

INTRODUCTION

NEIL SPILLER

Neil Spiller,
Site Plan -
Sector of the
Surrealist City,
2014

The drawing attempts to
cartographically represent
the un-representational,
to map the great chunking
engine of chance of the
contemporary city.

Let us not mince words: the marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful, in fact only the marvelous is beautiful.

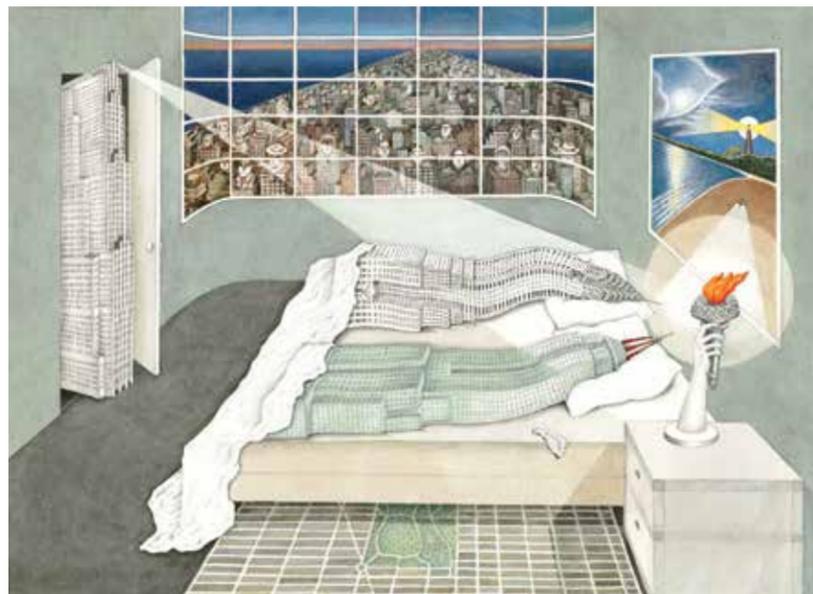
— André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', 1924¹

The title and theme of this edition of AD was initially suggested by my realisation that 2018 would be the 40th anniversary of the seminal *AD Surrealism and Architecture*.² Guest-edited by the Czech architectural historian, theorist and teacher Dalibor Vesely in 1978, the issue is constantly referenced by historians of Surrealism and densely packed with critical essays that deal with surreal notions of buildings and cities. The volume is also remarkable for the inclusion of two young architects who would later become starchitects – Rem Koolhaas and Bernard Tschumi. Both presented architectural game-changing texts from recently drawn and written projects, that were yet to be fully published Koolhaas's *Delirious New York* (1978)³ and Tschumi's *Manhattan Transcripts* (1981).⁴ These opened up new ways of conceiving architecture, both being derived from Surrealist understandings of space.

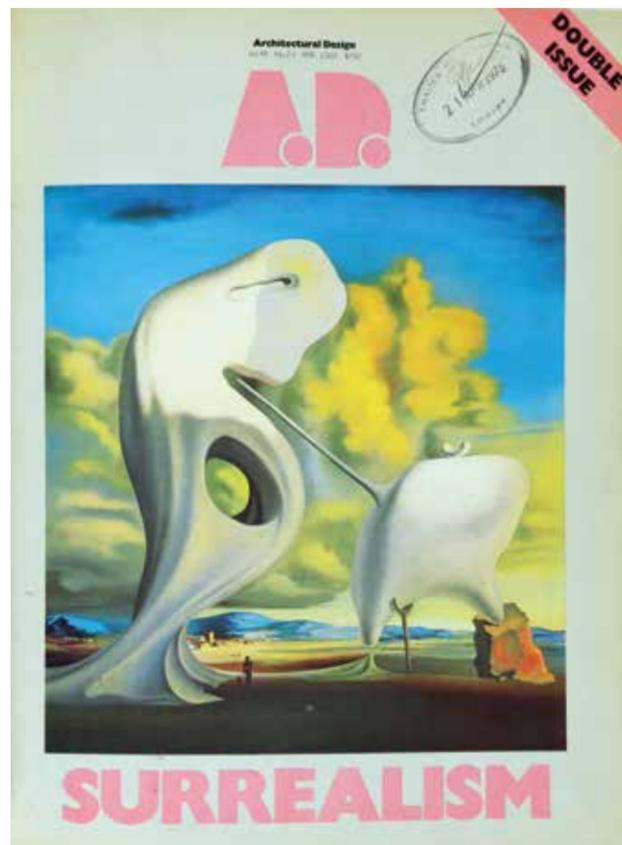
Koolhaas's piece was about the contemporaneous arrival in New York of Le Corbusier and Salvador Dalí. It highlighted Dalí's and Koolhaas's own joy in the great churning engine of the city: an engine that mixes the programmes, functions and forms of buildings to create the marvellous ambience and peculiar Surrealist maelstrom of New York. Tschumi's contribution posited a cinematic architecture of event informed by the Surrealists' privileging of the active onlooker's/participant's point of view. It emphasised the performative nature of the city while developing new ways of representing these time-based conditions. A pivotal influence on Tschumi, these explorations led him to develop his characteristic future forays into architectural notation and event space. In this issue, architectural historian and theorist Anthony Vidler further explores these texts, their influences, resonances and ramifications (pp XX–XX).

