at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design and the Architectural Association, she was a co-founder of the REAL foundation and co-editor of the Real Review, launched in 2016. She has held editorial positions at the Architect’s Journal, Blueprint, Strelka Press and Afterall, and has contributed TANK, Volume, and PIN-UP. Her publications include Real Estates (with Fulcrum, Bedford Press, 2014) and she was co-curator, with Finn Williams and Jack Self, of “Home Economics”, the British Pavilion exhibition at the 15th Venice Biennale of Architecture 2016.

Archifutures

strengthening. It means that the profession can find traction in other fields: the architect as strategist, as politician, as planner; the architect as curator or editor or writer, as activist or storyteller. Finding ways to operate in other disciplines just gives us much more agency.
mediated by a computer network, my Facebook friends, whoever I’m having Skype meetings with; I have no idea who lives above me or below me. My experience of my surroundings is predicated on network access and internet speed; my window to the city of London is a glowing, beaming rectangle, throwing out radiation at me.

But is that comparable to the spatial reality of the city?

It’s a new spatial reality. Technology doesn’t replace the city; it’s another layer. I tell this story about a field trip I made to Chernobyl, with Unknown Fields, a nomadic design studio I run with Kate Davies at the Architectural Association. A couple of years ago a Ukrainian-based gaming company went through Chernobyl and mapped it in meticulous detail, and used that to create the landscape in a game called Stalker. A security guard told us stories
of his nights in the exclusion zone, where local fanboys of the game would sneak into the area and play out their characters. The guards played out their roles, too, chasing these kids through the crumbling ruins. This place is at once a physical and real condition that we’re all standing in, but also this fictional condition. The city of Chernobyl is in the ground, through the radiation, in the trees, in the giant catfish, but it’s also distributed across the planet, in flickering constellations of these luminous rectangles, consumed and occupied through the game. You can no longer talk about place as a singular point on the map, or a city as being a singular zone. A city is now atomised, distributed and mediated.

In a normal week, I spend four days in New York, three days in London, but maybe one of those days is in some other random city giving a lecture. I spend more time sleeping in an aeroplane than in my flat; I eat more meals in the airside of an airport – which is a deterritorialised no man’s land – than I do in a real city. What am I a citizen of? I have an Australian passport; I have temporary residency in London; I have an even

How many (physical) cities have you been in during the last few days?
What Am I A Citizen Of? Everywhere

more temporary residency in New York. So the question of agency and citizenship is a really interesting one to think about. What do I identify with? It’s not about locality, it’s not about physicality, or borders on a map. It’s about another kind of connectivity than adjacency.

So then what qualifies you to be of a place, to be a citizen?

Well, you can hold a passport to multiple places. Can I be a citizen of Australia – where I can still vote – remotely, where I still have an incredible network of friends, where I still have a storage locker with physical stuff in – but where I spend only two weeks a year? What does home mean in that sense? I can’t vote in the US, but I spend four days a week there. I vote in Australia, but I spend two weeks a year there. I don’t vote in London because I’m too busy when I’m here catching up on all the things I miss. I don’t know who my neighbours are; I have a lot of collaborators through work but most of them operate remotely, so it’s not about where I work that defines who I am. My friends are dispersed but I usually see them at conferences or meet them in some random city – so I don’t define where I belong by where they are either. A student of mine made this project about IP addresses and territory. One iteration looked at the Western Sahara, one of the only places on the map that is classified by the UN as ungoverned; it has a very strong ethnic population that has been displaced, forced to flee and scatter across the world. The project was speculating on the idea of siting an IP address in this place, so that all this atomised and dispersed population could still occupy their homeland, but through the network – so they could cyber-squat their territory. What would that mean for the people who can’t be there physically to be there digitally – and vice versa? This question of citizenship is actually
In a very dry sense, legally you start to get into questions of jurisdiction and of borders. Take Megaupload, for example: some guy in New Zealand running a website placed on servers scattered all over the world on which are movies uploaded by thousands of users – how do you prosecute in a case like that, and which government does the prosecuting? And where? In a cultural and societal sense, I’m interested in the opportunities that starts to present: when you are not bound by a geographical location that you might be born into, you can start to make choices about forms of citizenship. Can I be a citizen of Justin Bieber? I can choose to be a Justin Bieber fan, and spend my time in Justin Bieber Land, being a citizen of the Beliebers. I can choose to be a weird quicksand porn freak,
and for that to be my community. I can surround myself with like-minded people and I can base my reality and my existence based on that network. We saw something like this emerging in Japan, with communities like the *hikikomori*, the people who lock themselves away and survive purely through online gaming environments and delivery food.

It’s hard to reconcile a certain kind of design with this. Obviously there’s a space for visual culture, but less and less for physical culture.

I don’t know: for the *hikikomori*, what is physical reality? We used to say “virtual reality”, which is an utterly outmoded term now; the digital and the physical are not mutually exclusive things. You can’t use those terms in opposition any more; our experience of this physical space is utterly conditioned by the *digital footprint* that we’re occupying at the same time. I talk about the idea of the shadow city, that the city is not just the physical city but also these luminous electronic *shadows* that we can occupy in different ways.
In the Prison of the Present

A short guide to post-futurist design strategies
By Ana Jeinić
Illustrations by Andreas Töpfer
“We live in an age characterised by the collapse of the very idea of the future.”
Building on her essay “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” from Volume 2 of the Archifutures series, architectural theorist Ana Jeinić addresses the architect’s fear of the future yet further by taking a critical look at some current strategies for a “post-futurist tomorrow”. The following strategies were written for the 2017 exhibition she curated at the Haus der Architektur in Graz entitled: “Architecture After the Future”.

According to social theorists, such as Marc Augé or Franco “Bifo” Berardi, we live in an age characterised by the collapse of the very idea of the future. In the last decades of the twentieth century, alongside recurring economic crisis, discouraging reports to the Club of Rome and the apparent collapse of the socialist project, our belief in the future was irreparably shattered. Considering that the architectural project, in the conventional sense of the term, has always been a project of the future, the situation has had profound consequences for architecture as a discipline. Understanding and revealing different ways by which contemporary architecture has been adapting to post-futurist social conditions therefore presents a major task for the contemporary discourse on architecture. It is also a necessary prelude to the imminent debate on how to reintegrate the dimension of the future once again into the architectural and broader cultural imagination. The short texts below about post-futurist design strategies have been developed with this aim in mind, as a part of the Architecture After the Future curatorial and research project. It is important to note that the outlined strategies do not constitute an ultimate taxonomy of the post-futurist design culture – they are conceived as a deliberately provisional and open-ended

Ana Jeinić

Ana Jeinić was born in Yugoslavia in 1981. She has since lived, thought, learned and taught in Graz, Venice, Amsterdam, Berlin, Edinburgh, and Zagreb. Upon completing her studies in architecture in Graz, she mainly worked as an architectural theorist and educator and aims to become a utopianist in the future. She considers herself a futurist who despises “futurist design”; a progressivist critical of technological optimism; a universalist detesting all forms of essentialism; a communist rejecting post-socialist nostalgia and an internationalist opposing neoliberal globalisation. Much of her personal and professional commitment comes from the persuasion that only the life that projects itself into the future is worth living and that only the society that strives towards a utopian horizon is a truly emancipated society.

* First published at architecture-after-the-future.org in 2017 and reproduced here with kind permission of the author.
mapping, which, without striving to provide a precise and supposedly objective representation of reality, content themselves with facilitating orientation within the present architectural culture shaped by the loss of the future.

The late late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries saw the emergence of the “architect-activist” – the designer who, abandoning the concept of top-down, large-scale, future-oriented projects, engages in localised, small-scale, participatory practices framed by a moderately critical political agenda. However, the passionate involvement of “activist-architects” and their tendency to conduct the building process from the first conceptual draft all the way to construction has been paralleled by the rise of diverse forms of “architectural passivity” – the conscious withdrawal of the architect from the design process. As elaborately described by architectural theorist Miloš Kosec, this reluctant attitude has taken manifold shapes in architecture: from the decision to delegate certain aspects of the form-finding process to forces and
agents beyond the architect’s control, such as the tendency to leave the building unfinished in order to enable active appropriation on the part of future occupants, to the Bartlebian refusal to engage in a project altogether or propose any significant changes to existing environments. The last of the described manifestations of “architectural reluctance” is seen as the most radical and politically significant one – refusing to design means a disruption of both a concrete building project (and through that, the capital investment embedded in it), but also a disruption of the very ideology of innovation, creativity, productivity, and entrepreneurship, which has long since been mobilised for constructing the public image of the architectural profession.

