BRAVE NEW WORLD

Brave New World
New Visions in Architecture

A Programme of Lectures and Exhibitions:
May 2018–September 2019
BSR Architecture Programme

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BRITISH SCHOOL
AT ROME

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Foreword

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I am delighted to introduce this publication which is the result of the series of lectures, events and exhibitions which took place at the British School at Rome between May 2018 and September 2019 as part of the architecture programme. This specific programme was entitled *Brave New World: New Visions in Architecture* and was curated by Marina Engel. The main aim of the series of events was to give voice to the emerging generation of younger architects, many of whom were born at the turn of the millennium. As so-called 'millennials', the intention was to examine how the social and economic concerns of this generation found a place within the field of contemporary architectural thinking and practice.

The title of the programme clearly references Aldous Huxley's famous pre-war dystopian novel *Brave New World* (1932) which painted a frightening vision of a futuristic state characterised by social, psychological and environmental conditioning in which one man, 'the Savage', struggles to come to terms with a new post-industrial order and ultimately commits suicide as the state-programmed satisfaction of his hedonistic desires leave his more profound psychological needs unfulfilled.

Huxley's novel is often read as a revolt against the age of utopias, and this tension between imagined futures, the 'new visions' of the programmes subtitle, and current practices and modes of design and repurposing was consistently challenged throughout the programme. The longstanding fixation with newness in architecture, as evidenced through what Reinier de Graaf referred to as the 'age of manifestos', came under repeated scrutiny: how compatible is the consumerist desire for novelty with the increasingly pressing concerns with environmental impact and sustainability? How new, in fact, is any architectural 'new vision'? What is it that the generation of millennial architects has brought to contemporary debate and made happen differently? How sustainable are these new practices? Is the age of 'new' building over and the age of repurposing beginning?

There is no doubt that architecture has a central role to play in meeting many of the great social and environmental challenges that face us. Questions of inclusivity, diversity, collaboration and equality of opportunity are as pressing in architecture as they are in many other fields. The fourth industrial revolution

and exponential growth of new technologies and AI are set to further accelerate change and destabilise established working and leisure practices. The use, and reuse, of materials and spaces has always been at the heart of architectural practice and the questions of sourcing and sustainability, and architecture's carbon footprint have never been subject to such close scrutiny.

This programme and the interventions in this publication bear witness to the vibrant and engaged manner in which these issues are being confronted and discussed. There is no doubt that the concerns of the millennial generation are impacting on the discipline of architecture and adding a vital voice to debate and the shaping of an uncertain future. When thinking through utopian and dystopian futures, the tragic events at Grenfell Tower are cause for reflection. Amongst the dead were two young Italian conservation architects, millennials who had come to London to further their careers working with UK practices.

As Phin Harper pointed out so forcefully in his lecture, the millennial generation that is often stereotyped as the 'snow-flake' generation are the most qualified and mobile whilst confronting a precarity unknown to other post-war generations. As I write, we are confronting a Covid-19 pandemic which is redefining how we interact and use space. In this context, it may be the 'brave' of the programme's title which remains the most relevant word as we envision new futures.

Introduction

Marina Engel

Curator, Architecture Programme,
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Oh, wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in 't!
The Tempest, Act 5, Scene 1

Few generations have been so acutely observed as that born roughly between 1980 and 2000, commonly referred to as millennials. They are natives of that digital world to which earlier generations are still learning to adjust. A generation that is coming of age during a period of extraordinary technological change as well as of post-9/11 political instability and post-2008 economic uncertainty. They will have to confront the consequences of unprecedented climate change, increasing wealth inequality, unstable working conditions, crippling rents and unaffordable housing, as well as changes in family structures and gender roles.

Common to a number of young architects and artists is the feeling that their economic and social needs are not addressed by the present system of designing the built environment. Many seek to venture beyond the traditional role of the architect, often conceiving social enterprises that endeavour to compensate for the diminishing role of the state. At the same time, they are the first to depend more on their peers—with the ability to access and share information on the web—than on figures of authority. They drive the rise in self-initiated projects. Assemble, one of the practices in the programme, describes itself as committed to both 'making things and making things happen.'

Millennials are seen as the force behind the new sharing economy and the increase of both shared working and living spaces. Many predict that they will have a revolutionary effect on architecture and urban planning and on the way we experience space and so on how we work, play and socialise.

Through a series of lectures and case studies, the programme *Brave New World* proposed a number of questions aimed at investigating the nature of some of the changes that are being brought about by this younger generation: Are younger designers driven by a renewed social consciousness and more utopian ideal of what can be done through design? Alternatively, are young

designers simply being pragmatic? What forms does this new vision of architecture take?

This generation is 'more concerned with making some positive and constructive difference to society than any previous generation of architects that I have known in the forty years since I went to architecture school,' concluded the critic Rowan Moore in his lecture. The themes of social purpose and the desire to create a more egalitarian society were discussed repeatedly in most of the events.

In the first case study *Ways of Listening* the multidisciplinary collective and Turner Prize winners Assemble exhibited three ongoing projects: their acclaimed Granby Four Streets, Café Oto and Baltic Street Adventure Playground. In order to concentrate on the collaborative process in their work, projects were presented through the voices of residents, volunteers and collaborators. All three schemes were characteristic of Assemble's hands-on working method that intends to create 'a change in people's environment, to fill the gap between the people who inhabit the city and the forces that govern how it has been made,' as Fran Edgerly stated in the round-table discussion. *The European International of self-building* is the ironic term Italian architect Simone Capra used to describe young collectives such as Assemble, Orizzontale and Raumlabor. Common to the working methods of many of these practices is a call to direct action, in which 'architecture becomes a tool in the service of citizens,' claimed Stefano Ragazzo of Orizzontale in the talk.

Assemble redefines the role of the architect today. They not only collaborated with residents in North Liverpool to challenge oppressive planning initiatives through re-building housing and public space, but also helped provide employment in the neighbourhood through the establishment of the Granby Workshop, a community-orientated manufacturer of architectural ceramics. Similarly, members of the collective continue to be involved in Baltic Street Playground, a permanent child-led space in east Glasgow, as well as in the experimental music venue Café Oto in London, built with the rubble found outside it.

Pragmatism is a word reiterated constantly, a concept that manifests itself in a number of forms: from the hands-on and self-initiated projects of Assemble and Orizzontale, to the entrepreneurial schemes of Assemble, Public Practice and Real Foundation, all respond to this sense of urgency. Luca Montuori refers to a *pragmatic utopia*. Pop-up architecture,

often temporary interventions, are emblems of this epoch. 'Starting from little things and establishing relationships in the here and now of everyday life may be the first step in finding an antidote to this situation,' writes Stefano Ragazzo (Orizzontale). Tactical urbanism is frequently cited: low-cost, small and often non-permanent constructions that strive to improve local neighbourhoods and public spaces. Montuori refers to the Italian philosopher Umberto Galimberti's *Il viadante della filosofia* which describes *wayfarer's ethics* in contemporary society 'finding our way towards an unforeseeable future that must be confronted through a balance of strategies and tactics anchored in three-dimensional reality'.

The second case study *New Publics* brought together the practices of Alison Crawshaw, David Knight (DK-CM) and Finn Williams (Public Practice), who see themselves as part of a generation who 'increasingly step across sectors and beyond traditional roles to build new forms of publicness.' Each practice contributed to a range of studies that debated publicness from different positions within and beyond the planning system. Public Practice is a social enterprise founded by Finn Williams and Pooja Agrawal that installs a new generation of architects, urbanists and planners within local government to improve the quality and *equality* of everyday places. *Making Planning Popular* is DK-CM's research project, and it provides the first on-line and revolutionary tool *Building Rights* to transfer knowledge about planning from politicians and developers into the hands of the layman. *Abusivismo edilizio* (unlawful building) in Rome was the subject of Alison Crawshaw's study *The Politics of Bricolage* which displayed Crawshaw's work with local residents in the Valle Borghesiana.

Public Practice strives to plan for the public good. It again redefines the role of the architect, this time acting as a social enterprise that positions talented professionals at the heart of policymaking. As Williams illustrated, the proportion of architects working in the public sector in the UK dropped from 49% in 1976 to less than 1% in 2016. He sees Public Practice 'as a way of rebuilding the public sector's capacity to plan proactively'.[1]

Neave Brown and Kate Macintosh, pioneers of British social housing in the sixties and seventies, are among the heroes of this generation, a long way away from the star architects of more recent times. Indeed, values and aspirations usually associated with the sixties reappear frequently. The marches against gun violence in the US united hundreds of thousands

of young protestors—numbers not seen since the sixties civil rights movements—an unprecedented 6 million were brought to the streets by the global climate strikes, and the nascent *movimento delle sardine* is galvanising young Italians to take action. And there have been many more such manifestations. The desire to create a more egalitarian society and the focus on a sharing society that has also given form to communal living and working spaces are just two of the common factors. But the differences could not be more notable; while the sixties was characterised by optimism, hedonism and economic prosperity, these are decidedly pessimistic times, and young architects are responding to a sense of impending catastrophe. As Reinier de Graaf concluded in his lecture, 'there is a deeply functional dimension to knowing that you are fucked'; and Phin Harper affirms that 'millennials are aware of the injustices foisted on the world by another generation' and will not 'do business as usual'.

Arguably some of these social/economic conditions are inherent to Italian society, and Italian architects have battled with similar challenges over several decades, a point emphasised by many of the Italian speakers. It is not fortuitous that we are witnessing a renewed international attention to Italian architects of the sixties and seventies, such as Superstudio and Team X, as well as contemporary architects and critics, such as Baukuh, San Rocco and Pier Paolo Aureli.

The Italian practice Fosbury Architecture has a particularly bleak view of the contemporary scene. Numerous unfinished buildings and infrastructure in Italy are the subject of their survey *Incompiuto: The Birth of a Style* which cites *incompiuto* as the most prominent Italian architectural style since WWII. Their attention focuses on research more than practice, skills employed in *Mean Home* curated by Real Foundation, founded by Jack Self. 'In recent years a new discourse has emerged about the social role of the architect and their obligations to society as a whole. The most pressing question is not what we should build, but for whom,' writes Jack Self.

At a time when houses are often seen above all as assets and only secondarily as homes (see, Reinier de Graaf), the housing crisis has become one of the most critical global challenges. Real's investigative research project *Mean Home* united Real, Adam Nathaniel Furman and Fosbury Architecture. Basing their research extensively on statistics in order to design the average home, Fosbury Architecture designed a home for the British,

and Real an Italian one. A colour scheme was produced together with Adam Nathaniel Furman.

Self also reinvents the role of the architect, concentrating on the socio-economic system that perpetuates inequality. He contemplates alternative models of ownership and the formation of socio-economic power relationships in space, themes successfully combined in the *Home Economics* exhibition he co-curated with Finn Williams and Shumi Bose for the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2016.

Jack Self talks about 'addressing the ordinary, designing the typical and reconfiguring the everyday' while Finn Williams reiterates 'the need for architects to work on ordinary briefs for ordinary people'.[2]

Meanwhile, Adam Nathaniel Furman's sensual forms and patterns, dazzling colours and multiple historical styles are anything but ordinary. Rather than redefine the role of the architect, Furman instead endeavours to redefine architectural form and identity by breaking boundaries that he considers exclusively heteronormative. *Presenting as Progressive Practicing through Exclusion* is how Furman depicts contemporary practice.

While this generation strives to create a more inclusive society, does it risk generating a new kind of conformism that excludes those architects who are more preoccupied with developing the language of architecture than confronting exclusively societal challenges? Muf is a reference figure for a multitude of young architects. However, for many decades, Muf was a counter-voice to mainstream British architecture. Will architects as diverse as Furman and Supervoid also prove to be exceptions? Marco Provinciali at Supervoid writes that millennial architects' research is often more concerned with the 'architect's field of action, rather than with architecture itself', an issue also raised by Maria Claudia Clemente in the *Mean Home* discussion. Rowan Moore commented in his lecture that millennial architecture 'in terms of its architecturalness is not really changing the world, it is not really creating something new...'.

But perhaps the feeling that time is running out and the necessity to redefine the architect's role and design a braver world before it is too late—obliterates any other concern.

The Asset Class
Architecture in the 21st Century

Reinier de Graaf

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Were architects ever in control? What if the strange stylistic hoops we have seen over the last 50 years had nothing to do with architecture? What if we witnessed not a succession of architectural styles, but a fundamental change in the role of buildings altogether? What remains of the history of architecture once we blatantly regard it as a function of the economy?