Madelon Vriesendorp,
Fragrant Delit,
1975

Vriesendorp's image was used as the cover of Rem Koolhaas's *Delirious New York* (1978) and features the city's iconic skyscrapers just after sexual congress.



The 1978 AD is also remarkable for two omissions: Daniel Libeskind and John Hejduk. At the time, both were working on iconic, theoretical and, I would argue, Surrealist-inspired projects. Hejduk was embarking on creating a series of 'Masque' projects (1978–89) situated in many differing city locations. These sought to distil the essence of place, its genius loci and the rituals and day-to-day activities of a city's occupants in eloquent, archetypal, architectonic forms. Meanwhile, Libeskind was collaging and drawing pieces intimately inspired by Surrealist precedent, and these forays into Surrealist ways of working would result in his *Micromegas* series (1979).

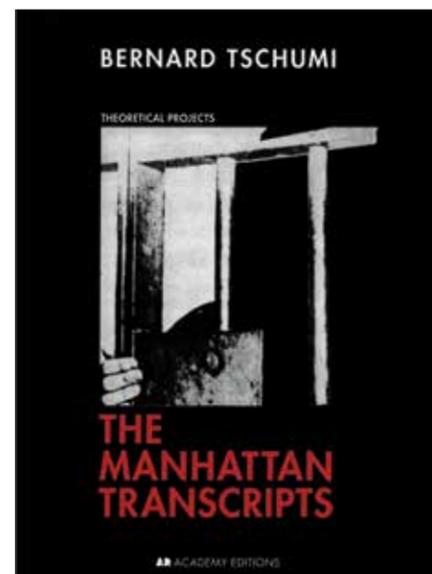


Cover of *AD Surrealism and Architecture*,
1978

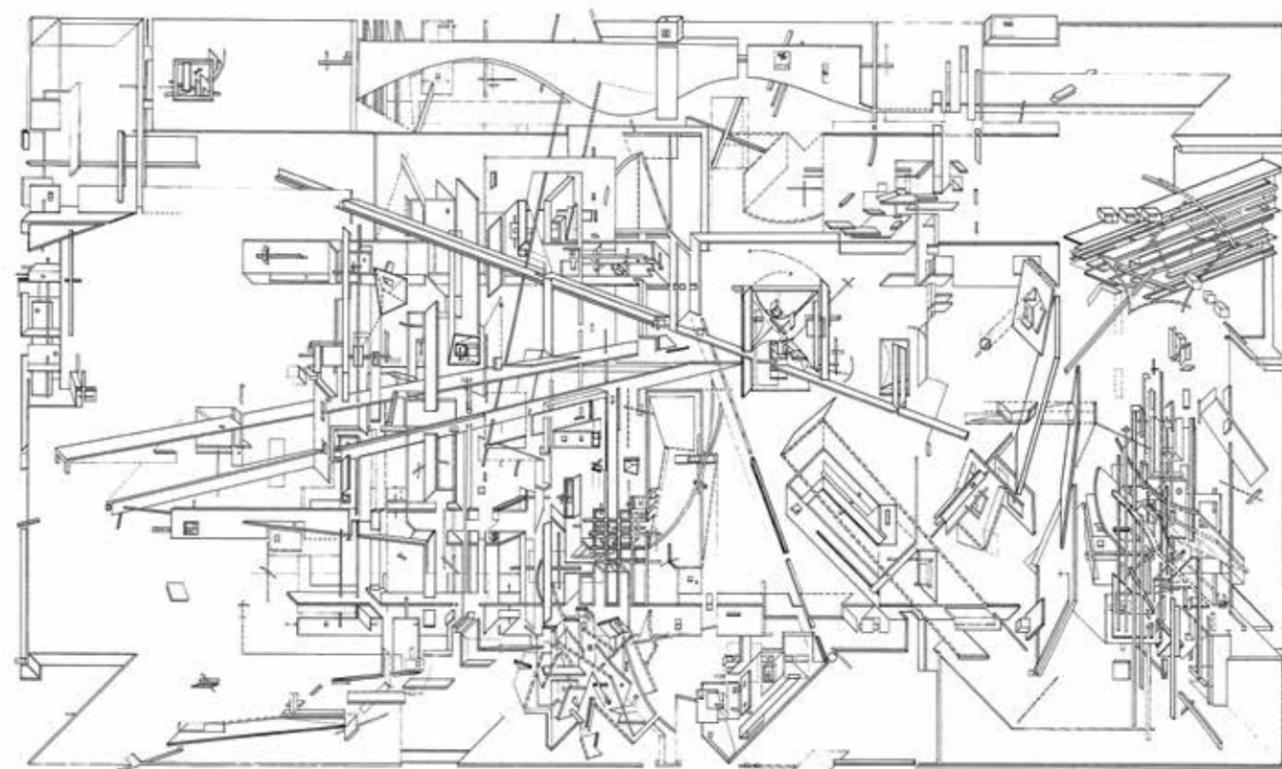
The cover features Salvador Dalí's *Millet's Architectonic Angelus* (1933), which shows two architectural forms in the vague attitude/stance of the two peasants standing in a ploughed field in Jean-François Millet's original painting *The Angelus* (1857–9) – see p xxx – their heads bowed for prayer at the sounding of the Angelus bell. Millet's painting was an important source of inspiration for Dalí's 'paranoiac critical method' of creativity.

