Shortly before his sudden death in September 2020, the American anthropologist David Graeber wrote a short text (Graeber, 2021). There, he recalled that, after the great recession of 2008, all questionings regarding the foundations of the economy during the peak of the crisis were quickly silenced; so, as soon as the economy recovered, everything returned to business as usual. Then, he wondered if, after the pandemic, we should go back to normal or not. His answer was a resounding ‘no.’ For Graeber, the pandemic has not been a nightmare but rather the awakening of a dream, because only in dreams do implausible situations make sense (e.g., extracting surplus without adding value, as in the land market).

Perhaps we all ask ourselves the same question: What will happen when we get out of this? After all, the pandemic is the closest our time has ever been to the shortcomings and restrictions of war. As much as rockets are already arriving on Mars, we still have nowhere to escape. Faced with this, the answers of this 20/21 seem binary: return to the previous normality (to the past), or venture into an uncertain future (but, at least, to a future).

Graeber’s response – thinking about how to prevent things from returning to ‘normal’ – is very similar to what was heard on the Chilean streets in late 2019. ‘Normal’ was the problem, as it naturalized the structural inequalities of our society. The pandemic changed things even more. Now we wonder if there is such a thing as a new normal.

However, what we considered ‘normal’ was actually an implausible situation. For example, two years ago, no one would have imagined that today we would be on the brink of changing our country’s political constitution through a Constitutional Convention with gender parity and reserved quotas for indigenous peoples. The old normality believed that something like this was impossible, even though it was only logical to correct the representation inequalities of historically displaced groups.

Those borders have moved at an unusual but necessary speed. Some people indeed find that dynamism hard to understand and prefer to return to their previous calm. But we can no longer neglect the fact that this calm was a luxury that not everyone could afford.

In ARQ, we have been trying to follow these transformations for a while, not because of presentism anxiety, but because we believe that we are witnessing a moment of change of historical proportions, transcending headlines. Conceptual and symbolic resignifications, postponement of global events,
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unbreathable air, new housing models, digitization of work, virtualization of teaching, outdoor life, confinement, facial protections, logistical automation, visibility of precarious work, concern for the care of non-human agents (from statues to domestic plants); all these topics – included in this issue of ARQ – were practically not discussed before 2020 and are now part of our daily conversation.

Feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser (2021) argues that we are witnessing the end of a new cycle of capitalism. Since its mercantilist phase, capitalism has been the primary agent of climate change because, in each of its phases, it exploits some form of energy until it is exhausted, to then force the development of a new one. In these processes of exploitation and exhaustion, whose pace is increasingly faster, the ecological damage generated is becoming irreversible. If, at first, it was animal power, then coal, and then oil, today, according to Fraser, it is impossible to separate the climate crisis from intensive land exploitation: mining, forestry, agriculture, and urban exploitation. This crisis, which is in principle ecological, becomes social because of the effects it entails. It is not only a problem of resources and their exploitation, but also of being aware that we will suffer the consequences of climate change without having participated in the benefits of intensive exploitation of the planet, in of the decisions that led to it. Hence, feminist, anti-racist, degrowth, decolonial, environmentalist, or indigenous movements – to name a few – have strongly emerged in recent years. While they may seem like atomized expressions of discontent, they attempt to widen the narrow spaces for participation. The various identities and voices that the old normality had rendered unimportant are now becoming visible.

Once activated, it is difficult for that social process to reverse. Today, we are a more diverse world with more voices to listen to in the process. How, and what will architecture be like in this new normal? How will these new voices appear in our field of knowledge? No one knows the answer. But those new voices and perspectives will find a space in ARQ because, following Graeber, the worst mistake after a crisis would be to return to the same normality that produced it. ARQ

Bibliografía / Bibliography

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