

**Archined**  
*The Persistence*  
*of Questioning*  
**Critical Reflections**  
**on the Future,**  
**on Architecture**  
**and More**



**‘What is architecture?’**

**With the extensive multi-project *The Persistence of Questioning*. Critical reflections for the future, on architecture and more, Archined wants to stimulate discussion about key questions in and for architectural practice and culture. In addition to the publication of written and visual essays both online and in print, the project includes podcasts and a physical gathering. The questions posed by Archined in *The Persistence of Questioning* cannot be answered equivocally, but that does not lessen their importance. What is the significance of the profession in and for the future? What is the relation between design and ethics? When do we speak of architecture and what criteria do we use to assess it? What is the value of architecture culture?**

**Views on what architecture should achieve differ greatly. This publication consists of a growing collection of essays that illustrate a multitude of contemporary, even avant-gardist practices. From the perspective of their own practice, architects consider the question: ‘What is architecture?’**

What is Architecture?

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## What is Architecture?

Architecture is not only about design, materials and detailing, but also about use, meaning and effect. About spaces, both real and imaginary. About representing, revealing, concealing. About concepts and pipe dreams, concrete and wood, systems and details. About doing nothing, adding, removing. About facilitating and improving. About authorship and users.

Archined published its first article on 4 September 1996. Browsing through the vast Archined archive that has accumulated over the past 25 years – containing essays, opinion pieces and reviews – the editors discovered, not surprisingly perhaps, that certain subjects have cropped up again and again, although the immediate reason and arguments raised differed on each occasion. If this yield from the past 25 years provides a framework within which to review the recent history of the profession, we see that a number of shifts have taken place.

The abolition of the Standard Regulation in 1997 meant the disappearance of the fee schedule for architects. Since then, clients have conducted tough negotiations about responsibilities and fees, and, more than previously, architects compete fiercely with one

another. In addition, the strict Dutch interpretation of the European public procurement regulations introduced in 2004 have made it more difficult for many – though not all – architects to secure commissions that are financed with public money. This influence of the market economy has struck deeply into the architecture profession and how it is practiced – making it harder and more commercial – and the result is that presentation and representation are becoming steadily more important. There is less and less time and space for reflection, and the relevance of architectural culture is diminishing. The 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath have compounded these developments.

Once again we find ourselves at a profound turning-point. The recently released report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) shows – not for the first time unfortunately – that the climate change caused by humankind is leading to irreversible extremes of weather all over the globe. And the world-wide impact of the MeToo movement, the Black Lives Matter movement and the COVID-19 pandemic on daily social and cultural life, on the economy and infrastructure, on the built environment and how it is used, has placed our worldview

in a different reality and made certain problems more visible.

The comprehensive and vast scale of these confrontational insights and tendencies has thrown up concrete arguments for changes and shifts. Architecture practice is now slowly but surely broadening its scope. Looking at the graduation projects presented at faculties of architecture in recent years, one sees that this broadening has been underway for some time but is now gaining momentum. Architects deploy architectural thinking in multiple and different areas, not to create new revenue models or to spread market risks, but on the strength of a genuine interest in questions beyond architecture, as the critic Hans Ibelings puts it, in what architecture can achieve outside itself. The notion that architecture can be more than a physical object is more widely accepted today. Prompted by a desire for social involvement, a growing group of architects views the alternative and avant-garde practices of the 1960s and 1970s as an inspiration to critically question their own field of work. Yet where the current period possibly differs from the 1960s and 1970s is in today's more widely shared feeling that

**architecture – in whatever form – can make a (modest) difference. A feeling perhaps strengthened by the knowledge that continuing on the old, familiar path is not a sustainable option. Avant-garde becomes mainstream?**

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# **Building Worlds: Architecture as Speculation on Society**

**Lara Schrijver**

At its core, architecture is a hopeful gesture; it envisions the potential of a place and strives to improve the conditions of human habitation. At the same time, it aims to facilitate the life within, providing what is needed for a range of individual and collective experiences. These two perspectives – the drive to improve and the aim to facilitate – are the foundation of architecture and its self-conception. As such, design oscillates between hubris and serviceability.

Architecture thus encompasses two concurrent visions, one that maintains the world as it is, and one that foreshadows another, possible form of coexistence. Imagining possible worlds is what architecture shares with science fiction and speculative fiction.

