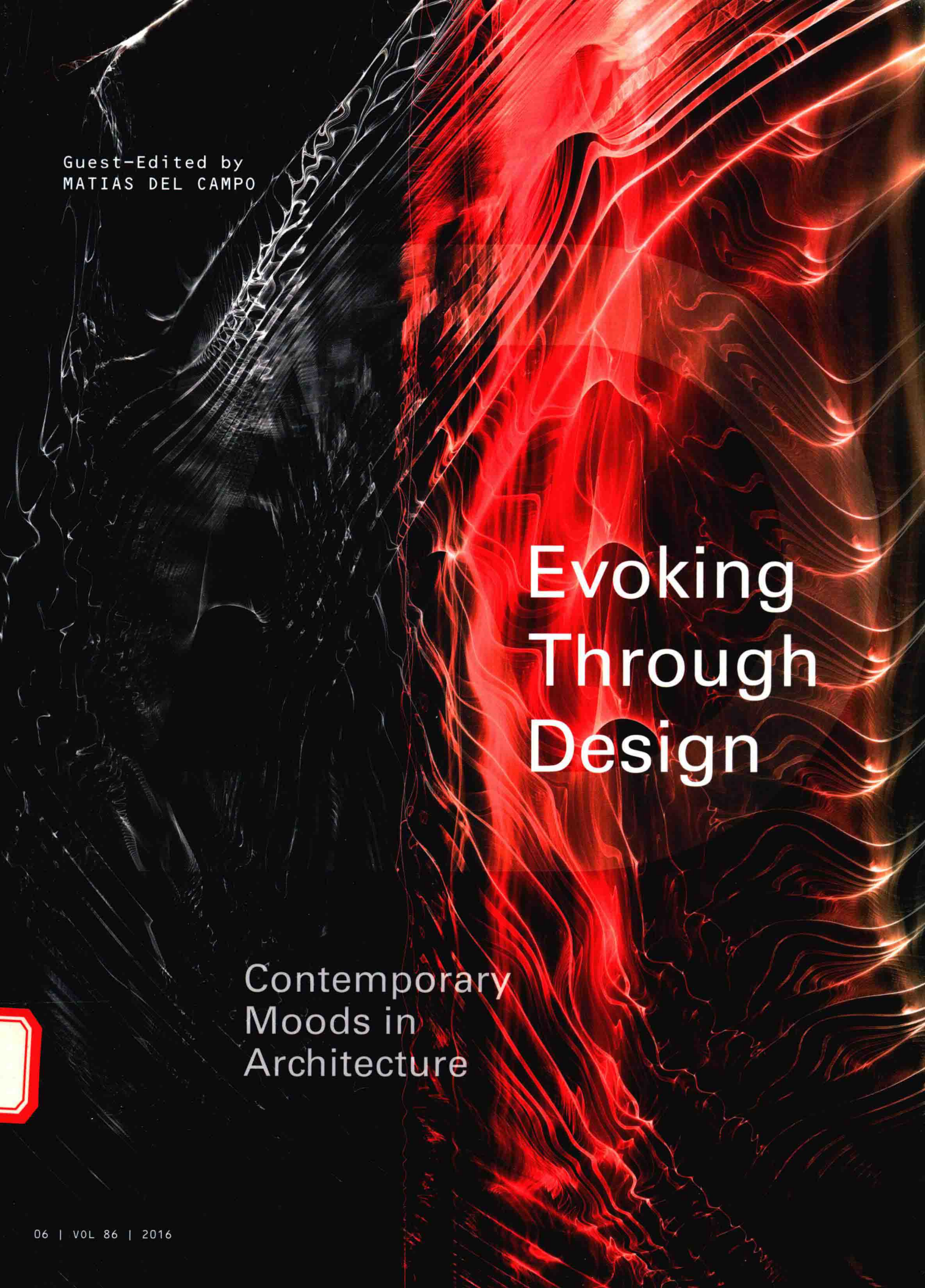


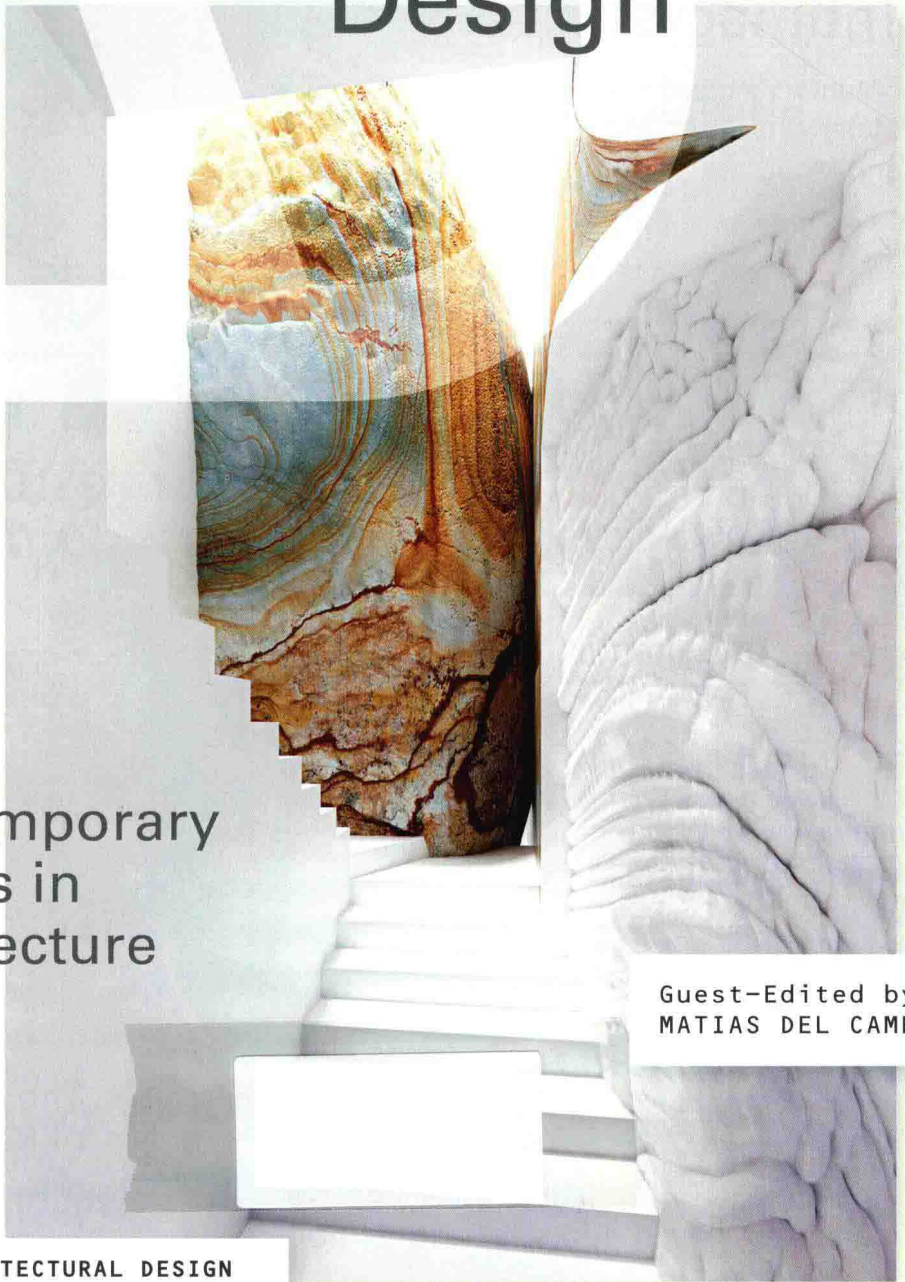


Guest-Edited by
MATIAS DEL CAMPO

Evoking Through Design

Contemporary
Moods in
Architecture

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MATIAS DEL CAMPO

Profile
No 244

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November/December 2016

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Eric Goldemberg
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Inside front cover: Alisa Andrasek with Wonderlab, XenoCells, 'Exo-Evolution' exhibition, ZKM|Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, 2015. © Alisa Andrasek, Wonderlab, UCL Bartlett, Shawn Liu

