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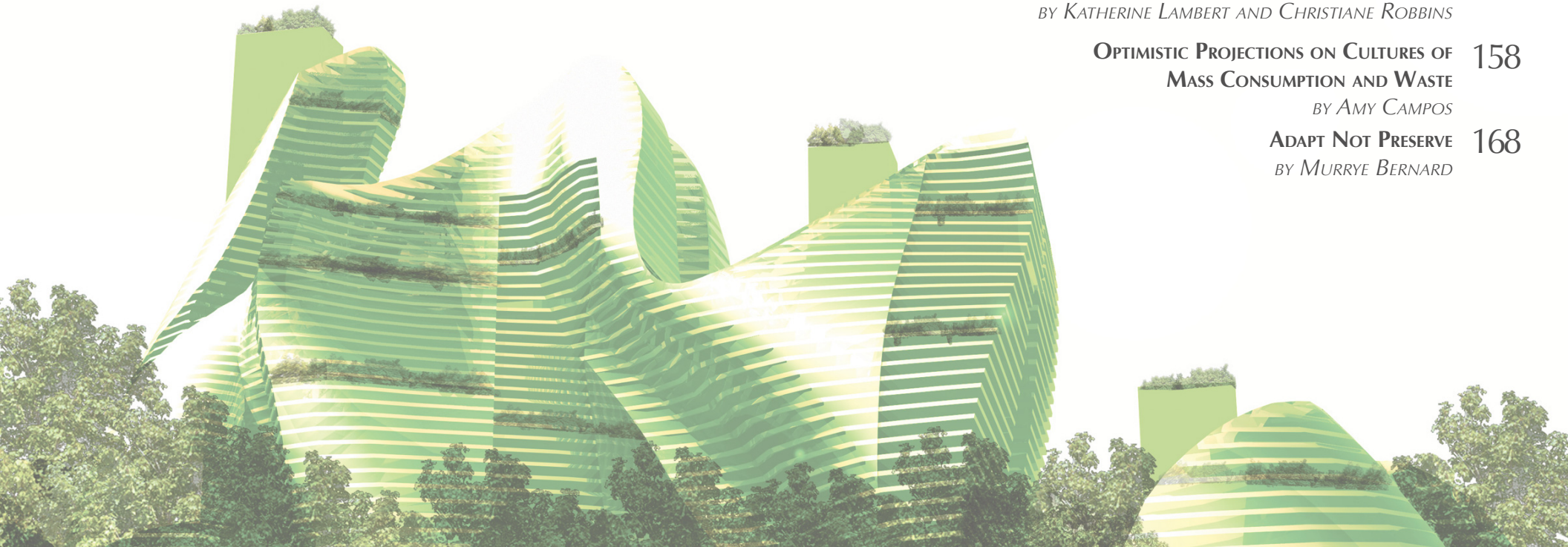
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TWILIGHT

*by Katherine Lambert
& Christiane Robbins*



“There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man it is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity it is the middle ground between light and shadow between science and superstition and it lies between the pit of man’s fears and the summit of his knowledge this is the dimension of imagination it is an area which we call – the Twilight”¹

-Rod Serling

twi•light n

1. an ambiguous or unsettled state or condition, especially between two opposing conditions.²

Many have been enthralled by the possibilities of projecting ourselves into a fictive present as future and future as present as seen in Serling’s iconic, episodic Twilight Zone. Some of us here, there and elsewhere easily grasp the secondary meaning and find ourselves perched upon an ambiguous or unsettled state of spatial presence, straddling two opposing conditions. Twilight holds these two impulses within a frame of productive tension, speaking to a sense of temporality and place - one that is never dull, is often startling and fantastical, is often at odds with itself.... and at times offers a measure of truth.

Recent decades have witnessed the deregulation of global markets, the rise of

flexible labor, ubiquitous computing, the proliferation of digitally sophisticated financial instruments, the economic crisis, the collapse of the housing bubble and imperatives to re-urbanize. At this critical moment, we’re also experiencing increased social complexity, the EKG inducing spikes of global terrorism, the costs of perpetual wars, the global propagation of multi-plexed, PZT surveillance societies - all surrounded by a emoticon laminate of Facebook friendsters :-). Given this context, chirpy twitters for futurity and singularity ricochet against a loop of flat-lined tweets.

Within this vortex lie the relational aspects of such socio-economic shifts, as well as the putative rise of post-industrial society, and of

21st century architectural practices. Architects are often torn between reflexive responses to the devils’ choices of financial crisis, ecological determinacy and/or that of securitization and control. Spaces, movements and mobility, too, are increasingly co-mingling in this Darwinian moment. They are evolving relationally - within a feedback loop of such immediacy that each is evolving in constant symbiotic adaptation and re-adjustment to the other. Implicit in this evolution is the flow of sensorial narratives with the exoskeletal materializations of space. A re-conceptualization and re-framing is being realized – one that deviates from a singular trajectory of bricks and mortar to one that is substantively more varied and nuanced. It comprises a challenge to the prevailing depictions of 21st century (urban/(sub)urban/x-urban) life and redefines notions of space, psycho-geographies, locative technologies, mobilities, and “citiness” itself.

