

inquisitive space.

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The instrumentalisation of design has changed throughout the industrial and digital revolutions, both conceptually and formally. An amorphous apparatus defined by its creator, its user, and its context, the field—and its variegated dispositions—has been influenced by environmental, techno-scientific, economic, as well as cultural factors. At a time when persistent dichotomies of nature and culture, information and material, and concrete and abstract are constantly reconfigured, design, like so many other disciplines, must, again, be reevaluated and reinvented. In fact, when few presumed best practices or metaphors apply, practitioners must distinguish themselves through conjectural yet specialised modes of inquiry. They must distinguish themselves through practices that occupy shared territories of both theory and praxis, and those that move beyond the servicing of consumption and production rates to other areas of contemporary life, such as work, education, participation, communication, material engagement.

In order for new design knowledge to be produced, spaces facilitating open critique and expanded thinking are required. To establish such a space is in my curatorial agenda for ADD METAPHYSICS, a publishing project in the context of Aalto University Digital Design Laboratory (ADDLAB) at the School of Engineering and the School of Arts, Design and Architecture in Helsinki, Finland. In the lab, designers and artists work with mechanical engineers and material scientists, together constructing a platform for experimental, inquisitive design practice that converges around not only the material and the digital but also the metaphysical: molding the perception of the material world as much as materials themselves. The forthcoming publications include contributions by select practitioners and academics, such as Vera Bühlmann, Graham Harman and Ines Weizman, who probe into the interrelations between information and material from their

idiosyncratic perspectives and share their ideas and questions in the form of radical assignments, stretching out to utopian or even enigmatic domains. The assignments function as boundary objects* between disciplines, encouraging activity and debate both within and outside of ADDLAB.

ADD METAPHYSICS takes note from philosopher Manuel De Landa, who, in a 2011 lecture at the University of Southern California, suggested that while computers are valuable in exploring different spaces of possibility, designers must create the spaces worthy of exploration.

The series of publications looks to prepare designers for their role as scriptwriters in the unfolding electro-material-cultural moment; so complex by nature that the ability to ask always overrides the capacity to answer.

Furthermore, in order to come up with the most revealing queries — those that seek to identify significant and insightful parameters — no less than a new vocabulary is required: new terms and analogies for productive encounters between disciplines, or words to shift the focus of digital design beyond technology and form, towards original sensibilities.

Borrowing from a schoolbook format, ADD METAPHYSICS presents an experimental foundation course in the midst of a changing electro-cultural logic of material. Consider its assignments as open-ended curricula taking place in the open site of the publication—interfaces facilitating a passage between disciplinary worlds. Let the material not confine.

**The boundary object is a concept conceived by Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer. It refers to objects that serve as an interface, or have a translational function between different communities of practice. Points of mediation and negotiation around intent, boundary objects may be physical artefacts (e.g. maps), or information sets, or conversations...*

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to beyond or not to be.

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On the spine of *Volume* magazine is the slogan 'To Beyond or Not to Be'. It's intended as a concise manifesto for architecture, advocating exploration beyond the traditional confines of the discipline to seek out salvation in the new.

This slogan became the source of great dispute within the office, and the arguments over whether to strip it from the spine or to stand by it seemed to overwhelm practically every editorial meeting.

Despite its brevity, it sets up a profound philosophical choice for a discipline that's currently under siege: abandon the camp in search of new territory, or remain in the apparent safety of home and slowly starve to death.

The stats of this siege are well documented: we are the graduates with the highest unemployment, the billings index of the construction sector is at its lowest in decades, we've inherited a business model which no longer stacks up, those lucky enough to have jobs work the longest hours, are paid the least, and are represented in the media as stylists who inexplicably endeavour to make everything more expensive and more complicated. Staying put and defending the gates will surely lead to ruin. If there ever was a time to set off in search of deliverance, it's now.

But by abandoning the core of the discipline — whatever that might be — there is of course the very real risk that we are left stranded with nothing. Perhaps there's a third path? One that can reconcile the centre with a new layer, breathing new life into a flagging practice. A mashup! Like the gravely riff of 'The Stooges' 'No Fun' looped and overlaid with the saucy lyrics of Salt 'N' Pepa's 'Push It', courtesy of 2ManyDJs... or a Peanut Butter Cup, 'Two great tastes that taste great together!'

We are seemingly surrounded by greener pastures, disciplines that tempt us with their social relevance and economic solvency.

In a series of interviews I conducted for my book *Future Practice*, many of the people and practices I encountered could be described as 'architecture plus'.

Indy Johar's firm 00:/ as architecture plus policy; Crimson as architecture plus history; muf as architecture plus community engagement; AMO as architecture plus research; Studio Gang as architecture plus ecology; Robin Boyd as architecture plus media, etc.

Each of these are a form of disciplinary mashup, hybrid formations applying knowledge and experience external to architecture as a means to revitalise architecture itself.

While much stake has been placed in multidisciplinary and cross-collaboration as delivering architecture from ruin, the endurance of these relatively new hybrid practices is yet to be fully tested. Right now they appear as evolutionary mutations or spontaneous deformities, the desperate attempts of a discipline striving to adapt to a rapidly changing climate. And while the contours of this new climate remain blurry, it's increasingly clear that the old model of architecture we've inherited will not be capable of addressing contemporary challenges on its own.

Did a mashup ever save us in the past? In music, an old song with a new beat can simultaneously satisfy our desire for authenticity and our urge for novelty.

But it's a satisfaction that's short-lived, leaving us craving hard-won originality, instead of the mere overlaying of pre-existing tracks. The components for architecture's reinvention will not be in easy reach, ready to be appropriated from an adjacent discipline and applied to our own. I look forward to the next generation of hybrid mutations, adapted to the all-pervasive flux, devouring the stale crusts of the past, and stomping forward into the future.

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"La Mestiza Cosmica", by Lynn Randolph. From the 1992 series "Cyborgs, Wonder Woman and Techno Angels".