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ABOUT THE
GUEST-EDITOR

MATIAS DEL CAMPO

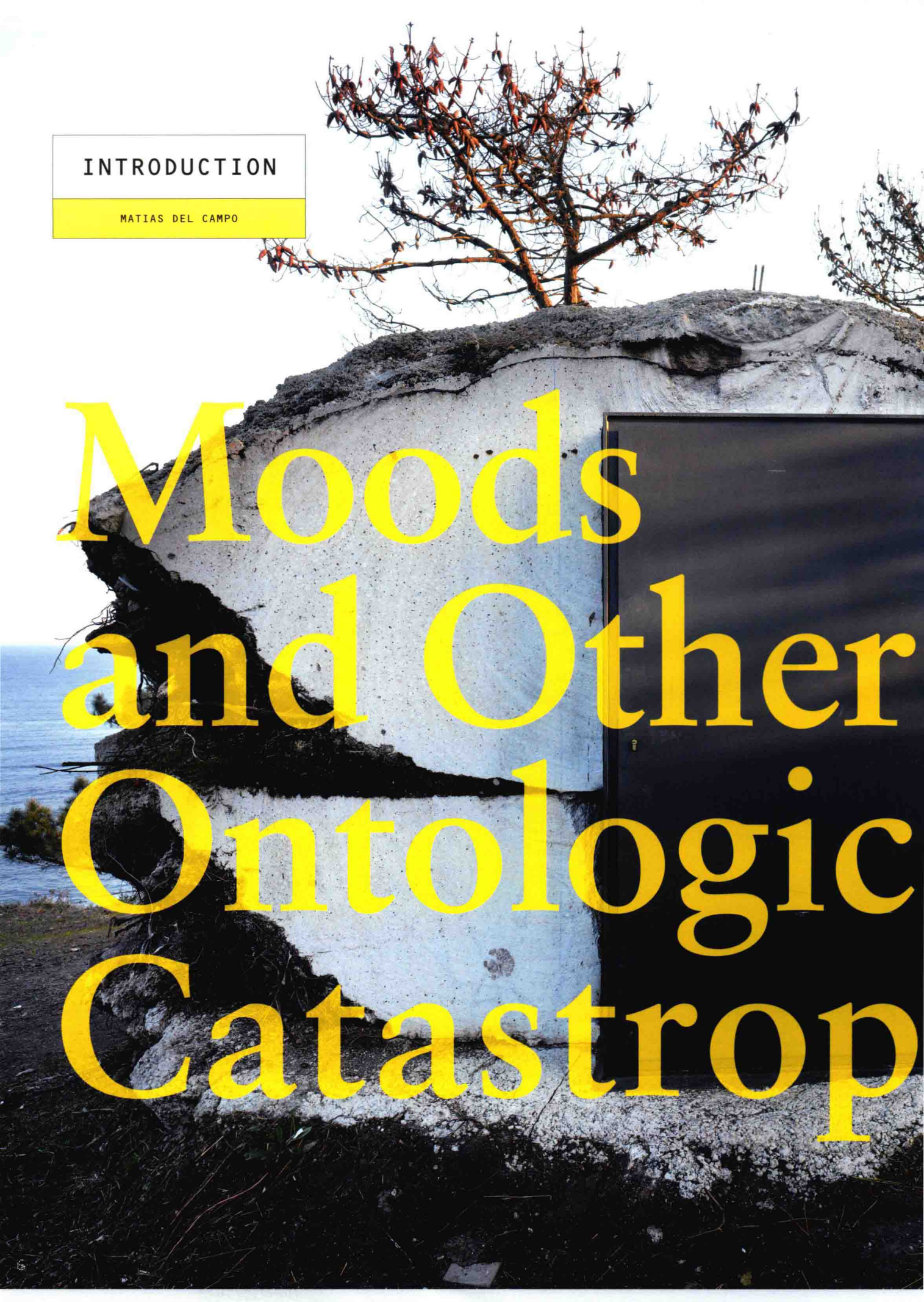
Matias del Campo is a registered architect, designer, and Associate Professor of Architecture at the A Alfred Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan. His obsessive explorations of contemporary moods are fuelled by the opulent repertoire of materialisation in nature together with cutting-edge technologies, as well as form, as a driving force in design at large.

In 2003 he cofounded the architectural practice SPAN in Vienna, together with Sandra Manninger. The practice is best known for its speculative projects dealing with the sophisticated application of contemporary schools of thought in architectural production. Its award-winning projects are particularly informed by Baroque geometries, Romantic sensibilities and continental philosophy, and interrogate the possible contributions of these sensorial and spatial conditions, in combination with the manifold qualities of algorithm-driven methodologies, to the discipline of architecture.



