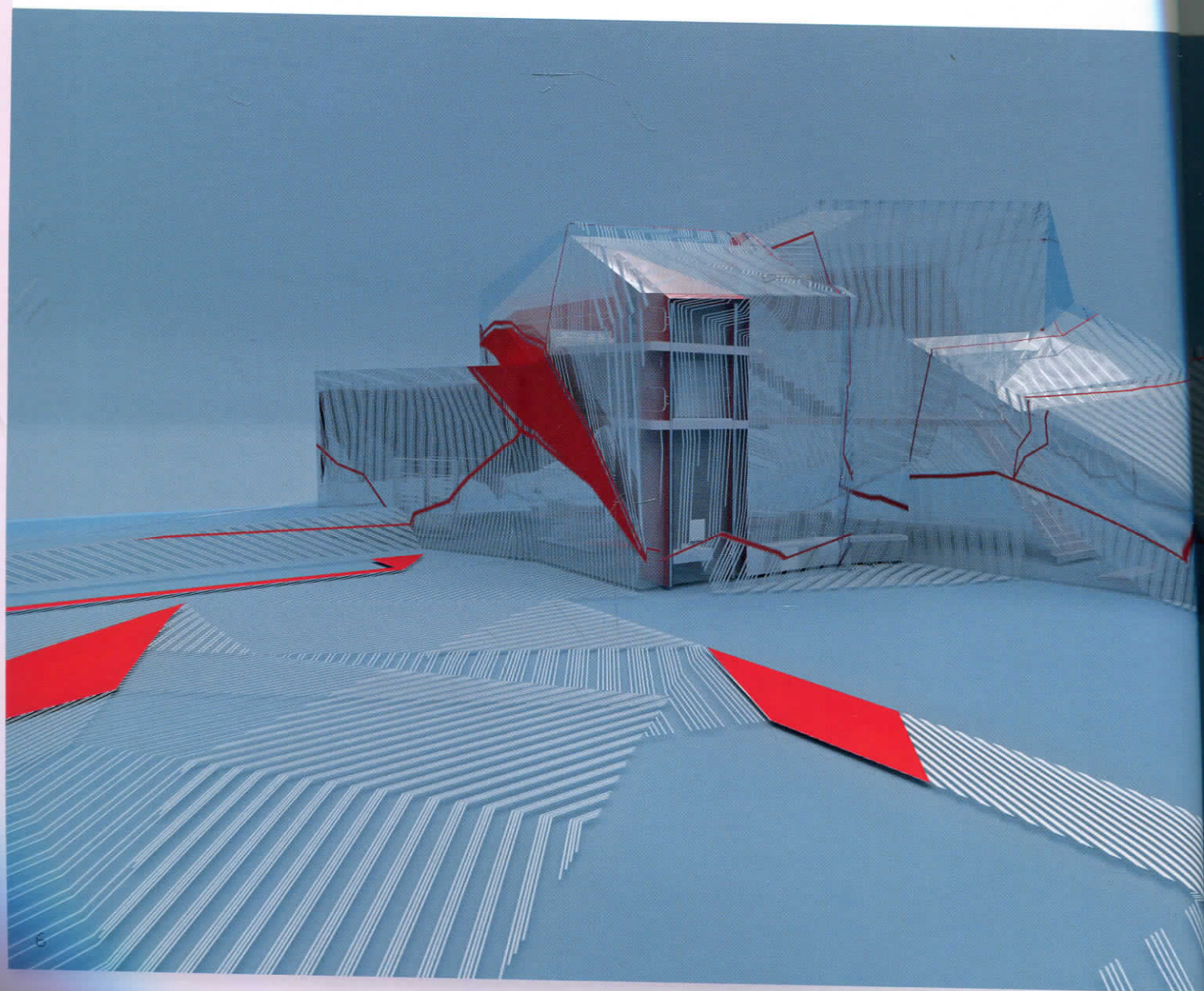


Embracing Uncertainty

INTRODUCTION

VIOLA AGO

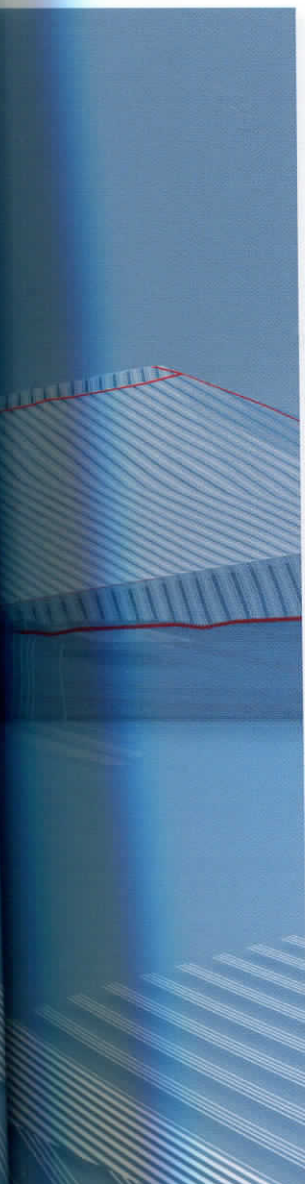
How Policies Shape the World



Something needs to be destroyed in order for the new to be created. So argues French philosopher Catherine Malabou who supports her argument with the biological analogy of *in utero* suicidal cells that die so that fingers can be created.¹ This is not an unpopular thought. We have understood and accepted that the emergence of the new is viable at the destruction – and at times the literal death – of the previous, or the old. *Alt-Form: Indeterminacy and Disorder* is thematically invested in revisiting previous trajectories in relation to the emergence of new forms so that we can revise and then devise alternative ways to respond and invent architecturally. More specifically, this issue of *Δ* is concerned with the different types of destruction of and violence against the built environment, the collective memory and the body – all extensions of architecture, broadly speaking. In an attempt to think through alternativism rather than novelty, *Alt-Form* seeks projects and research that do not shy away from politically, technologically, economically and socially charged and woefully distraught sites, but instead confront them head-on with sincerity, dedication, care, endurance and creativity.

Viola Ago / Miracles
Architecture,
House 1,
2021

House 1 pushes the erroneous moments of a graphic/form event where the graphic blanket that originated from a vector line drawing, and the formal composition at times align and at other times deviate to create their own independent localised agencies. The pixel drips and stretches in this rendering assert a faulty aesthetic language that seeks an architecture as an event.



Julia Jalowiec,
*I just came here to hang
out with y'all. Should
we order a pizza?*,
First Year Exhibition,
The Lantern, Lenfest
Center for the Arts,
New York,
2021

Jalowiec's work operates outside the bounds of conventional disciplinary artistic narratives in two ways: by subjectively challenging the formal and aesthetic norm of the biological body, and by forcing the two distinct genres of surface painting and iron casting in order to produce other visual conditions.