Buildings cost money; buildings earn money. Until the 1970s the latter barely registered on anyone's radar—least of all architects. All of that changed once the neo-liberal revolution of the 1980s identified buildings as an asset class. From a means to provide shelter, buildings become a vehicle to generate financial returns—not to use, but to be owned and traded. Public housing associations were privatised; homeownership rose dramatically. By converting large numbers of people from tenants into owners, the prevailing powers also garnered political sway. Owning one's own home gave people a stake in the system. Locked into an inescapable financial reality, they had little alternative but to sympathise with the economic agenda of the Right. The new homeowners formed an instant conservative constituency.

Nearly forty years on, the allegiance between the middle class and the Right has been exposed as a marriage of inconvenience. The conservative revolution had relied on two pillars: the endless rise of property values (to maintain the desire for homeownership) and wage moderation (to maintain the economy's competitive power). It was only a matter of time before they would clash. With property appreciating in value faster than incomes could rise, homes became ever more unaffordable; each new generation of buyers suffered more from the price increases that guaranteed the previous owners their profit. Over time, the basic possibility of owning one's home got progressively beyond the reach of more and more people.

The effects of the conservative revolution on the architectural profession too have been significant. 'Thought production' in the form of ideological manifestos has come to a standstill. Architecture, like other sectors of the economy, has become

a value proposition, with all the associated risks and uncertainties, and with buildings obeying a vastly different logic. The prevailing term 'real estate' is indicative: it signifies the replacement of the architect by that of the economist as the expert on the built environment. Architecture has become inexplicable on its own terms. The logic of a building no longer primarily reflects its intended use but instead serves to promote a generic desirability in economic terms. Judgment 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.

Ever since the 1980s, architecture and marketing have been indistinguishable, with the phenomenon of the 'starchitect' as the ultimate symbol of the convergence. The entire process through which architecture is produced has become subject to a curious reversal: computer renderings precede technical drawings, the sale of apartments precedes their design, the image precedes the substance, and the salesman precedes the architect. Perhaps Aldo van Eyck's famous tirades against postmodernism in the 1980s were nothing more than an expression of frustration that somehow our work had been hijacked. In hindsight, we may wonder whether there was ever such a thing as postmodern architecture at all. Once buildings were discovered as a form of capital, they could operate only 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 program: to universally share the blessings of science and technology. But once buildings are identified as a means of return, the economy of means—one of modern architecture's main features—can just as easily work against the original ideology: no longer a way to reach the largest number of people but simply a way to maximise profits.

Modern architecture's social mission—the effort to establish a decent standard of living for all—seems a thing of the past. Nearly twenty years into the new millennium, it is as though the previous century never happened. Despite ever-higher rates of poverty and homelessness, large social housing estates are being demolished with ever greater resolve. At the same time, owned-but-empty apartments have become an integral part

of the fabric of any major city. Residences dark at night, sometimes entire quarters of them, can be found throughout London, Paris and New York. China's phantom new towns, allegedly all sold out, carry no visible sign of inhabitation. Vancouver recently introduced a 'vacancy tax' on the many empty properties bought by shell companies.

The proliferation of unoccupied residential space meanwhile covers the full array of building types, from perimeter blocks in Spain to suburban tract homes in Florida. Its apotheosis is the unoccupied ultrathin residential tower. With no residents present, its interiors are on permanent display. The unoccupied residential tower represents asset value in its purest form: exemplary of how, in its terminal stage, the annexation of architecture by capital requests the exorcism of the human condition. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder; to appreciate it in full, we must remain outside.

Tainted Love
Simultaneously vilified and idolised, millennial architects are carving out work in an economy stacked against them

Phineas Harper

Phineas Harper is Director of Open House and Open City and former Deputy Director of the Architecture Foundation

In a 1907 Cambridge dissertation, the academic Kenneth John Freeman catalogued an array of gripes ancient Greeks commonly directed at the young of their day. Widely miscredited to Socrates, the passages list such laments as 'bad manners, contempt for authority, disrespect of elders and a love for chatter in place of exercise'. If these 3,000-year-old complaints seem familiar, it's because they are. Adults have always, it would seem, treated the young with contempt.

Many millennials, the generation born between the early 80s and late 90s, are now striding into midlife, yet, like their ancient Greek ancestors, they still endure a bewildering array of snipes from older pundits. Last year, *The Spectator* magazine asked 'Is sex too messy for millennials?' while the *Financial Times* claimed 'millennials are less entrepreneurial and fail more often'. Accusations as broad as these are clearly preposterous, and yet both deriding and idolising millennials has become a curiously enduring obsession. Do they share curious demographic traits across their global population of 2 billion 380 million? Are millennials interesting enough to merit this scrutiny? Or are they, as the newspapers would have us believe, just slackers with boring sex lives?

Traditionally, architecture has been a profession with a circumspect view of the cult of youth. Once, architects could be comfortably middle-aged, sporting wrinkles, offspring and mortgages, yet still be described as 'emerging'. Architecture was accepted as a game for old hands over young guns. Unusual amid a wider culture that venerated ephemeral nubility, was our lauding of age and experience. Louis Kahn was in his fifties before he got into his stride. Sigurd Lewerentz did his best work in his eighties. While the lithe rising stars of music and fashion filled their evenings with wild parties, so-called young architects would more likely read bedtime stories to their children and schedule prostate examinations.

But since the turn of the millennium, the faces of emerging architecture have become dramatically younger as nearly every architectural institution has established some programme directly targeting young designers for early recognition. Mixing the virginal myth of untainted youth with the appeal of the authorial designer, we have spawned a new and marketable commodity: the young architect.

Part of young architecture's seductiveness is intrinsically linked to a wider general lust for the new. You can see this in the language architects use to heap praise on work they enjoy: avant-garde, cutting edge, radical, contemporary—all these terms are simply synonyms for the new. This very series *Brave New World: New Visions in Architecture* foregrounds newness so prominently that the world 'new' appears twice in its title. The positivity placed on newness is perhaps surprising considering how many architects claim to be critical of consumerism and espouse timeless values of continuity and craft. Yet when it comes to architectural culture, we are very much consumerists—wanting new things for the sake of them being new. At architectural biennales and exhibitions, it often feels that newness is revered more highly than goodness.

Therein lies the catch for the young architect. Their inexperience, once dismissed by a haughty profession, is now prized but indelibly linked to novelty. Young architects quench our thirst for the new, but for how long? To adopt the 'young architect' mantle can grant some measure of hype, but alongside an implicit expectation of constant reinvention amidst a marketplace that bores quickly and pays poorly.

How does a generation simultaneously vilified and idolised reveal itself through architectural work? In the UK, the 2008 financial crash led to a deep economic slump but a wave of new practices. Young designers struggling to get jobs in large offices started their own practices instead. These new firms found work amid the downturn in temporary projects and arts initiatives. Assemble, We Made That, Agents of Change, DK-CM, Practice, Abberant, Baxendale, Studio Weave and many others threw themselves into pop-up projects that found voice in an aesthetic language of temporariness.

Initially a pragmatic response to swinging government cuts hollowing out public commissioning budgets, pop-up architecture became a fetishised look in its own right. Studio Weave, for example, were once booked to appear on the BBC Culture Show but were cut after the filming was complete. The producers

explained that they were dropped because their work 'looked too professional'. They didn't look like 'kids chancing it', which was the story the BBC wanted to tell. Austerity Britain liked the idea of young architects with jobs, so long as their hands were dirty.

The trap of affected provisionality is doubly frustrating. Practices yearning to take on substantial buildings are pigeonholed to a life of wielding two-by-fours, while the discipline of temporary architecture is devalued by its association with inexperience. Pop-up should occupy a major role in urban development, a way of prototyping and refining ideas within incremental urban strategies. Instead pop-up has been conflated with youth to provide a sop—giving a quick hit of newness on a paltry budget.

In Japan, millennials also face stiffer challenges than their baby boomer parents, but of a different character to British purveyors of pop-up. Once, driven by a culture of demolishing and building from scratch, young Japanese architects could expect a steady supply of opportunities to build. Now, as Japan's economy has stagnated, young architects cannot net the same calibre of moneyed clients that their elders enjoyed. Instead, they are turning to lower-budget tactics, taking advantage of existing built fabric and deploying lighter-touch interventions.

In contemporary Japan, where unemployment, particularly among the young, has become chronic and inequality and poverty are growing, new community practices based on sharing have appeared among the young. Founded in 2012, the Tokyo-based practice MNM have, for example, refurbished a small 1977 house into a shared dwelling for seven young adults. A lightweight gable extrudes from the façade, providing a shared veranda, while the multiple bedrooms are bundled back-to-back, skirted by a thin corridor. Seven adults platonically sharing a home is common in Europe but represents a new paradigm in Japan, enabled by millennial architects facilitating changing social norms with canny designs in the face of shrinking opportunities. Japan, however, like the UK, is a wealthy, mature democracy, and though inequality and homelessness are rising, extreme poverty is rare. Millennials in South Africa face a different context.

South Africa became a democracy 24 years ago with the fall of apartheid. Yet, when the country is just nine percent white, why are so few new South African architecture firms led by black practitioners? 'On average a black South African student is supporting nine people with their income when they leave

university,' says Johnno Bennet, founder of Johannesburg-based architecture and urbanism studio 1to1. 'There's huge pressure when you finish to both pay your debt back to the bank and support your family. So how could you break away to start a company? Why would you take that risk? You wouldn't do that—fuck that!' In the legacy of apartheid, the white nine percent own upwards of 70 percent of the land, while the wealthiest 10 percent own 95 percent of all assets, from mines and companies to factories and art—a difficult context to start out as a young black designer.

Furthermore, the architectural culture of South Africa is still rooted in a colonial attitude that the construction of buildings is the only way architectural thinking can effect change. Bennett and his peers are challenging that consensus with work that might not be widely recognised as architecture at all, but rather as social infrastructure, working intensely and methodically in townships and city centres with poor communities: 'We don't do buildings. We do social inventions.' In the UK, the millennial provisional aesthetic deftly avoided stepping on the toes of established firms. In South Africa, on the other hand, young designers are directly challenging the validity of conventional practice, questioning the conventions of boomer architecture. Bennett knows his work agitates older generations. 'When you start to do stuff which touches on these subterranean questions,' he says, 'what was your role in apartheid? What was your role in white privilege?—When you start to pull on those little fibres, people become endemically reactive.'

The work of millennial architecture is as diverse as the challenges it faces. Sometimes those challenges are small, like an obsession with novelty, which commodifies the young. Sometimes they are big, like the breakdown of a social contract around access to housing. Sometimes they are huge, like an abject failure to address the legacy of systemic racism.

If there is a shared trait of millennial architects, it is not their love of a particular diet or online dating app. It is not their sexual habits or work ethic. It is that millennials are aware of the injustices foisted on the world by another generation, and, rather than continuing business as usual, they are seeking to address them, both through their practice and by reinventing practice itself.

Ways of Listening

Assemble

Assemble is a multi-disciplinary collective in London, founded in 2010

Assemble is a group of people working co-operatively to realise architectural, design, and socially motivated work. Together, we have realised a varied body of work spanning across different scales and mediums, including strategic and organisational development, product design and manufacturing, curation and programming, and the construction of full-scale building projects. As a result of the interests and skills of the people working as part of Assemble, our collective roles within projects regularly extend beyond that of commissioned designer. This approach to practice has, at times, made space for us to have an ongoing role in projects and allowed us to be involved in their continued realisation. As a result, the complex, evolving and meaningful personal relationships we have experienced have challenged our collective understanding of how the built environment is made. Examples of these projects include Granby Four Streets (Liverpool), Baltic Street Adventure Playground (Glasgow) and OTOProjects (London).

Assemble has been involved in a number of projects as part of the community-led effort to rebuild the neighbourhood of Granby, Liverpool. For the past few decades, the residents of Granby have been actively working to take control of their neighbourhood in an environment where the Council gradually rescinded their responsibilities and withdrew, leaving houses boarded up and the physical fabric of the area deteriorating. A resourceful, creative and tenacious group of residents started to bring the neighbourhood back to life by clearing, planting, painting and campaigning. Assemble have worked, and continue to work, with the Granby Four Streets CLT (Community Land Trust) on a number of projects that have developed out of the hard work done by local residents to help build a community that is connected and has agency. These projects include the refurbishment of the ten Victorian terraced houses on Cairns Street; Granby Winter Garden, a public garden created from two derelict houses on Cairns Street; and the establishment of Granby Workshop, a community-orientated manufacturer of architectural ceramics, whose first range of products were developed as part of the 2015 Turner Prize and utilised in the local renovations.

Baltic Street Adventure Playground (BSAP) is a child-led space in Dalmarnock, East Glasgow, a project that developed from

Assemble at Sugarhouse Studios
(Stratford, London) 2015

a public art commission undertaken by Assemble with Create London in 2013. The playground is a space where children aged six to twelve years can play freely. The child-led approach places children at the heart of decision-making, increasing their confidence, their capacity for independent action and their ability to affect change. Currently open seven days a week, it supports an outdoor nursery project and free food for the community on site. Two members of Assemble have remained on the playground's Board since its inception, and the collective continues to provide support by helping to build infrastructure for the playground on the advice of the children who play there.