SPAN gained wide recognition for its winning competition entry for the Austrian Pavilion at the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, as well as for the new Brancusi Museum in Paris in 2008. The practice's work was featured at the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennale, at ArchiLab 2013 at the FRAC Centre, Orléans, France, at the 2008 and 2010 Architecture Biennale in Beijing, and in the 2011 solo show 'Formations' at the Museum of Applied Arts (MAK) in Vienna. It is also in the permanent collections of FRAC, MAK, the Albertina museum in Vienna and the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich. In 2013, SPAN expanded its operations to Shanghai, where the practice is currently working on building projects of varying scales. Design and research awards include the Young-Talent Award for Experimental Tendencies in Architecture (from the Federal Chancellery of Austria), the Rudolph Schindler Scholarship (granted by the Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur (BMUKK) and MAK), the Guardian Glass Research Grant and the Accelerate@CERN award.

Del Campo's previous teaching appointments include Visiting Professor at the Dessau Institute of Architecture at the Bauhaus; Guest Professor at the ESARQ School of Architecture in Barcelona; and lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania. He served as Chair of the 'ACADIA 2016: Posthuman Frontiers' conference, and is currently completing his PhD at RMIT University in Melbourne.

The background of the book cover is a photograph of a coastal scene. A large, light-colored, textured rock formation dominates the middle ground. A dark, leafless tree with some reddish-brown leaves stands on top of the rock. To the left, the ocean is visible under a pale sky. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

INTRODUCTION

MATIAS DEL CAMPO

Moods and Other Ontologic Catastroph

al hes

Ensamble Studio,
The Truffle,
Costa da Morte,
Galicia,
Spain,
2010

The Truffle house is part of Ensamble Studio's current series of projects that intentionally negotiate between rough services and clean-shaven planes. Here the raw, deliberately sloppy fringes of the concrete contrasts with the precise cuts executed with a diamond saw and the sober tranquility of the steel door.

The speculum of speculation is not a thin, flat plate of glass onto which a layer of molten aluminum has been vacuum-sprayed but a funhouse mirror made of hammered metal, whose distortions show us a perversion of a unit's sensibilities.

— Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, Or What It's Like to Be a Thing*, 2012¹

Time cools, time clarifies; no mood can be maintained quite unaltered through the course of hours

— Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*), 1924²

The debate on computational design thinking over the last two decades has focused mainly on techniques, technologies and tools³ – on how things are done, and not what they do or what they emanate. This has left very little breathing space to contemplate what these computationally driven chunks, pieces, objects and things actually imprint on the world in terms of cultural agency. What traces do they leave? How do they relate to each other, and the rest of the world? How do carved patterns, translucent columns, ultra-black asteroids, massive lacerated blocks and flocks of colourful boulders create an alternative frame for realism?

Instead of perpetuating the techno mantra of computational design, this issue of Δ strives to examine the characteristics of contemporary architectural production in terms of their ability to evoke mood, radiate atmospheric conditions and portray phenomenological traits of the sensual as well as the actual. Do these objects de facto have a mood? Is mood part of any possible interrogation? How does it contribute to the study of the nature of being, becoming, existence or reality and the basic categories of being and their relations? 'Mood' and the sublime, it can be argued, have a very close-knit relationship with the nature of aesthetic and artistic experience.



Joseph Mallord
William Turner,
*Snow Storm:
Hannibal and his
Army Crossing the
Alps*,
1812

left: Turner's *Snow Storm* marks one of the highlights of what the German art historian Heinrich Wölfflin describes as '*malerisch*' (painterly), in which the firm contour of an object is replaced by a system of relative light and non-local colour within the shade, thus turning shadow, darkness and luminous effects into features evoking atmospheric and moody conditions.



Stefan Klecheski,
Yingjing Ma and
Siwei Ren,
Cute Seams,
Seems Cute -
Seagram Building
NYC,
Taubman College of
Architecture and
Urban Planning,
University of
Michigan,
Ann Arbor,
Michigan,
2016

right: The project occupies Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building and intentionally perverts the Miesian form as well as his material fetishism. In the process it creates an uncanny tension between the well-proportioned angular properties of the Seagram Building and the almost vulgarly bulbous extensions.