Bernard Tschumi,
The Manhattan Transcripts,
1981

Tschumi's preoccupations with the event, the point of view and urban performance would also give him a disregard for the traditional protocols of architectural drawings and provoke him to seek alternative methods of choreographing other architectural experiences in the city, resulting in his seminal book *The Manhattan Transcripts*.

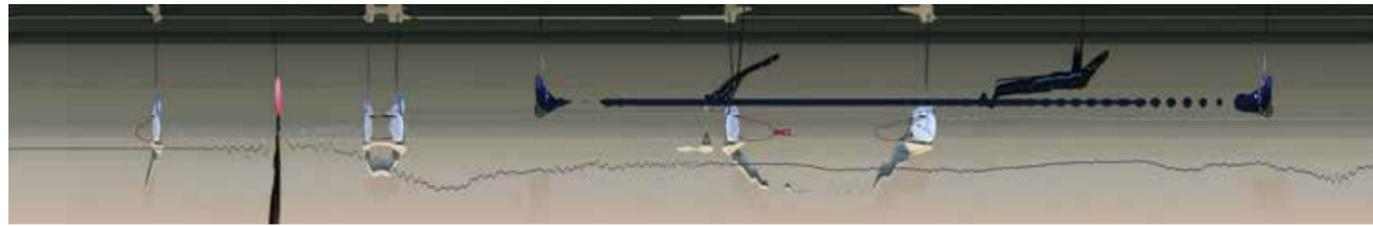


The definition of what might constitute Surrealist creative practice was left intentionally flexible by its founder, writer André Breton



Daniel Libeskind,
Micromegas: The Architecture of End Space. 1. The Garden,
1978

Libeskind's first iconic project distils architecture to almost nothing except a lexicon of junctions and collisions.