“An everlasting tie exists between the human being and the environment, between action and human response on one side and the environment’s characteristics and quality on the other... we resemble our environment and we could almost say that we are our environment.”³

- Jorge Glusberg

These are accompanied by not only a renewed global interest in the locative nature of non-place, mobile, social and technological networks, collaboration and relational aesthetics, but, perhaps more significantly by the underpinnings of subjectivity itself. One’s meandering through the city in a quest for serendipity, perversity, or “profane illumination”⁴ can be now read as an implicitly political and social act. Or, as the sociologist Saskia Sassen stated recently, a city’s most valued asset is its perpetual “incompleteness” and ability to continue evolving indefinitely, thus

advancing notions of “open-source urbanism.”⁵ This is easily translated to a compelling premise of an “open-source architecture.” Developing such strategies are essential to the formulation of inquiry and analysis of the relationality of cultural-material ecosystems.

In our considering such multi-layered subjects it becomes incumbent to do so in dialogue and perhaps counterpoint with historical precedents and legacies. This ensures our arrival at a more incisive understanding of the rather seamless adaptation of labor, production and spatial practices today – a field in which rules aren’t bent but are simply fluid. The persistent engagement of 21st century Architects/Designers to grasp, embrace and deploy the complex interactive nature of space and non-place has not yet resulted in a wide spread response from the field necessary to its widespread physical actualization.

Recently, numerous corporate entities have been divesting themselves of their commercial real estate holdings as quickly as is financially viable. Concurrent with the loss of real estate values implicit in the housing crisis, unanticipated consequences have resulted in an unplanned void in the ecology of our materialized brandscape, which, in turn, has demanded our re-adaptation. The branded workplace has now become a transitory non-place, often an empty apathetic artifice – a 20th century fossil, almost a nostalgic gesture to a collective memory of a representation of work in the North American hemisphere. The workplace was once Taylorized - mechanized by cycles, hours, restrictions - and visual monitoring. This is now been translated into newly inscribed, seamless, transitory, digital forms embedding a voyeuristic management ethos of virtual supervision and the circulation of capital.

One easily wonders is the workplace a dead

typology – one desperately sucking the blood from the promise of its own future? This may be true only to the extent that architectural practices will be called upon to materially (re)imagine and (re)adapt – to construct and actualize a compelling spatial presence and sensorial experience – invoking the specificities of a constantly evolving eco-cultural-material system. In an unrelenting quest to secure the endless branding aesthetics demanded by corporate culture, our new modes of work are pushing us to re-integrate architecture practices into the DNA of the spatial and sensorial performativity of work itself.

The nascent promise of recent developments of digitally augmented “smart” grids, buildings, urban spaces, and personalized data speak to a conducive exchange between the human body and its spatial and sensory environment. By way of example, architect David Benjamin stated that intelligent building skins and other sentient surfaces should “offer an interface to our public, collective thinking”⁶ by amassing and then displaying data about the urban spaces and environment. In building upon the experimental practices of Diller and Scofidio in projects such as “Blur-Building”, and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s Zócalo Square, Mexico City, Benjamin’s and Soo-in Yang’s recent collaborative work “The Living”, 2009, offers a harnessing and re-purposing of air quality data using it as a generator of building systems and recursive extoskeletal displays.

“A dynamic world calls for responsiveness. Responsiveness in architecture calls for new systems. New and untested systems call for full-scale prototyping.”

Living Architecture Lab

While proclaiming the promise inherent in adaptive technologies, their formal integration and abstracted deployment lays bare a tacit

acknowledgement that the medium is not fully the message in the advancement of database aesthetics. The Livings’ relevance lies in its responsive actualization of formal spatial practices and coded messages. Near future upheavals may forecast and reveal themselves now in these publicly accessible databases, as they offer a vast range of datasets - from environmental to financial to personal information.

“Yet each project is a beginning rather than an end.”

Living Architecture Lab

Such use of adaptable technologies and database aesthetics offers insights to global ecological changes heretofore never experienced or envisioned outside the narratives of science fictions and mega box surround sound. Arguably, we live in an overpopulated and under-resourced world and

One easily wonders, is the workplace a dead typology?

will not be able to re-generate the resources necessary to support the increasing demands of unprecedented planetary population growth and migratory patterns. By necessity, architects and designers will adapt more radical approaches than merely answering the utopian call to “green”: energy efficiency, green building technologies, or net zero consumption. Without question, these efforts are noble and essential. However, these remain market driven solutions to problems that have yet to prove themselves in today’s marketplace – one that requires radical intervention. In the interim, we continue down a path of unprecedented expansion and intensity within a wildly compressed time frame.

“How long it will take for the inevitable social and economic changes brought about by the war years to affect our living standards, no one can say. But, that ideas and attitudes will continue to change drastically in terms of man’s need and man’s ability to satisfy that need, is inevitable.”

