JEANETTE BUDGETT, CARL DOUGLAS, AND SIMON TWOSE

Almost-always-falling-apart

Introduction

This issue of *Interstices* coincides with a period of crisis: a global pandemic set against a backdrop of climate change and ecological disaster. Crises, times of intense difficulty or danger, signal turning or tipping points. They are unstable moments depending on emergent conditions, at which small changes might have big effects. Crises frequently demand urgent action, but also destabilise conventional patterns of thought, generating complexity and making simple solutions improbable. Previously successful strategies seem suddenly inadequate, and sometimes a surfeit of purported solutions does not change anything at all. Crises spill over economic, national, ecological, and biological bounds to form an overwhelming milieu or predicament, rather than a collection of discrete, well-bounded problems. Even where solutions are clear (stop burning fossil fuel, vaccinate), the path to those solutions can be unexpectedly complex. On edge, people rush to find certainty in ever-hardening positions; but fixed frameworks seem to generate antagonistic camps more likely to exacerbate crises than defuse them.

These crises are bedded in the narratives of the modern capitalist project: stories of progress, human exceptionalism, individualism, and timely technical solutions. The figure of the individual innovator able to identify and overcome problems is a frequent protagonist in these stories, and architects and designers have frequently been seen (and seen themselves) in this light. Media ethnographer Stephen Jackson points to the way stories of innovation obscure the work it takes to keep the world going, and to adapt what already exists for new purposes. Redirecting attention to the work of *fixing* he writes,

> The question is this: can repair sites and repair actors claim special insight of knowledge, by virtue of their positioning vis-à-vis the worlds of technology they engage? Can breakdown, maintenance, and repair confer special epistemic advantage in our thinking about technology? Can the fixer know and see different things—indeed, different worlds—than the better-known figures of 'designer' or 'user'? (2014: 229)

Fixers, Jackson argues, engage in the "subtle arts of repair by which rich and robust lives are sustained against the weight of centrifugal odds", occupying the fulcrum between an "always-almost-falling-apart world" and a world that is in

a "constant process of fixing and creative invention, reconfiguring and reassembling" (222).

Arguably, architects and designers have tended to understand their primary work as *poiēsis*, "the activity in which a person brings something into being that did not exist before" (Polkinghorn, 2004: 115). But what might emerge from considering spatial and allied practices more akin to fixing, or as *sympoiēsis*, "making-with... worlding-with, in company" (Haraway, 2016: 115). As Donna Haraway defines it, the term indicates more than merely cooperation or collaborative strategies. It points to an underlying reality in which humans, organisms, and all manner of non-human entities "compose and decompose each other, in every scale and register of time and stuff" (97). Haraway imagines *sympoiēsis* as akin to making string figures:

> Playing games of string figures is about giving and receiving patterns, dropping threads and failing but sometimes finding something that works, something consequential and maybe even beautiful, that wasn't there before, of relaying connections that matter, of telling stories in hand upon hand, digit upon digit, attachment site upon attachment site, to craft conditions for finite flourishing on terra, on earth. String figures require holding still in order to receive and pass on (2016: 10).

In this issue of *Interstices,* we envision architecture and its related arts as the woven work of the fixer or sympoet. Facing our critical moment and drawing on the ambiguities of the verb 'to fix', we attend to works, spaces, and practices of composition and decomposition, reconfiguring and reassembling, improvising and empathising.

Architectural fixations and relations

Fixing, in the sense of maintenance and care, shades into unfixing: times and places of ongoing relationship and *sympoiēsis*. Design often aims to fix, to produce something that corresponds to a predetermined outcome, to give matter to drawn lines. It also involves close collusion between human actors and non-human subject matter and design media, that inevitably throws spanners into the works, inflecting creative practices through an irrepressible, recalcitrant unfixing. What happens if architectural practice is refracted through the lens of fixing, unfixing, maintenance, and care? What new forms might architecture and its related arts take on? To what extent have these forms already existed, perhaps in minor or unrecognised ways?