There is, however, something more that gets lost when architects assume the Bartlebian position – it is the very projectivity (the essential capacity of architectural design to construct hypothetical spaces and envisage future realities) that is undermined as well, and, with it, the raison d’être of architecture as a discipline. One could argue that we should accept and even celebrate this loss: why be sentimental and mourn architecture’s demise when its main purpose (creation of future worlds) embodies the capitalist logic of envisaging, constructing, and exploiting potential futures for the sake of profit? But is it really like that? Has the future always been thoroughly absorbed into and monopolised by the market, or is it rather an anomaly of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries? It seems that what unites the two seemingly opposed strategies of the contemporary left – the activistic impetus and its reluctant counterpart – is their common renunciation of the future: the first position is characterised by acting here and now, while the latter refuses to act altogether. Whenever the

Andreas Töpfer

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emancipatory movements decide to break free from this self-imposed imprisonment in the present moment, they will have to liberate the future once again from the bondage of financial markets, commercial inventions and military-scientific ventures. In this context, reclaiming architecture means reclaiming the future!

Until not so long ago, reflexion was considered a privilege of architectural theory and criticism, whereas architecture itself was seen as an immanently future-oriented, projective discipline. However, such a clear orientation of the design practice and its resulting distinction from theoretical disciplines has been considerably loosened during the last few decades. Already Peter Eisenman and several other protagonists of the 1988 Deconstructivist Architecture exhibition in New York used the architectural project as a tool for "critical" interpretation and "deconstruction" of inherited design formulas and not so much for anticipation of the future. From then on, the reflexive strategy, which can be described as a tendency to maximise the analytical dimension of design, while simultaneously minimising its projective component, has been adopted by several generations of architects. Instead of envisaging the future, the reflexive project reveals, interprets, questions, deconstructs, recombines, reframes, polarises, radicalises, or politicises the past. This turns the present moment into a permanent construction site where the past is being productively recontextualised. Certainly, such reflexive (re)constructions influence future prospects as well, but rather as a by-product than as the primarily goal.

While Eisenman’s interpretative gesture addressed the formal grammar of architectural design, which he conceived as an autonomous semiotic system, the subsequent generation of reflexive architects counteracted
his “isolationist” approach by turning their analytical tools away from a narrowly architectural (formal, constructive and typological) towards a broader social (cultural, ecological and political) dimension of the built environment. However, as its proclamatory title and symbolic location (New York) suggest, the Re-constructivist Architecture exhibition of 2016, curated by Jacopo Costanzo and Giovanni Cozzani, announced once again the comeback of the “formalist” reflexivity of Eisenman’s generation, signalling a renewed interest in “genuinely architectural” concerns and re-engagement with the inherited repertoire of spatial forms, typologies, concepts, and narratives. This circular movement from the introvert over the extrovert and back to the introvert form of architectural reflexivity gives rise to an awkward question: Is architecture that has deliberately renounced its inherent future orientation condemned to repeat the cyclical movement in which the centrifugal effect of the extrovert, politically conscious and trans-disciplinary analytical endeavours of one generation is always followed by next generation’s centripetal drive towards more introspective, hermetic and inner-disciplinary forms of reflexivity? In spite of considerable differences in the context of
their application and the ambitions of their protagonists, pop-up constructions, tactical design, temporary spatial interventions, informal urbanism, flexible planning, guerrilla architecture and similar popular concepts all have something in common – they are not built for the future but for the here and now. They deliberately renounce durability and accept (or even promote) ephemerality as the incontestable social condition. They merge the temporal distance between the development of the project and its materialisation. The “project” gets absorbed by the “practice”. The future gets squeezed into the present.

The fascination with ephemerality is rooted in the critique of durability, solidity, and bureaucratic rigidity, all of which have been equally deprecated by both the neoliberal right and the alternative left ever since the post-war Keynesian economic order started getting shaky in the late twentieth-century. Taking this uneasy political convergence into consideration, it should not come as a surprise that architectural manifestations of the vogue for ephemerality reach from posh pop-up stores of corporate fashion houses and noble jewellery manufacturers all the way to fanciful low-tech temporary constructions built by architect-activists to serve as protest camps and progressive art festivals. However, beyond its ubiquitous popularity across the global architectural community, the condition of ephemerality also symbolises the cruel reality of migrant life – the depressing everyday experience of the millions of people caught in the permanent impermanence of emergency shelters and refugee camps. Can it be that these places, rather than the valuable achievements of temporary design, epitomise the post-futurist environment in the most radical sense of the term – the conglomerate of temporary settlements of the people without the future in the world of floating capital, shifting
Archi Futures

territories, invisible arms and proxy wars?

The only form of truly utopian architecture that flourishes in our essentially anti-utopian era engages with constructing oases of safety and sustainability amongst the ever-expanding war zones and wastelands of global capitalism. Salvational projects reach from low-tech emergency shelters and replicable microstructures for the poor and displaced to high-tech, self-sufficient, green, smart and protective superstructures for the

Salvational Strategy
affluent. Some of these projects have much in common with futuristic utopias of the high modern era: faith in technological development, the vast spatial scale of proposed interventions, radical changes in prevailing lifestyles and their material conditions, and, last but not least, the futuristic orientation itself. There exists, however, a crucial difference in the way that twentieth-century visionary architects understood and related to the future as compared to their contemporary successors. It seems as if the future changed its sign from positive to negative - if the function of modernist utopias was to anticipate the promising future, then the role of the salvational architecture of our era is to save us from the effects of apocalyptic scenarios, including climate change, ecological disaster, depletion of resources, escalation of poverty, forced migration etc. Floating constructions for climatic migrants, encapsulated high-tech oases in regions affected by desertification, intelligent surveillance systems for cities in the “age of terror” and artificial environments for the preservation of endangered species do not promise us a bright future.

It is sometimes claimed by the proponents of the salvational strategy that self-destructive tendencies of contemporary capitalism are inevitably leading towards an ultimate shipwreck, so that the best we can do is to build a dispersed network of self-organised lifeboats, instead of vainly trying to save the vessel destined to sink under its own weight. However, if all architects, urbanists, engineers, political activists and rebellious masses were to give up imagining, desiring and building better future(s) for the global society and instead focused on promoting alternative lifestyles and cooperative practices on the self-constructed life rafts beyond the sinking ship of the neoliberal world order, would they be able to provide
enough rafts for housing billions of castaways? At the end of the day, isn’t every salvational strategy condemned to end up as an elitist endeavour capable of saving only those of us who already possess the minimum of resources needed to sustain life?

Conceived as a visual metaphor of the architecture of Manhattan, *The City of the Captive Globe* – Rem Koolhaas’s famous drawing from 1972 – shows the potentially infinite orthogonal grid, with plots occupied by iconic buildings, each referencing a particular avant-garde movement and embodying a different “architectural ideology”. The relentless grid enables and structures the coexistence of otherwise irreconcilable projects, reducing them to a collection of isolated and mutually indifferent mascots advertising specific world views and design vocabularies. More than being just a representation of diverse streams of architectural modernism, the buildings depicted in the rendering are inseparable from the promises of bold futures characteristic of the modern era. However, the gesture of levelling achieved by the grid deprives these promises of all their radicalism, transformative potential and collective nature, turning them into exchangeable objects of individual desires and preferences. Thus, the drawing reveals the destiny of the avant-garde project in the era of neoliberalism: the culture of total interchangeability and unlimited consumer choice has caused the ultimate relativisation and disempowerment of the utopian horizons embedded in progressive architectural designs.

The relativistic pluralism of future scenarios doesn’t just occur, however, as an *a posteriori* effect of commercialisation and pacification of the once radical projects – it can also represent a conscious approach to
design. Incorporating into the project a range of different possibilities for its further realisation; leaving the design consciously ambivalent; conceiving it as an assemblage of mutually incongruous elements; or turning it into a catalogue of independent options – all these strategies can be viewed as examples of architectural relativism. Their underlying intention is mostly a mixture of post-modern irony and a desire to escape the determinant and restrictive character of architectural projects, which by their very nature rather channel than expand the trajectories of the future. The relativistic project, on the contrary, embodies the values of democratic pluralism and freedom of choice, while dismissing universalism and totalitarianism: it encourages us to choose our favourite futures and compose our personal utopias. However, it is difficult to believe that any of these individual future perspectives possess the capacity to divert the fatal trajectory of capitalist development, which at the moment seems to lay down the ultimate future horizon for all of us. It appears more likely that we need a common project – a democratically developed and collectively conducted one – to transform our common world. Certainly, architects cannot achieve this goal alone (it is rather a task for broad social movements and political forces), but what the practice of architecture can do is to turn a socially produced future horizon into a variety of tangible spatial forms.

Since the very beginning of the capitalist era, the term speculation has assumed a profoundly negative connotation – to speculate (in the narrow sense of the term) means to anticipate future scenarios with the aim of making personal profit, regardless of the cost to others. Rather than enabling substantial changes, profit-oriented future speculations projected back onto the present, tend to undermine every
possibility for transgressing the underlying conditions of the present order: when online shopping companies for example, use their customers’ previous purchases to estimate their “future wishes” and translate these calculations into personalised shopping suggestions, they de facto impede any significant changes in customers’ tastes, interests and behavioural patterns. Thus, by depriving the future of its substantial capacity to bring change, market speculations are not signs of recovery from the cultural implosion of the future, but rather its most troubling symptoms. There is however, more to speculation than sober financial calculus.

