(1) Marco Biraghi, *L'Architetto come intellettuale*, Torino, Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, 209 pp. - 2019, Paperback: - € 21,00 - ISBN: 978-8806239923
(2) Thomas Yarrow, *Architects. Portraits of a Practice*, Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 300 pp. - 2019, Paperback: - $ 18,85 - ISBN: 978-1501738494

Both Thomas Yarrow's *Architects. Portraits of a Practice* and Marco Biraghi's *L'Architetto come Intellettuale* offer fresh evidence of how new paradigms of study are required to satisfy our needs for disciplinary introspection. Traditional accounts of the architectural profession (such as the Albertian model, a universal producer of ideas and self-sufficient maker of drawings), are no longer representative of the status of the 21st-century architect, despite having guided our self-reflection for at least half a millennium.
Both Yarrow and Biraghi can be discussed here as answers to this search, in that they refer to methods of enquiry, aspects of the discipline and interpretations of its operative processes which appear so distant to each other to become almost specular.
Yarrow's book is an ethnographic study of the architectural practice Millar Howard Workshop (MHW), a middle-size studio based in the English village of Chalford, Gloucestershire. Yarrow proposes an anecdotal narrative of everyday life in the studio, with conversations, routine practices and protocols, as well as first-hand accounts of what members consider as the defining conditions, motivations and ultimate purposes of their profession.
The book belongs to a growing stream of ethnographic studies which, from Dana Cuff to Albena Yaneva (see for example Ardeth #02 'Bottega'), seeks to investigate the more relational, social and to some extent ordinary aspects of our profession.
As such, the actors in the study discuss commonplace tropes, such as a generalised disillusionment for education, tensions between 'theoretical discourse' and 'practical making' and a nostalgia for a lost culture of craft, which also appear as the most interesting aspects of the book. In fact, such considerations ultimately reveal the intrinsic contradictions of architectural life, instances where an ideology of informality clashes with the inherent hierarchies of the office, or where a heroic claim of progressiveness is ultimately revealed as conservativism.
On the other hand, *L'Architetto come Intellettuale* is a critical and historical attempt to locate the generalised conditions in which architects find themselves today and to propose 'the ways of a possible overturn'. These conditions are identified as a profound (and admittedly not new) state of crisis for the architect as an 'intellectual', that is, as a subject elaborating a theoretical thought with operative intentions and political implications or, in Biraghi's own words, a 'producer'. Instead, the author recognises that today the architect is reduced to a specialised 'supplier', unable to actively interpret our reality and, as such, accessory to architecture's capitalist commoditisation.
Biraghi's argument, validated through the traditions of Benjamin, Tafuri, Cacciari and Aureli, therefore investigates instances where an architecture 'within and against' can exist. This, however, is a question to which the book doesn't seem to have a definitive answer. Examples like the unbuilt designs by Dogma, or the nearly 60-year-old Economist building in London, offer only partial answers. On the other hand, practitioners such as Anne Lacaton and Alejandro Aravena are discussed as relevant figures for a recon-

sideration of our profession, but whether the attribute 'intellectual' can be applied remains unclear. If a solution to Biraghi's question is not plainly offered, the ambition of the book suggests at least a direction of enquiry. This consists, to put it simply, in the project of architecture. It is through interactive paradigms spread across the territory of the project that the architect can find a raison d'etre. Interestingly, Yarrow articulates his study along similar lines, making the project-as-process the most critical aspect of a contemporary architectural practice, the space where a dialog can be articulated and where solutions to our search for authenticity may be found. Undeniably, Biraghi would identify MHW as a 'supplier', in that the studio operates fully 'within' the interests of capitalism. However, there is a hopeful awareness in Yarrow's narrative which suggests a potential 'against' the crisis of values identified by Biraghi.
In this sense, both the ethnography and the essay, distinct in method, breath, geography and intention, ultimately display the same coordinates to locate the architect's problematic identity. Through these, the authors seem to propose, we can catch the blurred glimpse of a possible alternative. Such alternative, let's be clear, has entirely yet to become a reality.

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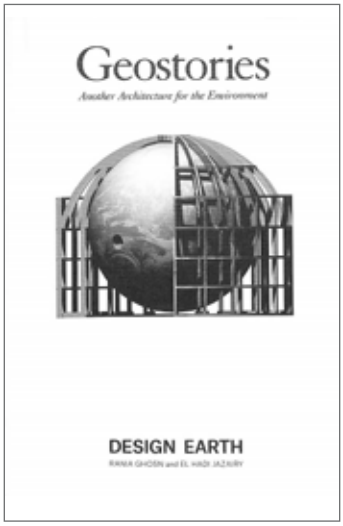
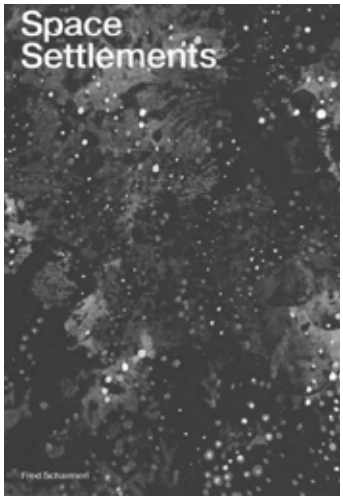
(1) Rania Ghosn, El Hadi Jazairy, *Geostories: Another Architecture for the Environment*, New York - Barcelona, Actar Publishing, 231 pp. - 2018, Paperback: - € 33,98 - ISBN: 978-1945150791
(2) Fred Scharmen, *Space Settlements*, New York, Columbia University Press, 208 pp. - 2019, Paperback: $ 24,00 - ISBN: 978-1941332498