Previous Trajectories

The trajectory of the Western canon of architecture is modelled as a lineage. Chronologically, style eras in the field of architecture have been synthesised, documented and theorised in a formulaic manner: the new style is almost always in response to – or measured against – the previous one; the old. In our more recent collective memory, one might think of the anti- or post- movements. Or perhaps in the popular psyche, one can consider the patricidal act as the most explicit manner for the new to establish its dominance. A prime example that comes to mind is the physical and artistic act of American artist Robert Rauschenberg who, in 1953, literally erased an original Willem de Kooning pencil drawing in an attempt to signify that the birth of the new artistic movement was at the expense – or erasure – of the old.

The most analogous example in architecture can be described with the Deconstructivists who in the late 1970s and early 1980s started to react to their predecessors: the Modernists and the Postmodernists. The Deconstructivists were working through projects that defied the laws of physics, confronted wholeness with finite libraries of elements, challenged geometric truths, and resisted conventional typologies and assemblies. For example, in his eponymous residence (Gehry Residence, Santa Monica, California, 1978, remodelled 1991), the American architect Frank Gehry altered his typical single-family suburban balloon-frame house by exposing wall studs in the kitchen and using industrial materials such as construction-grade plywood and corrugated metal as finish surfaces – in opposition to the white and clean aesthetics of the Modernists. The British-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid is another quintessential example. In her Vitra Fire Station (Weil am Rhein, Germany, 1993), she used a multitude of degrees for positioning walls and ceilings, while avoiding the right angle – which was another defining quality of the High Modernists. This churning of old and new through literal destruction or erasure spans the creative disciplines of the Western world and is currently understood and disseminated as styles that belonged to distinct period timelines.