Messy tangles and a world that is falling apart may seem inhospitable territory for architects, for whom fixing things in their proper place is a disciplinary priority. The question of how to fix things together into a greater whole is a fundamental architectural metaphor as well as a matter of practical concern. But this does not mean fixing is inflexible. On the contrary, through the concept of tectonics, fixing has also been advanced as a primary site of architectural meaning and play. In Marco Frascari's terms, the joint, "the fertile detail, is the place where both the construction and construing of architecture take place" (1984: 34). For Gottfried Semper, a critical figure in the European tradition of tectonics, architectural form derived not so much from the essential nature of materials, but from culturally freighted processes. He saw walls, for example, as fundamentally conditioned by

the knotting and weaving of wickerwork and textiles, even long after new materials had been adopted. Joints, fixings, and surface details responded not only to the need for secure and reliable structures, but were woven into a network of meaning and construal.

The idea that architects might be concerned with configuring polysemic and multi-performative webs rather than locking things into inflexible frames also resonates with contemporary practices that see architecture not as discrete and autonomous, but continuously woven with social, ecological, cultural, and technical contexts. Such practices often look to other domains for methods, concepts, and tools, and the roles they take on can begin to look very different from that of the traditional architect. Lacaton and Vassal, winners of the 2021 Pritzker Prize, for example, in their famous response to a 1996 "embellishment plan" from the Bordeaux City Council, proposed "doing nothing" apart from replacing some gravel, introducing some traffic-calming measures, and instigating a more regular maintenance plan (Lacaton and Vassal, 1996). In a Semperian sense, this response could be seen as atectonic. By querying productivist assumptions, it also counters long-held architectural habit. Perhaps less might be enough, as Pier Vittorio Aureli has proposed (Aureli, 2013). As Robin Wilson puts it, "Their solution is to disperse investment rather than concentrate it into the manufacturing of a new object" (Wilson, 2013: 47). They do not propose an insertion into the context (as if the context were a socket shaped to receive the new), but a re-weaving of the existing threads of place.

While this approach may seem novel in the context of modern architectural practice, it has long been intrinsic in indigenous understandings of place. Māori architect Amanda Yates, for example, describes Māori spatial practice as working in "an ontological framework that attests to a multi-species lineage where earth, skies, rivers, and mountains, for example, have agency and importance as ancestral entities" (2019). Western theory, we might say, is only beginning to discover and take account of the holism of indigenous world-views in which the rich interconnectedness of all things, human and more-than-human, frames new forms of inquiry and creative work. Care and ethical responsibilities are not simply between individual human figures. When María Puig de la Bellacasa writes that "Care is a human trouble, but this does not make of care a human-only matter" (2017: 2), we might remind ourselves that webs of emplaced care have a long history in the Pacific:

> The Samoan motto for ethical behaviour, "Teu le vā" (to tend and care for the relationships), dictates the terms in this system of belonging, and thereby the construction of the individual. To participate in the system one has to engage and attend to relationships and connections" (Refiti, 2014: 111).

Speculative (un)fixing

Creative practice is thought through making, and means becoming entangled with things to hand, be they exotic or mundane: pencil and paper, card, concrete, software, drone, or living matter. Creative acts are a complex interplay between the deliberate intentions of human authors (observing or determining form for instance), and the affordance and resistance offered by non-human agents. Engaging such things in *sympoiēsis* is necessarily an open-ended negotiation with results that are unpredictable, irresolute, and unfixed. In other words, it is

speculative, oriented towards "the making of a difference, for diffraction rather than reflection of the same, for alternative investments in thinking the possible or the virtual" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 111).

Speculative practices may require us to perceive in new ways, and become sensitive to new registers of affect, perhaps "'barely perceptible micro-movements at the cusp of awareness …" in which the subject matter being drawn or designed "always remains at the edge of its own explicitness" (Artega, 2017: 259). Ross Jenner describes the way that, "In any form of making, the world is caught in the act of making itself, where the maker is an amazed observer/participant" (Jenner, 2013: 210). Makers are poised between melancholy and wonder, unfixed and decentred, surrounded by dynamic agencies that speak back to us in languages we can't pin down. This sense of being suspended or unmoored recalls art historian Susan Ballard's "space of appearances where it is possible to both grieve and look to the future" (2021: 63). Speculative architecture, ecological art, critical cartography, and other sympoiētic practices reflect their gaze through the eyes of another, making space through a kind of suturing, or drawing together. In doing so, they give us ways to explore intangible, ungraspable things that escape easy representation. Speculative practices are modes of research that pursue while maintaining uncertainty; following the "indeterminate flux of 'no-how' rather than 'the methodological steel tracks of know-how'" (Maharaj, 2009: 3).