Overconfidence sets in when the architect believes that society can be changed directly through architecture. In the manifestoes of modernism, the scale tipped towards hubris, with architects taking on increasingly large-scale problems, and aiming to construct new societies through their projects. As sci-fi

author Paul Scheerbart wrote in 1914 for the Werkbund exhibition in Cologne: “If we wish to raise our culture to a higher level, we are forced for better or for worse to transform our architecture.” The later disappointment in modernism shows that grand visions cannot (or should not) always be built (as for example the desolate high-rise estates of Paris and Toulouse). Yet sometimes grand visions are needed in design – as long as modesty accompanies them, or the realization that not everything can be shaped.

This sense of ‘building worlds’ is not unique to architecture and science fiction. A variety of creative fields, among them as theatre, film, literature and game design, also provide alternative worlds for their audiences. Yet through the presence of the built environment in everyday life, architecture makes its mark on society, while simultaneously expressing the values of that society. This is not a direct, unmediated connection: how a building is experienced is a complex interplay of (individual) perception and (collective) culture. Buildings often remain longer than the societies for which they were built (as in the former Eastern Bloc). Moreover, important changes can sometimes come from unexpected sources – and may even be smaller, more

modest, or less consequential than the grandiose plans of history would suggest. In science fiction – both written and filmed – the environment and the narrative are intimately connected. Here, everyday experience seems to fade into the background, and the friction between intention and result provides a rich foundation for reflection on social conditions. These stories (particularly since the 1970s) often begin from an envisioned post-apocalyptic wreckage, inevitably founded in our present. Keeping the narrative and its environment coherent is a way of magnifying the questions, of shedding the everyday distractions that architecture facilitates. Showing a future in which our current constructions have fallen into ruin or caused extreme ecological destruction, these stories provide a counterpoint to the architectural schemes that project a controlled, improved future through their spatial organization.

Histories of architecture show many of the societal hopes and dreams that were woven into conceptions of the world-as-it-may-be. Tony Garnier, for example, claimed that no prisons were needed in his *Cité Industrielle* because there would be no need for crime in his rational and socialist city. In architecture, the far-reaching social and

spatial consequences of such ambitions often remain underexposed. In contrast, science fiction is free of the practical constraints of realization, and can also show the dangers and failures of those worlds yet-to-come. The coherence of the forms and forces of their worlds, and the values and behaviours they encourage, are part of the provocative strengths of these stories. At the same time, architects have equally imagined complete and far-reaching projects – Tony Garnier’s Industrial City (1917), Gyorgy Krutikhov’s Flying City (1928), Buckminster Fuller’s dome over Manhattan (1960) – which showed a hope for the future as much as it showed an architectural idea.

Today, one striking theme in contemporary science fiction is the questioning of the natural laws that constrain reality as we know it. This is a theme that has some roots in the later years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since the 1970s, some of the narratives have begun to voice a discomfort with the convictions of scientific knowledge, and with the notion that progress should be pursued no matter the consequences. While many of these narratives still rely on human resilience to overcome challenges – there is always a group that survives thanks to human (and



*Dome over Manhattan*, R. Buckminster Fuller, 1960

technological) ingenuity – the destruction in these stories is typically related to the unforeseen consequences of human behaviour. They are increasingly grappling with the conditions of what is now designated as the Anthropocene, and some stories seem to suggest that we should prepare for the absolutely unforeseeable.

For example, in James B. Tiptree's 1978 novel *Up the Walls of the World*, two separate storylines, one with an alien species and one about humans experimenting with telepathic communication, are gradually brought together. The alien narrative serves to speculate on a completely different approach to gender roles: in this species, the size and

strength of males is seen as making them particularly suited to child-rearing, while the smaller and more versatile females are the food gatherers and scouts. This simple inversion of a basic assumption of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that size and strength are needed for hunting rather than protecting the young, uses the Darwinian idea of 'fitness to purpose' to question our own societal assumptions.

In *Up the Walls of the World*, Tiptree (pseudonym of Alice B. Sheldon), uses the alien narrative to create characters outside the realm of typical narratives and to tell a story that holds a mirror up to our society. The aliens communicate in light-waves (not words), live in electromagnetic field storms, and have few physical features we can relate to as humans. Yet they communicate, and connect with their human counterparts. Their world is ephemeral – or at least not physical. This is played out against the human world, with a research department on a military base as backdrop – the ultimate in drab, bureaucratic and institutional architecture. Nothing here is spectacular, but everything is carefully considered.

Tiptree's story juxtaposes a completely different world with our own; the differences not only evoke a sense of wonder

but also question our own conventions and assumptions. In so doing, the story also suggests that modern society has brought not only progress and solid scientific knowledge, but also new challenges.