John Entenza, Arts & Architecture, 1945

We are facing a distinct, synergistic moment, one similar to the demands facing the USA at the conclusion of World War II. Once again, the nation is shifting - though in no less an all-encompassing mode. Of course this is replete with unforeseen challenges and difficulties. But much like that moment following World War II, our moment is double-edged and fortuitous. It reflects a tremendous spike in innovation, as key disciplines have evolved and matured over the past few decades. Indeed, this is tied to the largess of government funding for science and technologies related to the military. As were mid-century architects Charles & Ray Eames and Gregory Ain’s experiments with plywood’s use for military applications, we are now offered cleverly integrated cross-disciplinary initiatives such as mobile, augmented (visual + somatic) biometric, and robotic technologies. Many of these conceptual directives posit plausible, innovative applications for architectural and design market-based applications.

“Alternative components can be tested and new components integrated. On a larger scale, the projects are designed as swappable modules in new and existing buildings. Modules can be upgraded without replacing the entire building.”

Living Architecture Lab

In leaving the 20thc, the contemporary global workforce had acclimated itself to being outsourced and globally displaced. It seamlessly

shifted to a new reality that is our future-present. Many are now directing their own outsourcing, having evolved into the hyper-nomadic “expats” – mobile citizens - traversing the globe to transitory work “hubs” for assignments flexible in contractual duration and skill requirements.

Architecture, as both structuring element and form, continues to play a pivotal role in the inscription of our arrivals and departures. The last decade has seen a global address and facilitation to these new flows of travelers. New “uber-system hubs” are positioned to supplant conventional notions of the city, the town square, and the mall, as the global network centers of infotainment and commerce. They will be strategically hyper-



Image 2



Image 3

linked to real, augmented and virtual flows of people, travelers, tourists, and “expats” – aka re-locative technologies.

“I move therefore I am.”

Eva Franch 6

Workers of the new mobile class, conveniently categorized as mythological digital natives, are referenced as Gen Y in proverbial pie charts and PPT’s, and represent a larger market demographic than the Baby Boomers. Ostensibly, they view themselves as their own “hub” and the entire planet as their workplace. Many experience the “up-in-the air” status and dynamic glamour of global tourism as but a perk of their newfound freedom from their perceived claustrophobia of a locative-based office environment. Their measure of “freedom and choice” represents a singular opportunity for eager NGO’s intent on expanding their global market share.

The ability to relocate whatever, whenever, wherever, to whoever suggests that mobility forms one image of American society. Mobility is, however, more than a privileged Buena-vista point along the scenic highway. The all pervasiveness of mobility today reveals that the contemporary is only intelligible when seen from the conditions of mobility. We understand mobility to include the following. Mobility is polymorphous. It’s myriad of forms include social mobility, auto-mobility, mobile telephonics and eco-tourism. It is a transitional, transformational state re-configuring and refreshing – time after time. It is an event space – a sequence of appointments, dates and rendezvous points. It is episodic. It is multi-dimensional, temporarily functioning beyond the x-y-z coordinates of Cartesian space. It is 4-D, proprietary and self-animated.... perhaps even 5-D. It incorporates information technologies and telecommunications triggering a spatial schizophrenia – whereby

one can be in two places at once – possibly even three or four.

The measure of mobility today is the measure by which we value our place in contemporary societies. Mobility is an indicator of quality of life and thus links with broader concepts of social theory and environmental practices. Fractured status of global nomads ranges from technocrats to the displaced and/or disenfranchised migrant worker. The ironic contradiction, of course, is a generation of one class of the socially un-tethered whose privilege is ostensibly inscribed with a rather perfunctory social and ecological ethos. These same people may be unwilling to reconcile with the effects of the carbon footprint engendered by their own doppelganger.

Mobility contributes to a paradoxical twinning - associations of creativity and exclusion, marginalization, insecurity and at worst, violence. The new migratory patterns of the technocratic worker will soon be grotesquely out-sized by the concurrent migratory patterns of an irregular migrant - an increasing number of marginalized refugees traversing the continents, some looking for work, others for food and water. These are classes of trans-nationals that are increasingly and permanently displaced – on the move – and often without adequate or stable access to food, water, or shelter in this unfolding ecological quandary. Without debate, Architecture and Design have an urgent role in this increasingly fragile world of impermanence.

Twilight is instantiated twice during a 24 hr. period – civil (morning) and nautical (evening.) It is both permanent and impermanent - the never-ending opening and closing of our days. Its fixed period varies in degree from a locative-based POV relative to planetary positioning, nonetheless it is always there - somewhere. This framing offers one only traces of illumination

near the sunset or sunrise point of the horizon which are rendered difficult, if not impossible, to discern. It is often considered by many to be a most captivating, mystifying and seductive moment. Twilight envelops us ... where our horizons are obscured by an excessive signal to noise ratio, while our cosmographic capacities remain locked onto traces of illumination.

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7. Acknowledgement of the singular inspiration of J.G. Ballard and M. Dery.

PHOTO CREDITS

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