It is perhaps not a coincidence that many of the papers presented here engage with the unpalatable, the unpresentable, and the unavoidable. Waste, decay, death, dirt, erosion, dynamic and entropic processes significantly appear in what are seemingly unfixable and intractable contemporary problems: capitalist over-production and over-consumption, environmental degradation, class conflict, contesting cultural world views. By refusing to turn away from the uncomfortable and undesirable, not to afford oneself the comforting fiction of the *tabula rasa,* the *terra nullius,* or the autonomous field, these authors take up the subtle speculative arts of the fixer: pulling on threads, making use of unpromising materials, extending their ethical responsibilities, and finding new ways to weave a world.

This issue's articles

Interstices 21 contains ten responses to this contemporary territory of fixing, ranging from critiques of our approach to waste to ficto-critical explorations of the politics of maintenance. We have not sought to homogenise these into a single position or argument, but have relished the way fixing as a theme slips through them in various forms. They expand fixing as a notion, burrow into its underpinning of repair, and turning it inside out, to encounter its obverse, the open vitality of (un)fixing. Initial forays into the topic were shared at an online workshop hosted by Victoria University on 14th August 2021. This day-long event brought together authors to review and discuss each other's papers, and was orchestrated and administered by Julia Gatley, Susan Hedges and Simon Twose. It was a globe-spanning, constructive, and reciprocal exchange, and we warmly thank all the participants. .

Luciano Brina's article twists fixing and unfixing together, presenting a speculative solution to global waste that disrupts our preconceptions about waste and its governance: it proposes the landscape of Russia's inner periphery become a

vast 'waste sucker', storing the residue of globalised production. Through such a *pharmakon* landscape Russia acts as "an internationally-funded, planetary eco-logical donor". This is a confronting and enormous geodesign scenario in which waste is managed through "geo-bio-chemical governance", creating uninhabited zones of waste storage in the Siberian wilderness where carbon sequestration, rewilding of forests, harvesting of methane and heat are managed through a repurposing of Russia's military infrastructure, including its satellites and re-mote sensing capabilities. Brina's speculative scenario jolts understandings of waste so they begin to appear as a solution as well as a problem, a scenario in which "pollution and human exclusion equates to accelerated remediation".

Confrontations with waste are also presented by Jeanette Budgett, who looks to art for ways to shift our relation to matter out of place, the "inconvenient and rel-egated externalities of modern consumer society." Waste disposal landscapes, once regarded unproblematically as passive wastelands, demand new cultural and environmental considerations for their design. In *Dirt under our fingernails*, Budgett discusses a proposed new landfill site in Dome Valley, Auckland, cross-ing it with re-readings of works by Billy Apple, Mierles Laderman Ukeles, and Noel Lane "that made visible the matter, politics, and potential of over-looked residue." Their art practice critiques relations with waste and points to a parallel critique of how we manage and conceptualise waste in the landscape. Daylighting waste, rather than concealing it, may shift understandings from denial of accumulated residue, to waste being "reconceptualised as continuous with livelihoods, habitats and land".

The urgency of our impact on the land is also highlighted by Sibyl Bloomfield and Yue Yu, in their articulation of threats to coastal inundation through an-thropogenic climate change. *From vulnerable to resilient* discusses a speculative project for Onehunga, Auckland, exploring ways that unfixing practices might enable a transition from vulnerable coastal settlement to a resilient, sustainable pairing of settlement and land. Learning from te ao Māori, Bloomfield and Yu present a proposition aiming to fix (in sense of repair) by unfixing, through dis-solving property boundary lines that form an invisible network of barriers, with the ultimate aim of "re-establishing reciprocal relationships between communi-ties and their environment".