As John McMorrough so eloquently explains in his essay 'Mood Swings: Architectural Affective Disorder' (pp 14–19), mood may at first seem a rather trivial concern upon which to base serious architectural discourse. It sits lightly in the range of behavioural responses (human or not); it has been described as little more than feelings, but no less than a fundamental calibration of the world around us. Mood, it seems, once evoked, provokes. Upon closer examination, however, a whole set of fundamental questions arise concerning the relationship of subject and object, the source of causation, and the universality of responses. In short, a serious study of mood moves quite quickly from something understood as trifling and subject to change (one speaks of a 'shifting mood'), to a fundamental deliberation regarding influence and affect – not primarily as a personal reaction to a particular space, but as a conceptual issue that depicts mood as recurrent and repeatable; that is, transmittable.

The 19th-century German philosopher and notorious misanthrope Arthur Schopenhauer offers a phenomenologically complex account of how we may take aesthetic pleasure in a universe of delightfully weird or massively overwhelming architectural entities. If everything is an object, and achieves will-less contemplation of the ideas that express themselves in these threatening instances, then the objects maintain a 'state of elevation' – a feeling of the sublime.

Where Schopenhauer fails to show some compassion, Benjamin H Bratton makes it a staple of his essay 'Bad Mood: On Design and "Empathy"' (pp 96–101). His examples of buildings worth our emphatic recognition include the vast logistical archipelagos – factories, warehouses, container ships, distribution routes, switching depots – all briefly inhabited by inanimate objects in passing. It could be said that a contemporary moodless architecture already exists, in which those passing objects are incapable of emotion in any normal sense. Yet we build so many houses for them. Perhaps the reasons for this are stranger, more contradictory and more instructive than we realise.

In a Contemporary Mood

The opposite end of the spectrum of considerations is best described by Sylvia Lavin in her 2003 essay 'In a Contemporary Mood',⁴ in which she contemplates the contemporary as a speculative terrain triggered by an ambition requiring the identification of a field of architectural effects. These conditions can be understood as being detachable from the logics of causality. One of the primary attributes of the special effects described by Lavin is their inherent ephemeral quality and shelf life. Atmospheric qualities and special effects occupy the same terrain and are intrinsically bounded to the mood of an object. To exemplify this idea, Lavin relies on the Modernist icon Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, an architect strictly bound to the application of effect. The orthogonal anorexic architecture is laced with information by the material effects of glass, marble, bronze and steel.



The only intuitively romantic effect in Mies's work is in the colour of the marble striations, the veining of the Macassar wood, and the merciless reflectivity of the chromed column – ontological dependencies based on material qualities. Contemporary moods operate not on a different but an alternative set of interdependencies far more concerned with the intermediation of aesthetic imprints resulting from a crescendo of temporary material effects. Procedures such as accumulation, lamination, decoration, colouration, agitation, plasticisation and environmentalisation are expressed in an interest in primitive architectural conditions.

The raw, the coarse and also the obscene have a place in this hypogean plane of architectural thinking. Pixels, voxels and cells evoke an alternative universe of atmospheres or moods. François Roche's 'Parrhesia-stases (The Preamble)' (pp 66–71) drags readers deeper into a rabbit-hole called obscenity where they encounter the hidden, the secret and the repulsive as catalysts for condemnation and punishment. Sigmund Freud would certainly have raised an eyebrow, or maybe even two.

It appears that when discussing the properties of mood, the strange is never far away, as also exemplified in the work of Jason Payne and his practice Hirsuta. His Mathilde project, described in his essay on pp 42–5, literally observes a strange and dark object, an asteroid, slowly wobbling and stumbling through our solar system, initiating a new foray into an old subject – object conversation. In a similar vein, in his essay 'The Affects of Realism: Or the Estrangement of the Background' (pp 58–65), Michael Young unfolds some of the historical precedents of defamiliarisation and estrangement, revealing the world to be other than how it is commonly understood to be received. By 'estranging' objects and complicating form, he argues, art as a device has a purpose all of its own and ought to be extended to its fullest.

Young includes such devices as the shifting of narrative points of view (for example, to the nonhuman) and 'the description of an action solely through qualitative sensations, avoiding all direct naming of the action itself. For these formalist critiques, defamiliarisation operates both at the level of inverted conventions (a conceptual project) and heightened attention (a sensation project).' In our own work at SPAN, Sandra Manninger and myself have developed a similar interest in the combination of the conceptual and sensational, which allows interrogation of primordial architectural problems, strange corners, deliquescent walls, flirting ceilings, firm symmetries, adventurous illuminations, a staccato of floors, hairpin columns and sublime naves, and all the intimate relationships between those objects, regardless of its scale. Ore Fashion Stores and Blocks (pp 54–7) are two current projects that address facets of estranged conditions that are familiar yet alien at the same time.