"Is the surface of a planet really the right place for an expanding technological civilization?"
Gerard O'Neill





Geostories is a collection of fantastical proposals for a world run amok. The book posits proposals that harvest Antarctic ice, occupy emptied oil reserves, and make monuments of landfills. These interventions are developed through a blend of disciplinary representational mashups and meticulous craft in drawing, with Easter eggs and winks to past utopian projects, and imagining future developments at the scale of cities and planets. Through these technical and imaginative images, as well as their grand scale, they harken to past government infrastructural projects and global network economies. As interventions, they operate as situated analogies–ways of seeing, more than anything–the vast and abstract systems that have constructed our current crisis, and imagine them past their present functions. The proposals make visible, through allegory, what Saskia Sassen calls the 'expulsions'–systematic brutalities across economic, environmental, and political realms. Through their visual language and systems-orientations, they connect singular events and present-day configurations with deep time, and site provocations of technological and architectural solution-making. The drawings are unbelievably concise and complex, to a point of fetish, and the book should come with a dome magnifier as each image seems to operate on scales unnoticeable to the viewer.

Space Settlements is also, in essence, a project described through a series of global-scale interventions explored through renderings, this time from the 1970s and in gouache, commissioned in large part by a research project led by Gerard O'Neill at Princeton University and funded by Steward Brand. The renderings are explorations of imagined architecture and life on space colonies. In the book, they are contextualized through the trends and threats of the moment they are responding to–the 1970s inclination for exoplanetary habitation and assumption of expanding past Earth's planetary limits. These inclinations were built in part on the anticipation of nuclear annihilation, oil depletion, and population explosion. Space habitation was seen by some as the perfect solution, an architecture that was simultaneously ecologically and technologically driven, and worked towards planetary healing and symbiotic life.

These two books together exemplify the roles of architecture to build futures, envision utopian ideals, and contextualize the contemporary moment. In particular, they demonstrate the use of architectural drawing to think through details and scenarios, the role of technology (both known and anticipated) to play the role of savior or antagonist in these scenarios, and the mega-scale proposal to encapsulate global, ecological, and political externalities of their formation. The architect works in the future-tense, considering the material details and social implications of things that don't exist. This ability extends to things that are improbable, or never even meant to get built. The dichotomy between paper and built architecture is a fallacy in this way. To create futures, and inhabit them in order to better understand their implications, is to make architecture. In that way, also, I'm unconcerned with whether the renderings of banded torus habitats floating in deep space were expected to be built (they were), or whether they were thought experiments. The ability to think through conceptual futures–through rotational speeds, interior qualities, and social dynamics–is the point. And whether these particular futures were built, they never-the-less have implications in the future we imagine, and build towards, through our collective understanding of the shape and form it might ultimately take. These two books explore the power of representation to create futures and build alternative worlds. Many of the images in *Geostories* make visual reference to utopian architecture from around the same time that Buckminster Fuller was advocated for covering Manhattan with a geodesic dome: Superstudio's Continuous Monument levees controlled Antarctic melt, Archigram's tethered blimp makes a rainforest delivery, Fuller's Dymaxion Map graphs water capacities. This is apt. These projects represent a moment when architecture was projective–a form of urbanist science fiction. The faith we had in the built environment, and the discipline of architecture, to imagine new evolutions of technology, cities, and society seems to have been lost in the 50 years since. As *Space Settlements* points out, the formal cues of this time have shown up more recently as corporate gestures of future-orientation–the Torus at the Apple Headquarters, the Geodesic Dome at Facebook's new campus. What were meant as social utopias have been co-opted in late-capitalism into a tech branding exercise. The use of these recognizable projects in *Geostories* feels like both an elucidation of the optimism of these architectures, as well as a reclaiming of them within the discipline, in our new context of climate chaos and a moment when global corporations otherwise own our futuristic dreams. At the same time, *Geostories* is constructing a future from a present that valorizes the geologic as a technological force of remediation–the Earth as the ultimate technology. Using representational tropes from geology, from astrophysics, from astronomy, and from life sciences, they consider architecture that is in dialogue with planetary rotation, asteroids, and core temperatures rather than humans. There are very few people in their drawings; these projects are human wonderments, infrastructural monuments, but not really built for humans. They don't even seem built for the scale of a human lifespan. These drawings have the effect, taken together, of watching the ruins of the Earth through the portal of an escape pod spaceship, understanding our shortsightedness too late. The looming crises of the 20th

century created design interventions of enclosure, escape, and autonomy. Space settlements are the epitome of this–survival from a planet that was becoming too small, or in anticipation of its annihilation. The designs of space habitats show our faith in technology to save us–a breezy afternoon picnic in the park surrounded by the void of space. The encapsulation of civilization, calculated in gravitational orbits, breathable air, and acceleration speeds. The optimism of these renderings is not just in the peace and leisure they depict, but in the normalcy the architecture allows. No sacrifice or change, or even alien environment, was needed for the transition, so complete was our confidence in our ability to remake Earth in a bubble.