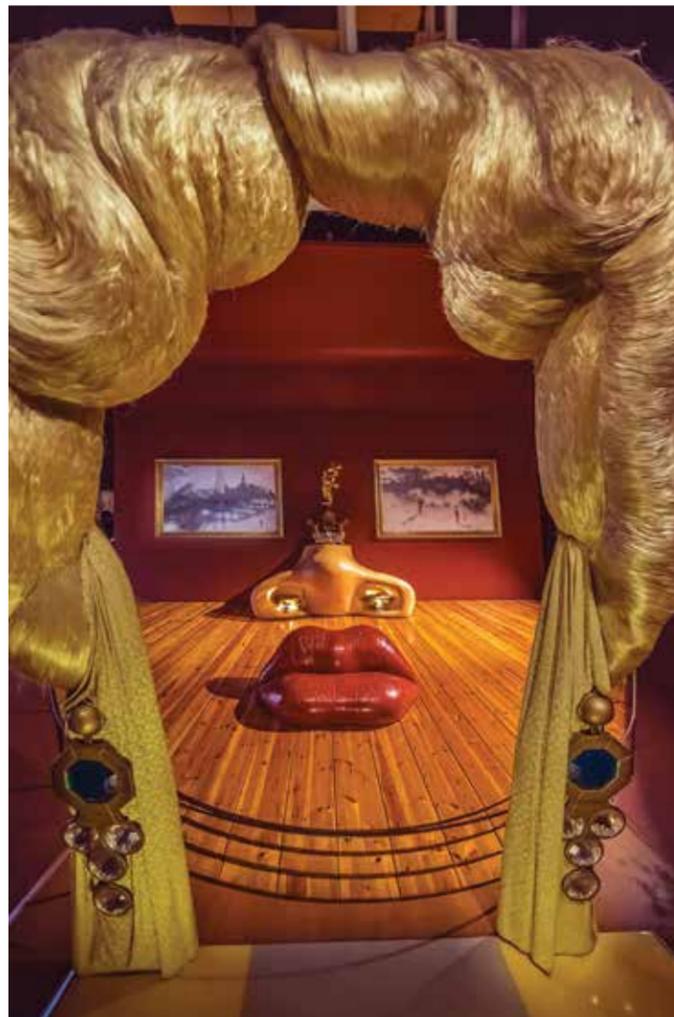


Luke Lupton,
Great White Bankruptcy,
2016

Luke Lupton,
Ominous Equine Empire Raditiona,
2016

Luke Lupton,
Pinnocchio's Proboscis and
its Deceptive Shadow,
2016

This project for a narrative-based betting shop utilised the construction of a scanning machine built from three proprietary scanners operating in different dimensions simultaneously. This tactic for choreographing chance produced these and other scans that were then named and used to inspire characters and the interaction of narratives and forms – models and drawings were later made that describe a most bizarre agglomeration of interactions and architectural spaces.



Salvador Dalí,
Mae West room,
Dalí Theatre-Museum,
Figueres,
Spain,
1974

Dalí was a master of the double image. Here Mae West's face is constructed from elements deployed in an architectural space.

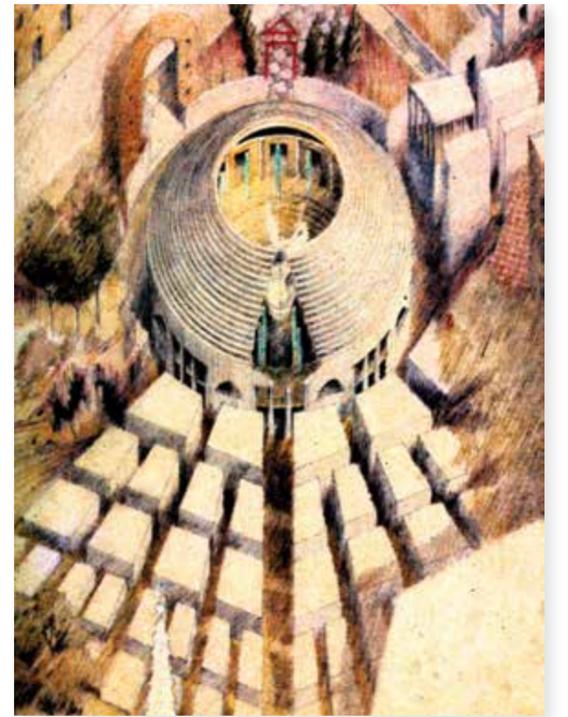
both architects and students in the 21st century by suggesting other, less architecturally traditional methods of combining materials and constructing space.

This AD explicitly makes the connection between contemporary architectural technology such as virtuality, synthetic biology and architectonic hybridity with issues, protocols and tactics of Surrealist practice and theory for the architectural world of now. Softness, metamorphosis, anamorphosis, wetness, the magical and the fantastic are all common to both paths of creativity. The issue will therefore be a seminal touchstone for anyone interested in the interaction with and inspiration of Surrealism for 21st-century architecture, and aims to introduce a new generation to its possibilities as a tactic or mindset rather than just a style – a means of infusing greater creativity into the architectural profession. It brings surreal architectures up to date with a survey of some of the most innovative, contemporary, architectural work being produced to illustrate a continuum of thought that stretches back through the 20th century and beyond.

Technology, Attunement and Enigma

Contemporary technology demands that architects design atmospheres and atmospheric connections that are functional, semiotic and poetic. Surrealist discourse often illustrated the personal attunement of individuals to architectural space, and contemporary commentators such as theorist Alberto Pérez-Gómez maintain that the use of computerised algorithmic imaginings of architecture in recent times has dislocated the relationship of buildings to site and of people to buildings, and that this has hastened the demise of personal attunement to space and place. In this issue of AD he argues persuasively and eloquently for its reinstatement and poetic potential (pp xx–xx).