Where Bloomfield and Yu speculate on ways to care for a landscape, through wid-er connections to social and cultural understandings, Verarisa Ujung describes the way that personal, cultural acts of care can constitute spaces in their own right. She gives an account of *mangokal holi,* a funerary ritual of Indonesia's in-digenous Batak people, in which the bones of the dead are exhumed, washed, and carefully reinterred. Ujung sees this as boundary work that produces a so-cial interior, a place of ethical and cultural obligations, embodied experience, and attachments. Her personal descriptions of the *mangokal holi* ritual map out a culturally rich interior space in which, "through caring touch that has filled my memory with depth, contour, and gesture, I share a space with my ancestors".

Julieanna Preston tackles themes of class, value, and care in a work of ficto-criti-cism. Exchanging the work of academic production for the labour of professional cleaner 'Maria' enables Preston to comment on capitalist transactional econo-mies. Offering to perform Maria's job for a few days, Preston muses on the formal and material technique of sweeping, so-called menial labour, and socioeconomic

class politics in the form of a series of personal letters. Preston performs the fictive Maria's cleaning, occupying her place as she dons the duster coat on the back of the cleaner's cupboard door. The epistolary narrative shifts become increasingly personal, signalling a (perhaps one-sided?) closing of social distance.

The intertwining of social, political, and material relations is given historical context by Carl Douglas in his examination of 19th century Parisian piles: literal piles of refuse that blocked the streets, a pile amassed by French Communards to cushion the fall of the monumental Vendôme Column, and metaphorical uses of piles and disordered matter. In *Politics of the pile* Douglas examines the complex slippage between the materiality of the mounds, the "sticks and manure, … heaps of meaningless consumer goods, impromptu barricades piled up in the streets", and political and social orders. He reveals complex connections between the shared imagination of matter and non-hierarchical political organisation. The pile becomes a metaphor for "cobbling together a new public world and catalysing new collective subjects".

The oscillating imagery of material, social, and political relations also appears in relation to 20th century industrial modernism. In *Parallax projections*, Michael Chapman and Timothy Burke make hybrid drawings of a ruined power station in Wangi, New South Wales, Australia. The drawings combine photographs, drone photogrammetry, and pencil-work that foregrounds the "holes left behind in the digital process". Chapman and Burke's work captures a building "torn between its presence as a highly functional machine of the future, and its ruin and obsolescence". The fixing priorities of architectural representation are destabilised in this project, with drawing becoming a way to chart the building's entropy, employing it as a lens to "reconstruct the history of the modernist project, its optimism, its pessimism, and its ultimate incompleteness."

Creative practice again opens up, critiques, and dismantles conventional modes of representation and understanding in a work of speculative cartography by Tamsin Salehian and Louisa King. In *Cartographies of care,* they project us into the remote, stony world of West Antarctica's dry McMurdo valleys. Their 'care-full' drawing deploys unconventional cartographic modes in performances of 'ecologic listening' (Puig) and 're-worlding' (Haraway), illuminating flourishing combinations of plant, rock, and weather in this distant place. Through urgent and affecting writing that draws on feminist cartography and ecology, *Cartographies of care* critiques both the troubling history of mapmaking in the Antarctic and proposes ecologically sensitive ways to apprehend the natural world.

On the other side of the world, images of the mountainous marble ranges of the Greek Attic landscape have been blended with idealised representations of Athens as the 'White City'. Chris French and Maria Mitsoula lead us up the marble Mt Pentelicon to the Aloula Open Air Museum of Quarrying Arts, "a site of un-fixing," where "city-landscape relations" are re-made. Eighteenth-century changes in visual perception saw the mountain quarries shift from a "working landscape visited as touristic attraction to an imaged landscape" exemplifying the emergence of what has been called the 'tourist gaze.' In *(Un)fixing Aloula* French and Mitsoula propose that Aloula un-fixes such conventional tropes. They deploy Jane Hutton's notion of the reciprocal landscape to prehend the situation differently. Perhaps, they suggest, the agency of stone might precede imagery, and sympoiētic co-design might elude the 'fixing' of orthodox design methods.