OTOProjects is a purpose-built workshop and performance space for the experimental music venue Café OTO in Dalston, London. The building occupies a disused site adjacent to the Café. Built from rubble found on site, it is a single, monolithic volume for experiential and educational performance. Assemble constructed OTOProjects with a team of sixty volunteers over the summer of 2013, and the project was delivered in association with the Barbican. Assemble has worked on exhibitions, performances and renovations both within and outside the building since its inception.

Granby Four Streets, Baltic Street Adventure Playground and OTOProjects all illustrate different approaches to work that has developed through incremental collaborative processes, as well as Assemble's approach to practice—hands-on and interdisciplinary—employing a range of means to make spaces that support independence, creativity and difference. Members of Assemble have spoken widely about our collective relationship to, and perspective on, these projects. When Assemble were approached by the British School at Rome to develop an exhibition in Rome, it felt apt to extend this invitation for discourse and representation to our collaborators —an opportunity for those who live, work and play in these spaces to describe and present these places from their perspective. The exhibition *Ways of Listening* became a lens through which to reflect upon the experience and the reality of long-term collaborative work through the gaze of the residents, workers and volunteers who helped to realise the projects and who continue to shape the outcomes of the projects day-to-day.

After embarking on a process of recording interviews with collaborators, with a view to creating a sound piece for the exhibition, we came to the conclusion that this approach was a bit pre-emptive; we felt that we were prompting and
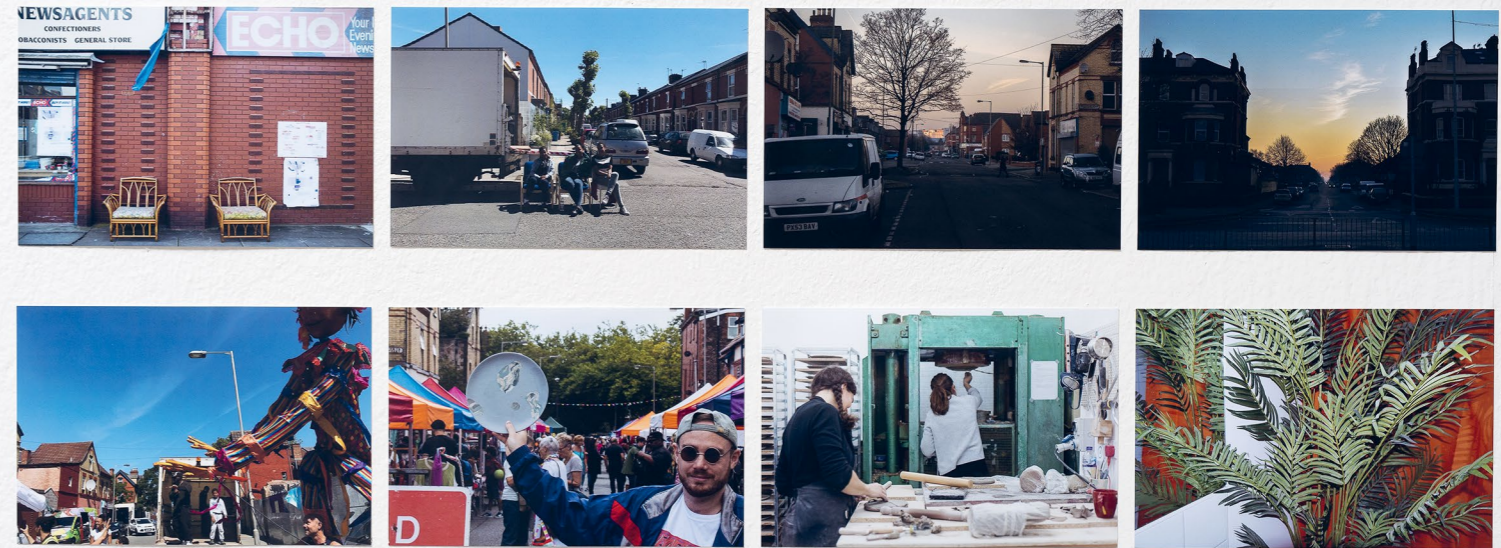
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steering responses from the people we were interviewing. We then changed tack, focusing instead on the idea of a group show, gathering exhibition contributions via an open call to people involved in all three projects. The call wasn't without limitations—we had to be able to transport the contributions with us on our Ryanair flight to Rome.

Receiving photos, poems, drawings, paintings, videos, music, Google street-view screen shots and even some detritus from the ground at Baltic Street Adventure Playground, we were heartened by the solidarity and energy expressed through the responses and outcomes to our call for contributions. We are thankful to those who made new work for the exhibition, which included reflective writing from Granby Four Streets CLT member Hazel Tilley; a painting by Jacqueline Kerr, a key member of the original Granby Workshop team; an essay from Lee Ivett, the Chair of the BSAP Board, in which he advocates a 'learning through doing' model for urban and architectural development, where communities have the space and agency to test ideas and self-generate their environments accordingly; sculptures created by the children of BSAP as part of an art-making workshop with artist-in-residence Lauren Gault; and a performance from OTOProjects artists Daniel Blumberg and Ute Kanngiesser, who generously volunteered their time to travel to Rome to be part of the exhibition's opening programme. Special mention should also be extended to Ute's son, who very generously lent us his t-shirt, which features artwork he created during a children's workshop at OTOProjects.

After the de-install of the exhibition, we were pleased to receive the news that the Granby Four Streets CLT won a funding package for the development of ten additional properties in the neighbourhood, in which Assemble will be involved. Granby Workshop is looking to expand into a larger space; the lease for the site OTOProjects occupies has been extended (the project was originally conceived as a temporary installation); and Baltic Street Adventure Playground has plans to nurture playgrounds on five new sites across Glasgow, including an early learning programme.

For us, *Ways of Listening* was a celebration of love, support and the strength of community—a rich and personal collection of work, reflecting upon daily life for a handful of people in Dalston, Dalmarnock and Granby. Having a moment to reflect on the value of Assemble's on-going relationship with these projects

Assemble: *Ways of Listening*, BSR, 2018

has highlighted the breadth of personal experiences across each project. This work has involved emotional, as well as professional labour. Maintaining Assemble's collective structure—and approach to practice—is a craft in itself like any other productive act or design. The value and skill in this craftsmanship lie in navigating the risk of failure.

Ways of Listening was made possible through contributions from, and the generosity of, Takiyah Daly, Paula Frew, Jacqueline Kerr, Sumuyya Khader, Vicki Opomu, Michelle Peterkin-Walker, Hazel Tilley, Granby Workshop, The Guardian, the children of Baltic Street Adventure Playground, Alistair McCall, Will Cooper, Lauren Gault, Laura Harrison, Lee Ivett, Robert Kennedy, Alan Kennedy, Daniel Blumberg, Ute Kanngiesser, Ross Lambert, Lia Mazzari, Cressida Kocienski, Onyee Lo, Leah Millar, Tom Wheatley, Billy Steiger, Seymour Wright, Marina Engel and the British School at Rome.

Assemble: *Ways of Listening*, BSR, 2018

Baltic Street Adventure Playground
Dalmarnock, East Glasgow, Scotland
2013 –

Baltic Street Adventure Playground is a child-led space in Dalmarnock, East Glasgow where children six to twelve years of age can play freely and deeply. The playground is easy to access and children are able to come and go as they choose. The site is looked after by a team of staff who support the children in their play, cook food daily and provide warm and waterproof clothes. Baltic Street argues for the continued relevance of the adventure playground as a counterpoint to modern urban childhood. The child-led approach places children at the heart of decision-making, increasing their confidence, their capacity for independent action and their ability to affect change.

The project developed out of a public art commission undertaken by Assemble with a group of children from Dalmarnock in 2013. Two members of Assemble have remained on the playground's Board since its inception. They continue to provide support by helping to build infrastructure on the advice of the children who play on site.

8.

Assemble: *Ways of Listening*, BSR, 2018

Assemble
The Ephemeral and the City

Simone
Capra

Simone Capra is co-founder and Co-Director of stARTT, founded in Rome in 2008

For many reasons, the collective Assemble is one of the most significant practices on Britain's new architectural scene. It is a multidisciplinary group that focuses primarily on inhabited space and architecture. Included are people with backgrounds in the humanities and in communication. This points to an attitude dear to Italian architecture, where the architect is considered an intellectual who expresses himself in his works and not only someone who offers technical services, though this attitude is not always shared abroad.

Assemble is also, despite Brexit, one of the most interesting practices in the new European architectural context. They are millennials and belong to that group of architects we might call the European International of self-building, which is what they practice in various ways, based on solid, well-grounded research. Together with the Berlin Raumlabor and Plastique Fantastique, the Rome Orizzontale and Madrid's Enorme Studio (ex PKMN), they bring into play the relationships between self-building, social commitment, participation and ideas about the city, as well as their shared reference to the experiments and projects of the architects of Team X and the second avant-gardes. I don't know to what extent—and we mentioned this briefly in the discussion in Rome—but certainly the student marches for free education in the past, in Britain and especially in London, must have shaped the imagination and commitment of this group of architects.

Assemble started their practice by engaging with the city through small installations. Temporary architecture was used to explore the possibilities and uses of a place to improve the life of citizens. Subsequently, the collective has developed an approach towards the study of the urban situation through increasingly complex projects. These tackle such issues as the construction of public space and the renewal of the urban fabric without the gentrification effect, as in the case of the Granby Four Streets project.

Their interventions are always based on procedural and participatory involvement in the planning and development of the project and in its construction. This commitment

to collaborative design is also reflected in their model of production and organization, which involves the rotation of project leaders, group decision-making and promoting manual labour through self-building.

Their works are beautiful and refined. They explore the *terrains vagues* and the vacant lots of the metropolis (Folly for a Flyover), the aesthetic and artistic potential of the 'as found' (Cineroleum) and the promotion of self-building, while opposing the pauperistic aesthetics in vogue among architects in the tertiary sector (Yardhouse).

Public space is the heart of the city. The focus is on the shared urban space, on the empty space that everybody walks through, the space between and not of... The city is what it is because it shares facilities — for them and for us it is the place for community life.

Shifting / Layering / Collaborating

Orizzontale

Orizzontale is an architects' collective in Rome, founded in 2010

Every generation of architects ask themselves what role the profession plays in society. Sometimes, the need (or obsession?) of architects to identify their position precisely has had the opposite effect, isolating architects in debates within the discipline itself. In our opinion, hybridization, a move that is essential for a profession that works in an area that is by definition heterogeneous, now seems an almost obvious starting point for our generation. Obviously, it is virtually impossible to speak in the name of a whole generation, but when common patterns can be identified amongst professionals who are contemporaries but from very different geographical and cultural backgrounds, it is important to explore them, since they may signify much more than a repositioning of the discipline. At the end of the 2010s, new professional collectives emerged across Europe, including Assemble and Orizzontale, and their working methods have elements in common: architecture becomes a tool in the service of citizens. The guiding thread of many of their projects is action: testing their ideas and visions directly in the field, promoting projects and changes personally, and then analyzing the consequences and critiquing them. In this way the stages of research, design and construction cross-fertilise and influence each other. We can describe this new working method through three actions: shifting, layering and collaborating.

Shifting
We start from a fundamental question: What can design and architecture do to foster the creation of a better habitat? The question may seem banal at first sight, but the contradictions we are experiencing in the contemporary city show how this principle has been neglected over the last few decades. How can we change our perspective by seeking to meet citizens' needs? Inhabiting a space, whether physically or figuratively, becomes a design tool, creating sometimes-unexpected synergies between architect and community. It is a new way of shaping the human habitat, by promoting the creation of spaces and rituals in which the community can recognise itself. We are not only talking about an ancestral relationship with the space, but about seeking a natural link between inhabitant and habitat. In the Post-Anthropocene age, this consideration should guide all architectural processes, ranging from the use of recycled–upcycled materials to the broader idea of the city's reproductive cycle.

Layering

Architecture thus becomes an open process that welcomes input as it progresses and enables the project to better respond to the needs of the inhabitants. The temporary transformation of the inhabited space is used as a design tool, by which to gain information on the possible future; we are therefore talking about a spatial and temporal layering of a place or incremental urbanism. Modification of the space—sometimes even daily—enables testing and working out specific solutions. At times, it is precisely this constant change that stimulates the collective imagination to develop new projects. Hence the objective is not only to modify the space materially, but also to stimulate the creation of stronger communities that are also aware of the role they can play in transforming their everyday habitat.