Others, such as Dagmar Motycka Weston (pp XX–XX), argue that the metaphysical cityscapes of Giorgio de Chirico are a lesson for contemporary architects not to over-rationalise the beautiful complexity of the city and its enigmas, and to leave room in their work for the emotional. Surrealism made a great contribution to such notions of the city, as was defined by Roger Cardinal in his seminal essay 'Soluble City' in the 1978 AD.⁵ Here Cardinal defined six Surrealist readings of the city: as a dream, as a love affair, as a palimpsest, as a poetic text, as a psychic labyrinth, and as a system of signs. As I have written elsewhere: 'These are not mutually exclusive, but simultaneous and concurrent. Like quantum fields of events, everything exists at once as potential readings until it condenses, momentarily provoked by an observer, read and captured as a trace of another reality where the familiar rules are not obeyed.'⁶ In this most subtle of ways, yet unmistakably adhering to Cardinal's analysis of the surreal city, is the work of Eric Parry, both as a student of Vesely and as a practising architect.



Eric Parry,
Urban Necropolis,
St Giles,
London,
1979

Parry created this drawing while studying under Dalibor Vesely at the University of Cambridge. Vesely's students often developed ways to illustrate their work that were particular to the studio: shadowy and with collaged points of view.



Eric Parry Architects,
One Eagle Place,
London,
2013

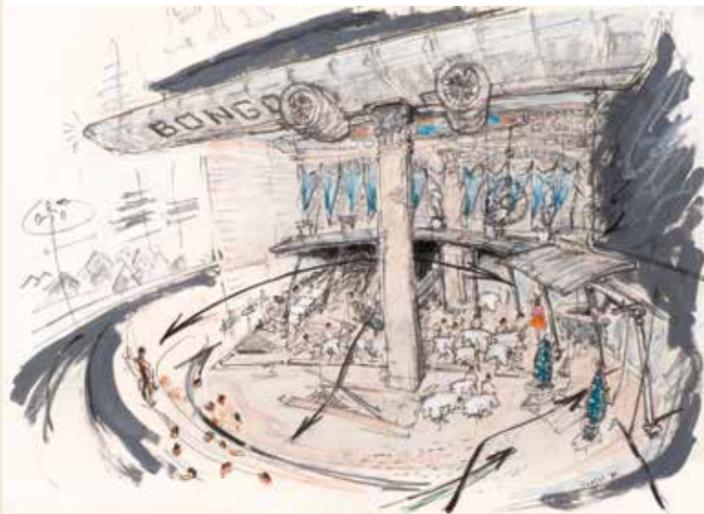
Parry's office building is prone to surreal flashes of colour. Artist Richard Deacon was commissioned to design the unruly bright cornice.

This issue therefore examines Surrealism as an often overlooked stream of artistic thought that needs to be reassessed in the light of the impact of emerging technologies on architectural space-making and the human habitation of those spaces.

However, much has changed since 1978, particularly for architects. Every aspect of architects' work has radically altered: whether it is the way they operate; their position in the construction-industry food chain; the manner in which they are commissioned; the way they represent and analyse their projected buildings or how they build them. Computers and the digital worlds they construct have become ubiquitous as an engine for these changes. The boundaries between the real and the virtual are disappearing daily, and splines, lofting and render farms have become part of their everyday life. Also, many are now experimenting with biology, and some with synthetic biology and autonomous systems. This issue therefore examines Surrealism as an often overlooked stream of artistic thought that needs to be reassessed in the light of the impact of emerging technologies on architectural space-making and the human habitation of those spaces. It offers us, as architectural designers, much-needed inspiration for how to be joyous and not reductive makers of architectural space. Swiss artist HR Giger eschews architectural reductivism and gives us a maximalist, disquieting yet beautiful vignette into the possibilities of biomechanical synthesis in his Giger Museum Bar in Gruyères (see pp x-xx).

Vortex City, Nature's Vicissitudes and the Surreal House

The complex, forever dynamic vortex of the city also offers prospects for the fulfilment of desire, a visual and visceral feast of strangeness and charm, of danger and lust. Architect Nigel Coates (pp XX-XX) treats us to not only a very personal reflection on his work relative to Surrealism, but also lets us into his new proposition for Voxtacity, a contemporary Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens, its tactics of space-making highly surreal and marvellous. Like his friend and colleague Will Alsop, Coates appears to have a long history of surreal work, featuring reconciled forms and thoughts that are, at first at least, seemingly conventionally alien to one another. Visceral pleasures in the city again feature in Mark Morris's explorations into the strange world of autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) (pp XX-XX) – the satisfying nervous cascading tingle ('braingasm') provoked by altruistic attention in hairdressers, architectural desk crits and the scraping of wet paint on canvas among other things.



Branson Coates Architecture, Caffè Bongo, Tokyo, 1986

Coates's vortex-like sketch of the bar depicts customer movement and uncannily transcribes the ambience of the finished building.