The tools with which we might resist fixity of thought and conclusion are suggested by Simon Twose's proposition for the "open sketch". His collaborative creative practice with Jules Moloney, Lawrence Harvey, and Anastasia Globa explores phenomena that elude concision: unfathomably deep ocean trenches, seismic plate action, the engulfing unpredictability of bushfires. As Twose describes it, their practice "aims to extend gestural aspects of the sketch in response to the agency of matter, as a way of capturing unfixed, intangible presences between drawer, sketch medium, and imagined space." Immersive installations deploy multiple modes of making; casting, scanning, digital parametric procedures, VR, AR, and ambient sound tactics to make the resultant sketch-space "bodily appreciable" in what Twose calls "habitable drawings". The poetic force of architectural "sketch space", as a portal to the not-yet-fully-understood, leverages the sketch's agency for *sympoiētic* drawing of the irresolute, incomplete, and un-fixed.

In addition to discussions on fixing and (un)fixing, this issue also includes an interview by Julia Gatley with professor and emeritus dean of Columbia University, Mark Wigley; a review by Tim Nees of Aaron Paterson, Sarosh Mulla and Marian Macken's installation *Drawing Room*; and a selection of creative research projects from postgraduate students.

Loose weaving

Donna Haraway reminds us that "it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots" (Haraway, 2016: 12). In a similar vein, Shannon Mattern writes: "To study maintenance is itself an act of maintenance. To fill in the gaps in this literature, to draw connections among different disciplines, is an act of repair or, simply, of taking care—connecting threads, mending holes, amplifying quiet voices" (2018). Remaining open-minded and open-hearted seems more important than ever. Accordingly, the articles that comprise this issue are sensitive to the minor, irresolute, and under-recognised. It is not our aim to launch a polemic or frame a manifesto, merely to pull on threads that suggest new ways of practising architecture and its related arts.

INTERSTICES **21**

REFERENCES

Arteaga, A. (2017). Researching aesthetically the roots of aesthetics. In N. Gansterer., E. Cocker., M. Greil. *Choreo–graphic figures: Deviations from the line* (pp. 255–264). Berlin/Boston: Edition Angewandte, De Gruyter.

Aureli, P.V. (2013). *Less is enough: On architecture and ascetism*. Moscow: Strelka.

Ballard, S. (2021). *Art and nature in the anthropocene: Planetary aesthetics*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Frascari, M. (1984). The tell-the-tale detail. *VIA*, 7, 23–37.

Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the trouble*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Jackson, S. J. (2014). Rethinking repair. In T. Gillespie, P. J. Boczkowski, & K. A. Foot (Eds.), *Media technologies* (pp. 221–240). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262525374.003.0011

Jenner, R. (2013). Thought out of bounds. In A.-Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul., M.A. Peters (Eds.), *Of other thoughts: Non-traditional ways to the doctorate. a guidebook for candidates and supervisors*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Lacaton, A. and Vassal, J-P. (1996). Place Léon Aucoc, Bordeaux. Retrieved from https://www.lacatonvassal.com/index.php?idp=37

Maharaj, S. (2009). Know-how and no-how, stopgap notes on "method" in visual art as knowledge production. *Art and research, a journal of ideas contexts and methods, Vol. 2, No. 2*, pp. 1–11.

Polkinghorne, D. (2004). *Practice and the human sciences: The case for a judgment-based practice of care*. State University of New York Press.

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2017). *Matters of care: Speculative ethics in more than human worlds*. University of Minnesota Press.

Refiti, A. L. (2014). Mavae and Tofiga. Spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony and architecture [PhD Thesis], Auckland University of Technology.

Wilson, R. (2013). *Not doing/overdoing: "Omission" and "Excess" —Lacaton & Vassal's Place Léon Aucoc, Bordeaux, and Construire's Le Channel, Scène Nationale de Calais, Calais.*

Yates, A. (2019). *Whanake mai te mauri ora. An expanded wellbeing framework and urban science data tool for integrated wellbeing governance.* (Report for Building Better Homes, Towns and Cities: Mauri Ora and Urban Wellbeing.). http://buildingbetter.nz/resources/publications.html