On Liminalities

A conversation between
the Editorial Committee members

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SS + CE - We deployed the opportunity of this editorialship as a tool to uncover the design implications of fully inhabiting an understanding of ourselves as entwined within the world. The call discusses how our cognition expands out within a dynamically interwoven process of understanding and acting, whilst the world constantly acts upon us. We expand into our tools and begin to perceive through them. Andy Clarke and David Chalmers asked "Where does the mind stop and the world begin?", and Malafouris discussed how "We think 'with' and 'through' things, not simply 'about' things. Don Ihde has spoken of how human evolution is entangled with our engagement with tools. We did not invent new tools as we had evolved, we evolved as we had new tools. Within this perspective the drawings and models with which we work emerge as tools through which we think. When we begin to understand our relationship with the world in this way the spaces we inhabit reveal themselves as extensions of ourselves. They are frameworks to support our understanding of ourselves; hooks on which to hang the memories on which our identities are built. This issue of the journal, Liminalities, set out to explore this fluid and transitional character of our engagement with the world, and how this reflects into our designerly practice, our understanding of space and the process of designing.

JAB - Understanding the process of design through architectural tools, I totally agree, digital tools isolate processes from their fixed contexts, allowing us to find real meanings on architectural designs. Those tools redefine the elements, to later de-escalate the process and return to talk about the entire set as a single entity.

A digital process of pure knowledge would be one in which any decision would be valid just because it is a decision. In this case we would not have an unspeakable structure, but rather a total absence of structure. A total undecidability and then, a decision-making agent would make the decision in conditions of total omnipotence.

A digital system is based on decisions. Since the decision is always made within a context, what is decidable is not entirely free. What is considered a valid decision will have the limits of a structure that, in fact, is only particularly unstructured. Undecidability is therefore always a deconstructed structure and, therefore, the madness of the decision is, like all regulated madness, not fixed.

The singularity of the decision, through digital tools, will tend to the universality of the rule, and vice versa, because there will be a plurality of contents equally capable of assuming that function of universal representation. In an opposite sense, contexts in fact limit structural undecidability, and also the spectrum of contents that can, at a given moment, play the role of universal representation.

The action that is developed is based on pure decision without worrying about the effects of our actions on others. It is a decision to propose action by and for the subject and is built on the accident as context.

In this digital system there is an instantaneous expansion of worldly experience, with the consequent loss of identity and memory.

This reaction and production on the instantaneous, on the accident, has an example of its artistic expression in the poems of Apollinaire. "The poet places himself in the middle of life and records the lyricism of things and voices." Apollinaire fragments the subject and his experience of space and time, achieving an aesthetic form that is put to the test in "Zone". There is now a day a change of era in the history of artistic perception. The aesthetics of simultaneity appear, a vision of reality that the reader must interpret and reformulate. The kaleidoscopic and changing vision of the city is the place to produce and modify this reality and transform it into an "intelligent" reality.

SS + CE - Tim Ingold discusses our entanglement within making in terms of a two-way dialogue with material, writing "These materials think in us, as we think through them." He explains that within this perspective all making is necessarily experimental, and moves forward in direct dialogue with the constant becoming of the material, it's context, and ourselves. We share in the editorial that Jonathan Hill spoke of how: "A dialogue can exist between what is designed and how it is designed, between design intention and working medium, and between thought, action and object – building the drawing rather than drawing the building. [...] In building the drawing, any instrument is a potential drawing tool that can question the techniques of familiar building construction and the assumed linearity of design, so thatbuilding and drawing may occur in conjunction rather than sequence." (Hill, 2005, 17).

Our drawings and making also extend us into the fictions of spaces yet to be. In the call we asked if we begin to see our models not as something beyond ourselves, but instead employ immersive design practices, might this open up routes to an immersive architecture? Might a knowing implementation offer further potential?

MLN - Looking at Architecture as an "Art of inquiry" we look back and re-think at the debate on the separation between disciplines and how in many countries Architecture was considered to be a Technical field of studies losing the essence of what Art makes us reflect upon, inquiry, experimentation, making through the hands, using tools, questioning, speculating. Looking at the discipline of Architecture and how it is thought in many of the Schools of Architecture nowadays in Europe and beyond we can find words like sustainability, problem solving, answer, profession... I strongly believe in the value, in the practice as well in the education of future architects of questioning, rather than solving. Investigating the spatial practice through fiction and situations.