The well-being of individuals in a highly technological and urban society, the shortcomings of rationality in the face of a complex ecosystem, and a heightened awareness of environmental concerns are central to the stories of the past 50 years and determine the structure of their environments. More recent narratives go even further, transforming the relationship between humans and the environment with a profound transformation of materiality itself, building on cybernetic systems, nanotechnologies and accelerated evolution. These stories are set against the background of a continuing destabilization of how we understand 'humanity', 'technology' and 'nature'.

For example, one story that goes against the laws of nature is Jeff Vandermeer's Southern Reach trilogy, of which *Annihilation* (2014) became a Netflix feature-length film. In this story, a mysterious area called the 'shimmer' is the object of an investigative expedition. People who go into this

area sometimes fail to return. Those who do return are no longer themselves. The shimmer is a zone full of strange events, and as the story unfolds it turns out that there have been many previous expeditions. The area seems to be expanding, and it becomes clear that the environment is causing a kind of anomaly in which human, animal and plant life mix to create new, hybrid life forms. Human-trees, bear-humans, and plant-fishes are emerging here, and time also flows differently. The series as a whole questions the very limits of human agency, and it addresses the consequences of conceiving of human life as separate from other life. As such, it also questions how modern thinking came to neglect the constraints of the world it occupies. The trilogy reflects on the failures of modern society, which is also increasingly tangible in buildings that alienate people and damage the environment. Vandermeer explores this narrative even further in his 2017 novel *Borne*, imagining a world where technology, life and DNA become blended, where species are equal parts natural and artificial.

These types of speculations have a role in making sense of the world as it is,

**and conceiving the world as it may become; they are provocative reflections on the collateral effects of collective actions. Science fiction in particular can help architecture to consider unforeseen consequences of design decisions, to thoroughly recognize how on the one hand the environment and society are connected, and how on the other hand the future remains difficult to predict. Thanks to the many worlds that have already been conceived – in architecture and in science fiction – design can relate to the world we want to build. Science fiction magnifies existing conditions to speculate on other potential worlds. Architecture similarly seeks to envision possible worlds, while it is also bound by the existing context. These two aspects of building worlds are not mutually exclusive but, rather, inform each other. The complementary perspectives show how our existing and imagined realities influence one another, thereby shaping the worlds we actually build. It is precisely by incorporating these radical visions (of thriving urban ecosystems, or a variety of different residential cultures) that change can be initiated. Some level of pragmatism is necessary**

**to realize a building, but imagination  
is equally needed to shape the future.**

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# Inhabitability as Criterion

## Mechthild Stuhlmacher

Guidance by Aalto

I'm spending a few days in a Berlin apartment designed by Alvar Aalto. Temporary accommodation courtesy of a hospitable friend. It's an uncluttered apartment in a large block that contains units of various sizes, probably originally intended for smaller families. Aalto, an architecture hero from the 1950s, designed the perfect place for a resident who today travels a lot and uses the apartment as a home base and film studio, a lifestyle that Aalto no doubt didn't envisage at the time. It's also a perfect place for the various neighbours: young families, singles, couples, seniors, young people. What exactly makes it so pleasant here? The care given to ordinary things: the entrance to the building feels naturally inviting, for visitors with or without luggage or bikes. At the apartment you enter a spacious hall, with passageways leading to both the kitchen and the versatile living space, described at the time as an *Allraum*. A spacious loggia – perfectly positioned between dining area, sleeping area and living area (now workspace) – feels

like the centre of the house and draws light deep inside. That creates a careful yet unforced differentiation between activities such as cooking, dining, relaxing and working. Diagonal views and sight lines and transparent partitions make the space feel larger than it actually is and ensure connections between all interior spaces and the surrounding landscape.

The windows around the loggia capture the changing sunlight, creating variety and life. The effect is enhanced by the distinctive open corners that articulate the whole building inside and outside. Simple planks fixed on top of the radiators form heated benches.

Built in 1957 in the Hansaviertel district, the celebrated and still modern-looking apartment building boasts two spacious and shared entrance halls, one at the level of the bike shed and the main entrance one level above. Located beside the main entrance is a wonderful covered outdoor terrace, a sort of 'columned hall' where neighbours meet one another even on cold autumn days. And though that might not happen every single Friday evening, the welcoming generosity exuded by the space is nonetheless of immense value. From here, one can access the easy-to-ascend and uncluttered staircases, flooded with daylight and with a splendid corner bench on top of the radiator.