Collaborating

Working on the habitat means affecting various aspects of the inhabitant. Thinking that the tools of the architect or designer are sufficient takes us back to a mechanistic view of the inhabited space, which seeks to govern human complexity through rationality, isolating the inhabitants and forcing them into a system of social relationships that complies with the project. We are experiencing the consequences of this approach today in the contemporary city. The act of collaborating in a multidisciplinary approach and across-the-board attempts to explore all the ramifications that develop during the process does, in turn, create new ones.

Obviously the tools that motivate collaboration are many and varied, ranging from self-building to the organization of workshops and events. These always adopt a system of collective cooperation, in which each actor plays a specific role according to their skills, without however becoming isolated. In fact, this collaborative model aims at improving each actor's skills and has the ambitious objective of developing possible new synergies between habitat and inhabitant.

These three actions, animated by a pragmatic purpose, but the fruit of a new social sensibility, seem to be a positive reaction to the rather bleak times the whole of Europe is experiencing. Our hope, our objective is to start from little things and establish relationships in the here and now of everyday life, which may be the first step in finding an antidote to this situation.

Orizzontale: *Iceberg — Perestrello 3.0*, Rome, 2017

New Publics
A Conversation

Alison Crawshaw, DK-CM and Public Practice

Alison Crawshaw founded her practice in London in 2016

DK-CM is an architecture planning and research studio, founded in London in 2012 by David Knight and Cristina Monteiro

Public Practice is a not-for-profit social enterprise, founded by Finn Williams and Pooja Agrawal in 2017

The 2008 financial crisis ushered in a decade of austerity and deregulation that has reshaped the role of the state in Britain and Italy, and in turn reshaped the public life of our cities. The generation of architects who started their careers under these conditions is increasingly stepping across sectors and beyond traditional roles to build new forms of publicness.

Alison Crawshaw, DK-CM and Public Practice are three organisations that have emerged in this context. What follows is a conversation between Alison Crawshaw, David Knight and Cristina Monteiro (DK-CM), and Finn Williams (Public Practice) that took place in London in 2019, prompted by selecting points from their collective New Publics manifesto exhibited earlier this year at the British School at Rome.

PLANNING MUST BECOME POPULAR
Planning is our collective tool for deciding the future of our environment, but its democratic potential is increasingly compromised by corporate interests. This democratic potential must be restored in a way that recognises that the public is an agent of planning, not just its recipients.

David Knight: This is taken from my PhD research *Making Planning Popular* and the design project that came out of it *Building Rights*, a proposal for an online forum for the public to share planning knowledge. It was directly informed by projects that Finn and I had already collaborated on: *SUB-PLAN: A Guide to Permitted Development* (2009) and *The Rule of Regulations* (2008).

Cristina Monteiro: Those projects unpicked the opaque and technocratic language of regulation for a general audience. They took specific regulations and translated and illustrated them to make them more accessible. The translations reveal the impact that they have on the built environment, or what is actually possible under their terms. In *SUB-PLAN*, you revealed the full potential of Permitted Development (PD), which is the UK law that defines what someone can build without formal planning permission, and handled it in a subversive and enabling way.

DK: A key discovery after we'd made that book and published it was that within weeks it was out of date. In response to how people were exploiting PD and to initiatives like our book, the government had moved quickly to update the legislation. I vividly remember us discussing, Finn, whether or not we would keep updating the book forever, or instead whether we should find other means of building connections between planning knowledge and people.

CM: Something that we've all been trying to work out is how to make the language around the built environment something that people can contribute to. And it might not be through a translation, it might be through other forms of media such as social media and online discourse (as with *Building Rights*) or through film. At DK-CM we have been making films with children for Haringey Council, which explore how they read and interrogate place on their own terms.

Finn Williams: I'm interested in how *Making Planning Popular* explores the origins and pre-history of planning as an idea based on popular consent, and traces how this kind of social agreement became codified through the state rather than the people. Before we had a formal planning system, what got built was directly related to what forms of development were commonly accepted within a community. But the more planning got codified, the more it was lifted up to a national level, and the more distant it became from people's day-to-day understanding of development, and of their own role in giving that consent.

DK: Yes. The over-professionalisation you've just described was there from the start. If you look at the writing of people who were there at the genesis of planning, like Thomas Sharp, Clough Williams-Ellis, Patrick Abercrombie, all these guys were ultimately advocates of the professional classes taking responsibility for a nationalised right to build, on behalf of the rest of the population.

Most planning polemics of those early years, say 1900 to 1947, advocated a state-led system with some kind of class-hegemonic character. Although things have changed enormously, these assumptions were so fundamental at the outset that they're still present in some aspects of our planning system, and I believe that we can and should challenge them. And one way to challenge them is by looking at other models that pre-date our current system.

The Third Public Practice cohort, 2019

For example, the logic of the Arabic-Islamic city was that there was a space between the street and the home called the *fina* where there were no laws. There were elaborate laws about the street and the home, family structure and behaviour, but the *fina* was a deliberate grey area. People ran businesses in the *fina*, and buildings leaned into it to provide spaces where women could participate in the life of the street while still being veiled by the architecture. Such a planning law (or absence of a law) was obviously the product of a rich discussion about how to formulate the rules that shape place.

FW: Planning might start informally with one person complaining about their neighbour's wall, but it inevitably gets codified and formalised over time. For example in Christiania, the 'freetown' in Copenhagen set up outside of Danish law, when a provocative TV crew went in and started building their own structure to test how *free* it really was, the local community immediately said: 'You can't just build whatever you want here, we have a system. You have to say what it's going to be like, and there's a meeting once a month where we gather together to discuss it and take a vote.' And that's essentially the planning system! Within a couple of decades they have gone from anarchism to a local democratic model similar to ours.

DK: The biggest failing of post-war planning was the assumption that the endgame was a consensus, and that once we had consensus we could roll out the plan. Planning is a political space, so it must contain and embody difference, argument, heterogeneity, antagonism, dissent and debate. Its purpose is not to build consensus but to make decisions in the context of dissensus.

Alison Crawshaw: When we were talking about this at the *New Publics* opening, a member of the audience noted that our projects focus on policy rather than politics and, in doing so, avoid some of the destructive polarisation that characterises political discourse today. What I found in Rome in the periphery where I was working was that people were quick to define themselves as being left or right. I wanted to bypass these divisive self-categorisations, engage as many different voices as possible, and make space for negotiation and productive disagreement around tangible, spatial issues. That was the purpose of the meeting room in Borghesiana.

DK: What you describe sounds like politics to me. It's just not politics as currently practised.

Image Left: Bruce Grove Stories. DK-CM worked with filmmaker Alex Jones and local primary school children to document their local area in a series of films. This is multi-level engagement, allowing DK-CM to understand how the children understand their place whilst also enabling access to perceptions and opinions typically out of reach through conventional engagement processes. This work was undertaken in the context of DK-CM's architectural and strategic work, improving spaces and buildings in Bruce Grove, Haringey, 2019

FW: I think planning is always political, but good planning should try to transcend local or party politics. For me there's a big difference between what makes the public willing to be involved and what's in the public interest. The purpose of public planning and local government is to broaden representation of people beyond those who are directly impacted, to take into account a wider sense of society that crosses socio-economic divides. For me, it's vital that we try to stretch our perspective beyond the self-interest of individuals or communities, and that's the role of the public planner.

PLANNING BUILDS DEMOCRACY
Every citizen should have a say in how their city changes. Good planning gives a voice to the silent majority by advocating for broader communities, wider geographies, and longer horizons.

FW: There are two different ways of going about engaging the public in planning. One is teaching the public the rules and language of the planning system, and expecting them to somehow engage on the terms of the system itself. The other is the planning system learning how to listen to the public, and speak the language of reality. Planning needs to talk to people on their own terms—and through the media they're used to using. But even then, no matter how popular a social media platform is, it's still not going to take into account the people who haven't moved in yet, or their children. That's what is so important and exciting about the role of the public planner. You get to advocate for a broader public and wider set of values than the confines of a contract with a client. You can persuade developers to create benefits for communities beyond the red line boundaries of their sites, or make decisions that will benefit people who aren't even born yet.

CM: The 'silent majority' that this manifesto point refers to is, I suppose, the people who don't have an existing sense of entitlement or agency towards their environment. We need to be reaching these people and I think that one method is through environmental education from an early age.

When I first took part in engagement events as an architect, I was surprised at how much the general public talked about CCTV, parking and such like. But it's not a lack of imagination—these concerns are valid. People have seen local government cuts for so long, particularly in the context of austerity. Small things become big things and are symbolic of wider changes in society.

DK: Engagement has become codified. The public go to consultation events and 'perform' consultation. There are meaningful conversations happening every day about the environment that are not captured in those moments.

FW: Consultation is too often about asking 'Do you like this design we've already come up with?'. It forces people to be reactive, so it's not surprising many of the responses are reactionary. We need to get better at engaging people before the big decisions are made, by making the earlier stages of the planning process more tangible and inclusive. A number of our Public Practice Associates are working on this. Hannah Lambert, an Associate in Newham, has been co-producing a development at Custom House, working with local residents to write the brief and commission the design team. Hana Loftus has been working with communities in Parish Councils across South Cambridgeshire to develop design codes for their own villages. Or there's Jan Ackenhausen, whom DK-CM have been working with at Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation and who is running a new community-led design review panel.

CM: I think we need consultation stages like the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) construction stages, as a way of being clear about what is being discussed and when. Not led by the RIBA necessarily, but perhaps by another body.

FW: Exactly. I think there's no professional body that covers the full breadth of the field we work across. The institutions for architects, planners and engineers have each retreated into their own defensible spaces, leaving a no-mans-land which is undefined, but probably the most interesting area in terms of broadening our agency.

DK: Finn, Diana Ibáñez López and I teach a postgraduate architecture studio at the Royal College of Art, and I once asked our students how many of them wanted to one day qualify as an architect. Only one student put their hand up, and it was just to say 'What do you mean by an architect?'. Not one of them was willing to accept the received definition.

FW: I think we need to avoid a situation where architects don't feel able to say what they're doing is architecture just because it doesn't involve designing a building. We should be seeking to broaden the boundaries of the built environment professions so that they all see things like meaningful community engagement as part of the job, and don't see

their training as a limit on their ability to shape the world around them.

EVERYDAY PLACES CAN BE EXTRAORDINARY
Planning has the power to build better everyday environments, for everyone. Rather than creating exceptions to the norm, we work to raise the standards of normality itself.

FW: I made the move from private architectural practice to working for the public sector because I didn't want to work on projects with big budgets that only served a narrow public—the few who could afford it. In England, 94% of new homes are not designed by architects. I didn't want to be confined to the other 6%. I was always more interested in working on the built environment that normal people really use. That's why I chose to join Croydon Council, and then the GLA.

DK: There's something great when an architect designs for a client that isn't the direct client, especially when that indirect client is the public at large or the community that the literal client represents. This is what unites, in my head, the public work of the LCC Architects Department with the private speculation that was Georgian London. This is something that we talk about at DK-CM, that is, using our design skills, such as they are, to serve that broader need. We have had to tell councils sometimes that, on one level, they're not the client.

CM: I think we're all working in different ways to raise the quality of normal places. Common Ground, the charity, is an important reference for me. They created the 'Parish Map', a kind of collaborative craft-based mapping used to establish what's important, valued and distinctive about a particular place. They have produced an amazing series of publications about place, and about the cultural implications of mapping.

FW: Common Ground informed a small group of practices that were established in London in the early 2000s, including General Public Agency (where David and I worked) and Muf architecture/art (where Alison and Cristina worked), who created a counter-voice to the predominant architects of the time that claimed all the headlines. I think these practices played an important part in teaching us, and our generation, to take the existing reality of a place—not only physically but also socially—as our starting point.

Alison Crawshaw, DK-CM, Public Practice:
New Publics, BSR, 2019

DK: If I think about the generation of practices that we all worked and met in, despite being known for developing new forms of practice, they also are united by very strong aesthetic principles, though many don't assert them overtly. If you look further back, there was the 'community architecture' generation, working in the late 60s to early 80s who had experienced first-hand the post-war consensus model and had quite fundamental problems with it. The overwhelming feel of that period was a crisis of aesthetics and crisis of confidence, mirrored by a lack of faith in the professions of architecture and planning. And, of course, the start of the neo-liberal project. To me, the generation Finn is describing was distinctive because they talked about politics and society, and indeed new forms of practice, but ultimately were able to manifest that in form, shape and character. Barking Town Square, which Alison worked on at Muf, is a hugely distinctive space to be in. General Public Agency developed policy-level research that had an aesthetic language never seen before in that kind of document. That felt like the shift to me.

PLANNING IS A BALANCE BETWEEN CATCH UP AND CONJECTURE
In order to make a projection for the future, one must acknowledge and understand the terrain.