Overcoming Style

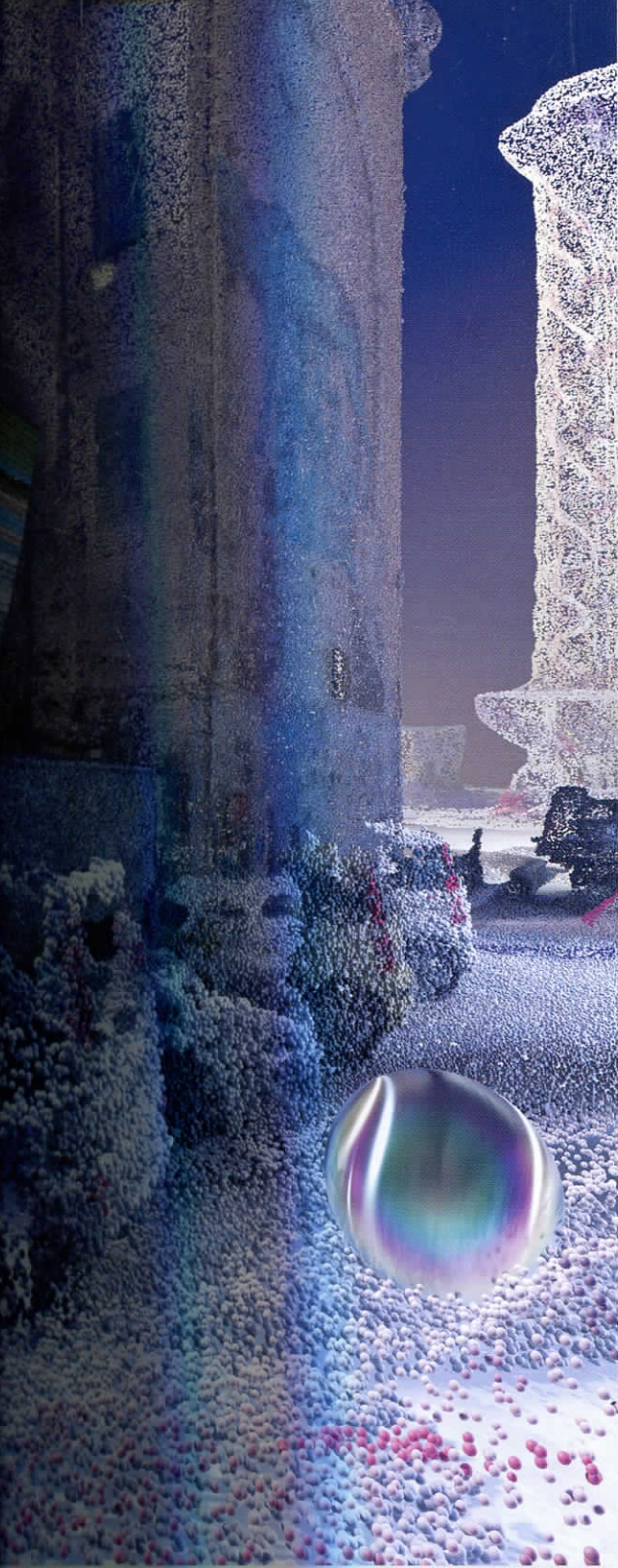
Deconstructivism, as described above, inevitably became a style, even though its creators claimed that they were interested in ideas and, as such, argued that its placement in the canon as a style was in a way antithetical to its original ambitions. This, too, is not a new phenomenon. New architectural ideas do not necessarily seek to establish a new style. They do however lead to movements; movements gain momentum; and momentums lay the groundwork for the establishment of style. Similarly, the two primary architectural projects that followed – the digital and the neo-Postmodern – also inevitably became styles. It could be argued that the early digital project (late 1990s to late 2000s) originated as an extension of Deconstructivism. Its procedure-based methodologies and compositional apparatuses – here one thinks of Bernard Tschumi's Parc De la Villette (Paris, 1982–98), Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum (Berlin, 1999), Peter Eisenman's series of House drawings (1970s–80s) – paved the way to architecturally oriented digital processes as computers started to support complex 3D modelling environments and animation tools.

