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Over the span of six months during 2022, the 140 individual pods of Tokyo’s Nakagin Tower briefly flew across the sky for the last time, as a crane detached them from the cores before demolishing the building. A landmark of the Metabolist movement, the Nakagin was designed to change with the city and its inhabitants (Kurokawa, 1972) — a building of replaceable pods and serviceable parts, an epitome of retrofitting. Following a decade of efforts to save it, and even after being listed in 2006, the building was demolished last year. Among the reasons cited for its demolition were several concerns: repair costs, the presence of asbestos in the building, its small footprint and the city’s seismic regulations, and its “inefficient use of prime real estate in central Tokyo” (Lin, 2021; Oshima, 2020; McCurry, 2023). In other words, technology, health standards, building codes, and economic pressures on its urban context, had all changed much faster than the pods could be replaced. A building designed for adaptation seemed very unfit for change.

Change is a constant in life, but it doesn’t come easy to a discipline like architecture — even our tools and processes are notoriously not well-equipped for it. Design is a gradual process that involves agreement between stakeholders: designers and users, but also engineers, construction workers, urban authorities, and financiers. This agreement is usually sealed in a project, which can internalize change only up to a point. The window of opportunity closes, or becomes a lavish expense, once construction is underway. And even when it’s planned or designed, like Nakagin, the results can be unpredictable at best, and wasteful and naïve, at worst, because change itself is unpredictable.

However unpredictable, designing change or posing it as a question that can be addressed in terms of design — through a project’s form, structure, or program — has long captured the imagination of architects and designers. In his research on collective housing, Agatángelo Soler outlines the changing meanings of the concept of flexibility in architectural discourse and the design strategies formulated throughout the twentieth century to introduce (and debate) the possibility of change in the domestic interior.

There’s a difference between allowing change to happen in a building — designing conditions for it to maybe take — and conceiving it as a mechanical feature of architecture. Harking back to the age of early electronic computers, Mario Carpo recounts the history of cybernetics, and how enthusiasm for a new technology drove experiments in forms of responsive architecture, often overlooking the distance between imagination and actual computational capacities. The moral of this story is all the more poignant in the current frenzy over tools like AI or ChatGPT: change in architecture doesn’t always come in the form we expect or is underpinned by the technologies we expect it to be driven by.

The Anthropocene — the theory that places human activity as a source of geological change — may have helped raise awareness of our impact on the planet, but it has also reinforced human-centered narratives over nature. In her article on the ecological conditions of a flooded gravel pit in the Upper Rhin Plain, Johanna Just reflects on the site’s changing nature and proposes a narrative shift: plant and animal species, rather than passively adapting to anthropogenic environments, actively co-produce a new and unique ecology.

Many times, change in architecture is bolstered by circumstances beyond an individual’s control. Discussing the reforms to the Santiago Municipal Theater building, from its inauguration in 1857 until almost a century later, German Hidalgo recounts many forces that drive change: natural disasters, stylistic debates, urban modernization, among others. The foyers occupy a central role in this narrative, as a space for presentation and representation: where the technical demands of the theater meet the aspirations of an institution, a city, and the building’s successive architects.

Between 1871 and 1827, the expansion of water infrastructure in Santiago changed the way of understanding and managing the territory. Relying on cartographic reconstruction, Sandra Iturriaga takes us to the beginnings of the San Carlos canal — an artificial waterway that connected the Maipo and Mapocho rivers — to delve into the urban, political, and economic repercussions of a public scheme to irrigate south Santiago.

Cedric Price was a fervent critic of blind faith in technology as the answer to all problems (Price, 1979). Luciano Brina’s article delves deeper into Price’s figure and his understanding of technology; analyzing his visual production for the Potteries Thinkbelt (1966) and Fun Palace (1966) projects, Brina links Price’s representation techniques to his social and political agenda, evincing how they anticipated current calls for change like remediation practices, environmental narratives, and alternative urban processes.

If there’s one thing about change that’s clear from the articles in this issue, is that it is easier to comprehend in history than to predict, and therefore design. The problem with championing “an architecture for change” as a tabula rasa is the overdetermination of how change must occur; in the Nakagin Tower, the possibility of change hinged (literally) on the connection between pods and structure and the very expensive use of cranes. Both proved inviable, and after the realization that it would be impossible to disconnect one pod without removing its neighbors, the alleged freedom and individuality of this architecture of change took an ironic turn. The current political and ecological climate demand that we treat change not so much as an individual alternative, but as a collective necessity if we are to survive in and with this planet. But to work with change, architects don’t need to foresee and design it — because technologies change in unpredictable ways — but may fare better by looking at transforming: creating conditions for it in existing buildings. This is exactly what the projects in this issue do, and they are presented in more detail on page 47. Alongside articles and projects, we have included two critiques: a review of the XXII Architecture Biennale of Chile by Diego Ortiz, and of the Plan de Emergencia Habitacional [Housing Emergency Plan] by Monica Bustos. Both look at these contemporary developments from the perspective of change.

This issue is the first of a new editorial cycle, based on some of the conditions established by the previous editors of the journal. I wish to thank Montserrat Palmer, Patricio Mardones, and Francisco Diaz for their editorial vision, which have made this journal a haven of theoretical reflection and debate on the field of design. And as with any form of gradual change, stay tuned for more to come.

**BIBLIOGRAFÍA / BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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