AC: This point came from a text that I read by an urbanist called Cassetti that described the history of the masterplans of Rome as being 'the story of the continuous pursuit of transformations, inserted a posteriori in an overall design of the future city'. The statement acknowledges that masterplans aren't definitive, that a lot of development happens spontaneously outside them or in ways that deviate from what was anticipated, and also that masterplans have a lifespan, that they will inevitably be rewritten or replaced. It seemed to me that to think of the production of masterplans in this way, to see them as an opportunity to analyse why a city has developed in one way rather than another, in order to inform how it can move forward, was a very positive take. In Rome, there is a huge amount of illegal building; a third of the city has been built without permission since WW2. Each time the authorities make a citywide masterplan they have to acknowledge that it is there. Successive masterplans have absorbed it and set out policies to address it whilst saying that it must not continue, which of course it does. It is a cycle of prohibition and condoning, rather than reflection and visioning, which is what the manifesto point is advocating for.

Alison Crawshaw, DK-CM, Public Practice:
New Publics, BSR, 2019

Alison Crawshaw, DK-CM, Public Practice:
New Publics, BSR, 2019

CM: In your own work in Rome, did you try to produce surveys that would enhance understanding of these places?

AC: There is a policy in the most recent citywide masterplan that sets out the terms for the recuperation and retrospective legitimisation of illegally built zones. It demands that the residents of each zone form a committee, hire an architect and develop neighbourhood plans. The intention of my project was to make a physical space for the policy meetings—a space in which to gather information on the neighbourhood and enhance understanding of it—which would underpin the neighbourhood plan.

DK: What I enjoy about this is the idea of a responsive planning that is partly propositional and partly about documentation. There's a sort of push and pull between those two states, like reading and writing. Back and forth. It's quite a positive statement to make for planning today. Particularly as the previous peak of public planning in the post-war years was very heroic and not very good at understanding what was going on in its path. It achieved a huge amount, but not much of it was particularly contextual.

FW: That heroic period of planning was often carried out from a distance. You see black and white photos of a few men pointing at maps and looking down on distant fields, which were treated as blank slates for building a 'new Jerusalem'. And you can see it in the use of zoning, where complex urban life was separated out into pure envelopes of single uses that could be seen and managed from a helicopter-view. But if there's one approach that unites the practices we've worked in, our own practices now, it's that they give value to what already exists.

DK: *Making Planning Popular* was based on the premise that, rather than focussing on the contextual methods of architects or planners, the context itself should be empowered to speak: people are constantly producing narratives of a place that are of value to us in terms of understanding what a place is and how it should change. But there are very few lines of connection between those narratives and how a planner or architect might typically read a place. We tend to rely on very codified moments of understanding rather than building new, more nuanced and open relationships.

AC: The other thing to mention on this point is that large-scale regeneration rolls out over ten, twenty, thirty years, and in that time the market and policies can completely change. When the

result does not fulfil the original plan, it is talked about as if it is a failure. Instead, we need to find a way to be propositional without the constant narrative of failed plans, and this is where conjecture comes in. We need ambitious visions that have some flexibility and open reflection built into them.

DIVERSE PLANNERS MAKE DIVERSE PLACES
Places and their populations are complex and don't benefit from being simplified. We value the diversity of the places we plan and reflect the diversity of the people we plan for.

FW: At Public Practice we believe it's really important that built environment professionals understand and reflect the communities we serve. At the moment we're recruiting practitioners with at least three years of professional experience. But the big drop-off in diversity is the transition from higher education to practice, and the transition from school to higher education. So to really make a difference in terms of diversity, we need to work further upstream. We'd like to get to the point where we can run a programme for teenagers, or create a foundation course that is genuinely serving the public of the future.

CM: I teach in an institution that actively tries to broaden the range of people who can access its courses, so I tutor students from very diverse backgrounds. But they can struggle despite the support we offer, and I think it's because the built environment hasn't been properly explored with them in earlier education.

AC: Another way to access under-represented demographics could be to ask for nominations for Public Practice recruits, as well as inviting applications from people who by default have the confidence and know-how to put themselves forward. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, for example, didn't initiate her run for congress herself. A group called Brand New Congress issued an open call for nominations, and her brother put her forward. She was a waitress and hadn't ever considered going into politics until she was approached.

FW: I'd love to do that for local government: a leadership programme to bring in a new, diverse generation of local politicians, with real understanding of spatial and environmental issues. Young practitioners coming out of architecture and planning schools today are motivated by emergencies like climate change and the housing crisis. And if there's one way of actually making an impact on these issues, it's through engaging with politics and planning.

New Publics
A Discussion on Public Space between Realism and Utopia

Luca Montuori

Luca Montuori is Professor of Urban Design at Roma Tre University and Assessore all'Urbanistica at the Comune di Roma

In order to compare architects who have differing working objectives, methods and outcomes, we could begin with what they have in common and then look at possible dialectics of their approaches to public spaces.

After 2008 and the following ten years of crisis that triggered a recalibrating of equilibriums and systems, we needed a radical revision in the relationship between research and the profession. This has been especially true in the case of the rapport with the public, in the ways of understanding the critical—and therefore political—modus operandi of architects vis-à-vis citizens and clients.

In the last ten years, we have witnessed a kind of polarisation that has led to the emergence of new forms of aggregation and collaboration of professionals from divergent sectors. These have manifested in streamlined and flexible structures, small firms that reject the logic of the 'brand', the new lingua franca (we now even find experts who can discern whether the architecture we are designing is 'Instagrammable' and therefore a consumable commodity on the global network). These new practices have oriented themselves towards local relationships within highly concrete and specific contexts. It is a return to a new realism as a kind of backlash to a world reduced to its media representation. Its ethos lies far from generic abstraction, instead reaffirming a design project as concept closely connected to something concrete and actual, the outcome of a specific political and economic process, often the effect of an established system.

The planning of small installations, pavilions, aspects of public spaces and tactics of intrusion into the daily lives of citizens—who are seen as the true patrons/users of the work—intertwines with a large-scale view of territorial complexity. This fusion is the hallmark of the desire to combine utopia with realism, abstraction with materiality.

Consequently, it is a completely different sort of polarisation from what we saw towards the end of the last century, which

had the profession on one side and the academy on the other, pragmatism on the one hand and a retreat into draughtsmanship and theory on the other.

Today, although pursuing different trajectories, the paths of A.Crawshaw, DK-CM, Public Practice, Supervoid—and most of the practices presented in the *Brave New World* cycle of debates and exhibitions—are joined together around the concept of 'pragmatic utopia'. It is an operational approach to the profession that allows for a clear overview of a potential horizon and provides a visionary framework for each specific intervention, even within an unpredictable and uncertain future. These are paths that combine strategies and tactics for transforming public space with a continual dialectic between formal and procedural aspects, all based on the functional approach of a profession with a new awareness of its social role.

It is no coincidence that many members of these practices have worked together in previous configurations and collaborations, sharing training and projects.

Among the four groups showing their work in this series, we can still distinguish between a 'formal' approach—in which the abstraction of the form is the foundational aspect of the project, with the theoretical elements confronting set conditions closely tied to the actual situation—and a 'procedural' approach, which regards the final form as the result of a field operation within the specific political and social situation where the project is developed.

DK-CM and Supervoid work within rigorous formal schemes. Their projects refer to a system of ideas expressed in a graphic representation that is part of a renewed naïve aesthetic— a highly structured and recognisable international trend that seeks to blend post-modern irony with a new realism. Their projects derive from a fresh interpretation of the 'parallel city', in which small pavilions, installations and landscapes become fragments emerging in the real world as narrative space, transporting each project towards a utopian level. It is a parabola that moves from utopia to pragmatism and then back to utopia. Such is the case with DK-CM's pavilion on the Thames 'Erith Lighthouse', which sought to evoke the port area's industrial past through the temporary structures that comprised the building, but which through the use of Pop Art colours stood out as a device detached from the non-figurative original pavilions.

Similarly, Supervoid, in their project for the La Mistica estate, used the portico as a formal device and metaphor for the Roman countryside, of which it becomes a narrative element.

Taking the opposite tack, Alison Crawshaw's and Public Practice's processes and interactions arrive at the shape of a project through the tactic of referencing everyday life—what Georges Perec called *l'infra-ordinaire*—as the core of their design activities. Their projects grow out of a concept of public space as a place of interaction of various processes and subjects, as a place of tensions, conflicts and relationships that organically give rise to the nature of the space. Alison Crawshaw's work on *Toponimi* in Rome was born in the field and developed through discovering the forms of illegal self-construction in the suburbs, in direct relationships with the inhabitants with whom she designs and builds a public pavilion. Then, in a second phase the operation is shifted through its aestheticisation towards utopia. It is a path in which the process has as its goal the artistic or design act—which, in turn, gives rise to an object that, independent of its context, becomes an abstraction or conceptualisation by 'transferring' itself, with a shift in scale, to the façade of the British School at Rome.

Public Practice evinces yet another attitude. This collective arose as a social enterprise that operates through transformation of associated forms as a whole, at times through normative means. It does so by integrating professionals, public administrative employees and various parties who seek to influence project practices through building strong ties with public entities operating in certain geographic areas.

Their goal is to affect planning decisions and procedures by directly influencing the structures from which the operations derive. So, it is not the construction of a process interacting with social forces, but instead the modification of the administrative structures that generate and implement all such processes. Unlike the previous examples, the goal is not to work on the ways an architect acts as interpreter of collective needs, but on the reworking of roles linking professionals, administrators and citizens, between those who provide the answers and those who pose the questions. It could be defined as an enzymatic process that obtains ramified effects on the overall physical construction of space by producing small modifications in the organising system itself. This process starts from the ways in which needs are read, and then translates them into equilibriums and actions, even before projects come up.

It's a challenge that begins with the interpretation of the roles of the architect and the planner within the process, but with the ambition of structurally changing the underlying approach to any project.

Given these considerations, it is now possible to circle back and reaffirm our initial assumption, namely, that through a shared interest in transforming the meaning of public space —in a comparison that showcases structurally divergent, sometimes even contrary approaches—we find a basic convergence on certain common themes. First of all, there is an interest in the real transformation of the spaces of everyday life and of the relationships of those who live in the designed spaces, through an established oscillation of pragmatism and utopia in continuous cross-referral. These arise from our second assumption—that of a renewed ethical attitude towards architecture and a critique of the context and attention to the sustainability of interventions, articulated in conjunction with governmental structures and local civic entities. Today, we no longer have any shared abstract ethos, born of some ideology or religion. Instead there is an ethics that has been dubbed 'the wayfarer's', which acknowledges the continuous change of environmental conditions and uses of spaces, whereby we are called upon to operate without any precise, predefined objective—finding our way towards an unforeseeable future that must be confronted through a balance of strategies and tactics anchored in three-dimensional reality.

Making Architecture

Supervoid

Supervoid is an architecture practice founded by Marco Provinciali and Benjamin Gallegos Gabilondo in Rome in 2016

Supervoid is an architecture office that works in 'traditional' ways, whatever that may mean. We don't see this choice as being either positive or negative. However, we reject that pervasive feeling of nostalgia for the lost role of architecture in our society and prefer to think of our discipline as a fundamental aspect of Western culture, in constant, though nonlinear, evolution. Certainly, we must be aware of the fact that in architecture it is always to a greater degree material conditions that determine its appearance, rather than the architect's imagination. Today these conditions are extremely unfavourable, at least here in Italy. In effect, it is difficult to describe the present problems of architecture as a generational issue, since they have far more to do with the political ethos of our times.

While millennial architects probably share a fragile socio-economic situation and are linked by a kind of solidarity in responding differently to common problems, in our view there is no such thing as 'millennial architecture'. This becomes evident when we analyze the broad spectrum of approaches to the profession adopted by the so-called 'young' architects (a rather reductive term). While this variety of approaches is not a novelty in the history of the discipline, it is worth pointing out how much of this research is concerned with redefining the limits of the architect's field of action, rather than with architecture itself, in a society that is showing less and less interest in the subject. This situation is reflected in or influenced by the lack of an actual critical discourse on strictly architectural questions, which would attempt to restore coherence to this mass of heterogeneous proposals. Probably what holds us together is a vague and problematic 'class consciousness', rather than a shared formal and theoretical approach.

We come after a generation which seriously believed that computational design would solve the problems of architecture, while we grew up in the increasing complexity of a perpetual state of crisis. This has had the effect of triggering a rather naïve reaction to the technological positivism that reigned until the 2000s, generating at times a more realistic and pragmatic approach to our work. In fact, we are disillusioned when it comes to the possibilities of architecture today, which we think of as a basically critical activity, in opposition to the narratives that still dominate academic discourse, not to mention the building

Supervoid: *La Mistica* construction-site, 2020

industry (it is not merely by chance that competitions are won by speaking of trees, not architecture).