During this time these projects were still guided by design ambitions that were not rooted in the digital.² It was not until the end of our current century's first decade and the beginning of its second that the digital project incited other complex subgenres such as the surface project (or façade), object-oriented ontology, fabrication and optimisation, and the computation project which later developed its own set of subprojects – ones that were primarily informed and driven by mandates discovered and developed in the digital world alone. This moment of the digital project was defined by the field being wholly obsessed with novelty and technological advancement. The hermetic nature of the digital project however led to the subsequent neo-Postmodernist project (neo-PoMo, 2010s–2018) – and perhaps even the brief but potent post-digital one. In so doing, these two projects fell back into the conventional strategy of the death of the past; the old. To be specific, architects of the neo-PoMo realm turned towards simplified permutations of colour and 2D shape illustrations and operations in an attempt to erase recognisable digital traces, while those of the post-digital realm started operating with intentionally banal and seemingly poor-resolution digitally rendered visuals to counteract the high precision and fidelity afforded by advanced digital technology.

In accepting the risk of reducing complex architectural historical scenarios to a few traits, it is important to place these shifts into an architectural style diagram so that we can collectively best understand our current moment – a moment that cannot escape its past either. The suggestion here is not to be informed by the vetted Western canon, but rather to leave it temporarily aside while we as architects, collectively and individually, develop new ideas and proposals that can avoid the hermetic nature of that canon – one which, with minor exceptions of course, developed an architecture that



was exclusive (and highly subjective), centralised, linear, hierarchical and non-porous. The ambition of this purging moment in history seeks to encourage an architecture that can also host peripheral disciplinary problems as well as social, economic and political conditions in much more dedicated and real ways, so as to achieve pluralistic and intersectional approaches to architecture.



Maya Alam and Daniele Profeta, *Casa Zwei*, 'Cloud-ing',
College of Architecture and Urban Design,
Kent State University, Kent, Ohio,
2018

This rendering presents alternative material capabilities that take cues from digital imaging technologies, cultural outtakes of the proliferation of the digital image, as well as tectonic affinities innate to the digital rendering engine. Such complex digital data compression destabilises the conventionally understood architectural material as merely physically mineral.

Aranda\Lasch,
Another Circle,
Exhibit Columbus,
Mill Race Park,
Columbus, Indiana,
2017

The installation consists of stacks of limestone arranged in self-similar but never identical manners. The placements and postures of the clusters seem completely random from human eye level, while on plan view it becomes clear that it has been intentionally composed with organisational logics that favour human experience, site, landscape and geometry.



Alternatives for Novelty or Techno-positivity

Favouring the thought experiment that the new (not the novel, but the new as the mere present condition) can reach outwardly towards other urgent and previously omitted avenues can be incredibly powerful and even liberating in a lineage that is predominantly based on new architectural conditions emerging in response to its predecessor. Furthermore, the political theorist Jairus Grove, director of the Hawai'i Research Center for Future Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, argues that the new – and more specifically our present new – does not necessarily depend on the destruction of the old. Rather, the old, and consequently the things that we are left with, destructive as they may be, must be embraced as a present condition.³ It is precisely through this embracing of aspects of life that seem external to our being in the world, that we can find creative potential, rather than defaulting to conventional conditioning that has trained us to either deflect or resolve the bad, the negative, the wrong, the destructive, the unstable.

To be clear, there is no assurance that history will not repeat itself; neither should that be the primary focus. However, in the space of plurality, architecture can transcend the erasure of the past paradigm towards an axis of alternatives gained from observations and integration of knowledge. In other words, the primary ambition is not to seek novelty and advancement. Instead, the collective intention must work towards transformative alternatives which are based on existing problematic, unjust, hermetic and forgotten yet very real current forms of life.