Hansaviertel apartment Berlin, 1957. Alvar Aalto Foundation, H. Havas



Hansaviertel apartment in Berlin by Alvar Aalto. Photos author

The dimensions of all spaces inside and outside are modest, the materials sober. Yet owing to the proportions and spatial relationships, Aalto overcomes the banality, monotony and oppressiveness exuded by comparable blocks of flats from roughly the same period. It is his generosity, his focus on how space is used and the attention he gives to daily movement patterns and needs that have sustained the life in these apartments for so long, far longer than in comparable apartments created with less skill and attention. Genuinely good architects have the power to spin ordinary things into gold; to elevate everyday places into valuable living environments; to truly achieve sustainability.

Rigour, continuity, appropriation

Good architecture helps us to appropriate the world. That, to me, is the ultimate aim of every architecture project – big, small, transformation, new, public, collective or private, urban or interior. Architecture provides guidance, protection, impetus, dignity. A good building in the city is like a corner bench in a room, a wainscot, a rug, a podium to sit or stand on, something that helps us find our place, alone or in the company of others, and a place to call our own.

‘Inhabitability’ or *‘bewoonbaarheid’* is a selection criterion in many Belgian competitions. What that means is that a building must respond to the practical needs of its occupants; it must be useful, not just functional; it must express dignity and beauty, and be more than an image.

What do you need to create an architecture of appropriation, apart from the unrivalled talent of Alvar Aalto? I often like to refer to three concepts that I believe are essential for the type of architecture we want to create with our office. They are ‘rigour’, ‘continuity’ and ‘appropriation’, or the ability to inhabit architecture.

The first two terms are taken from the titles of issues of the magazine *9H*, published in 1989 and 1995. They were hugely inspiring themed compilations of familiar and unknown projects, texts and images. These publications were genuine treasure troves, containing discoveries such as Hans Döllgast and Hans Tessenow, then completely unknown in the Netherlands; student work by the Norwegian architects Jensen and Brynhildsen, who designed a leprosy hospital in Lasur, India, with astonishing precision; and one of the first houses by a small yet promising office called Herzog de Meuron.

With 'rigour' I am referring to artistic and practical precision and mastery of the craft, the trained eye, sensory perception, sense of space. This blends harmoniously with the concept of continuity, which denotes the broad notion of cultural, spatial and historical contexts and the development of the concept of 'building upon' or *weiterbauen*.

The third concept, 'appropriation', does not feature as a title in *9H*, but in my view it forms a logical and desirable extension. Appropriation can take many forms. It denotes the guidance provided by architecture, those elements that people want to embrace in making spaces, buildings or neighbourhoods their own. It is about interest in people, about generosity and appropriateness. And about looking at the profession from different perspectives. As an architect you are present and absent at the same time. You ensure that not only the residents and other users but also the materials, the light, the texture, the rhythm and certainly also the plants outside achieve full potential. You ensure that residents, visitors and all other users feel at home, unimpeded by the architect's wilfulness. You design very consciously and precisely, but in your decisions you consider the *undesigned*, the existing, the changeable,

the natural, and all predicted and unpredicted later additions and disruptions. In landscape design they call that ‘borrowed scenery’, by which the surrounding landscape becomes part of the design. This attitude should not be confused with modesty. Instead, it concerns the ability to observe and the empathy needed to draw conclusions from what has been observed. To achieve that you need to display care, an interest in people and nature, in precision and craftsmanship. And if there is craftsmanship, then architecture has the potential to both serve people and be poetic.

*Appropriation: the designed and undesigned*

A good example of an appropriated space in our work is the enclosed garden of the Parkhof residential care facility in Machelen (Belgium). A wide gallery encircles a large garden designed as an ‘artwork’ in collaboration with the artist Rudy Luijters and garden and landscape architect Arne Deruyter. Thanks to the many volunteer gardeners, it can assume different guises all the time. There are bird’s nests, chickens, wooden play equipment, an ancient stone water tank found somewhere, unorthodox vege-

tation, a pétanque court, strawberry bushes and an old sweet chestnut. The walkway has the character of a cloister, and the garden feels like an appropriated outdoor room with the gallery as its wainscot. Here you can take shelter from the rain or sun. The gallery literally offers guidance, for a daily stroll, to observe guests, residents, animals and plants. The garden complements the architecture, provides relief and compensation. The *undesigned* stands alongside the *designed*; the spontaneous opposite the specific; the changeable and temporary opposite the permanent.

In the Predikheren, the city library in Mechelen for which we restored the ruins of a baroque monastery after years standing empty, these guiding elements include, among many other things, timber panelling that turns up throughout the building in various guises – as wainscot, bench, worktable, closet and rostrum. The panelling makes the walls warm and agreeable to the touch, gives the spaces a pleasant acoustic quality, provides a place for electricity and light and, above all, mediates between the building and the people who want to use it. As a result, the building shows all its facets and reveals all its irregularities and scars.