Architectural production must, of necessity, be a critical activity, precisely because architecture is essentially public, since it is executed in the public sphere, and therefore claims importance whoever the client may be. The aim of someone who commissions a work of architecture, whether it be the state, a company or a private citizen, is always to gain social recognition or achieve self-representation through the execution of a project.

In this context, completing and hence delivering an architectural project to society becomes an extremely 'democratic' gesture, since, given its necessarily public character, architecture can reveal, criticise and ultimately contribute to changing present-day conditions in our society. The idea of the 'architect as a seismograph'[1], recording and reflecting the current situation through his/her work, is simply no longer enough for many of our generation.

The tools we use to build a relationship with the public dimension are, however, strictly architectural. We are concerned with designing spaces defined by walls, columns and ceilings, in such a way as to construct a discourse that has some relevance in this context and that triggers debate. In our opinion, this is a rational assessment of the limits of the profession, at least in Italy.

The redefinition, even the extension, of these limits is a phenomenon that is important from the socio-economic angle, and when it is accompanied by a political project for the management of urban development, it can effectively have an impact on the built environment.

This is what happened in Italy in the second half of the 20th century with programmes like INA-casa (a state-funded housing project); but social democracy, the political reality into which we were born, gradually disappeared as our generation was growing up. Consequently, the state no longer invests in architecture, and Italy (the country with the oldest average age after Japan) spends most of its resources on meeting the needs of the elderly.

In this situation, the only good news is that most of the buildings dating from those years are getting old at the same rate as the population and are now dilapidated. We will have to replace or renovate a large number of them to meet present-day demand,

not only in material but also spatial terms. In the next few years, we will need to make a great planning effort with regard to schools, state housing (whose percentage of the total number of buildings constructed has fallen from 20% in 1984 to 4% in 2005[1]), and public spaces. This could be the chance to revive the debate on the relationship between architecture and the public sphere.

Since Supervoid is an office based in Rome, a city built almost exclusively by private initiative, it often finds itself at the centre of constant negotiation between private and public interests. The aim of our work is to produce a project that is a significant synthesis of this opposition. The Parco della Mistica project is a good example of the design opportunities which this context still offers. This project is part of a larger urban intervention in a peripheral area of the city typical of the outlying Roman landscape, where conflictual elements coexist: monumental archaeological ruins, unplanned industrial sites, main roads, and finally, new public facilities. The project consists in the construction of a rectangular portico 110 x 55 metres in a farming community of four farmhouses arranged around a central space, which has fallen into disuse. The portico, a frequent element in Roman architecture, creates a new courtyard in the middle of the existing buildings, defining a space where fragments of the landscape are combined to make a garden. Marking a distinct break with the random development of this urban area, the portico acts as an element that brings order and establishes new relationships between the interiors of the buildings, the protected area of the courtyard and the noisy surroundings. The project, therefore, functions merely on a spatial plane.

To paraphrase Robert Venturi's foreword to his 1966 classic *Complexity and Contradictions in Architecture*: we are trying to talk about architecture and not around it, if only to avoid falling into the trap of making statements that have become clichés. We define our practice by studying precedents that interest us, copying certain architects, and choosing a way of representing our designs. All these choices contribute to forming a project, which is the specific tool of our discipline.

1. Title of the Venice Architecture Biennale, curated by Hans Hollein in 1996

2. Data taken from Paola Merdi, 'Housing Sociale' in *Aggiornamenti Sociali 06*, 2008

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The Architecture of the Future

Maria Claudia Clemente

Maria Claudia Clemente is Co-Director of Labics, which she co-founded in 2002

The British School at Rome's project *Brave New World: New Visions in Architecture* has addressed an extremely important and topical subject, namely, the role architecture should play in the contemporary world, seen through the eyes of the new generation.

At this point, it is a good idea to stand back and get an overall picture that places the views of the younger generation in a more general political, economic and cultural context.

As we are well aware, the last thirty years have been characterised by an unconditional faith in economic growth, which alone seemed to guarantee a better future. Everything seemed possible, and architecture—which, like art, reflects the spirit of the times—has conferred a guise and an aesthetic on this expansive faith by responding with great linguistic and formal freedom.

Today, when all we have left are the ashes of that faith—or in any event, we now see all its consequences, in terms of both social rights and economic equality—a general rethinking of the discipline seems necessary and is urgently called for. The architecture of the 1990s and 2000s seems to us suddenly obsolete, with its often heedless use of resources, its frequent and unjustified formal outlandishness and its starchitect, that free-spirited, capricious figure of the collective imagination. Undoubtedly, architecture has become—not always, but too often—a sublimely useless *bijou indiscret* as Manfredo Tafuri prophesized.

In this extremely complex picture, it is only natural that the younger generation, who are trying to understand the objectives, means and tools of their trade, should be the ones who feel most strongly the urgent need to restore architecture to its primary role. And this is especially true of those who have been born in a world that is less fair and less optimistic about the future, who want to attempt through architecture to give a better and more equal face to our society, by fighting the most devastating effects of financial capitalism and, not only economic, but also ethical neo-liberalism.

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There are two aspects addressed by this new call to arms: on the one hand, the role of the architect in society, still poised between intellectual/artist and professional, and on the other, the meaning and role of the architectural project with respect to the dominant economic and cultural model. To a certain extent, that critical, reformist, if not revolutionary atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s seems to have returned.

It is no mere coincidence that design practices based on sharing have re-emerged, often in the form of architecture collectives diametrically opposed to the star architect, such as Fosbury Architecture, one of the three offices invited to the *Mean Home* day. Its architects live in different cities and feel the urgent need to produce theoretical projects that are often controversial and completely independent of reality: 'counter' projects.

Now we come to the crux of the matter: how and by what ways and means can architecture dissent? But most importantly, in order to pursue what objectives?

We are well aware that this subject deserves a longer and more complex discussion that addresses the very nature of architecture and hence how it differs from art.

For art it is relatively easy to be counter: art is a free discipline, the act of making a work of art is an action the artist decides independently, expressing something individual and personal. A vision of the world, in fact. We could argue that in the past this was not the case, that artists, like architects, were normally in the service of clients until the 18th century. But now that is no longer the case, except for the rare instances of works that are commissioned (mostly by the ruling system).

For architecture this is virtually out of the question. Historically, architecture has always existed within the mechanisms of the market. Architecture itself exists because there is a demand, a spiritual, material, economic and functional demand, and often this demand comes precisely from the ruling system. We only have to think of empires, the papacy, monarchies, totalitarian regimes and now finance and capitalism. The architect's action is not in itself a free action; its freedom is expressed through the kind of response it gives, through the tools it uses, through the choices it makes and how it carries them out. Or in its refusal of the demand, because it is thought to be wrong. Of course there exists, and there has always existed, the possibility of making autonomous architecture, where there is no real

demand. Much of 20th-century architecture (but not only) expresses a vision of the world, like a work of art. Moreover, the architect's work—and it is here that its complexity lies— has always been a combination of art and technology, service and theory.

Going back to the question put to the three architectural practices invited—Fosbury Architecture, Jack Self / REAL Foundation and Adam Nathaniel Furman—recent history suggests that there have been two main ways of dissenting. The one more revolutionary and the other more reformist. If we are talking about the second half of the 20th century, the first could apply, for example, to all the so-called neo-avant-gardes of the 1970s, and the second to Team X and in general to a certain Brutalist architecture.

In fact, it is no mere coincidence that the 1970s neo-avant-gardes are among the main reference points for the new generations—if we think, for example, of the rapport not only between Fosbury Architecture and the Sottsass of *The New Italian Landscape*, but also between Adam Nathaniel Furman and the early works of Memphis, and in general the widespread rediscovery of Archizoom and Superstudio.

These practices had the courage to create alternative worlds and scenarios of thought and action. By making an impact on the discipline, they influenced the way of thinking and designing, they innovated the language and advanced thought through a critique of the modernist capitalist city. However, in actual fact, they did not change the productive structure of architecture, to use Tafuri's terms, which was one of the objectives held by some of them, especially Archizoom. This is because their autonomous response, since it was not to a demand, was in a way outside the system rather than 'within and against' it, as stated by Pier Vittorio Aureli[1], who for this young generation is the main theoretical reference, especially outside Italy. He certainly is for Jack Self, who with great determination and social consciousness is seeking to reduce inequality in London housing by working not only on architecture but also on the economic system behind it, by attempting literally to change the logics of 'capitalist production'.[2]

The risk that lies in all this is a new dualism between theory and practice, a dualism that influenced architectural production all through the 1970s (ending with the noncommittal 1980s). It is a dualism in which theory is assigned an important and legitimate task and role—'yet it is through theoretical work that

1. Pier Vittorio Aureli, *Il progetto dell'autonomia. Politica e architettura dentro e contro il capitalismo*, Quodlibet, 2016; the same position is then taken up and expounded by Biraghi in his book *L'architetto come intellettuale*, Einaudi, 2019;

2. Pier Vittorio Aureli, *Real Estates: Life without Debt*, Bedford Press, 2014

3. Idem, op. cit., p. 141.

architecture as a form of knowledge, as a way of understanding, reappropriates its own space, which is that of thinking, criticizing and, if possible, changing the space in which we live and struggle'[3]—assigning designing and construction an almost secondary role, necessarily compromised because it is within the system.

But as we were saying, there is a different way of thinking, criticizing and, more importantly, changing the space in which we live and struggle; a reformist way, to use a political metaphor, that is often radical, operating from 'within', through architecture, both in itself and in its relationship with the city, namely through the definition of a signifying and significant form. We only have to think of the work of Smithson, van Eyck, De Carlo and, even earlier, of the research of Artigas and then Mendes da Rocha; they all express a vision of the world applied to its transformation and improvement. Architecture without compromises, architecture as manifesto, that declares its autonomy through the form of its response.

There is no road that is better than any other, or that excludes any other. Indeed, exemplary architectural research should use both thought and action—certainly we have to ask ourselves if this is not, in fact, the best way to save architecture and give it real 'operational' autonomy today.

Mean Home

Jack Self

Jack Self is an architect and writer based in London and founder and Director of REAL Foundation

Architecture is a discipline obsessed with the production of singular and spectacular projects. This is because architects are defined by their lack of autonomy in relation to their creative labour. They are always an agent for other financial and political powers. Indeed, it is also true that the architect's clients are merely agents themselves, for processes they rarely fully understand. For example, any property developer is heavily constrained by the sum pressures of contemporary capitalism: increasing profit, reducing time and cost, etc. Except in very particular circumstances, they have no more free will than the architect. These agents rarely ask, or allow, the architect to design generalised models that can be easily copied by others. To do so would be to diminish their capital investment in the design and labour, and reduce their possible profits. This is true for both developers and private clients.

And yet, most human societies are unlikely to survive this century unless they radically rethink how and where they live. Housing is an urgent task. It holds all the keys to ecological sustainability, redressing economic inequality, and creating inclusive, democratic societies. It is within the house that ownership, environment, and technology converge. Equally, education, autonomy and wealth all begin at home. For this reason, we must find new ways to tackle the commonplace domestic, design a new ordinary, and thus reconfigure everyday life. In recent years, architectural discourse has shifted in such a direction. Our modest work here hopes to contribute to this movement.

The exhibition *Mean Home*, held at the British School at Rome, explores statistical means in Italian and British housing. It presents two visions for average homes in spatial, financial, social, cultural and material terms. To design within today's average conditions, REAL and Fosbury Architecture researched the state of housing in each other's countries. This implicated everything from floor area and space use to planning guidelines, the cost of construction, minimum standards, plot sizes, household types, family size, population growth and demographic trends.

Interestingly, mean family size and property ownership rates were identical (2.4 and 72% respectively), and both countries have a prominent north-south divide. Beyond this, there are

BEING MEAN

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Headline results can be found in the table to the right. Interestingly, mean family size and property ownership rates were identical (2.4 and 72% respectively) and both countries have a prominent north-south divide. Beyond this, there are few similarities. Multi-generational households are 28% more common in Italy than Britain (where most homes lack children). British house sizes are at a 90-year low, and amongst the smallest in Europe; Italian homes have steadily grown over time, and new-builds are amongst the most generous in Europe. Although household debt in the UK is double that of Italy, mean property prices are still 20% below their 2008 peaks. Households in both countries remain typically 11% poorer than in 2010.