If understood in a wider sense, speculative reasoning proves indispensable for philosophical theorisation, utopian projects and projective imagination in general. It is this transformative potential of speculation that has animated its recent reassessment within theoretical and design disciplines - there is hope arising among philosophers and architects alike that using speculation beyond and against its common (profit-driven) field of application may turn the future once again into the medium of emancipatory change.

In line with the described intellectual realignment, the label “speculative design” has achieved a vertiginous
ascent among the vogue words of contemporary architectural discourse, making it ever more difficult to define what the term exactly refers to. What can be observed however, is that architectural practices described as “speculative” tend to engage in individual projects of limited scale, while broader social movements with a projective focus and the capacity for interconnecting these dispersed efforts and giving them a common direction have not yet consolidated. As a result, being left without a wider framework capable of envisaging and enforcing systemic alternatives, “speculative projects” run the risk of not achieving much more than giving the outcomes of the capitalist financial and technological hyper-production a more “friendly” appearance, socially beneficial functions and a “subversive touch”. In other words, as long as the impetus of speculation has not managed a radical shift from the predominantly individual, technical, pragmatic, and context-defined agency to the resolutely collective, political, utopian and context-defining one, the separate speculative practices confined to the sphere of design will hardly help us break through the horizon of the possible (defined by self-reproductive patterns of global capitalism) and reach the possibility of the impossible.
Architecture of Commons

How citizen-led action in Turkey reclaimed the notion of common(s)
By Merve Bedir
“Despite all their differences, the citizens of Istanbul were united in claiming what they commonly understood to be theirs: the tree, the park and more.”
The demonstrations against Turkish government action to demolish Gezi Park in Istanbul in 2013 prompted the self-organisation of its citizens and a new grassroots understanding of the notion of the “public”. Urbanist, writer and curator Merve Bedir, took part in the protests. Here she analyses what happened back then and how the seeds of a new type of urbanism were sown.

It all started as a demonstration to save a tree in Gezi Park in 2013. By then, for over a year, the government had been threatening to raze the urban park and reconstruct an artillery barracks there as part of a “pedestrianisation project” of the neighbouring Taksim Square. No information was forthcoming about what the intended use of the barracks would be and what this would mean for the city. Some of the alternative uses that then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan mooted had been: a shopping mall, a mosque, an ice-skating rink, a city museum, an opera house and housing. The ambiguity surrounding the future of the park kept people guessing for a long time, until the day an excavator entered the park and ripped up a tree from its roots.

Merve Bedir

Merve Bedir is an architect and researcher. She is a partner at Land+Civilization Compositions, an office based in Randstad and Istanbul that works and collaborates on issues related to built form and is a PhD candidate at Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture. She was a curator for the Netherlands Architecture Institute in 2012, where she worked on two main projects on reuse of buildings and urban transformation in Turkey.
The ensuing protests on the streets continued uninterrupted for 20 days; with crowds gathering in Gezi Park, Taksim Square and the surrounding areas. Despite all their differences, the citizens of Istanbul were united in claiming what they commonly understood to be theirs: the tree, the park and more. This event marked a threshold moment in which the people remembered the notion of “common(s)” – one that they have been re-discovering and exploring ever since, through all the possible spatial and political meanings of the word.
When the police retreated from Taksim Square after the initial demonstrations, people occupied the adjoining Gezi Park with tents, workshops, a library, an infirmary, a warehouse, a kitchen, a café, a TV and radio station, and many other things. Free film screenings, book readings, and yoga classes became daily activities there. Groups with a range of different ideologies joined together to reinforce the south-east barricades that separated Gezi Park from Taksim Square. Another small adjacent public park, closed by the municipality some time earlier, was incorporated into Gezi Park and made into an organic garden. The people who came into the park after that first clash collected and cleared the garbage off the streets and a solar cooker was brought in by Greenpeace. This is how the city of resistance arose in the park, in Istanbul.

The park became a cohabitated space where communication was almost intuitive and gathering was effortless. The initial aim was to protect the park from the police by continuous occupation, but late in the evening of the first day, one inhabitant was already talking about the kind of vegetables he wanted to plant in the organic garden next summer. The free speech corner saw new battle tactics formulated, but in addition it functioned as an open-air individual therapy centre. Almost a week after its settlement, the police entered the park again, and cleared away the commune and all its elements.

After the Gezi Park protests, people started organising forums in parks in their own neighbourhoods. This included more than 15 parks spread across the city and there was even a map of how to get to each of them. Everybody who was concerned about their city was welcome to come – whether local residents or passers-by.
HICBİR SEY SONSUZ
SON SÖZÜ DOĞA
The forums were held for people to discuss further collective action. As spaces for exercising direct democracy, the parks in the city became forums, agora(s) and common(s). The results of the various discussions were shared around the city and a daily report on each forum disseminated via a newsletter and blogs. These forums made people remember their public parks again, and their relationships to one another. Local inhabitants started maintaining the parks in their neighbourhood, using and programming them in ways that had never been experienced before. The movement, encouraged worldwide reactions and participation – from Brazil to Greece and beyond.

The issues discussed during the forums varied from urban transformation to earthquake threats, the environment, Istanbul's candidacy for the Olympics, social housing, collective budgeting of projects and cooperatives, collective urban space, the government’s privatisation...
policies, approaching local and general elections, social exclusion, other protests in Brazil, Egypt and Bulgaria, police violence, neighbourhood committees, gerontocracy - and more. The forums were often accompanied by workshops, lectures, film screenings, picnics and Ramadan dinners.

What might have come out of the protests and forums, had they continued, is not clear. This reactive movement had no leadership, the autonomy of the Gezi Park occupation was more intuitive and self-organised. For some it is already old history, for others it is a nostalgic moment, whilst for a few it became a starting point for other struggles - other common(s) issues.

Without doubt, the understanding of common(s) is as a new kind of (urban) space that is outside the dichotomy of public and private; a space that is created by collective action, by people; not trying to be permanent but looking for the transforming capacity of the temporary. Learning from the dynamism of the temporary is certainly inspiring for designers and other creative disciplines.

How can designers position themselves so they facilitate the creation of new common(s), outside the established hierarchies, at certain places and times? The response to this question is not a formula, recipe or model that can be repeated in other contexts. During the occupation of Gezi Park, the specific urban space, regardless of its physical boundaries, was re-produced, including and beyond its initial aims of design, revealing another capacity within which the roles of design and designer are redefined, where they can explore new existences.
The park created a new kind of friendship amongst the people who gathered there as well. Partially it was “xenia” (guest-friendship) defined as the hospitality shown to a stranger or an unknown foreigner, an outsider to the community – or indeed by them as a host – that of showing the necessary mutual respect, generosity, and courtesy. This definition is far from a legal one, in that it is neither created nor instrumentalised by law.

Gustavo Esteva\(^1\) explains this as a friendship through which we can create the kind of social fabric to offer us security, protection and a good life alongside our neighbours and friends. He asks, “where do new concepts of the self begin to emerge, that make us realise that we are not alone in our struggles, as well as desires?”

The most important thing is creating new common(s), by the people, particularly in the cities. We know we all have a thousand virtual friends, but we only have a small number of real friends. Ivan Illich talked about his polyphilia, the need to be with friends. He elevated friendship as the main category for the reorganisation of our society, for reconstructing it in a different way, as the starting point of hope.

Friendship as common(s) is a working methodology bringing people together towards collective imaginaries that also acknowledge the individual within them. This working methodology could be an inspiration for designers to position themselves, as well.

When Turkey declared an open door policy for Syrian refugees in 2011, nobody could have guessed that the war in Syria would continue for so long and the number of Turkey’s new “guests” would rise to three million. Today, the debate about Syrian refugees ranges from integration...
to xenophobia. How much the refugees “benefit” from free public services (such as health and education) is a major question for many. Undocumented refugee labour and its abuse is another debate, amidst claims that Syrians take many jobs because they work for lower wages compared to Turks. Meanwhile very few people focus on the actual issues of the undocumented economy in general.

Refugees need support, but the understanding of “support” has to shift from humanitarian aid to acceptance, living together, sustainability and empowerment. This mass migration from Syria came at a point when people were discussing their common(s), new friendships and new urban spaces, where they were able to define their own struggles through the struggles of refugees.

A transnational women’s solidarity platform was established in the city of Gaziantep in Turkey, around the concepts of a kitchen and garden run by a collective of women from Gaziantep, endorsed and facilitated by artists and architects, and logistically supported by cultural NGOs.