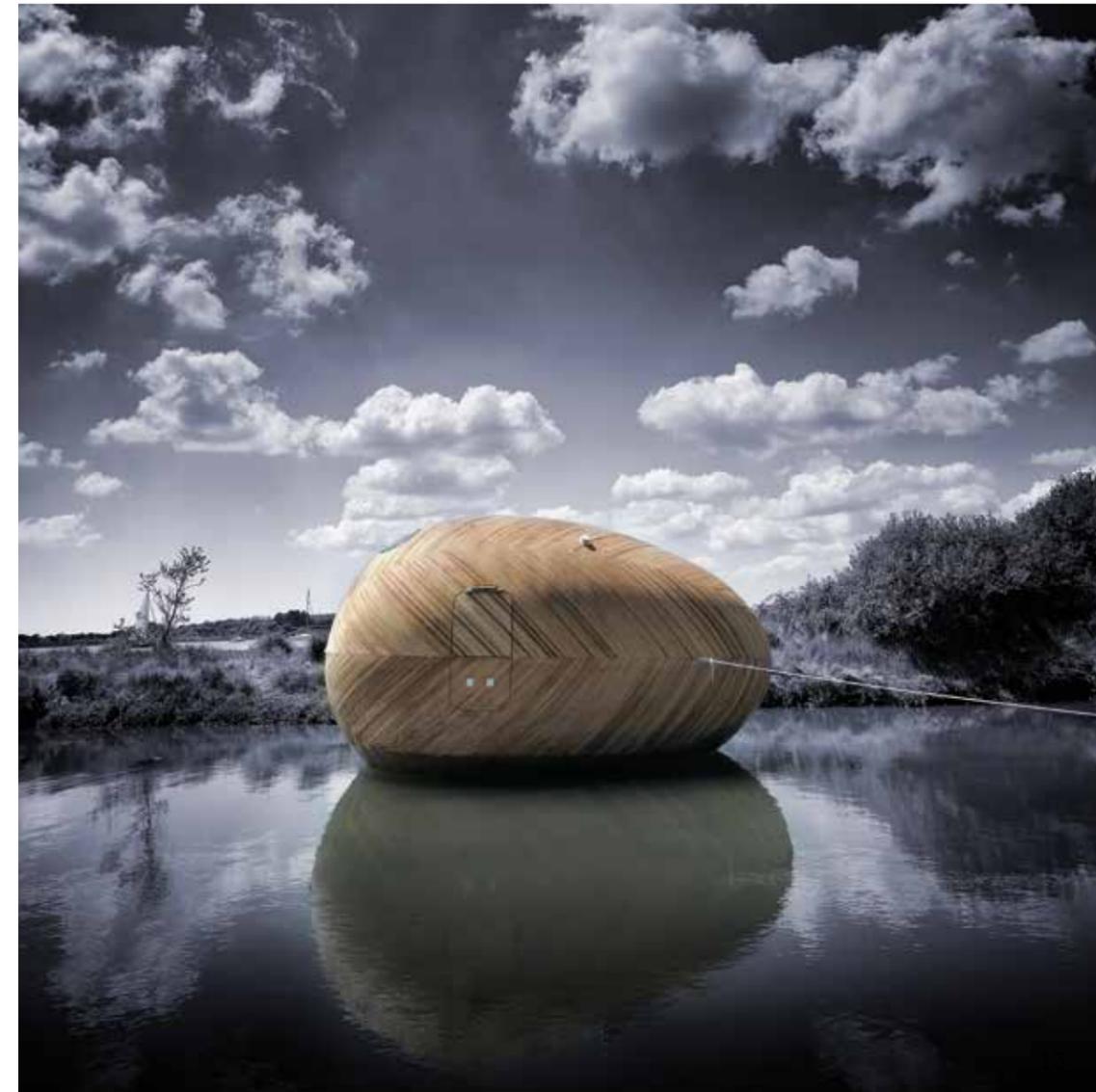


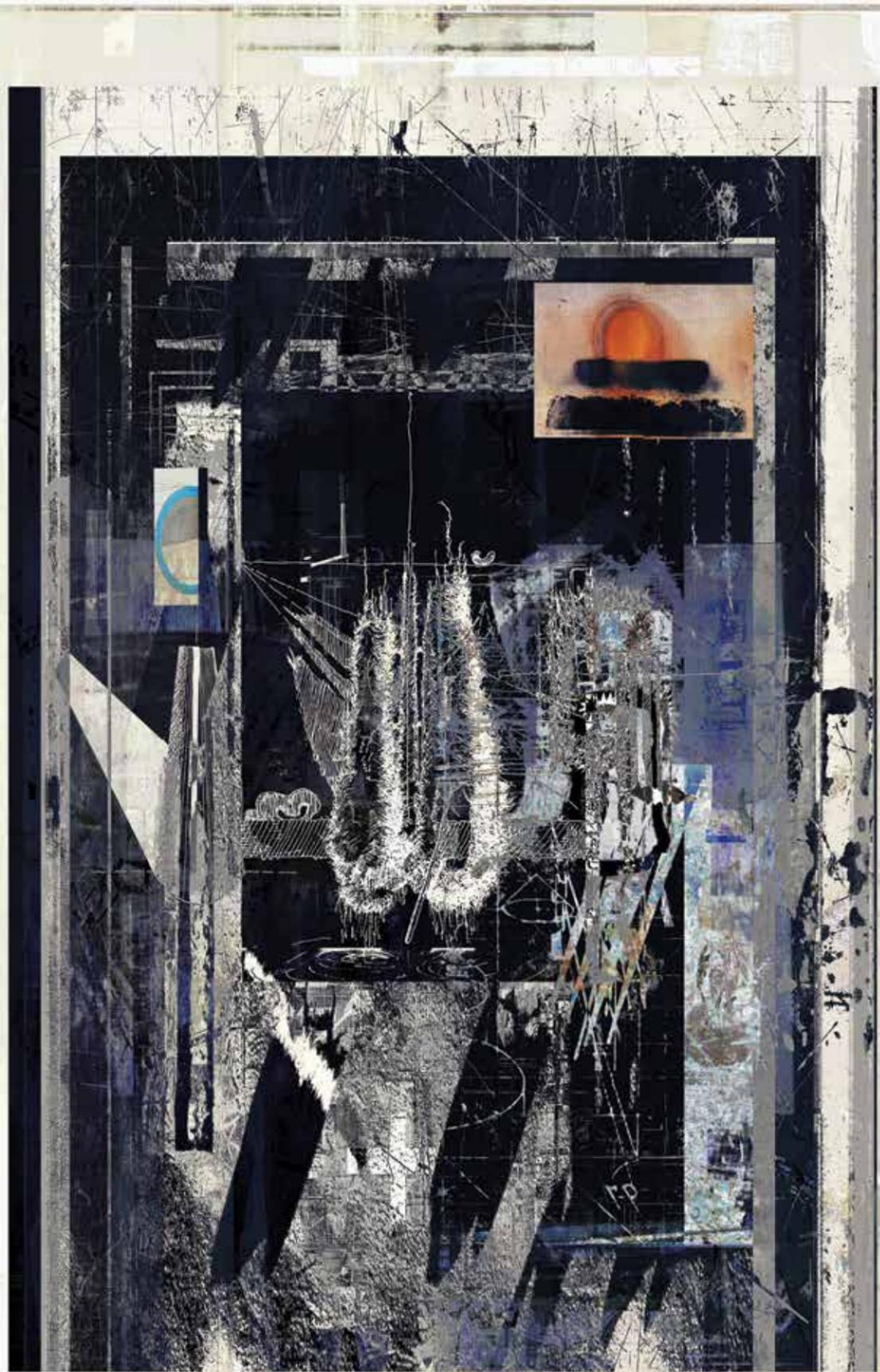
Will Alsop, Sketchbook, 2004

Alsop explores his building projects through his paintings, which become vehicles to communicate his design intentions to clients and stakeholders, but equally possess a surreal gravitas.

PAD Studio, Space Place & Urban Design (SPUD) and Stephen Turner, Exbury Egg, Exbury, Hampshire, 2013

The egg motif has a long and complex history within the Surrealist lexicon. The floating egg frequently appears in Surrealist works, here as eye and protective womb utilised as a boathouse – simple and effective yet having a profound, uncanny effect on its context.





Elizabeth Ann Williams (pp XX–XX) uses surreal techniques and ideas to confront and reconcile architecturally the formidable power of the Mississippi River and the architectures and landscapes that come from the realisation that it flows through time and myth and cannot be fully controlled. This results in wild, frenetic drawings and texts that are highly personal and arresting. English/Korean architect Natalie Gall (pp XX–XX) takes the narrative of Leonora Carrington’s novel *The Hearing Trumpet* (first published in 1974, in French) and weaves it into the landscape of Southeast London’s Thamesmead to create a paracosm of rescaled furnitures and animals, dark regurgitating forests, secret passages and hungry mantelpieces – all staple Surrealist preoccupations. The result is a spectacular series of drawings where *Alice in Wonderland* meets Aubrey Beardsley – both favourites of the Surrealists.