The mean IT home is 2.4 people
The mean UK home is 2.4 people
The mean IT home has 1.2 children
The mean UK home has 0.4 children
The mean IT home size is 82sqm
The mean UK home size is 85sqm
The mean IT new-build is 108sqm
The mean UK new-build is 76sqm
The mean IT home has 4.1 rooms
The mean UK home has 4.8 rooms
The mean IT home costs €1,020/sqm
The mean UK home costs €1,440/sqm
The mean IT home debt-to-GDP is 41%
The mean UK home debt-to-GDP is 87%

Mean Home catalogue, 2019

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REAL's response to this condition was to focus on a mass-producible Italian suburban house, at exactly the mean floor area of 108sqm. The home is intended to host a variety of family types and structures at multiple and different stages in their lives. The plan tries to be adaptable and indeterminate, by working hard to eliminate functionalist spatial logic from its arrangement. The spaces are generous and unprogramed, designed primarily with ideas of light in mind (certain rooms point east to catch the morning sun, others face south for habitation during the day, some point north for a diffuse light, one has no orientation but is lit from above, while the west evening sun is allowed in only very carefully). In the tradition of blank exteriors concealing rich interiors, the street façade is windowless. It is common in Italy for adult children to live with parents. To accommodate their needs, habitable rooms are never adjacent, but separated to maximise privacy.

REAL's home pays homage to a masterpiece of Italian Classicism, Palladio's Villa Rotunda. This was the first ever house to sport a dome, which was previously an exclusively religious form. While this might seem like a minor act, Palladio's comparison of the home to a temple is as fascinating as his method of appropriating one typology in order to advance another. This design attempts to popularise the principle.

Quite aside from the design of the housing model itself, *Mean Home* also aspired to experiment with the way architecture is represented. The typical exhibition standard today is to present maquettes, drawings, images and photos. The designer has only two options: use the walls of the space, or create freestanding display elements. Mostly, there is a mix of both. There is a big difference between an exhibition about architecture (described above) and an architectural exhibition, which is an attempt to convey the qualities of projects through spatial experiences and mood. The former is always a disappointment, in that the actual architecture is absent.

The latter has the possibility of becoming a type of architecture in and of itself.

Mean Home relocated the traditional elements of exhibition design: the gallery at the BSR was filled only with three large, painted rectangular volumes. The dimensions were based on the monk Hans van der Laan's theory of the 'Plastic Number', which is a proportional system concerned with legibility of space, not with human scale. It is thus a non-functionalist method. The colour scheme for the three volumes was developed by REAL with Adam Nathaniel Furman. It was based on an algorithmic analysis of Italian films shot in the UK (such as *Blow Up* by Antonioni and Lucio Fulci's *Lizard in a Woman's Skin*), and British films shot in Italy (such as *The Italian Job* and Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio*). This palette was applied in such a way as to produce shifting compositions of Anglo-Italian aesthetics. This treated the exhibition display elements as an exhibition in itself.

All the maquettes, drawings, images and text were removed from the walls and packaged in a small publication, also called *Mean Home.* In this sense, the catalogue serves as both the show itself, and the record of the show. Within the largest of the three volumes we installed four maquettes, or scale models. Two were dedicated to Fosbury Architecture's home and two to REAL's home. These models were 3D-printed in the form of one-point perspectives, so that when your eye was close to the keyhole you had the sensation of being immersed inside a room. This was a tactic to give us ultimate control over an imaginary domestic space.

At a time when Britain is estranged from its European neighbours, we must find new ways to work together. REAL invited Milanese collective Fosbury Architecture to design an average British home based on current median conditions. Meanwhile, REAL did the same for Italy. This 'exquisite corpse' method allowed for collaboration in sequences, while estranging us from our own assumptions. Sometimes, we can be too close to home.
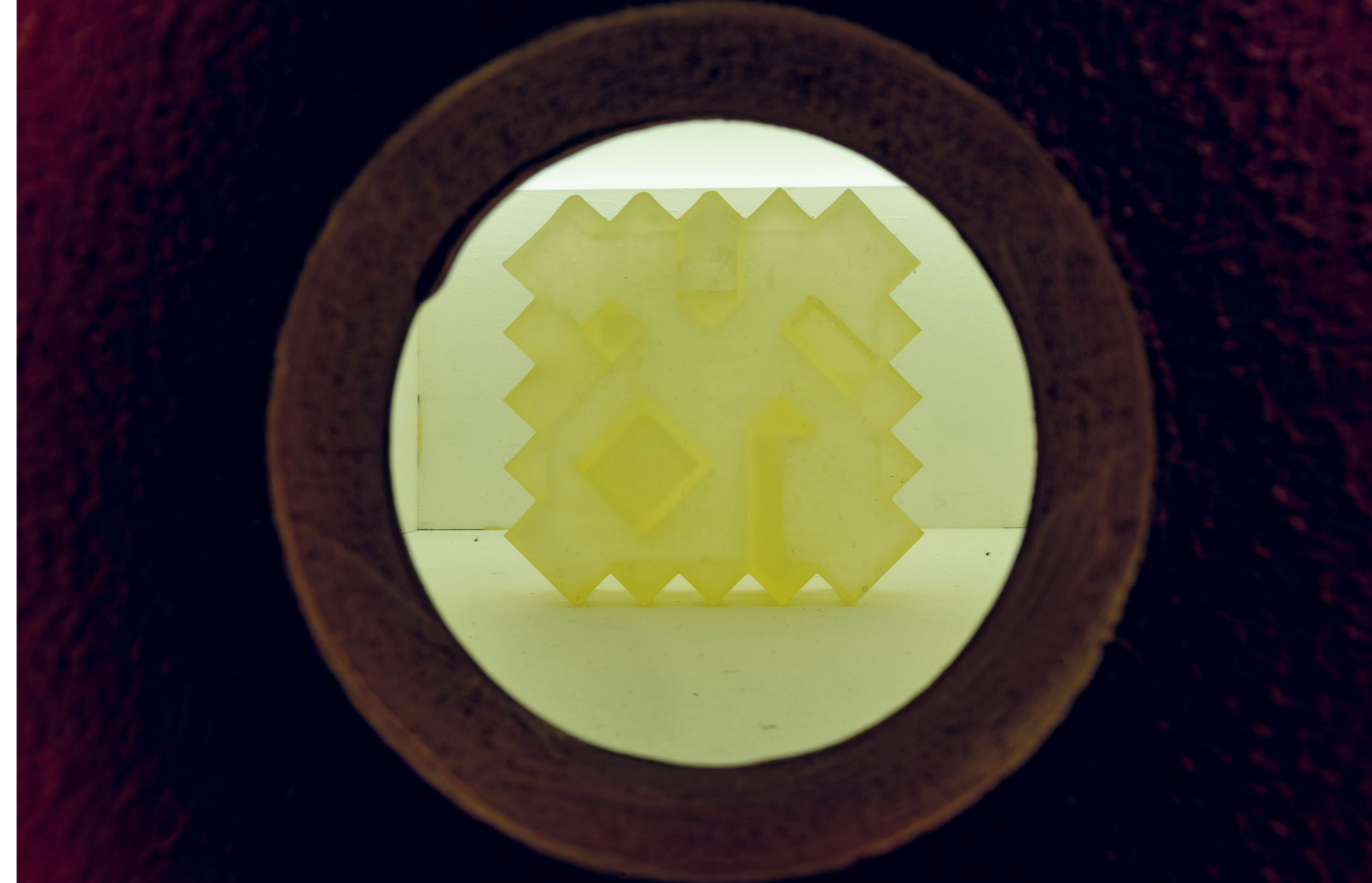
Adam Nathaniel Furman, Fosbury Architecture, REAL, *Mean Home*, BSR, 2019

Presenting as Progressive,
Practicing through Exclusion

Adam
Nathaniel
Furman

Adam Nathaniel Furman founded
his practice in London in 2013

For a profession that likes to pat itself on the back about how
well-meaning it is and that sees itself as liberal, diverse, open
and progressive, architecture has a serious problem with diversity
of pretty much every kind. It is dominated by people from well-
off backgrounds. It trains a lot of brilliant female architects but
doesn't pay them as much as men, and it loses many of them
after 30 when they are not supported in balancing work and
family life. Its ethnic make-up is very, very white, considering
this is Britain in 2019. A supposed beacon of success is the
acceptance of the LGBTQ community within the field, but
as with women and those from religious and ethnic minorities,
stories abound of unprofessional comments, inappropriate
jokes and insidious forms of jovially 'innocent' othering and
the diminution of identity-specific concerns.

And that is without mentioning the terror of aesthetic diversity,
which seems to be a shared paranoia amongst architects the
world over. Whenever there are more than a couple of variations
of a prevailing orthodoxy, one comes across herds of academics,
practitioners and critics ululating about the death of shared
meaning, and the terrible arbitrary wilfulness of the contemporary
scene, which, of course, is another way of saying how terrible
it is that not everyone builds exactly as they do, or as they would
wish. But not to worry, there is a great entropy within the ranks
of architecture itself which means that, like water from everywhere
in a valley eventually finding its central river, a consistent
supermajority of the profession herd together to design buildings
that look exactly the same as one another anyway.

One could find this latter issue funny, whilst registering the
former as deeply problematic. However, for a realm of human
production whose primary cultural purpose is to aestheticise
values, to reify our culture into built form, to literally stylise our
sphere of existence with forms, proportions, details, dispositions,
colours and materials that embody our communal existence—
in much the same way clothing identifies and comports
our bodies—these two deficits are profoundly interlinked
and insidiously damaging. Even when those from different
backgrounds, orientations and ethnicities do manage to break

Adam Nathaniel Furman: interior view
of the *Democratic Monument*, 2017

into the profession, even when they manage to rise up the ranks within practices, they are forced to make a Faustian pact with the Janus-faced (outwardly liberal, inwardly oppressive and exclusionary) world of architecture into which they are ostensibly welcomed—on the implicit understanding that they leave their singularity and uniqueness at the door, that they keep their identity far away from any kind of architectural expression.

The uniform disavowal of 'radical' (or, really, any true) aesthetic and stylistic liberty, the continuous pressure towards conformity, continuity, context and the shared delusions of architectural fads, means that there is not and has never been space in this vast profession for the embodiment of a diversity that might reflect society at large and its now brilliantly varied make-up. Architecture is dominated by straight white cis men, with the inclusion now of more women, and some of other backgrounds, who all need to act and design as if they are straight white cis men, or else face the critical scorn and peer derision afforded those who step out of line. What this entails is an exceptionally narrow range of expression-through-building that is as limited in its horizons as the vanishingly thin academic canon from which young architects are fed sanctioned ideas and precedents when at university.

The intolerance of true diversity in architecture's outward expression is a direct outcome of the fundamental lack of acceptance of real diversity within the ranks of the profession, with the consequence that our cities and buildings are the continuously renewed reification and expression of a monolithic white male culture. In order to participate in the great endeavour of adding buildings to the public sphere, one must agree to supplement and feed this edifice, trading total exclusion from the profession for a form of inclusivity that requires one to actively build monuments to one's own aesthetic erasure.

Beyond the groupthink of architectural places of education and production, in which a form of ostensibly well-meaning criticism and peer-pressure 'helps' those with 'out-of-line' architectural proclivities 'find' the 'right way' to design, much in the way that a visibly different child in a playground learns how to behave in order to be accepted into communal play, there are two simple and insidious modes of argumentation deployed to exclude all but the most minor forms of architectural difference at the next stage, when they reach the interface between the paper project and the city itself.

On the one hand, there are arguments of contextual propriety, which effectively say that one must fit-in with the neighbours, an urbanistic version of the kind of polite xenophobia in which newcomers are accepted only if they blend-in to the point where they disappear. Everything new must be identifiably similar to what came before, an architectural version of political nativism. On the other hand, there are arguments relying on precedent-based propriety, in which deviations from the local context are accepted to a degree if they conform to characteristics of the academically praised architectural canon of white male orthodoxy. Everything new that doesn't obviously fit in with its neighbours must be similar to other previous exemplars of past architectural elites, an aesthetic version of economic nepotism.

For those who manage to fight their way through university without discarding their identities, who manage to graduate and to somehow express their difference through the medium of architecture in a hostile profession, these final barriers of irrefutable arguments—whose substance is the malice of exclusionary propriety—mean that virtually nothing can be built that is not an extension and further reinforcement of the status quo. The cumulative result of this is that our cities reflect a Britain (and this is applicable in a host of countries across the West) of the past—not only profoundly nostalgic and backward looking, but actively damaging, as they suffocate the potential spaces of genuine architectural difference within the profession that would foster and attract those of less represented backgrounds. It is a result that symbolically annihilates even the palest hint of plurality or otherness.

Our 'progressive' profession keeps churning out the symbolic infrastructure of a nepotistic architectural nativism that is completely at odds with the (duplicitously) friendly, (disingenuously) inclusive, open image it likes to present to itself and to the wider world. These are contentious times of great change, and it is a matter of great importance that architecture steps up and actually embodies—through the manifestations of its practice, in the medium of building and through the transformation of our cities—the liberal inclusivity it preaches in the lecture theatre, yet acts so strenuously to exclude from expression by its practitioners of difference. May a thousand new styles brought forth by a hundred disaffected groups bloom on the pallid body of contemporary architecture.

