

# New Paradigms

EDITORIAL

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“...today, not letting others use your work can mean irrelevance.”  
(Cathy Casserly, former CEO at Creative Commons)<sup>1</sup>

When we launched the call for this themed issue of *The Plan Journal*, we intended to stimulate and present reflections and studies on what appears to be an important turning-point in the evolution of architecture and the design disciplines. As we posited in the call:

The “sharing economy” and the “sharing society,” made possible by the new technologies of the last decades, have significantly changed our culture. Architecture and the other design fields have not been immune from this epochal change and, in some instances, have in fact tried to embrace it and leverage it to their own advantage. New communication technologies, shared design platforms, interactive ways of engaging the wider public of design projects, as well as the explosion of social media itself, have triggered a series of changes that have gone beyond superficial fashion trends to really transform the way the project is conceived, developed, assessed, constructed and used.<sup>2</sup>

Collaboration and teamwork, which was one of the most important and clearest tenets of Modern Architecture, precisely because it questioned the stereotype of the “architect as a visionary” (though still mainly on ideological grounds, thus not always effectively), has found in the latest technological developments the needed support, and has now become an obvious and inevitable condition for design practice. It is simply the need to more strongly reconnect architecture and design with society that demands it.

As Wouter Vantisphout has pointed out: "... to restore architecture and planning to a position where they can have a real positive impact on society may even demand destroying the mythology of the architect as visionary."<sup>3</sup> New modes of a "peer-to-peer" culture are emerging, along with new design strategies, such as "design thinking," as defined by Paola Antonelli:

[These design strategies have been] brought to life by the act of tinkering productively, experimenting, testing, re-testing and adjusting, and all the while enjoying it with many like-minded spirits and engaging with the world in an open, constructive collaboration with colleagues and other specialists. In other words, in open-source mode.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, we tried to address a set of questions that sits at the very epistemological core of our design disciplines, including those mentioned in the call:

Are these changes a sustained paradigm shift or temporary cultural shocks? How is the nature of the architectural project being transformed vis-à-vis these changes in the economy, society and culture? How are current and future digital technologies going to morph the statute of the architectural project as we know it? How are the dynamics among the traditional professional design fields going to be revised? And/or which other professional expertise/s will emerge? How is the public going to be impacted by this change? How will the appreciation of the power of architecture by society at large going to change?<sup>5</sup>

We believe that the contributions selected for this themed issue do suggest some possible new perspectives, interpretations, and design strategies vis-à-vis this epochal cultural transformation.

A first set of contributions opens the issue on the paradigm shifts that the "shared project" is bringing about: from a broad discussion by Doug Kelbaugh of what are the implications and the potential at the urban (indeed, metropolitan) and ecological scale of the "sharing economy," trying to answer the simple but compelling question of "why is sharing important to our civilization"; to an exploration by Olivia Hamilton on the concept of "commoning" and on its consequent social processes and design strategies and tactics; to the complexities, discussed by Wendy Fok, at the nexus among new modes of urban living, access to information and design processes, proprietary transformations and new digital technologies. How new digital technologies can be used to tap the cultural and design potential of the "shared project" is in fact the theme explored by a second pair of contributions: Carlo Ratti and his team discuss their on-going research at the MIT Senseable City Lab applied to a concrete design case-study for the new Agnelli Foundation Headquarters in Turin (Italy), while Jose Manuel Sanchez demonstrates the possibilities of creatively and

effectively applying videogame technology to urban design issues. Another set of articles delve more into new modes of participatory design and planning processes: from a redefinition of re-appropriation of public space and urban *terrain vague*, with the discussion of a concrete example in Knoxville, Tennessee (Jennifer Akerman); to new participatory models and their actual implementation through a couple of case-studies (Niloufar Vakil and Joe Colistra); to the testing of the potential of GeoDesign processes and consequent design patterns applied to the actual case of Baltimore (Jana VanderGoot, Dan Engelberg and Gerrit Knaap). The issue is completed by a pair of design speculations: on developing a system of mobile, “pluggable,” niche-habitats for a new model of “fluid urbanism” (Sharon Wohl and Reny Revariah) and on the radical reasoning of bringing to its extreme consequences the “un-cramming” of Manhattan second and third dimensional congestion, by tapping into the inherent potential of New York City’s zoning code, for a “fourth dimensional” urban structure (a hyper-cube) that can translate into a new “shared urban habitat” (Winka Dubbeldam).

Paradigm shifts are demanded, new digital technologies can be leveraged, new design and planning processes can be implemented, and new speculative design explorations are necessary. If we, as architects, designers and urbanists, want to be agents of change, be part of the possible solutions to current social and environmental challenges ahead and contribute to shape a better, more beautiful and “more shared” world, we need to take responsibility and tap into the possibilities of this new era.

## Notes

1. Cathy Casserly, currently Research Affiliate at the Institute for the Future, and former CEO at Creative Commons, “The Future of Creative Commons,” press statement, 2013.
2. Call for Submissions, *The Plan Journal* 3, no. 2, April 2018: <http://www.theplanjournal.com/content/call-submissions-vol-3-2018-no-2-fall>.
3. Wouter Vantiphout, interviewed by Rory Hyde, “Historian of the Present: Wouter Vantiphout,” *Australian Design Review* (August 12, 2011): <https://www.australiandesignreview.com/architecture/historian-of-the-present-wouter-vantiphout/>.
4. Paola Antonelli, Senior Curator of Architecture & Design + Director of R&D, MoMA, New York, “States of Design 03: Thinkering,” *Domus* 948 (June 2011), published July 4, 2011: <https://www.domusweb.it/en/design/2011/07/04/states-of-design-03-thinkering.html>.
5. Call for Submissions, cit.