During this moment, some emergent architectural practices have turned their attention to more aleatory affinities. The seduction of the ruin, unhappy wholes, faulty aesthetics and other non-ordered mandates are proliferating in the field as our being in the world has become indisputably more unstable and uncertain.

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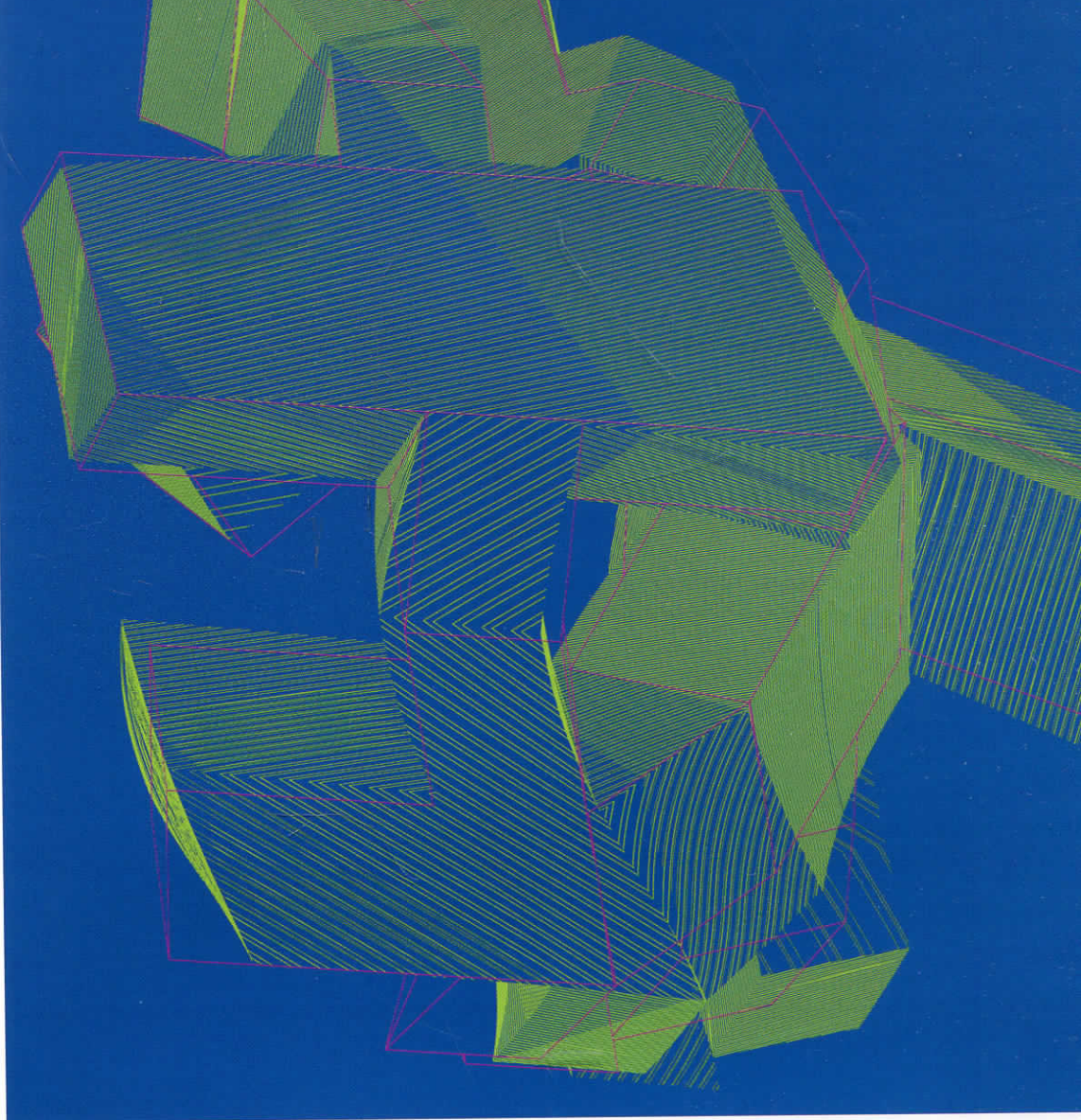