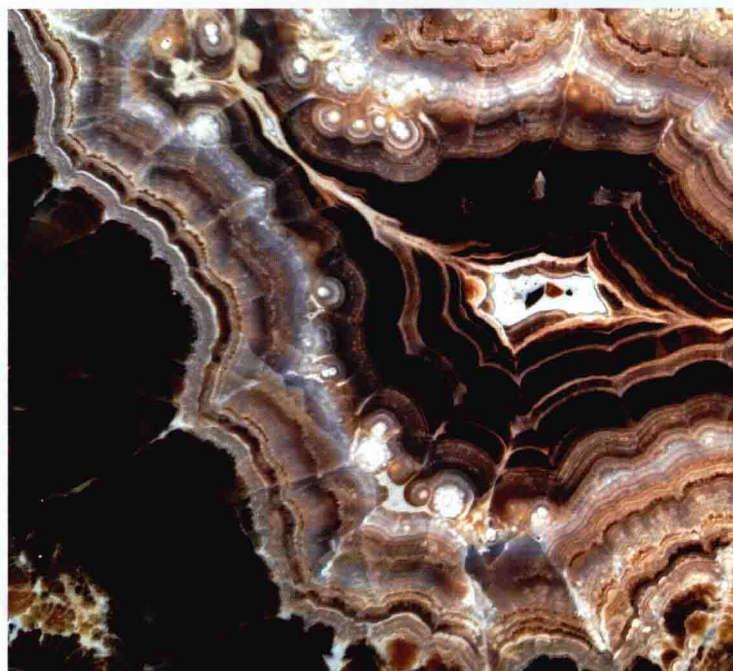
Traditionally in architecture, ambient effects are described as essentially based on material agencies. Indeed, Adolf Loos was able to orchestrate sensations by using the inherent properties of materials. For example, in his American Bar in Vienna (1908), the sensorial reflections active in the room range from the warm grip of the ivory doorknob to the hysterical veining of the marble, and the coldness of the yellow brass and sad endlessness of the implacable mirroring of the ceiling. Loos's play on material effects is thus a vehicle for speculations on defamiliarisation and estrangement.

Along these same lines, Eragatory's 'Intimacy' series of objects attempts to estrange the lineage of the application of 'honest materials' in architecture (see founder Isaie Bloch's article 'Intimacy: Eragatory's Experiments in Materiality, Deep Texture and Mood' on pp 20–25). Although clearly making use of the familiar striations of semiprecious stones such as banded agate or strongly figured onyx, the project wades knee deep into the realms of estrangement, as the undulating weft and colourful layers of these materials are scaled to the size of the impossible. In opposition to the strangeness of the larger-than-life stone banding, Eragatory exploits quasi-common architectural elements to lure us into the safety of familiar spatial conditions. A bathtub, stairs, a pretty lounge chair and remarkably modern glazing emphasise a 'normal' everyday environment, yet hovering above this is the uncanny feeling that an undescribable something is different.

In his article 'Aesthetics as Politics: The Khaleesi Tower on West 57th Street, NYC' (pp 26–33), Mark Foster Gage advocates for the emergence of architecture as a discipline able to articulate itself beyond tamely shaded utilitarian excuses. His New York City tower irritates with no clever intertwining of programme, no cute animalistic metaphors, and no effort to achieve apparent sustainability. Instead it opts to be loved or hated: it gambles with the emotional response, and thus with the mood it evokes. There is certainly a polarity here between the real and the sensual, the object and its qualities.⁵

Messy Things and Raw Figures

The work presented in this issue of Δ intentionally embraces the coarse and the raw, without ever becoming bucolic. The projects rather play with primordial architectural moments, such as the hut, cave and totem, but express such conditions in a relentlessly contemporary way. It is precisely this romantic desire to explore the archetypal architectural problem (besides huts and caves, findings in contemporary projects deal with colonnades, grottos and facades) that positions the work featured in the issue in an area of architectural production that breaks free from the vicious circle of the postmodern age – avoiding techniques such as collage, ironic referencing of building elements and nostalgia, and instead morphing the primordial into novel conditions that trigger speculations on modes of spatial perception. Examples of this are given in Gilles Retsin's contribution 'Something Else, Something Raw: From ProtoHouse to Blokhut – The Aesthetics of Computational Assemblage' (pp 84–9), where the desire to move away from concrete form and surface is expressed through the use of gruff chunks, cognate pieces and tattered blocks.