“Refugees need support, but the understanding of “support” has to shift from humanitarian aid to acceptance, living together, sustainability and empowerment.”
This initiative aimed to shift the discussion on migration and refugees at many levels:

- The kitchen and garden helping transform refugees’ roles and the perception of them in society from the role of guest to that of the host.

- Food/kitchen/cuisine become a cultural space of diversity, sharing, experimenting and representation. A cultural space that is for facilitating a participatory society, where thoughts are not only spoken, but can be realised.

- A self-sufficient space was developed, where initial support transforms into a sustainable network of socio-economic capital. Capital that is not defined by finance, but by voluntary labour devoted to a common imagination.

Roland Barthes\(^2\) addressed the philosophical problem of the coexistence of individuals through the lens of the everyday: food, things, places. Achieving the utopia of a collective, “idiorrhythmic” subject requires us to overcome arbitrary division as much as to open up spaces of shared interests. How can common(s) relationships be translated into cultural methods to build a convivial society? Can the sense of emplacement give new meaning to our engagement with the global issues of the world?

In the case of Gezi Park, the kitchen and garden became places for everyone, yet they belonged to no-one and everyone, helping create a new vocabulary for the contested notion of public. Through the kitchen and garden, design and designer facilitate and get involved in a horizontal process of ecological and social “transition” that takes root in simple gestures of everyday life: growing food, preserving seeds, bartering knowledge and building tools of resilience to prepare for the multiple crises that lie

\(^2\) Roland Barthes, 1977 lectures: *How to live together.*
Archifutures

on the horizon of our complex, yet fragile systems of organisation.
The Century that Never Happened

Was modernism just a glitch?
“Architecture is now a tool of capital, complicit in a purpose antithetical to its social mission”
As large housing estates are being demolished and the age of great social democracies recedes, taking with it any notion of an architecture for the public, OMA partner Reinier de Graaf asks if there is any alternative to building capital.*

Not long ago Thomas Piketty published his book, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.1 If Piketty is right, we can once and for all bury the illusion that the present economic system ultimately works in the interest of all and that its benefits will eventually trickle down to the poorest in society. Contrary to what every economist after Keynes has been telling us, the inequality produced by capitalism may not be a temporary phase that will ultimately be overcome; it is rather a structural and inescapable long-term effect of the system itself. Piketty’s analysis is exceedingly simple. He identifies two basic economic categories: income and wealth. He then proceeds to define social (in)equality as a function of the relation between the two over time, concluding that as soon as the return on wealth exceeds the return on labour, social inequality inevitably increases. Those who acquire wealth through work fall ever further behind those who accumulate wealth simply by owning it. Only during the twentieth century under the pressure of two world wars, social unrest, revolutions, labour unions and the daunting presence of a global alternative to the capitalist system in the form of a (former) communist world only during this unique capsule of time, was capital briefly surpassed by labour as the prime means to accumulate wealth.

Whether or not the twentieth century was a brief exception in the inescapable mechanism of a deeply fraught economic system remains to be seen. Much will depend on what happens next: the twenty-first century

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The Century that Never Happened

will determine the legacy of the twentieth. So far, the signs are not encouraging: since the late 1970s, after the great conservative revolution set in motion by Reagan and Thatcher, the promise of accumulating wealth through work has steadily lost ground. The fall of the Berlin Wall (generally claimed as a victory of that same conservative revolution) and in its wake, the wholesale collapse of the Communist Bloc, have exacerbated this trend. If current indicators are right, we could well be faced with a situation in the near future where, for the first time since the end of the nineteenth century, returns on wealth through ownership will again exceed those of labour.

Indeed, if Piketty’s argument holds true, the twentieth century will have been no more than an anomaly: a brief interruption in the systemic logic of capitalism, where the inherent accretion of capital through capital remains an unbreakable cycle. This simple economic conclusion may have social and cultural implications beyond our wildest imagination. When a lifetime of labour can no longer match the returns on an acquired fortune, inherited wealth once again becomes the defining factor of class distinction, reducing any notion of social mobility to a remote possibility at best.

Furthermore, if the twentieth century really was an anomaly, then perhaps so were its ideals: an entire period characterised by an enlightened belief in progress, social emancipation and civil rights can be retroactively discarded as a fleeting moment of self-delusion (no more than) a footnote in the long course of history. For the generation currently in a position of power, raised and educated in the twentieth century, this is difficult to acknowledge. For them, the moral imperatives of the twentieth century are beyond question, irrespective of

“If the twentieth century really was an anomaly, then perhaps so were its ideals: an entire period characterised by an enlightened belief in progress, social emancipation and civil rights can be retroactively discarded”
political choices. (Even the most ardent supporter of the current free market economy probably does so only because s/he believes that the system ultimately acts in the interest of all, rather than explicitly supporting the notion of inequality.) The current generation, whether left or right, has not (yet) had its faith in the great emancipatory mechanisms shaken in any way. It is all they know and all they have ever known.

I was born in 1964, started primary school in 1970 and graduated from university in 1988, one year before the fall of the Berlin Wall. I received 18 years of public education, during which the notion/dogma that one
progressed through study and hard work was firmly instilled. You earned your rights and did not inherit privileges. Education was received on the proportional basis of your talents, not the size of your wealth. We lived in the conviction that cultural and religious differences, Protestant and Catholic alike, there was no sizeable Muslim population yet, would eventually merge into a single middle class. The absence of a poor “under class” was generally interpreted as the logical consequence of the (apparent) absence of an “upper class”. Inasmuch as we were aware of an upper class, in no way did we have to reckon with or even acknowledge them. Sure, we had a monarchy, but even their implication in the occasional corruption scandal in no way shocked our faith in their absolute irrelevance. They were a symbolic necessity, there to represent the unity of a nation that in every other respect was getting by without them. Power was in the hands of an elected government, independent of our royal head of state. (It was not until much later, until the mysterious release of Dutch Greenpeace activists in Russia, that I realised things were perhaps not that straightforward … ) Wealth existed, but it did not guarantee a right to power, nor should it. Our leaders were chosen by us, for us, from us.

If Piketty is right, those selfevident “truths” may well have been based on quicksand. The many privileges/blessings of a life in the latter twentieth century, particularly in Western Europe, were not the natural outcome of a progressive evolutionary process, but the result of a shortlived and unsustainable suspension of the real fate dictated by its contemporary economic system. Only under severe (political) pressure did capital refrain from showing its true face. In that context, Western Europe was a good deal protected by American intolerance towards
the threat of Communism, but was itself threatened (or savvy) enough to maintain a generous welfare system, dissuading its citizens from entertaining any real Communist sympathies of their own. With the dissolution of the Communist Bloc, much of that threat is gone and the economic trends of most European countries after 1989 speak subsequent volumes: welfare cuts, the erosion of pensions, the reduction of public services, and so on.

Although my training as an architect might make me utterly unqualified to comment on Piketty’s economic theories, I certainly cannot help but notice the resonance between Piketty’s narrative of “economic history” and the context of my own profession. If you study the history of architecture, and particularly that of the last century, a striking confluence emerges between what Piketty identifies as the period of the great social mobility and the emergence of the Modern Movement in architecture, with its utopian visions for the city. From Le Corbusier to Ludwig Hilberseimer, from the Smithsons to Jaap Bakema: after reading Piketty, it becomes difficult to view the ideologies of Modern architecture as anything other than (the dream of) social mobility captured in concrete.
Let’s take a closer look. Until 1914, the returns on capital enjoy a comfortable lead over economic growth; from 1914 to 1950, the period of the great wars, that relationship reverses. Not only does this period signify a turning point economically, it also marks a major cultural shift as the period during which the great Modernist visions emerge. Shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, *The Futurist Manifesto* was published in *Le Figaro*. The spirit in which it is written is one of a deliberately reckless and unconditional embrace of the new. The manifesto glorifies speed, machinery and violence as the dawning of a new era. In announcing great crowds excited by work, pleasure and turmoil it “describes” the Russian revolution before it happens. The Futurists insisted that “Man will not be overtaken by progress, but instead Man will absorb progress in its evolution... reacting against the potentially overwhelming strength of progress, and shouting out his centrality.”

This “triumph of the will”, more than the aggressive nationalism it is generally associated with, is a definitive reckoning with the *laissez-faire* of nineteenth century Italy and the lethargy of its ruling class, to be abolished in favour of cultural rejuvenation and an aggressive modernisation.