Viola Ago / Miracles Architecture,
House 3,
2021

above: From a series of speculative house designs, this drawing of the house as a graphic blanket uses algorithmic processes and consists of parallel lines with varying densities parcelled out in a top-view composition in an attempt to create dynamic and unexpected relationships between the parcel outlines (in magenta) and the line clusters (in green). The drawing is then rasterised and used as a graphic shrink-wrap.

Heather Roberge, *En Pointe*, SCI-Arc Gallery, Southern California Institute of Architecture, Los Angeles, California, 2015

left: The column-like units in the installation lean and support one another precariously in an upright organisational composition, while the formal attributes of the individual parts suggest a bend – an action that almost challenges the overall upright stance. This compositional strategy is a refreshing alternative to formal arrangements that are rooted in the orderly and the rigid.

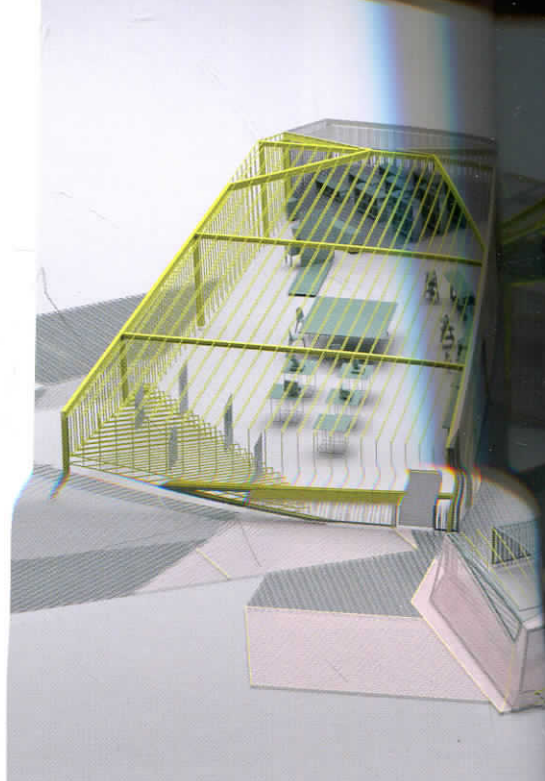


Forces of Disruption

In the search for alternative formalisms, the work of my design research practice Miracles Architecture has been building on project proposals conceived through material methodologies and digital engines to develop forms and graphics in states of duress or to aggregate collections of objects into casual, loose and intentionally misoriented compositions. More specifically, this work attempts to integrate violence as a central force in creative disciplines and surface as a supporter of visual phenomena. For example, some of the earlier design research work (MADTBIM, 2017; Poppy Red, 2018; So Graphic!, 2019) was based on surface articulations rooted in commercial and, by extension, capitalist-centric practices: sign printing, backlighting, plastic coatings, graphic wrapping/shrinking, image mapping, electronic sensorial systems, etc. The studies produced for these projects explore forceful and aggressive events between 2D graphics and corresponding 3D forms.

