

Fulcrum

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critical, political.

editors

Fulcrum is a free weekly publication, founded in January 2011 by three students at the Architectural Association in London. It really began as a response to both the rise of image-based media and the decline of critical theory in architecture.

Throughout the 2000s the use-value of the printed word changed dramatically, as the new immediacy of the Internet destroyed all the traditional financial models used to support printed matter, from the daily newspaper to the novel and scientific journal. Online outlets and digital platforms replaced either the format of the publication directly, or its cultural mode of delivery.

In architecture, what marked this period was the shift from critique and comment to purely image-based consumption. In line with the sculptural formal pursuits of the Starchitects, design websites were promoting re-hashed press releases and seductive imagery, not as a *representation* of architecture, but as *architecture itself*. The real-world feedback loop resulted in a vast proliferation of coffee-table picture books, in which the value of text was barely more than filler: occupying the margins between photographs, like the vacuous lyrics of a pop-song.

We don't think architecture should be exclusive, and we are ideological pluralists. There is a time and place for all forms of information exchange, and all modes of expression. But what worried us was the correlating decline in political agency of the architect.

In a sense, if you're not habituated to thinking critically, you become unhabituated to acting politically.

The dilemma for us seemed to be how a printed publication could present relevant and projective texts about the direction and future of architecture, while not indulging in anachronistic nostalgia (either technological or cultural).

What we conceived was a single sheet, with two short articles, presenting a dyadic view on a specific subject. The inherently pluralist nature of this format is integral to Fulcrum.

It is rare today for a student publication to appear more than three or four times per year. They therefore tend towards the format of small journals rather than, say, newspapers. They often attempt to present a cohesive impression of their student body, or at least collect together work of a diverse nature.

By printing weekly, we can focus on a single theme, and the frequency permits us to explore many ideas quickly, as well as extend our discussion to many authors — both those well-known and those who maybe have never been printed before.

The aim is to deliver small, bite-size chunks of theory and to engage the largest audience possible. We've abandoned any sense of comprehensive coverage in favour of presenting slivers of discourse reflecting architecture's manifold dimensions.

For some time now our readership has been predominantly digital, the majority of whom have never seen Fulcrum in printed form. But the purpose of this piece of paper is its ability to be folded, passed about, photocopied, left on busses. In short, its essence is in part its physicality.

From this week onwards we will be increasing our print run and delivering copies to several locations around the world. You are now just as likely to be reading this article in New York as Berlin, Venice as Vienna, Los Angeles as London.

Our editorial remit is specific, as is made clearer in the adjacent article, but we think focus for a publication is vital to its development and success.

If something about this small sheet appeals to you, please get in contact. We are always looking for anyone else with whom we can develop ideas and push agendas. At the very least, we hope you will return to the place you found this page again next week, to pick up a free copy of issue fifty-two — in which French architect Bernard Cache and noted astrophysicist Niel Turok will be discussing "cause and effect" as it applies to Vitruvius, the origins of architecture and the very beginning of the universe itself.

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"The 20th century lingers on. It shapes everything we do...the way we think. There's scarcely a good thing you can say for it. Genocidal wars, half the world destitute, the other half sleepwalking through its own brain-death. We bought its trashy dreams and now we can't wake up."

J.G. Ballard

There is a certain theory that says the first ten years of each century belong to the last. Taking historical events into account, one might therefore reasonably argue that the 20th century began in July 1914, and ended in August 2007.

This period, bookended by World War One and the Global Financial Crisis, lives on — in the material historical fabric of our cities, but more significantly in the continued inertia of the Baby Boomers. Hidden underneath this population spike are several younger generations struggling to escape the popular fetishisation of the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s. These people, the New Millennials, are coming of age in a period marked by its economic stagnation, global and local instability, and ideological exhaustion.

For the West especially, it seems that the key institutional frameworks we rely upon for social progress and paradigmatic evolution are breaking down.

In Britain, a succession of scandals over the last three years have exposed the profound corruption and collusion between the media, politics, justice and finance.

The sleight-of-hand by which corporate debt has been transferred onto the state (and then on to its citizens through austerity) has produced unprecedented levels of social inequality, and for the first time ever, we are seeing rising levels of starvation and poverty among not only Britain's poor, but also its middle classes.

This socioeconomic polarisation is paralleled in politics, as the collapse of the spectrum leaves voters

frustrated at a lack of real choice, increasingly producing extremist minorities. Recent movements, like Occupy, hint at a glacial change in social order. But actually, political change is only one facet of a broader paradigmatic shift.

In science, experiments like the Large Hadron Collider, or the progressive decoding of the human genome, are radically reshaping our understanding of the structure of the universe and our place within it.

In technology, developments like Twitter, mobile hi-speed Internet, Cloud Computing or touch-screen devices are changing the way we communicate and organise information.

In philosophy, new branches such as Speculative Realism are opening avenues not explored for 500 years.

The upheaval and change Fulcrum is attempting to track (in its own extremely modest way) traverses all these fields and many more. Most significantly, it is through the lens of architecture that we hope to explore the subjects we believe will come to shape the 21st century.

In Fulcrum's first 50 issues we focussed on subjects as diverse as the injustice of neoliberal market economics, and the origins of computational design; the corporatisation of the public realm, and how China is buying up vast portions of Africa; the rise of the architectural collective, and the meaning of the London riots. Our authors have included novelists and economists, artists and architects, scientists and engineers.

The relationship of these subjects to our discipline is a clear one: we believe the primary responsibility of architects is not technological innovation, formal experimentation, or commercial speculation — it must be foremost social and political engagement. We don't mean to discount the importance of these other aspects, but only to stress their deontological depreciation below the social function of architecture.

Without invoking the modernist failure, or the Randian hero, it is still valid to say that architecture has an important social duty — at the very least inasmuch as any citizen or professional has a duty to participate and contribute to their society. The alternative is individualism, incohesion, fragmentation, and decline.



WHEN ALL
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