A belief in the promises of modernisation continues to dominate much of the rest of the century. It results in a curious alternation between brutal industrial wars and utopian blueprints, the latter of which hope to deploy the (ensuing) maelstrom of industrial development for the greater good. In this respect there is a clear resonance with Piketty’s book, which observes a close relation between the progress made during the twentieth century and the upheavals that went with it, noting that somehow no manifestation of the new ever unfolds without unsettling the old vested interests and established
relations of power.
The great visionary actors in architecture from the Futurists to the Constructivists, from CIAM to Team X, from the Metabolists to Archizoom invariably seemed to have coupled their embrace of the new to a need to settle scores with (read: destroy) the old. Despite its mostly social(ist) mission, there is an element of unabashed cruelty in the depiction of the “city of tomorrow”, with its repetitive, industrially produced housing blocks and ambitiously over dimensioned infrastructural systems. Good intentions are dressed up in harsh vestments, as if to convey the brutal truth that progress comes at a price. Piketty has been viewed as a Marxist. This is wrong. Where Marx saw social relationships and class struggles,
Piketty sees only economic categories: wealth and income. Marx envisaged proletarian rule through revolution, Piketty’s views are rather apolitical. Indeed, if Piketty’s analysis is at all political, it is only because he recognises the relevance of political choices in the context of signalling capital’s natural tendency towards inequality, which is best countered when the opposition between political sides is prolonged without end. In this view, the emancipating achievements of the twentieth century owe their existence largely to a contest between opposing political camps and would last only as long as victory for any one party is suspended. Thus does the concept of struggle itself move to the centre, not as struggle between social classes, but as a form of necessary agonistic pressure on the system... perhaps even an indispensable part of the system itself, one that can never relent if the system is to remain progressive. “Except in struggle, there is no more beauty”, wrote the Futurist Marinetti, followed by: “No masterpiece without an aggressive character.”6

Also here an interesting echo with the Modern Movement emerges. Modern architecture is invariably considered
to be political, but by and large its political life has proved promiscuous. Italian Fascism was a sponsor of Modern architecture, as was Communism until Stalin. Le Corbusier served both the USSR and the Vichy regime. It is mostly in a desire to overthrow the old that commonalities between these systems can be found: a shared belief that whatever the consequences of action are, the consequences of inaction would be greater. In hindsight then, the social mobility of the twentieth century becomes not a victory of the left over the right, but of new over old: a cleansing
of the existing social order in the name of levelling the playing field. Maybe that is the main idea encapsulated, albeit strangely, in Le Corbusier’s statement: *Architecture ou Révolution*, wherein architecture is presented as a way to prevent (violent) revolution, embodying an (ideological) revolution in itself. Despite all the hallmarks of leftist rhetoric, somehow this slogan proposing that architecture replaces politics, remains apolitical. Political oppositions dissolve in a battle between new and old in a choice between progress and regress.

The resonance of Piketty’s historic analysis of capital with the progression of architectural history is eerie at times. The first intersection (economic output exceeding the returns on capital) just prior to the First World War clearly coincides with the emergence of the avantgarde, but the resonance even applies at a more subtle level within the twentieth century itself. From the early to mid 1970s, for the first time in the twentieth century, the lead of economic output over the returns on capital begins to diminish. And towards the end of the 1970s, a different political wind begins to blow. The conservative revolution first sweeps America and later Europe, forcing an agenda of economic liberalisation and the slashing of government spending. The size of the public sector is steadily reduced and large public housing projects become a thing of the past. This period essentially and concurrently marks the end of an unfettered belief in the merits of modern architecture. In 1972, the Pruitt-Igoe public housing estate in St Louis is demolished, an event that is generally heralded by critics as the *end* of modern architecture and on a larger scale, the end of modern utopian visions for the city. After the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe, the confidence in the architectural profession is severely shaken. The mood becomes pensive, the major
seminal works of architecture are no longer plans but books, no longer visions but reflections. It is telling that the most noteworthy architectural manifesto of 1989, the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the onset of an uncontested global rule of capitalism, is *A Vision of Britain* by Prince Charles. The modern age prefigured in *The Futurist Manifesto*, at the tail end of the Ottocento with its hereditary hegemonies, ironically concludes with an antimodern manifesto written by a member of the British Royal Family.

If the egalitarian climate of the 60s and 70s had made modern architecture generally unpopular, the neoliberal policies of the 80s and 90s made it obsolete. The initiative to construct the city comes to reside increasingly with the private sector. “Thought production” by the architectural profession, in the form of theoretical manifestos or wholesale urban visions, gradually comes to a standstill. The very grain through which the city is constructed
“The end of modern utopian visions for the city.”
changes. Large interventions in the city, using public housing projects as the texture from which to compose a new, alternative urban fabric, become virtually impossible. As part of a wholesale privatisation programme, public housing associations are privatised and home ownership takes a dramatic rise. By transforming large sections of society from tenants into home owners, the prevailing powers also hope to garner political sway. As soon as people own their homes, a mortgage will give them a vested interest in keeping interest rates and inflation down. Locked into an inescapable financial reality, they will have little alternative but to sympathise with the economic agenda of the right. Home owners, it is reasoned, will form an instantaneous conservative constituency.

Yet, over the decades to come, the new allegiance between the middle class and the right turns out to be a marriage of inconvenience. The conservative revolution had relied on two pillars: a permanent rise of property values (to maintain the desire for home ownership) and wage moderation (to maintain the economy’s competitive power). It would only be a matter of time before the combination of these two would clash, exposing the whole system which allowed people to “buy in” as something of a Faustian pact. With property appreciating value quicker than incomes rose, homes became ever more unaffordable; each generation of buyers suffering from that same condition by which the first owners had gained profit.

Piketty’s observation on the returns of wealth over income manifest clearly in real estate narratives of the last decades. Real estate is a prime example of how capital, after a first wave of seemingly working to people’s advantage, inevitably acquires a dynamic of its own. With time, the basic possibility to own one’s home is
progressively beyond the reach of more and more people. After the conservative revolution, the built environment and particularly housing acquired a fundamentally new role. From a means to provide shelter, it becomes a means to generate financial returns. A building is no longer something to use, but to own (with the hope of increased asset value, rather than use value, over time). Through the general deployment of the term “real estate”, the definition of the architect is replaced by that of the economist. This is also the moment that architecture becomes definitively inexplicable (at least in line with the criteria according to which architects usually explain architecture). The logic of a building no longer primarily reflects its intended use but instead serves mostly to promote a “generic” desirability in economic terms. Judgement of architecture is deferred to the market. The “architectural style” of buildings no longer conveys an ideological choice but a commercial one: architecture is worth whatever others are willing to pay for it.

This is also the moment that architecture and marketing become indistinguishable. A curious reversal of process follows: computer renderings precede technical drawings, the sale of apartments precedes the design of structure, the image precedes the substance, and the salesman precedes the architect. Perhaps Aldo van Eyck’s famous tirades against Postmodernism in the 1980s were actually nothing more than the expression of desperation or indignation, that somehow our work had been hijacked. Indeed, if we take the Piketty analogy to its full conclusion, we may wonder if there was really ever such a thing as Postmodern architecture at all. Perhaps what we witnessed was not a succession of architectural styles in a state of mutual polemic, but a shift towards a fundamentally different role of buildings altogether. If before the 1970s (roughly speaking) buildings were primarily regarded as
(public) expenditure, after the 1970s buildings became mostly a means of revenue which fact ironically only contributed to further downward pressure on construction budgets. Once discovered as a form of capital, there is no choice for buildings but to operate according to the logic of capital. In that sense there may ultimately be no such thing as Modern or Postmodern architecture, but simply architecture before and after its annexation by capital. Recent decades have seen the emergence of a new sobriety, a new Modernism, at least in aesthetic terms. But how modern is the modern architecture of today? Modernism had a rational programme: to share the benedictions of science and technology, universally. Recent decades have also shown, that modern architecture can easily be deployed to work against its original ideology. Once
buildings are identified as a means of return, modern architecture’s “economy of means” is no longer a way to reach the largest number of people, but a way to maximise profits. The same repertoire of rational production, the incorporation of industrial products, the celebration of the 90 degree angle and the aesthetics of sobriety that once made buildings affordable, now make buildings “cheap”. Marketing plays a crucial role here. Once Modernism can freely be reinterpreted as a style rather than an ideology, it becomes relatively easy to dissociate a (high) selling price from a (low) cost base and reap record profits as a result.