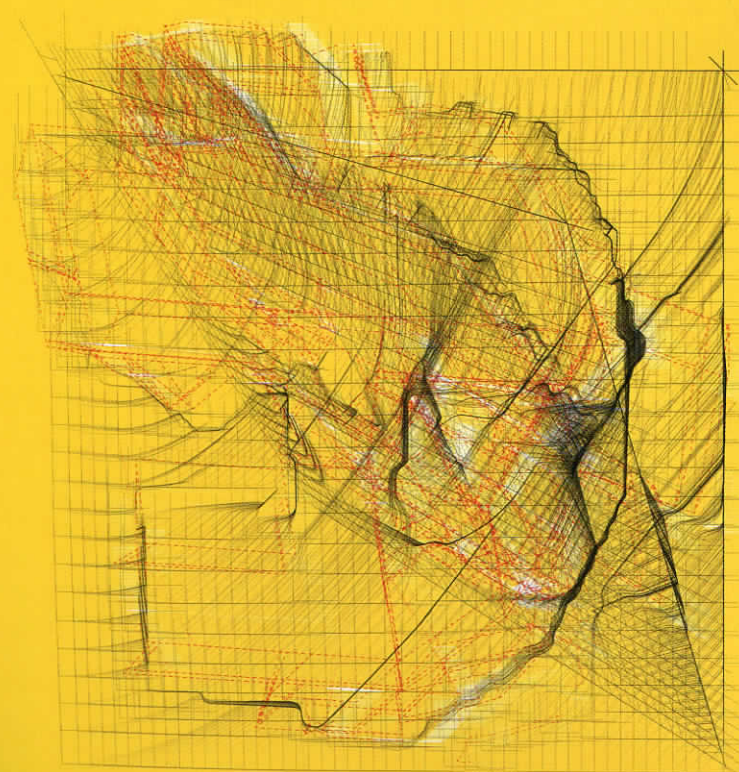
In his 1961 book *The Wretched of the Earth*, in the chapter on violence, the psychiatrist and political philosopher Frantz Fanon sketches an immersive parallel between the coloniser and the colonised. Simply put, he describes the coloniser's imposed value system as violence and the response of the colonised as aggression.⁴ This weighs heavy, that a destructive atmosphere – a complex network of multi-axis diagrams between violence and aggression – is inherent in not only our contemporary being, but persistently through most of modern life. In our context, the Western creatives of the second half of the 20th century missed this, perhaps due to the institutionalised nature of knowledge production and dissemination.

The violence-aggression axis offers a captivating potential for an architecture in need of a shake-up. The work of Miracles Architecture further builds on this thinking by constructing architectural sequences using digital simulation platforms that afford our field design and creative agency that is not merely visual, but also haptic, gestural, spatial and, by extension, political. More specifically, conflating the laws of physics (for example the behaviour of shrink-wrapping a graphic blanket on a volumetric aggregation), affective experiences of natural behaviours (such as the tears and stretches of a digital image) and attributes in a network of things (or in other words, the relation between self-similar parts in a massing study) can productively engage our perceptual apparatuses in ways that extend past the traditional narratives of architectural thinking and making towards truer forms of engagement with the world.



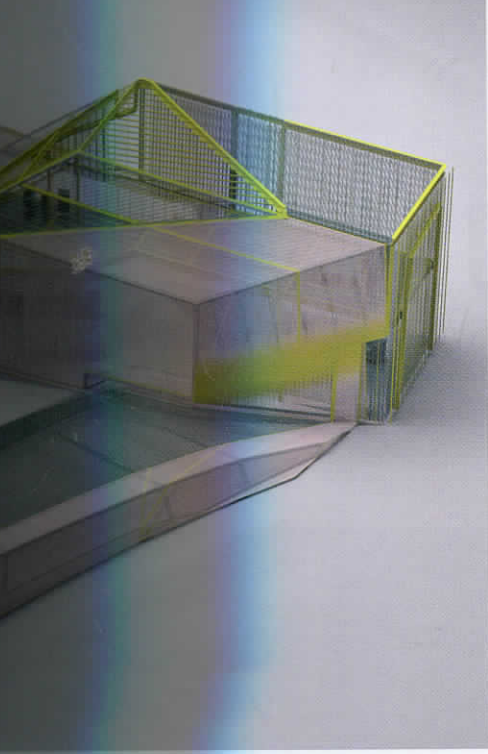
Viola Ago / Miracles Architecture,
House 2,
2021

The tectonic articulation in this project breaks rules based on visual dynamics that emerge from the visual conditions of the graphic/form event rather than preset or standardised rules. The structural members, skin panels, furniture, graphic lines, etc., are all loosely composed in response to the author's sensibilities and perceptual mechanisms.