MLA - Architecture as, at least, one definition per architect. Schools of Architecture have tried to bind common assumptions on what architecture is in order to offer a collections of pieces (Frankenstein's style) to compose a meaningful whole. Questioning via understanding that we deal all the time with fictions (ours is a fictional-based duty) might be a way forward... it's been done before.

MD - This point about architects being people who question, and by extension who question what tools they need, comes at an opportune time. In the UK, architectural education is about to fundamentally change (ARB, 2023). No longer will it be necessary to have an accredited undergraduate degree in architecture. https://arb.org.uk/arb-approves-new-competencies-and-regulatory-framework-for-educating-future-architects/ The interface of 'architecture' and 'the 'rest of the world' will change. This, then, opens the discipline up to a range of new 'thinkers' - people who engage with the world differently to 'traditional' architects. The possibility of architecture moving from being inter-disciplinary (at best) to trans-disciplinary is, at long last, a real one. I foresee new spatial experiences, new tools to embrace and experience them; but it requires a new mindset, one in which architecture shares its knowledge base, becomes less protective of itself and learns from and acts with others beyond its known world.

SS + CE - We challenged ourselves and our authors to realize ourselves as participants; part of spatial, design and/or environmental ecologies, bringing situations into being. We asked in the call whether through an embrace of our geographical natures we might begin to uncover routes towards analogue and/or digital spatial engagement that interweave and entwine rather than divide or simulate; enhancing and extending spatial experience. We wished to speculate on whether an embrace of our entwined nature might begin to unveil opportunities for new architectures, and start to realign how we consider our inhabitation and construction of architectures, or indeed what that word might mean or encompass.

MLN - Tools are important as well as the method and themes to be explored. Architecture is one of the Art, the only one that can act across scales and territories, in this way there is a potential in the intersection between methods, tools and themes that the focus on the tools itself would not substitute. Thinking about the discipline and how this has been evolving throughout history, and how pedagogy has been discussed in relation to it (just think about the different programmes: Studio based education, Bologna reform, transition from Art Academy to Technical Sciences...), we must acknowledge that there is still an unexplored field that sits in the intersection between art and architecture where we are looking for a place for experimentation and this journal and this Issue gives us an opportunity to reflect on it.What can be next?

MD - I agree that, for me, 'architecture' is an 'art', even if I'm not so sure it is the 'only' one which such can act spatially so widely as Maria Luna suggests. But it is not so for all my colleagues. They think differently. Like Wittgenstein's 'Beetle in a Box' (1953) we each have a different definition of 'architecture'. We all think we have a shared experience of something, but in fact we might all be talking about very different 'somethings', whether they be real or virtual 'somethings'. Architecture is something different for everyone. Whatever it is, it is complex and it needs a common understanding of the space in which it operates, of the values we bring to it, and expect of it, if it is to be 'understood'. Maybe architecture has become too complex for an architect to cope with? The architect is not a 'God', the 'Creator' the 'Controller' of all space and time - whatever tools s/he might use to attempt such - the question now, for architecture, is whether or not the tools (as Joaquín Alvado hints) have become so sophisticated they take over the design role. Perhaps the changes to architectural education in the UK are therefore a good thing. By recognizing that there's no such thing as one definition of an 'architect' they address Wittgenstein and at the same time, by bringing new ideas and people they allow for human rather than artificial control over the discipline and profession (and its future).

MLA - Not having a clear perspective on whether architecture is an art or not might also be an opportunity. Are we social agents debating on the present-future of the world by acknowledging architectural tools and a quite specific (or generic) mindset? Is it useful?

JAB - Talking about design role, the condition of the future places us in front of new meanings to which the architect must respond directly:

- Virtual place: hyperlink of processes and situations capable of absorbing the future. Vector within the virtual map that establishes new synergies with other objects, regardless of the physical relationship of proximity.

- Virtual matter: physical medium where actions are fixed and others are reproduced. Urban void as an object of thought.

- Virtual structure: ability of the object to sustain itself and adapt to the imagined city. Digitalization applied to the environment.

- Virtual construction: Material measurement processes on the action and its transformation.

The map of the real city and the map of the physical city complement each other in their double measurement, real and virtual. The physical and the digitalization processes overlap and identify the culture of the project on the "body" of the city. The architect not only acts on the phenomena of the city, but measures and projects it into the future. The veracity of the process is carried out on the investigation and the series of hypotheses throw the scope of that issue.