Ironically, this development affects both rich and poor. With sale values exceeding production costs to the current extent, quality no longer resides in the product, but in a potential profit through selling. The whole notion of physical luxury is superseded by a value on paper. However, the value on paper in no way represents the real material value of the product. The price of property is created by a combination of size and location. Unless major technical flaws come to light, the material or technical quality of buildings barely plays a role. As long as the hype continues, the “investment” is safe. A small anecdote: at the time of writing, a high-end residential project is due for completion in one of the wealthier boroughs of central London. The project consists of some 50 luxury apartments. The obligation to realise a percentage of the apartments as affordable homes, a legal requirement according to London planning policies, has been met by offering an alternative site in a somewhat poorer neighbourhood some distance from the development itself. The project is targeted at the expat market, broadly known to settle purchases in cash, without a loan from the bank. Sales go quicker

“Once discovered as a form of capital, there is no choice for buildings but to operate according to the logic of capital. In that sense there may ultimately be no such thing as Modern or Postmodern architecture, but simply architecture before and after its annexation by capital”
that way. The cheapest apartment in the project costs £11 million. (The price of the most expensive apartment remains privileged information between the buyer and the developer, covered by a confidentiality agreement.) The sales brochure speaks of “a rare place to live, in and around outstanding modern architecture in a park”. For quite a few of the prospective residents (rich Russians, perhaps) the idea of modern architecture in a park will invoke memories of a system whose collapse funded their personal fortunes. The architects are rumoured to have considered weather resistant cardboard as a facade material, underlining the supreme irony of asking some of the world’s richest people to pay record prices for a cardboard box. The client, an old hand in the development business, has remained unfazed by the irony and has allowed the project to proceed, albeit on the condition that there is a “slight change” in facade material.

Despite its “aesthetics of poverty”, the building is already substantially over budget. By coincidence, the surveyor released his report (urging major cost cuts) on the same day as the estate agents released their list of buyers: an interesting collection of über-wealthy Americans (many with Dutch surnames); Russian oligarch-billionaires and Arab oil sheikhs. Their combined fortunes represent about twice the size of the British economy. The “poorest” of the prospective buyers is worth a little over £2 billion, about 50 times the project’s construction budget. To ensure that “finances will add up”, the cost of the project is subsequently cut by 40 per cent.

This anecdote, for all its more tragicomical elements, is symptomatic of overheated residential markets such as central London, where even record prices paid by astronomically rich residents do not prevent the
downward pressure on construction costs. Meanwhile, the upward trajectory on residential prices created by the expat market has had a predictable effect at the other end of the spectrum in forcing moderate income groups to live ever further from the centre. Nurses, teachers, policemen, firefighters and other professionals earning moderate wages no longer qualify for mortgages required for even the most modest properties inside central London. The recent firesale of council property in central London boroughs, supposedly created to enlarge the stock of affordable homes, has done little to mitigate the process. After the first generation of tenants is offered to purchase their rental apartments at subsidised rates, the next round of sales quickly conforms to market rates, generally making the apartments unaffordable for the income groups for whom they were originally intended.

Even a well intended piece of architecture, with all the
right references to the enlightened Modernism of the twentieth century, cannot but become an accessory in promoting an ever widening gap between value and quality: a downward spiral where ultimately even the happy few get shortchanged.

Trellick Tower, a 31-storey building with 217 flats in North Kensington, built in 1972 and very familiar to architects, long had a reputation for antisocial behaviour and crime. With the introduction of the “right to buy” council homes in the mid 80s, many of the flats were bought by the tenants. A new residents’ association was formed and several security improvements were undertaken, including the employment of a concierge. After the building’s Grade II* listing in 1998, property prices rose sharply and flats in the tower came to be regarded as highly desirable residences. Despite serious technical problems within the building, properties inside the tower have sold for between £250,000 for a small one bedroom flat to £480,000 for a fully refurbished three bedroom flat. The maximum obtainable mortgage on an average annual gross income of £32,188 in the UK in 2014 was £152,000.

Central London is not the only place affected by this phenomenon. The Park Hill Estate, in Sheffield, North Yorkshire, a council estate built in 1957, fell into decay in the 1970s. In 1998 the complex was Grade II* listed, following which English Heritage, together with a private developer, launched a renovation scheme to turn the flats into upmarket apartments and business units. (The renovation was one of the six shortlisted projects for the 2013 RIBA Stirling Prize.) According to Sheffield’s own website, the city has “the lowest annual average salary of UK’s core cities”, at around £24,000, allowing

8 Designed by Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith
a maximum mortgage of around £115,000. Outside the UK, the original units of Le Corbusier’s Unité d’Habitation are currently being sold for €151,000 (for a 31 square metre studio); €350,000 (for a three-bedroom flat) and €418,000 (for a four-bedroom flat). The average annual wage in France is €30,300, allowing a maximum mortgage just shy of €120,000. *Existenzminimum* seems
to have become a privileged condition in the twenty-first century. The twentieth century taught us that utopian thinking can have precarious consequences, but, if the course of history is dialectic, what follows? Does the twenty-first century mark the absence of utopias? And if so, what are the dangers of that? Piketty’s framing of the twentieth century echoes the familiar notion of “the short twentieth century”: 9 the historic period marked by a global contest between two competing ideologies, running from the beginning of the First World War to the end of Communism in Eastern Europe; starting in Sarajevo, ending in Berlin. If we are to believe Piketty, we may well be on the way back to a patrimonial form of capitalism. With that, modern architecture’s social mission the effort to establish a decent standard of living for all seems a thing of the past. Architecture is now a tool of capital, complicit in a purpose antithetical to its erstwhile ideological endeavour.

Fifteen years into the new millennium, it is as though the previous century never happened. The same architecture that once embodied social mobility in béton brut, now helps to prevent it. Despite ever higher rates of poverty and homelessness, large social housing estates are being demolished with an ever greater resolve. Perhaps Piketty’s theory, the final undoing of the twentieth century, finds concrete proof in the methodic removal of its physical substance.


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9 The short twentieth century, originally proposed by Iván Berend (Hungarian Academy of Sciences) but defined by Eric Hobsbawm, a British Marxist historian and author, refers to the period between the outbreak of the First World War and the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe.
Telling Tales

Storytelling as architectural representation

By Jana Čulek
“As architects, we often create more stories than buildings.”
With her research project “A Flat Tale”, architect and urbanist Jana Čulek analyses the phenomenon of storytelling in representing Dutch architecture in a series of three books, analysing and exploring how both visual and textual narrative can explain architecture.

As architects, we often create more stories than buildings. We have come to a point where the main criterion for a scheme’s success is a compelling concept, manifested through the architectural story. A Flat Tale is a research project that examines architectural stories, their narrative structures and methods, through the specific investigation of Dutch architecture and visual culture.
The project questions the storytelling capacity of architecture by using a research and projective method in which a known category of architectural representation is paired with a familiar literary and didactic genre. The format of the story is used as an heuristic device to extrapolate and transpose different approaches to narrative structures and methods onto architectural narratives. This method has resulted in three component publications: an alphabet book entitled *A Good Life ABC*; an architectural picture book called *A Flat Tale*; and an architectural journal appropriately titled *Pitch*. The three parts represent three phases in the development of narratives and architectural projects, as well as three different ways of correlating text and image. The project concludes with an appendix, *A Reference Unreferenced*, which explains the correlations and thoughts behind the project’s texts and drawings.
Archifutures

easier to understand, architects sometimes oversimplify. In an effort to explain the complex architectural idea in a relatable way, the architectural process is reduced to a set of simplified drawings and an icon that represents the final stage of development. *A Good Life ABC* uses letters of the alphabet, paired with drawings of familiar objects and elements of the Dutch built environment, drawn in a reductive manner with minimal detailing. In order to further remove any specificity from the objects, the colour palette is reduced to primary shades. In this way emblematic objects and places are created which refer only to themselves and perform as generic symbols of Dutch identity.

As an analogy to the architectural project, the second book, *A Flat Tale*, is presented in the form of a picture book. “Picture books are unified artistic wholes in which text and pictures, covers and end pages, and the details of design, work together to provide an aesthetically satisfying experience. The spelling *picturebook* – as one word – is utilised intentionally in order to emphasise the unity of words and pictures that is the most important hallmark of this type of book.”¹ Picture books use images

*A Good Life ABC:
“L is for Landscape”.
Photo: Lena Giovanazzi
to illustrate the events of the corresponding *fabula*. Image is used as a conveyor of spatial narrative, while text is used to convey the temporal one. Since “words and pictures necessarily have a combative relationship, their complementarity is a matter of opposites complementing each other by virtue of their differences. As a result, the relationships between pictures and texts in picture books tend to be ironic: each speaks about matters on which the other is silent.”2 But unlike the picture book, where both the drawing and the text are used as critical and didactic tools, the architectural drawing has become mere representation. In order to regain its critical use, the drawing has to perform as something more than just a visual description of a project at hand. It has to become a speculative tool, containing an additional layer of thought and information. In this way, the nature of the architectural drawing can change. In a world that has already been oversaturated with images, the drawing can cease to be a representational end-product and become, once again, part of the process of creating and disseminating architectural thought.