The Silver Lining
Italy 2020 AD

Fosbury
Architecture

Fosbury Architecture is an architectural design and research collective, founded in 2017 and based in Milan, Rotterdam and Hamburg

In the 1970s (perhaps the last time Italian architecture held a prominent position on the international scene) the debate was extremely polarised, between professionals—namely, those who had built their credibility project by project—and those who questioned the very nature of the profession. However, with the 1973 Milan Triennale this juxtaposition shifted to within the avant-gardes, rendering the discourse unquestionably self-referential.

Nonetheless, in describing Italian practice we prefer to discuss approaches rather than positions; therefore we believe that the 1972 exhibition *Italy: the New Domestic Landscape* curated by Emilio Ambasz, though aimed at showcasing the originality of Italian industrial design, is the most appropriate point of reference. The curator classified Italian designers as conformists, reformers and protesters, categories that are still firmly rooted today after several generations.

We believe that we need to refer to this period if we are to consider the teaching and practice of architecture in Italy, since no one in the meantime has had the strength or credibility to propose something really different, let alone to realise it. The legacy of the teachers, who meanwhile have gradually disappeared from the debate due to age, has been watered down by subsequent generations of pupils who inevitably turned to mannerism. In the meantime, the search for a foreign 'father figure' has not had any lasting effect in a conservative situation that was too widespread to be definitively cast aside.

Professionalism has almost completely disappeared from architectural practice. The city continues to self-build, apparently alone, at the hands of a few architects, many engineers and a large number of property developers, who re-propose an imported recipe consisting of efficiency, sustainability and urban green space, totally indifferent to the politics that favours this provincial neo-liberalism, hence shielding it from criticism.

Fosbury Architecture: *J'ai Pris Amour*,
installation for the Chicago Architecture
Biennale, 2017

After fifty years, the economic crisis, the glut of graduates
in architecture and the fragmentation of architectural practice
into multiple small offices have together produced a vast number
of young firms, collectives and other forms of association,
all practising architecture in a different way from the system,
involving unpaid internship, VAT numbers and difficulty
in obtaining commissions—which is partly due to the stalled
property market.

In this essentially historical context, where it is still very difficult
to carve out a niche for yourself, these practices tend to take
up the positions traditionally held by Italian architects, namely,
either by building a reputation through individual projects or by
designing from a critical stance, without taking up a particular
battle, but rather swinging back and forth, protected by the
alibi of the basic impossibility of realizing anything.

The conservative professionalism embodied in the young
architecture office resorts to an obsessive, painstaking
attention to detail. Renovation, if done regularly, is considered
by most to be a more than satisfying a business model for
embarking on a career. It becomes the thing on which
to vent the frustrations of a talent that has difficulty in finding
other outlets and is often expressed through sophisticated
material palettes.

The reformist-style idealism of those groups who believe in the
traditional competition of ideas to gain visibility, skipping the
regular stages and avoiding apprenticeship—in an Italy where
you are still young at forty—often means adopting a strategic
withdrawal into a mix of theory and hybrid practice, involving
small projects, publications and installations. On the one hand,
they follow the model of the architect as all-round designer, while
on the other, they risk not forming a coherent narrative to guide
the practice.

Even the protest of those groups who are re-discussing
the limits of the discipline at a time when there is a constant
information overload is drowned in a flood of voices competing
to find mainstream channels and is relegated to a series of niches
struggling to make headway in a system where the debate is still
firmly in the hands of the older generations. When we look
at the past, what is surprising is the total political detachment
that relegates any critical attempt to a disciplinary and
consequently self-referential sphere.

What is increasingly emerging in all these groups is the focus on representation, which cannot be put down simply to the lack of commissions and the proliferation of architectural competitions for young professionals, but rather to the need to use the immediacy of the image to assert one's position in the discipline, often by alluding to a pantheon of references. The citation of even recent examples remains an easy and reassuring method, though it inevitably produces that rather retro effect, which at times hides a lack of projects. However, if it is not tied to fashions, it defines an identity that is by necessity virtual, given the vast extent of the phenomenon.

The spread of architectural images is not completely disconnected from the growing use of social media as a free means of dissemination and publication, so much so that we are witnessing the emergence of groups whose existence is almost exclusively digital. While Instagram has, in fact, boosted the predominant style, ranging from pastel shades to a roaring return to the 1980s, it should also be credited with making known the work of emerging professionals outside Italy.

In giving a general picture of the production of young Italian architects, it is evident that rather than actual shared aims, what the so-called millennials have in common is the social and economic context that influences their work. What is surprising, however, is the constant emergence of new groups—perhaps also because Italy has not completely recovered from the economic crisis—which are a cross between a factory of dreams and of real originality, as from time to time displayed in group exhibitions. The aim of this long self-criticism is to provide, as far as possible, an objective picture of the difficulties facing a young practising architect. It is important, however, to give this generation credit for being particularly efficient at stirring up ferment, which is already influencing the next generations and will inevitably contribute to the renewal of the practice of architecture.

Just what is it that makes millennial architects so different, so appealing?

Rowan Moore

Rowan Moore is architecture critic of *The Observer*

In 1956, the exhibition *This Is Tomorrow* opened at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. It is probably the most remembered exhibition of its decade, its mythic status re-confirmed by the Whitechapel's 2019 homage *Is This Tomorrow*?

There were many reasons for its fame: its pioneering collaborations of artists, architects and designers; its engaging three-dimensional installations; its fusion of popular and high culture, exemplified by the hiring of the sci-fi movie star Robbie the Robot to open the show. Many of its protagonists went on to greater fame: the artists Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi, the engineer Frank Newby, the architects James Stirling, Colin St John Wilson, and Alison and Peter Smithson. On the cover of the catalogue there was a Hamilton collage 'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?' that was to become one of the most memorable images of pop art.

It is striking now, looking back at *This Is Tomorrow*, how confident the contributors were, the architects included. They seemed to have complete faith in their ability to contribute both to the unfolding story of art and culture and to the shaping of future society. This confidence was justified: the Smithsons, then aged 28 and 33, had already completed Hunstanton School in Norfolk, a public project that would launch both their reputations and an architectural movement, the new Brutalism.

The post-war period, more generally, was a time when young architects were, with the help of design competitions, entrusted with large-scale public works—The Golden Lane Estate in the City of London by Chamberlain Powell and Bon, Churchill Gardens by Powell and Moya, Lillington Gardens by Darbourne and Darke, were all major social housing projects designed by architects in their twenties or early thirties. There was a belief, apparently shared by those who commissioned them, that it was an absolute good to use young imaginations to shape the spaces where many thousands of people would live and learn. Also that there was a meaningful connection between avant-garde theory and the practice of large-scale building.

Times have changed. The title of the Whitechapel's *Is This Tomorrow?* by turning what was an assertion into a question, reveals a decline in confidence. The equivalent of Hunstanton School for the millennial generation is perhaps Cineroleum, the temporary cinema created in a former petrol station in 2010 by the just-assembled collective Assemble. Like Hunstanton, it was a statement of intent by very young architects—they were students, in fact, not-yet qualified. It demonstrated a desire to act in and on the public sphere, as well as a belief in collaborative making that opposed the cult of starchitects. But where Hunstanton was a publicly funded permanent work, albeit on a very tight budget, Cineroleum was an entrepreneurial initiative in which the designers invented the project, found the site and built and ran it themselves. It was temporary, although destined for an afterlife on social media.

If you look more generally at the works of aspiring architects in contemporary Britain, you will see temporary pavilions feature prominently. The idea of an annual architectural pavilion was pioneered by the Serpentine Gallery at the beginning of the century. More recently the Dulwich Picture Gallery and London Festival of Architecture have followed suit. There is also the Architecture Foundation's Antepavilion. Whereas the Serpentine's annual pavilion has been designed by international stars drawn from the same universe as winners of the Pritzker Prize, Dulwich and the Architecture Foundation aim to give a platform to younger architects.

The results can be intriguing, joyful, thought-provoking. They fertilise the creative culture of architecture. Examples include the 2019 Dulwich Pavilion (Dulwich Picture Gallery) by Pricegore and the designer Yinka Ilori, a project which combined a simple but powerful use of colour, boldness of scale and a clever deployment of basic building components such as drain sections and standard sizes of timber. The 2019 Antepavilion, by Maich Swift, also used colour and simple timber construction, in this case to realise a temporary theatre on its canalside location.

In these works their designers make the most of the freedoms of a temporary pavilion—freedom from planning controls, from a complex brief, from longevity—to let loose their creative energy. Which only makes more striking the contrasts with what might be called the 'real' world of contemporary practice. You can see such contrasts in the recent glut of building in London, much of it speculative housing, which is in no way informed by the sensibilities of the pavilion-designing architects. You can also

see them in the latters' own websites, which are models of sober-sounding professionalism. 'We aim to produce work of the highest quality,' say Maich Swift dutifully, 'and demonstrate the value of good, careful design on projects relating to architecture, interiors and furniture.'

This is the language British architects have had to speak ever since Margaret Thatcher gave them a painful lesson in the early 80s. They could no longer feed on big public commissions, was the message, but rather they would have to sell themselves in the market. In a parallel cultural development, architects were routinely castigated in the media for being arrogant, self-indulgent, indifferent to the feelings of ordinary people. Architects would now be service-providers, and would be expected to try exceptionally hard to prove how responsible they were.

The later rise of iconic architecture and the associated appearance of cultural projects funded by the British National Lottery did, to be sure, give some architects another way to express themselves. But their theatre of action remained circumscribed: they were given a licence to dazzle only in specific circumstances. It was still a long way from the post-war idea that schools and public housing might be occasions for serious and committed architectural endeavour.

This is a question—that of social usefulness—of which millennial architects are particularly aware. They know that there is a housing crisis in Britain, not least because they are of a generation and income bracket that is hard hit by it. They have a particular desire to do good in the world. This yearning made itself manifest in the reception given to an extraordinary talk given by Neave Brown in October 2017, shortly before his death. Brown had designed magnificent housing projects such as Alexandra Road for the London Borough of Camden, not long before the Thatcher axe fell. A mostly millennial audience packed out the 1275-seat Hackney Empire theatre and gave him a standing ovation at the end.

Another version of this yearning is in the work of Adam Nathaniel Furman, an architect critically noted for his bright interiors and ceramics, who also uses the power of digital images to create imaginary town halls and other public buildings drenched in colour and decoration. Another version again is expressed by the critical fascination with Assemble's Granby Four Streets, the rescue and renovation of some condemned houses

in Liverpool. The project helped them win the Turner Prize for artists in 2015, a notable achievement for architects. It is admirable, but it has taken several years to complete a handful of homes. This is not the scale of Alexandra Road or Golden Lane.

To be public now, of course, is to be environmental— to have at the very least a position on the question of global climate. This gives architects—who have long been conscious of the construction industry's high levels of emission and consumption—a chance to take a leading role. London architects Maria Smith and Matthew Dalziel, the critic Phineas Harper and the Norwegian urban researcher and artist Cecile Sachs Olsen have done so. They curated the 2019 Oslo Architecture Triennale about the subject of degrowth and laid down a challenge to the profession to show how building really can be carbon-neutral. It remains to be seen how it will be answered.

The millennial generation of British architects is socially-minded in a way their equivalents thirty years ago were not. The current political climate does not, when it comes to putting their ideas into practice, look encouraging. But the build-up of determination and energy is such that it is hard to believe it will simply go away. The issues they want to address, meanwhile, in particular those of housing, are still very much present.

Programme of Lectures and Exhibitions
May 2018–September 2019
BSR

May 2018
Reinier de Graaf: Lecture
The Century That Never Happened
Introduced by Pippo Ciorra
(University of Camerino, MAXXI)

June 2018
Phineas Harper: Lecture
The Kids Aren't Alright
Introduced by Luca Galofaro
(University of Camerino)

October 2018
Assemble: Exhibition and round-table discussion
Ways of Listening
Round table with Orizzontale, chaired by Simone Capra

February 2019
Alison Crawshaw, David Knight and Finn Williams:
Exhibition and round-table discussion
New Publics
Round table with Supervoid, chaired by Luca Montuori

May 2019
Adam Nathaniel Furman, Fosbury Architecture and Jack Self: Exhibition and round-table discussion
Mean Home
Round table chaired by Maria Claudia Clemente

September 2019
Rowan Moore: Lecture
Just what is it that makes millennial architects so different, so appealing?
Introduced by Pippo Ciorra

Several texts are resumes of contributions to the round-table discussions.

All texts were written before the Covid-19 pandemic.

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