**Here, too, it is about the relationship between that which is designed and what already existed. The colourful ruin is framed, placed on a pedestal, prepared for appropriation, and only then can it come to life.**

**These examples constitute an appeal for an architecture that reflects on its core tasks. In the words of Andreas Hild, architecture belongs to the world of buildings and not to the world of things or objects. Architecture facilitates, frames and supports, and it can therefore only be understood through its relationship with the other. Objects, however, stand alone. Good buildings line streets and squares, create settings for people and encounters, provide dignity from within. Most of all, good buildings can be experienced at full scale. As architects, we do not build objects but spaces; we position benches, literally and figuratively. As architects, we do not stand on the stage; we build the stage that others must appropriate.**

## **Innovation and craftsmanship**

**“To all the professors who belong to a different generation of ours: this world moves**

**so fast! Put pride, your stupid studies of past things, your tastes, your beliefs aside! The mistakes of the past are leading us to destruction! (...) People used to tell us to look to the past to avoid the same mistakes in the future, but I say: let's look to the future, to avoid the mistakes of the past!"**  
(source: [archicage.com](http://archicage.com))

**This citation is representative of the voice of a young generation of architects at a time that many see as a turning point. It is normal and worthwhile for each new generation to think that it can, and must, do things better and differently to the previous one. Even so, I think that now is precisely the right time to reflect on architecture as a discipline. I see this not as a look backwards but forwards. The Hansaviertel district in Berlin, where Aalto's residential building is located, was created within the framework of the Interbau '57 building exhibition and, at the time, was the ultimate model for future building. Stacked apartments set in green surroundings with contemporary materials and compact floor plans were promoted as an optimistic alternative to the reconstruction of the bombed city. A differentiated, natural**

landscape design supported an urban plan that broke with pre-war traditions. Aalto's building embraces the surrounding landscape. In contrast to the numerous blocks of flats from the decades that followed, which were built according to comparable premises, Aalto's building is still highly valued. More than anybody else, he proved capable of combining the radically innovative agenda of the time with attention for appropriation.

I would like it if we, like Aalto, could connect a contemporary innovative agenda to craftsmanship and appropriation. That we could start to see architecture once again as building, and that we ask ourselves what buildings must do – and not do – and what distinguishes them from objects. I am convinced that the fundamental transition into a genuinely sustainable, future-proof architecture, which we now face, calls for more than the substitution of concrete with wood or hemp, and the construction of jaw-dropping objects. Let us once again look at buildings and our role as designers of them. Let us ask ourselves why there are buildings that remain good for fifty years or longer, and what makes us want to continue living in these build-

**ings. Let us once again see architecture as an art that concerns the making of good spaces and living environments, and let us learn to value it again as both an innovative yet slow discipline that serves the purpose of empowering everybody to appropriate a piece of the world.**

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# Velvet Realities

## Sven Jansse

These images symbolize a search for an answer to the question: 'What is architecture?' A series of highly abstract structures at the intersection of architecture and sculpture. All features that usually help us identify and read architecture and give it a place are absent. So, too, is any familiar context. The shapes appear against a darkened background, like precious objects inside a jewelry box. These whimsical monoliths look unchangeable. Their textures are almost tangible, yet impossible to describe. Even so, the recognizability of the abstracted shapes and the exaggerated articulation of typical architectural elements – there are overhangs, plinths, roofs – enable us to engage directly with what we see. They touch on repetition, stacking, ensembles, public space. Despite their two-dimensional representation, these stripped-down architectural forms convey an existential, spatial, almost volumetric experience.

Sven Jansse creates imaginary spaces and spatial imagery that blur the boundaries between art and architecture as well as between reality and fantasy.











# **Shifting Authorship and the Design of the Encounter**

**Giovanni Bellotti**

**Alessandra Covini**

During an interview with the poet David Shapiro, John Hejduk recalls a conversation between himself and Peter Eisenman. Eisenman, looking at Hejduk's repertoire of nomadic, fragmented work, dismissed it as 'not being architecture' because 'one could not get in it'. To which Hejduk's theatrical answer, staged with his index pointed at the interviewer, was: 'You, can't get in it!' Hejduk's argument rested on the idea that architecture is not confined to the built fabric of the environment, that a building can be a form of architecture, as can a drawing or a model, and that one can only enter a project through a capacity, or a desire to understand it.