Lucy McRae and
Bart Hess,
Grow on You #2,
2008

Fashion designers by trade, Lucy McRae and Bart Hess have developed a mastery in the combination of the familiar and the alien. The project of defamiliarisation and estrangement reveals the world to be other than how it is commonly understood to be received. *Grow on You #2* literally negotiates between figure, object and plane of observation.



Mies van der Rohe,
Detail of onyx wall,
Villa Tugendhat,
Brno,
Czech Republic,
1930

Mies van der Rohe trained as a stonemason in his father's workshop in Aachen, Germany. In stark contrast to his reduced formal repertoire of planes and volumes, the stone in his work emanates drama, swirling motion and profound chatter. There is a quasi-romantic side to Mies after all.

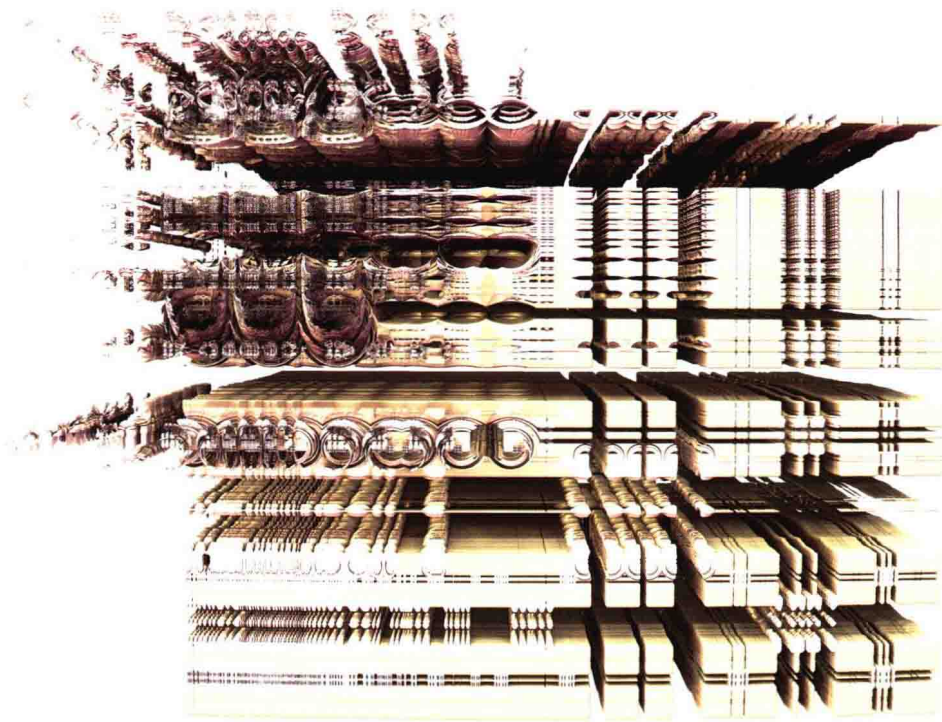
As explained by Mario Carpo in his essay 'Excessive Resolution: From Digital Streamlining to Computational Complexity' (pp 78–83), contemporary computational design is messy. Does it mark a desire for the unexpected, the random, the dirty? The new work presented in this issue enables an alternative, philosophical reframing of narrative and theoretical possibilities. Carpo points towards the notions presented in Graham Harman's *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (2012),⁶ which allow the construction of a speculative frame around architectural projects that to a certain degree deny conventional classification (and thus appear uncanny or weird), but nonetheless contain enough familiar architectural features to be presented as a viable part of the discourse. Apart from the literary description of exotic architectural features, the main strain of Harman's book allows speculation about possible design solutions that are familiar but different, normal but unseen, new and ancient at the same time.

Alisa Andrasek and her Wonderlab colleagues at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London (UCL), certainly fit this description. The lab's XenoCells project (pp 90–95) oscillates between prototypical column, colourful coral and impasto aggregate. The clear outline of the column is articulated in multiple corrugated ruffles, rucks and pleats of varying translucencies and luminous colourations. In 'Affects of Intricate Mass' (pp 72–6), Roland Snooks unveils the RMIT Mace – an example of an object that possesses a familiar primitive morphology (the club, or mace, being one of the most archaic of weapons) while simultaneously being corrupted, compromised and corroded in its silhouette by a rich, massively intricate maze of beautifully swirling plications of fibrous components. Both XenoCells and the RMIT Mace celebrate the 'excessive resolution' that Carpo speaks of.