The story depicted in *A Flat Tale* is centred around the development of Almere, the newest city on the youngest Dutch polder. From large areas of housing developments, to the masterplan for Almere Centrum created by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture in 1997, and public buildings designed by other famous Dutch architectural offices, Almere has it all. The story of Almere can be viewed as a compact version of Dutch architectural history, a fruitful resource for creating imagery relating to various aspects of Dutch architectural production. In *A Flat Tale*, Almere is used as a lens for presenting and observing architectural, urban and infrastructural approaches. It is also used to establish ideas forming generative theoretical elements of Dutch architecture.
and culture (such as concept, export, good life, welfare, subsidies, etc).
Focusing predominantly on architectural texts, the third element, *Pitch*, takes the format of an architectural

*Top: A Flat Tale: “Planning Polders”. Photo: Lena Giovanazzi*

*Bottom: A Flat Tale: “Polder Life”. © Jana Čulek*
Composed from texts, paired with simple black and white diagrammatic drawings, it examines Dutch architectural projects through the use of narrative, argumentation and criticism. The format of the architectural journal is almost without exception aimed at architects. When writing about architecture, or related subjects, architects tend to use jargon filled with overly complicated semantic constructs, alluding to a complex, deep and intellectual creative process. But Dutch stories are different. When writing about their projects, Dutch architects tend to use terms, images, words and experiences relatable to everyone. These are stories aimed for the end user and the architectural theoretician or critic. In *Pitch*, these stories are collected and used as case studies in order to re-examine the concepts, diagrams and original project pitches created for some of the most iconic examples of Dutch architecture.

*Pitch* ends with a fictional conclusion, an interpretation of the same type of material, but through a written description of an architectural project. It is set in an undefined future. It is a utopian, infrastructural, urban and architectural project for a mountain in the
Netherlands. The description excludes all the visual elements that typically define architectural projects in order to question if it can still remain accessible, relatable and understandable even without the use of graphic tools of representation. It questions the capacity of architectural storytelling by presenting an architectural project, which is inherently visual, only through text. Diagrams and allusions to the project in the form of ‘infiltrators’ are placed in the first two publications in order to entice the reader to re-examine the entire set after finishing the first read.

A Reference Unreferenced is the project’s appendix. It contains references, sources, inspirations and explanations for all three elements of the project. The appendix draws on the research carried out on Dutch architecture and visual culture: the history, meaning and structure of tales and narratives and the approaches, elements, meanings, structures and formats of picture books. Formatted as a reference lexicon, it illuminates the stories and backgrounds behind the texts and drawings, positioning them in the architectural discourse and giving them an added meaning, which can be explored through re-

By merging existing visual and lexical narrative forms with methods of architectural representation, a different set of rules is applied to forming and sharing architectural thought. Examining architectural representation through both its lexical and visual qualities allowed for the elucidation of three main categories forming this project: the diagram and emblematic object presented through the alphabet book; the architectural design project and its narrative presented through the picture book; and the architectural journal with its short story conclusion. These elements, together with the appendix, represent the symbols, depiction, reflection and story of the good life in the Netherlands.
Beyond the Biennial Bubble

Copenhagen Architecture Festival

Three festivals, three approaches
Belgrade International Architecture Week

Tirana Architecture Week
“Biennials, triennials and other festival-like events do create a parallel world that *on site* is probably not that close to architecture.”
Architect and writer Léa-Catherine Szacka sat down with the organisers of the Tirana Architecture Week (Saimir Kristo), the Copenhagen Architecture Festival (Josephine Michau) and the Belgrade International Architecture Week (Danica Jovović Prodanović) to reflect on the growing popularity and role of architecture biennials, triennials and other such festivals.

Week-long celebrations, biennials, triennials and other architecture festivals are popping up all over the globe these days, bridging topics from the centre to the periphery and back again. What forms do these different events take? What is their scope, temporality and line of action? Who are they really for? And who pays for them? The following discussion explores three approaches from three architecture institutions in three very different European countries: Albania, Denmark and Serbia.

Saimir Kristo (SK), Tirana Architecture Week (TAW)
Over the last 25 years Tirana has undergone a series of radical changes not only in its political and social character, but also in terms of its urban and aesthetic character. The capital of a post-communist state that existed in isolation for over 45 years, Tirana since the early 2000s has become known as the city of colours, thanks to the...
Saimir Kristo is an architect, urban designer and lecturer at POLIS University. He was the curator of Tirana Architecture Week 2014 – [En]Visioning Future Cities.

Tirana Architecture Week’s aim is to promote international knowledge exchange amongst professionals and enhance public interest in architecture, art and design, as disciplines deeply concerned with the contemporary city development.

In order to respond to this new condition, The Tirana Architecture Week (TAW), an initiative of POLIS University, was launched in 2012 with the theme of (Re)appropriation of the City. From the start, our approach was to not just to address theory, but to also to implement practical, applied examples. It is a philosophy that stems from our work with co-PLAN, an NGO founded in 1995 that studies the development of habitat.
Josephine Michau (JM), Copenhagen Architecture Festival (CAFx) Copenhagen Architecture Festival was created with the aim of communicating architecture to a wider audience through film, talks and debates. Coming from a background in documentary film distribution, I found out that I shared a broad, amateurish interest in architecture with a lot of people. It was whilst distributing Copenhagen Dreams, directed by Max Kestner in 2010, and The Human Scale, directed by Andreas Møl Dalsgaard in 2012, that I truly realised how I could engage a wide audience through these films, from politicians, architects, city planners to anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists and artists. This made me want to expand further by concentrating it into a festival focusing on film and architecture. Together the architect Peter Møller Rasmussen, the more theoretical Mads Farsø and myself formed what the festival is today: still with a film focus but also communicating through other media, such as seminars, conferences, exhibitions, performances, walks and workshops.

Copenhagen Architecture Festival

Josephine Michau is director of Copenhagen Architecture Festival (CAFx), which she founded in 2014 together with Peter Møller Rasmussen and Mads Farsø to explore how architecture characterises our lives and the world around us and how, in turn, our lives shape architecture. In 2016 they launched two further local festivals in Denmark: Aarhus Architecture Festival (AAFX) and Aalborg Architecture Festival (ALAFx).
Danica Jovović Prodanović (DJP), Belgrade International Architecture Week (BINA) The BINA festival started in 2006 as an initiative of six architects, colleagues and friends. We felt then, as we still feel today, that architecture, together with all of its accompanying processes, is conspicuously absent from the cultural and everyday life of the city of Belgrade. We were also concerned by the lack of interactive, participatory programmes that engage an audience of citizens. At the time, the majority of existing programmes were designed exclusively for a professional public (e.g. Salon of Architecture – an annual exhibition of realised buildings, awarded competition entries and retrospective or thematic exhibitions). We thought that there was a need for opening this kind of activity up towards a general audience, to present, discuss, promote and to criticise architecture.

So after many conversations, we decided to try and change things. We were all working in different contexts...
Archifutures (academic, design practice, cultural institutions) and as a result brought a range of different experiences and professional contacts. We also had a good starting position: institutional support and – crucially – an initial venue for our programme. BINA gained momentum, and has grown ever since. Although we still use the word “week” in the title, the festival lasts almost a month now. Outside of festival time, a number of programmes take place throughout the year in the form of lectures, exhibitions, and BINA on tour.

**SK (TAW)** TAW was created as an open platform for Albanians, that went beyond simple interaction with architecture and urban planning. It is in direct correlation with Tirana Design Week (TDW), which runs on alternate years with TAW, making them sibling biennials. That means that the university is always organising similar activities during the academic year, without a specific theme but within the framework of its fields of studies. Organising a greater number of activities under a specific theme increases the impact we can have upon the general public and that is what is very important for us, creating a direct dialogue with the city of Tirana and its citizens.

**JM (CAFx)** An exhibition is just one of many formats we use to communicate, no matter how radical or non-radical the statement might be. Rather than using the festival as a tool for a specific political or aesthetic statement, we use it to show many positions in architecture.

Does the time interval of your events (annual, biennial, triennial...) deny the potential for making a radical, absolute statement? What is the result of the difference in temporality between a permanent/temporary exhibition and a festival?
Beyond the Biennial Bubble

Unrealized Utzon lecture by Carsten Thau © CAFx

Sound & Space concert by Peter Albrechtsen and Troels Abrahamsen © CAFx
**SK (TAW)**  [Re]appropriation of the city aimed to address the way Albanians were dealing with urban space. A lecture series provided the theoretical framework to understand the topic of reappropriation at two levels: public space and private space. Firstly, the reappropriation of public space in terms of the drastic need to engage local communities and to transform and convert leftover spaces into playgrounds and green spaces for neighbourhoods - in some cases we had the chance to physically transform some of these areas permanently. In this regard TAW dealt not only with the urban, but also with the reappropriation of industrial and military “leftovers”, such as bunkers and other structures with the potential for tourism. Also very effective was the temporary transformation of such spaces through the organising of public events and performances by artists and students into places for creativity and critical thinking. On the other hand, private and individual spaces are very important since the city skyline has been evolving not only according to official urban development plans.

