

Fulcrum

ISSUE 100 - JUNE 27, 2014 - PARADIGMS

it's
over.

The last half-decade has seen an intensification of processes that were hardly visible when Fulcrum first began: the class struggle of the precariously employed was not yet popularised, and even the concept of the 99% (or conversely, the 1%) did not exist as a term. On the whole, although there was a great frustration, very little was understood by the general public about what caused this catastrophic economic recession.

The period 2009-10 (after the explosive period of the crash itself) represented a kind of slack tide between epochs, when it was clear that the 20th century was definitively over, but the new condition of the 21st had not yet become clear.

Fulcrum emerged from this period, shocked by the injustices and tragedies of the crisis, violently opposed to the acceleration of economic inequality, the burdens of debt, the rampant (and embraced) self-exploitation, as well as widespread weak subservience to authority. As children of the late 80s, Fulcrum's peers were described as an 'apathetic' generation. In truth we were more properly browbeaten into submission.

Inasmuch as we tried to promote the ideals of social justice, we could not bring ourselves to conduct an autopsy on that rotting corpse; the implications of conclusively deciding that democracy has failed — which seemed to us tantamount to embracing oligarchy — were too serious to be examined.

Fundamentally, however, we never challenged the most basic power relation upon which all else is built: the systemic failure of our democracies. We were not apathetic, we simply rejected the choices (and at times, rejected the question too). Fulcrum has struggled to remain propositional, since what is primarily missing from the world today is alternatives grounded in the possibility and reality of our agency.

In another sense, the drift into aimlessness that has accompanied this age of austerity is manifest in the decline of the mainstream media that also permitted Fulcrum to exist. For the media, in a way, stands as a signifier of all that has changed: collapsed business models, outpaced by technology; increasingly this has produced piecemeal solutions — plenty of strategies for raising revenue (apps and paywalls) — but no clear ideological sense of how to move us forward as a society. There is no rallying cry, but in any case, no flag to rally behind, and no nation to fight for... the flipside of globalisation being perpetual uprootedness.

We perceived a dearth of intellectual rigour in the academics, and a poverty of aspiration in the discipline: most students take political positions that range from coy to naive to outright irresponsible; most professionals wouldn't care to pass opinion (being ethically moribund).

Redressing this situation requires reframing the entire role of the architect — and the architectural office — to match the conditions of the 21st century. One aspect of this modernisation certainly concerns the rise of a new form of economic architecture (which is not simply the economics of architecture, but design as a product of financial innovation); another might have to do with inverting our subjection by time.

Use the long-term as a subversive strategy. Develop ten year plans. Develop fifty year plans. Learn to transform and trade in the possibility of tomorrow today, just like the financial elite to whom we are beholden. Attempt to buy back the future our parents sold, and if you cannot get a decent price for it, then steal it.

If you find yourself in a favourable or privileged position, remember that morality compels you to act foremost in the service of others — we can never justify any form of inequality and must always act to reduce it; those of us with the broadest shoulders much bear the greatest load. Because if we do not get a handle on inequality, particularly in Europe and America, we cannot expect the Western world to pull out from its current death spiral.

Without greater equality, everything we love will be simply torn apart.

Fulcrum has pursued architecture and the third millennium (as its strapping professes) for three and a half years. It was inspired by the long history of AA student publications, those many passionate pamphlets that ran (at most) for a few years before dying with the graduation of their editors.

In the spirit of this transiency, Fulcrum will not be institutionalised or imitated, as has sometimes happened in the past. We will decide when to end it, and what happens to it afterwards. Our reasoning is neither jealousy nor some arrogant fear of plagiarism, but simply the fact that what follows Fulcrum must be propositional, of its time, and wholly original. Producing Fulcrum each week has been a pure delight; we hope you have enjoyed reading it as much as we have enjoyed planning, penning and printing it.

It was begun by three students: Aram Mooradian, who worked on the initial concept and several of the first twenty issues before graduating; Graham Baldwin, who worked tirelessly on the first sixty (as well as our spin-off publication at the 2012 Venice Biennale *The Commonplace*); and Jack Self, who drove Fulcrum forward from the start to full centenary. In addition, the publication has had a rolling board of advisors and guest editors, without whom many of the finest issues would never have been published. This perhaps raises the question of authorship, as sometimes articles were written under the name Fulcrum, and at other times the particular names of our editors.

This is because a publication is an entity that has a political voice other than that of a single individual — the combination of opinions and perspectives that informed our editorial agenda, even if frequently written by one person, could not be fairly attributed to just one.

With maturity, Fulcrum became less cautious about expressing its political position, an aspiration to radicality that was nevertheless present from the very first issue — a large image of a distorted, marble fist raised in defiance.

Accordingly, the pursuit of the third millennium for the most part constituted of tracking topical issues — from the tenth anniversary of 9/11 (#21) to our extensive involvement

in Occupy LSX (#30s). We at times tackled global social issues, as with the Chinese corporate invasion of Africa (#16), as well as historical questions like the origins of computational design in architecture (#54). Ultimately though, we are most proud of Fulcrum's more general philosophical propositions, as with *Work on the Self* (#68) or *Freedom of Speech* (#33).

Fulcrum sought to display architecture in all its contexts: historically, aesthetically, technologically, infrastructurally, politically and economically — to both challenge its relationship to the media (#20), and to articulate the changing nature of those same media (#43). We always tried hard to make positive contributions to contemporary theory (while still maintaining a healthy scepticism about those same contributions).

As a format it is far from being exhausted: two authors, one subject, pitted against each other, their rhetoric revolving around the pivot bar between columns; the typographic fulcrum that drove forward our pursuit of the zeitgeist...

Nonetheless, this is the final issue of Fulcrum.

We are grateful to the Director of the AA, Brett Steele, for his support of Fulcrum; Bedford Press for the use of their printer; and Patrik Schumacher (and ZHA), whose generous donation in 2012 has partly funded the publication. Mostly, of course, we owe terrific thanks to the authors and collaborators, who gave up their labour freely for the cause.

It only remains to invite you to produce something of your own much better than this flimsy sheet.

This concludes Fulcrum, which ran for 100 weekly issues from the 31st January 2011 to the 27th June 2014. Readership grew steadily to between 3-7000 a week, with a peak of 12,000 unique downloads for one term, making it the most read student publication about architecture in the world. The complete digital archive will be available freely as long as the AA maintains our site.