"The [space settlement] images are terms within larger systems: not only political, architectural, landscape, and urban systems but also cultural systems, including ideas about science fiction and utopian speculation on the future. They mediate anxieties about the American city, about technology, and about the changing role of human beings within space and architecture more generally." From "Introduction," *Space Settlements* (p19)

The belief in technology to save us is part of our contemporary crisis moment as well, though this time it is seen as remediation, repurposing, retrofitting. *Geostories* thinks through scales of technology about the design of encapsulation, redistribution, property allocation, and preservation at scales of planetary infrastructure. Unlike the 20th century version, these technologies revel in the complexities of ecology, property, and economics. NASA capital is replaced with private speculation or opportunistic schemes. In the same way that leisure and nature is unquestioned in the space-life renderings, national advantageousness and competitive strategies is the unexamined backdrop of the Design Earth propositions. This feels very true to this moment to me, in the same way that the space colonies of today would be positioned as Amazon outposts or Bechtel mines.

The futures we construct, in architecture as in literature, are, more than anything, representations of the present. The solutions proposed reflect our current crises more than solutions to them. But at a moment when we once again find ourselves considering space habitats and escape pods as a way out of our constructed crisis, it's important to posit new relationships we can have to our planet, and new roles that architecture can play in the imagination of these scenarios. If there is a path to inhabiting the planet that accounts for political and environmental externality, and valorizes qualities beyond profit and capital, we will have to imagine it before we can build it.

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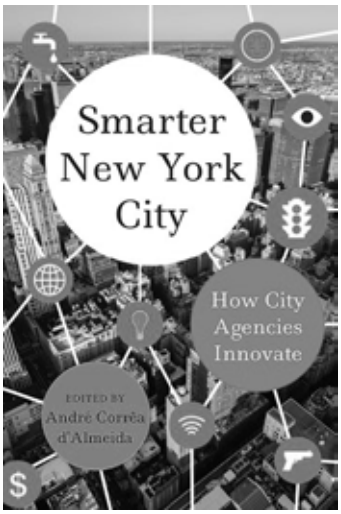
André Corrêa d'Almeida (ed.), *Smarter New York City: How City Agencies Innovate*, New York, Columbia University Press, 448 pp. - 2018, Paperback: - $ 30,00 - ISBN: 978-0231183758



The book reports the outcomes and findings of a collective work brought about by the Smarter NYCitywide Research Group, where thirty scholars from twenty-two different research institutions and ten universities worked as a multidisciplinary team for three years, involving three hundred people, thirty city agencies and twenty private companies. A collection of twelve stories taking place in the city of New York between 1994 and present, it aims at depicting innovation residing in local public administration, questioning the idea that city agencies (public offices, city units and departments, etc.) are for the most part unmovable and ineffectual bureaucracies.

The reasearch is not providing a (further, umpteenth, motion-

less) definition of what a "smart city" is, but proposes to explore "smartness" as a process, something contextual, incremental and locally based, closely related to a bottom-up and top-down duality. Overtaking most common idealized tech-centered concerns, the relationship between the multiple descriptions of smartness and how innovation takes place in cities is framed taking into account historical, institutional, organizational factors driving local development processes. Data and technology are then looked at within the broader city-administration ecosystem and in parallel with other equally internal and external innovation forces – institutional context, leadership and decision making, networks and collaboration, organizational structure and culture. "Smarter New York City" offers a wide and well articulated collection of cases, spanning from data architecture, organizational structure and technological infrastructure of a smart city, to the galaxy of services (for economy, energy, water, waste, air and health) and safety and mobility policies. Each study case is analized through a common framework, based upon three principles: 1. innovation as a process of adoption and adaptation, where problems and opportunities are firstly identifie, to then design programs and pilots, implement actions and finally evaluate the outcomes; 2. innovation drivers as embedded in the local institutional context, the organizational structure and culture, networking and cooperation skills, leadership and decision-making arenas, the capacity to measure results and impact; 3. the delivery of analytical tools to explain the complexity, non linearity, challenges, limitations and lesson learnt emerging from each program/pilot.
A useful insight on how city departments and units are incubating innovation from within, the research strives to witness how government agencies can grow in flexibility and capacity to generate change – though it lacks a specific and dedicated analysis of the different roles played by these organizations from time to time (facilitator, promoter, etc.), and along the processes. Nevertheless, the book offers a rich reflection about what new ways of doing, seeing, analyzing, deciding and assessing are necessary in order to improve, advance, evolve and optimize a city. It explores the ways in which trial and error unfold within city agencies, looking at innovation from an evolutionary perspective, in which individual local agencies search for, select, test, and implement new solutions whose outcomes are not necessarily known or expected when they are launched, and are not necessarily succeeding at first.

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