Viola Ago / Miracles
Architecture,
House 3,
2021

This drawing consists of five layers of information that include representation, fabrication, illustration, geometry information and other undefined categories. The drawing imagines near-figural aesthetic possibilities by appropriating information that is strictly used for production phases in architecture.



focuses on a site-specific case study to sketch an intense and fraught architectural correspondence between discourse mandates, political agendas and occupant realities. In another type of correspondence, Jennifer Newsom whimsically interrogates industrial and city-scale materials and structures with empathetic pluralistic experience.

Contributors Ersela Kripa and Stephen Mueller present an imperative space of creative activism where architecture and urbanism collapse with military realities and politics. Thematically adjacent, V Mitch McEwen and Kristina Kay Robinson describe new forms of collaboration and performative imaginaries that are necessary to revisit realities of city planning, systemic structuralism and Black life. Another deeply architectural lens is on offer by Anna Neimark who convinces us that forms can have an attitude and does so through a technological lens of three implicit timelines: prehistoric, post-industrial and current. Pushing us further into the imaginative, Faysal Tabbarah offers painterly, new materialist trajectories that zoom in on the problem of Modernist precision, while Jeffrey Halstead constructs new perceptual methods through geometrical implausibilities based on material and gestural behaviours. Working through more lyrical formats, Dalena Tran informs us of an emergent type of aesthetic condition that responds to pressures of the visual, technological and political, while Carl Lostritto takes us through cultural and technological implications of the misconception of architectural digital representation through atmospheric and transient registers. In all, the issue presents a survey of alternative forms of engagement through some of the leading figures in architecture, art, design and critical thinking.

We live in a world where it is no longer possible to deny the uncertainties and instabilities that dictate daily life. As architects, we have a responsibility not only to the built environment, but also to other forms of life. As such, it is also no longer possible to operate within the conventional disciplinary bounds because architecture has been an active participant in complex structural systems that have been imposed top-down. The contributors to this issue poignantly revisit this role and offer profound alternatives by co-residing in the distraught, the disorderly, the unstable. Δ

Notes

1. Catherine Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans Carolyn Shread, Polity Books (Cambridge), 2012.
2. Greg Lynn, 'Going Native: Notes on Selected Artifacts from Digital Architecture at the End of the 20th Century', in Andrew Goodhouse (ed), *When Is the Digital in Architecture?*, Canadian Centre for Architecture (Montreal) / Sternberg Press (Berlin), 2017, p 290.
3. Jairus Victor Grove, *Savage Ecology: War and Geopolitics at the End of the World*, Duke University Press (Durham, NC), 2019.
4. Frantz Fanon, 'On Violence in the International Context', in *The Wretched of the Earth* [1961], trans Richard Philcox, Grove Press (New York), 2004, pp 1–62.

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The Current Paradox of Form

Form is by definition something that encompasses hierarchy, ordering mechanisms and structure. Alternative formalism might sound counterintuitive – or antithetical at first glance. However, the alternative in form does not necessarily mean an approach to form devoid of structure, hierarchy or order. Rather, an alternative one prefers not to favour these attributes, and instead invites an external formalism (social, literary, scientific, etc) to collapse onto the architectural and aesthetic one.

Alt-Form can be thought of as a structural principle undergirding many experiments in contemporary architecture's culture. With this objective in mind, this Δ issue invites critics, theorists and artists, in addition to an influential group of architects and designers, to articulate, argue for/against and think through current projects that speak to faulty aesthetics, erroneous forms, fictitious systems, responsive apparatuses and more.

Conventionally perceived as the outermost layers of the discipline, in their contributions to the issue Andrew Culp, Carolyn L Kane and Jack Halberstam offer architectural parallels in cultural theory, media studies and gender studies respectively while keeping a keen eye on aesthetic consequences. Reeling us in a little closer to architecture, Suzanne Cotter interrogates the liminal and irregular space between sculpture, performance and architecture. Perhaps more unapologetically centred in our field, Thom Mayne presents a series of drawings, the descriptions of which resist human language and instead develop their own semi-autonomous vocabulary based on chance and willfulness that are still inextricably tied to architectural contingencies. Through photography and various modes of research, and also centred in the field, Dorina Pilumbi