In the years that we have been working together as Studio Ossidiana, we have in the everyday world of contracts come up against disciplinary boundaries and the definition of 'architecture'. In the negotiations concerning artist's fees instead of architect's rates, occasionally reinforced by colleagues, family or students when they ask: Are you an artist or an architect? We sometimes wished we had the

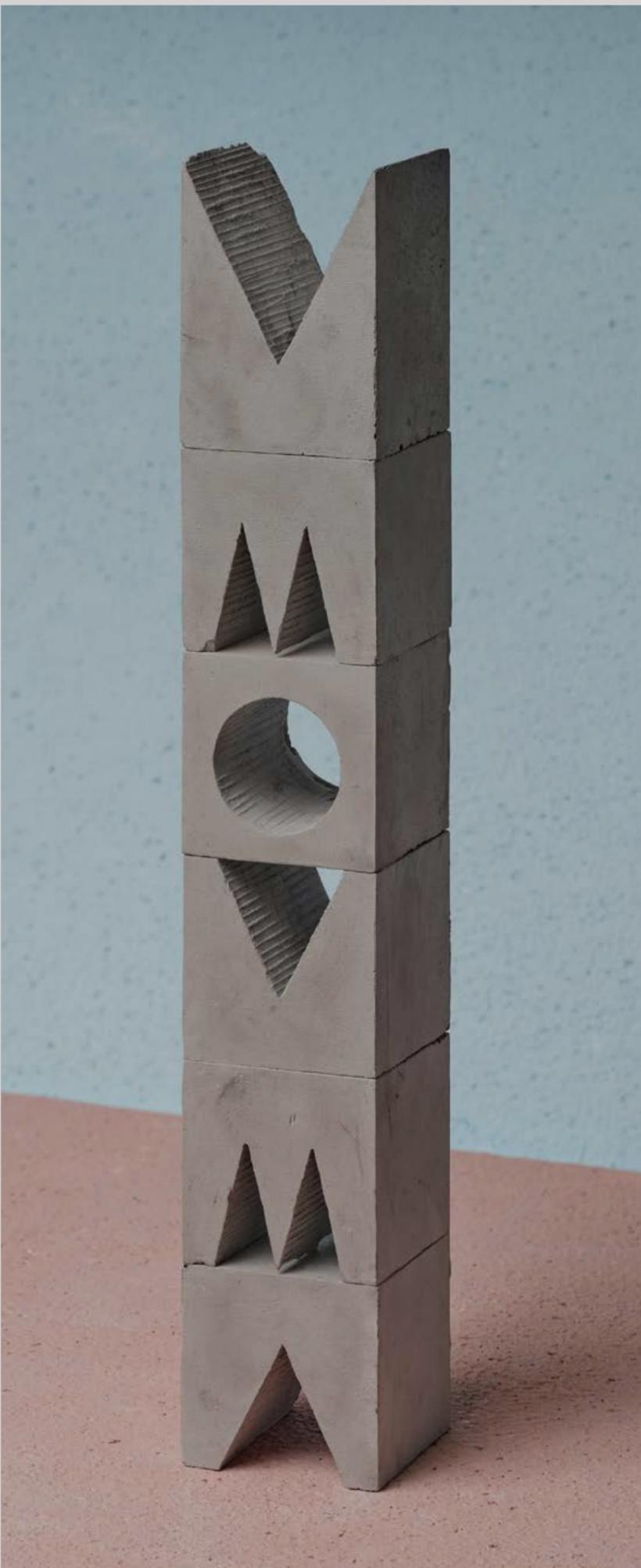
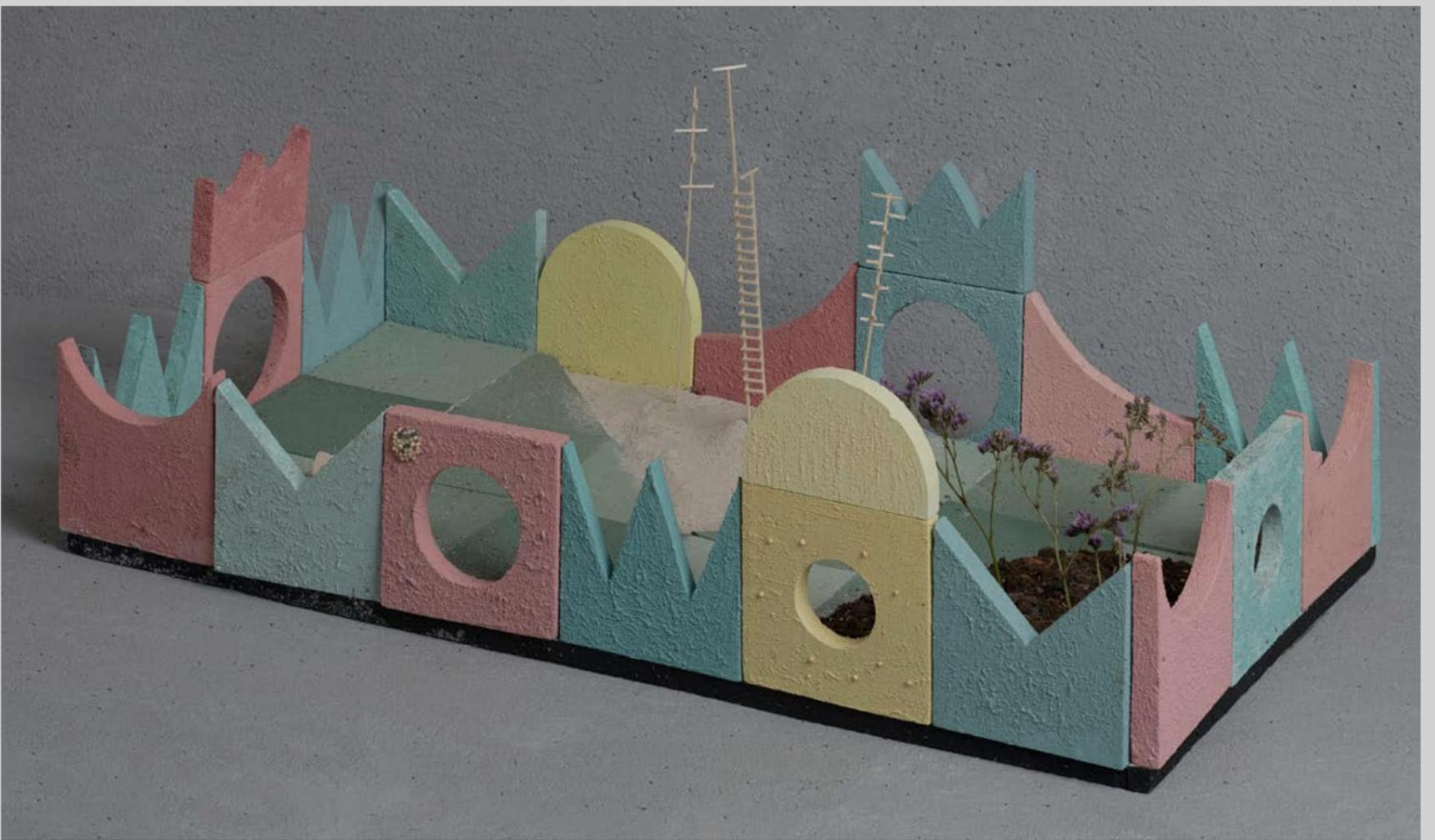
confidence to respond with Gordon Matta Clark's famous quip: 'If there is plumbing, it's architecture.' But as we grew less preoccupied with the disciplinary implications of our contractual flexibility (hired as either artists or architects), we increasingly felt that much broader and established notions and definitions had begun to waver, and not without consequences, around us. Notions of *natural* and *artificial*, terms that were once capable of speaking to a collective imaginary, were becoming clouded. Their meaning was either too broad to be useful or too narrow to be credible. What meaning do natural or artificial hold in a world where the very composition of the soil and air has been unintentionally designed by people? Their collapse of such notions was accompanied a renewed thirst for stable disciplinary grounds. But like the notion of nature, architecture appears to refer to a thick layer of definitions rather than to an imaginary realm to which projects and objects are either admitted or refused entry on the basis of their cultural pedigree. We have not interpreted this desire for stable disciplinary foundations as a call for agnosticism, but we sense a growing need to inhabit the gradient between disciplines, while we try to establish meaningful connections between the fields we cross.