Film, both stills and movies, has been at the centre of the Surrealist odyssey just as much as poetry, painting, sculpture and prose. Perhaps the best known are Dalí and Luis Buñuel’s two filmic collaborations: *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), which gave us the quintessential surreal image of the woman’s eye cut with a razor (symbolising the liberation of the subconscious), and the subsequent *L’Age d’Or* (1930). Surrealism has a long legacy in the history of film. A microcosm of this is the studio and work of the Quay Brothers, the doyens of stop-frame animation and conjurers of claustrophobic architectural, jittery, filmic interiors. In an interview with Mark Morris and myself (pp xx–xx), they let us into this world, answering our questions about their surreal precedents, their obsessions, ideas, methods and their thoughts on the surreal city.

Neil Spiller,
Communicating Vessels Landscape,
2016

Spiller has been working on his epic *Communicating Vessels* project for 20 years. Taking Surrealism as its starting point in an attempt to speculate about the future of architecture of this century, it now consists of more than 1,000 drawings.

My own work continues to speculate on the old relationship of house and garden, expanding the house out into its engorged and fecund, uncontrollable landscape – a landscape of reflexive things teetering on the edge of equilibrium that addresses fears, loves and the darker meanderings of the Surrealist mind and legacy.

Shaun Murray (pp xx–xx) is interested in the invisible dynamics of everyday life, which can be ‘excavated’ using tools held as apps by any smartphone, or via photographs and video, and then divining with these architectural and animal soundings to create an architecture of coalescing intensities acting out or choreographing over time – fluxing terrains hanging in the air. Perry Kulper (pp XX–XX) uses the Surrealist technique of collage in a contemporary way to co-join textures, wallpapers, computer renderings and landscapes for all manner of wildlife to create mises en scène that are on the edge of belief and marvellous all the same. Bryan Cantley charts the ‘machinic’ in all its manifestations, and on the way develops an extraordinary graphic language of glyphs and glitches, torques, bladders and vectors firmly in the marvellous tradition (pp xx–xx). And James Eagle (pp x–xx) is interested in the strangeness of the chemical and natural world. His architecture is aqueous and fluid; one of flows, densities and durations that deposit over months and years to form a ‘depositional house’ reminiscent of Dalí’s soft landscapes. Eagle’s temporary irrigation armatures here take the place of Dalí’s crutches as an architecture before the architecture, sifting, supporting and setting out the geometry of the house or installation.

My own work (pp XX–XX) continues to speculate on the old relationship of house and garden, expanding the house out into its engorged and fecund, uncontrollable landscape – a landscape of reflexive things teetering on the edge of equilibrium that addresses fears, loves and the darker meanderings of the Surrealist mind and legacy. Architect Mark W West and his mysterious colleague and friend Mark West discuss the former’s beautiful drawing techniques and surreal modes of architectural creativity (pp xx–xx). Nic Clear (pp XX–XX) presents his great technologically convergent city, located on Canvey Island in the mouth of the Thames in Essex, at once science fiction and situationally surreal. Here he concentrates on the great (delete) computational and vastly deep caldera at its centre.

All of the architects, designers and filmmakers featured in this issue, in some sense or another, are trying to understand the poetic potential of bodies, the city and objects and their collective creative dance. They seek to discover what these dynamic terrains conceal or celebrate – and to augment these marvellous semiotic operas with anomalous juxtapositions and semiotic eclipses, sometimes utilising advanced technology, sometimes not. Some even try to draw maps of these volatile, fluxing forms and territories.

Above all, this issue of *AD* is dedicated to the memory of Dalibor Vesely – one of our brightest and best, who did so much to open our eyes to the potential of architecture as a theoretical and poetically creative, humanity-enhancing force. ▀

Notes

1. André Breton, ‘Manifesto of Surrealism’ (1924), in ‘Manifestoes of Surrealism’, trans Richard Seaver and Helen R Lane, University of Michigan Press (Ann Arbor, MI), 1972, p 14.
2. Dalibor Vesely (ed), *AD Surrealism and Architecture*, 48 (2–3), 1978.
3. Rem Koolhaas, ‘Büer! Ai bring ou surrealism auredi meni pipoul in niu york jove bin infected bai zai laifquiving and marvellous sors of surrealism’, *AD Surrealism and Architecture*, *op cit*, p 153.
4. Bernard Tschumi, ‘Architecture and Its Double’, *AD Surrealism and Architecture*, *op cit*, p 111.
5. Roger Cardinal, ‘The Soluble City: The Surrealist Perception of Paris’, *AD Surrealism and Architecture*, *op cit*, pp 143–9.
6. Neil Spiller, *Architecture and Surrealism: A Blistering Romance*, Thames & Hudson (London), 2016 p 126.

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