**DJP (BINA)**  When we started BINA we wanted to spread the word about architecture and related cultural and social processes, to underline their importance and to make them more visible. We also wanted to educate and raise questions, to involve citizens and to try to influence decision makers. We see BINA as an open platform for discussions, experiments, meetings and hopefully as a starting point, as a nucleus for some more profound projects.
Informal extensions of balconies, for example, have also shaped the skyline, as a way of gaining more private space inside communist residential buildings, which met only minimum requirements when they were first built.

In Venice, the Architecture Biennale was born out of the Art Biennale in the late 1970s with Vittorio Gregotti. Later, there was no consensus on the disciplinary position of architecture at the Biennale. Since the 2010 edition, curated by Kazuyo Sejima, architecture has made attempts to define itself through the appropriation of terminologies, methods and concepts belonging to other fields of knowledge. How can the intersection between architecture and other disciplines (artistic, but also social and political) be productive or counterproductive in the context of an architecture festival?

**SK (TAW)** Interdisciplinarity is an important aspect of TAW since the context itself requires a systemic approach. The layered interaction of different disciplines is also part of the philosophy of POLIS University, in order to promote the collaboration between architects, urban planners, designers, engineers, and environmental specialists. We tried to enhance this character in the second edition of TAW with the theme of *[En]Visioning Future Cities*, inviting architects and visionaries such as Peter Eisenman, Emilio Tunon, Jesse Reiser and Hitoshi Abe, but also John Allen, who is director of research at Biosphere 2, an earth systems science research facility. In this case we are able to study, understand and intervene across a full spectrum of topics and interests, but always refer back to the theme of the festival, which serves as the general framework of understanding.
**DJP (BINA)** We feel that today the intersection of disciplines is a must. Disciplinary boundaries between architecture, art, social and other sciences have become porous as knowledge and interests flow. We believe in presenting architecture as a layered phenomenon that affects everyday life in a more complex way than just aesthetically or structurally.

Back in 2007, the art historian and curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev talked about the “Biennale Syndrome” to qualify “The rise of biennales (and other periodic international exhibitions)” that had, she says, “decentralised art and created multiple art systems”. The rise of biennials and triennials started in the art field about a decade ago, but with architecture different issues are at play. What does this "-ennials" syndrome means for the discipline of architecture? Does it only contribute to the creation of a parallel (and often closed) system of production in and around our discipline or can it have a wider, more positive implications for architecture?

**SK (TAW)** Architectural festivals should provide a dual view, combining theoretical frameworks with examples of practical approaches. In this sense, they are a great opportunity not only for well-established architects and practices to communicate their work, but also for young architects to attract attention and, for the even younger generation of students, to find inspiration and positive models. From our experience, a festival is also a tool to raise awareness for those citizens that want to become more involved in the decision-making processes of their cities.

**BINA (DJP)** Biennials, triennials and other festival-like events do create a parallel world that on site is probably not that close to architecture. But still, we feel that these exhibitions and festivals are important because they raise awareness about certain topics by opening and provoking discussion.
This is valuable for both general and professional audiences. These festivals and exhibitions are also opportunities for experiment. In a rigid, precise and very expensive discipline such as architecture, experimentation is a pure luxury – and therefore it’s very valuable. From my point of view, a good example of a well prepared and conceptualised programme or exhibition was the 15th Venice Architecture Biennale, entitled *Reporting from the Front* and curated by Alejandro Aravena in 2016. This was all about architecture, invention and the future – but took a modest approach. It showed the impact that architecture, as a discipline, has or could have, upon daily life.

**SK (TAW)** As an academic institution educating young professionals in Albania, we believe that there is a lot more to be done for both the country and the region in order to provide a platform for action in architecture. But it is important to note what TAW has achieved in that it is already considered a significant open platform for debate at both the national and regional level. However, it is important not only to express the methodology of one university but also to bridge communication between other academic institutions, organisations and architectural associations to stimulate constructive discussion.

**JM (CAFx)** We too are proud to have established and consolidated ourselves as an important voice in the field of architecture at a national level.
DJP (BINA) Apart from regular annual programmes, BINA participates in a number of international projects and exchanges. BINA also initiated Do.co.mo.mo Serbia – an organisation working for the protection and preservation of modernist architecture – and has established long-lasting cooperations with numerous cultural and academic institutions and organisations in its home country and abroad as a solid base for further collaboration. But I would say that a very special achievement, both professionally and in terms of social responsibility, is the BINA pavilions (BINA KABINA) that were built in the garden of the Faculty of Visual Arts as an outcome of a student workshop. The first temporary pavilion was built in 2012 in one of the main city squares. Now this BINA KABINA is used as a venue for student workshops, exhibitions, meetings – a motor for dialogue in and around architecture.
Hyper-supersurface
National Museum of XXI Century Arts, Rome

A collage conversation between Cristiano Toraldo di Francia & Guillermo López
A Dialogue Between Generations
A collage conversation from Cristiano Toraldo di Francia & Guillermo Lopez

Text by César Reyes Nájera
The National Museum of XXI Century Arts (MAXXI) is the first museum dedicated to contemporary creativity in Italy. Conceived as a large campus for culture, the building was designed by Zaha Hadid and opened in May 2010. It is run by a private foundation instituted by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism. MAXXI produces and hosts art, architecture, design and photography shows, as well as fashion, cinema and music projects, theatre and dance performances, lectures and meetings with artists and architects. The museum views itself as: “a platform open to all the languages of creativity, a place of encounter, exchange and collaboration ... open to everyone.”
In 1963 a group of students occupied the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Florence, protesting about the Vietnam War, students’ rights and changes to the academic curriculum. Their political actions were reflected in their projects: introducing politics and criticism to production models and also to their means of representation by going far beyond conventional architectural drawings. This was the genesis of Superstudio and Archizoom, the Italian radicals that set a milestone in the philosophical and political interpretation of design and architecture in the second half of the last century.

Superstudio was founded by Cristiano Toraldo di Francia and Adolfo Natalini, who were later joined by Piero Frassinelli, Alessandro Magris and Roberto Magris. The photographer Cristiano Toraldo di Francia and painter Adolfo Natalini were in continuous contact with other creatives from the disciplines of film, photography and painting. As a result, they brought revolutionary new forms of representation into the discipline of architecture that are still in use today.

The work of Superstudio has been widely documented and their influence continues to be relevant since their ideas were “not simply a critique of modern architecture but a more general critique of architecture’s political mandate in a capitalist society” 1. It is not surprising then, that the MAXXI held a retrospective exhibition, Superstudio 50 in 2016, half a century after the group’s foundation. The show’s curator Gabriele Mastrigli also invited contemporary artists to respond to their radical discourse begun back in the 1960s, giving a perspective on the validity of those radical architects and the extent of their influence.

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Archifutures

influence. We can still find echoes in contemporary events and challenges faced by architecture that were already being addressed by some of the ideas and display methods they used back in the ‘60s and ‘70s.

Over the following pages you will find an unconventional conversation created especially for this book. It is a dialogue, developed in the manner of Superstudio, between one of its co-founders, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia and Guillermo López, the co-founder of a young Spanish practice MAIO who have also been generating interesting proposals that question the nature of architectural discipline and explore other means of expression in their projects such as collages or performative installations.

Collages have an evocative power to build symbols anew. It’s hard to find such power in contemporary digital representations. However, the conversation shown here is not a romantic revision of technique, nor just of Superstudio ideas, but a dialogue between generations on the issues that architecture will still be facing in the years to come. The lines leading from Superstudio’s Continuous Monument from 1969 can be continued today because they are the lines of a narrative reminding us of the latent promise of our discipline to merge with the environment, to subtract, to add, to build or destroy; one propelled by forces we can barely infer, but nevertheless keep feeding by our own fundamental actions.

What comes after the complete absorption of architecture by capital? Maybe it’s a stack of histograms, the emergence of a post-human set of beings and values, a dialogue between algorithms, or perhaps just the fortunate ability architecture has to talk about other fundamental things.

Guillermo López

Guillermo López is a young architect and member of a Barcelona-based office MAIO founded in 2005. His partners are Maria Charneco, Alfredo Lérida and Anna Puigjaner.

MAIO’s practice encompasses both built and research projects with a particular focus on the theoretical positions engendered by flexible systems, the ephemeral and the ad hoc. López is also an editor of Quaderns, the magazine of the Catalan Association of Architects.
THREE PERSPEX TUBES IN BLUE RED YELLOW
CONTAINING NEON TUBES
LIKE A RAINBOW BETWEEN TWO BLACK MARBLE CUBES.
A LAMP FOR CONTEMPLATION
TO ILLUMINATE THE MIND,
TO PUT IN ALL DESERTS, PUBLIC OR PRIVATE,
IN DESERTS OF SAND OR SALT,
IN MAN-MADE DESERTS OR IN INTERNAL ONES
A Abis, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia
B Unexpected, Guillermo López
C Untitled, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia
D Afterlife, Guillermo López
E Illuminari i deserti, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia
F Modern life, Guillermo López
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October 2017
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