The questioning of binary categories — artisanal and conceptual, material and abstract, but also the broader ones of human and non-human, cultural and natural — does not bring with it an intrinsic political or aesthetic position. Rather, it requires us to question more deeply each context and to give specificity to words like sustainability or inclusivity, words so common in briefs to the point of becoming losing their meaning. This kind of questioning is not an embrace of the collapse of cultural categories or disciplinary boundaries. Instead, it is the acceptance that no project is innocent; it will always include and exclude; it will always position itself towards one form of sustainability rather than another. Once it is accepted that innocence is not granted by technical optimization or by some form of environmental friendliness, the impossibility of architectural innocence carries with it a new kind of optimism. Each design must position itself as necessary in other ways: by enabling unseen or forgotten forms of relations with others, by actively proposing new ways of being in a home or in a public space, by facilitating new forms of agency.

Within this finer, more circumstantial positioning, we believe, lies the space and significance of projects. Projects have the power

to transform the generic into the specific, and to rewrite ethical concerns as contextual positions. A project does not have to centre on an author. The focus can shift during the process, encouraging other forms of authorship and ownership to grow within the cracks. Architecture can then be defined as a form of hospitality, open to critique and contributions. This is perhaps the reason why we love to work with materials and models, regarding them not as a step towards architecture, but, in line with Hejduk's thinking, as fragments of it.

The models we like the most are the ones that are objects in themselves, which acquire materiality and are a manifestation of the tools that made them, models that are both representations of possible spaces and inhabitants of space. Such are the sculptures or models of Andrea Branzi, Gonzalo Fonseca, Fausto Melotti and Michele de Lucchi, which are capable of arousing a kind of affection and desire towards their materiality, models that are both fragments, and precursors to their possible transformation into buildings. These models seduce us, and seem to ask to be taken care of, almost questioning their spectator, and not just their maker, about what they could become. These kinds of



Variations on a Birdcage, Studio Ossidiana. Photos: K. Kimitunesitunes

model-objects acquire a different agency from that attributed to the canonical architectural maquette, intended either as a quick three-dimensional sketch or a scalable representation of a set outcome. Less submissive, these model-objects do not surrender passively to being scaled up, as their scalability requires translation, while their sheer material presence questions future choices. They exist simultaneously in at least two distinct scales. Each is in itself a fragment, as Hejduk pointed out, of architecture, but it is also an autonomous object.

The possibility of translation to other scales does not heighten or diminish its influence. The models and material samples we make in our studio are certainly instrumental to the development of a project — and are indeed thought at, and made at, a certain architectural scale. At the same time, we aspire to make the kind of instruments we would want to collect, feel responsible for, and cherish both for their intrinsic material quality and for the possibility of their translations. And in this translatability lies their generosity: they require cultivation, inviting others — whether they be artisans, builders, clients, future users

or students – to join the conversation. This openness of the work sits very far from an idea of neutrality. We don't think there is any neutral architectural form, material, or design. Neutrality in architecture, and perhaps anywhere, is as charged a position as any other. It can only be framed as a desirable outcome when there is a wish to conceal, to ignore those for whom that specific blend of neutrality, norm, or standard, is an aggressive form of exclusion. The openness we speak of is closer to the model proposed by Umberto Eco – and later adopted by architects like Aldo van Eyck – in *Open Work*. Eco describes an artwork as 'an object endowed with structural properties that render possible a number of successive interpretations, a series of evolving perspectives, but that also enable us to coordinate such a series'. This openness is not generic, and its interpretations are not accidental. They require, in fact, to 'get into the work' to respond to embodied positions. In this desire to communicate lies the space for action and authorship, which is the inherent and unavoidable form of generosity of every project. As a model becomes a series of drawings, drawings become matter, and

**matter becomes material, and objects become spaces to be appropriated. Several authors begin to exist within this process: those who imagine the space, those who build it, and those who care for it.**

**This summer, in the tentative break we enjoyed between lockdowns, we had the fortune to see projects we had been working for over the past two years being built. In other words, translated to an urban, civic scale. In Utrecht, we realized the Fire Dune, a public kitchen-dune, a landscape of fireplaces and sand where one can cook or rest by the fire; in Stockholm, Utomhusverket, an open garden-observatory; and in Amsterdam, the Bird's Palace, a floating island dedicated to birds and birdwatchers. In all, we felt both the challenge of sharing the forms, materials and thoughts that had been with us for years, and the realization that what we had designed was but a fragment of the project. Utrecht's Fire Dune also belonged to the metalworkers who made it, to the people who lit it up and cooked there, and the association that took care of it; Utomhusverket became much more than we ever thought because of the work of a team of curators, who had to reinvent**

**themselves as gardeners, negotiating between the desires of the plants and birds who came to inhabit it, and those of the visitors; the Bird Palace was ultimately appropriated by birds, who farmed it and fertilized it, driven by appetite and curiosity.**

**Through these translations, authorship and ownership shifted, and architecture, at least in the definition we give it, become a form of charged hospitality. Visitors — through curiosity, cultivation and care — become gardeners or explorers.**

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## Colophon

The aim of Archined Foundation is to stimulate discussion about urban design, architecture and landscape architecture as widely as possible through various channels, including the Archined website. Editorially independent, the critical online communitybased site has been in existence since 1996. Archined articles are written by designers, academics, students and others active in the field.

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