A Hidden Tool

One of the major differences between the process-oriented production of architectural pieces around the turn of the 21st century and the desires, ambitions and interests of the next generation of architects is certainly the dismissal of the tool as a means to shape the architectural discourse. A debate that inspects the manifold facets of the post-digital age such as ideas about architecture as an autonomous object, interest in phenomenological qualities, the disentanglement of contextualisation and object, and speculative and weird realism.

For example, in The Bittertang Farm's Buru Buru project (see the article by Bittertang cofounder Michael Loverich on pp 102–7), the re-emerging interest in the primitive hut is interpreted in steel and straw. The almost repulsive quality of the intrusively bulging, ugly brownish straw 'sausages' somehow ties in with what Schopenhauer described in the early 19th century as the stimulating and the charming. Although Schopenhauer considers the stimulating a contemplation-resistant object,⁷ Buru Buru can certainly be described as charming, in its pastoral moments virtuously contemplating the repertoire of memory, the picturesque, and romantic desires. It also effortlessly escapes discussions on technique, and rather lives through its physical presence, engaging not only with its visual context, but also with its tactile and probably olfactory qualities.



SPAN (Matias del Campo and Sandra Manninger),
Blocks – Topview,
Detroit,
2016

top: Blocks speculates on the nature of urban textures. The project negotiates in a bland space a combination of the conceptual and the actual. The strikingly familiar features interrogate primordial architectural problems and parse them as strange corners, ruthless blocks, coquette windows, firm symmetries, fluffy colonnades, sublime naves and all the intimate relationships between them, regardless of their scale.

Canaletto, *Venice: Caprice View of Piazzetta with the Horses of San Marco*,
c 1743

bottom: Capriccio painting is primarily defined by the invention of architectural scapes that organise real elements into unfamiliar and speculative alternatives. Canaletto's capriccio creates a convincing alternative universe in which the horses occupy the Piazzetta. It is a familiar yet alien sight that evokes an uneasy tension between horses, plinths, steps, dogs and the soignée Venetians who seem to contemplate the strange appearance of four horses without riders. The Baroque exercise of the architectural capriccio can be considered an early form of negotiating realism through the lens of speculation.



Adolf Loos,
American Bar,
Vienna,
1908

Material agencies are defined as the main generators of mood in architectural discourse. Adolf Loos is an exemplary icon for this argument, able to orchestrate sensations by using the inherent spectacular characteristics of material properties such as stone striations, reflectivity and the tactility of bronze and leather.





Notes

1. Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, Or What It's Like to Be a Thing*, University of Minnesota Press (Minneapolis, MN and London), 2012, Kindle Edition, Location 701 of 4016.
2. Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg (The Magic Mountain)*, S Fischer Verlag (Frankfurt), 1924, p 877.
3. Mario Carpo, *The Digital Turn in Architecture 1992–2012*, John Wiley & Sons (Chichester), 2012.
4. Sylvia Lavin, 'In a Contemporary Mood', in Zaha Hadid and Patrik Schumacher (eds), *Latent Utopias: Experiments Within Contemporary Architecture*, Steirischer Herbst (Graz), 2002, p 49.
5. Todd Gannon and N Katherine Hayles, 'Mood Swings: The Aesthetics of Ambient Emergence', in Neil Brooks and Josh Toth (eds), *The Mourning After: Attending the Wake of Postmodernism*, Ropodi (Amsterdam), 2007, p 133.
6. Graham Harman, *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*, Zero Books (Winchester and Washington DC), 2012.
7. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Dover Publications, (Mineola, NY), 1966, p 187.

However, atmosphere is created by more than just visual perception. MONAD Studio considers the perception of sound to be crucial in all its diverse incarnations. The design research practice's various exercises in the transmutation of sound into architecture are manifested in the multitude of exotically formed interpretations of various string and pipe instruments. Cofounder Eric Goldemberg's essay 'Mood, Posture and Rhythmic Feedback', (pp 108–17) is not only an account of how these sonic beasts came into existence; it also reflects on the relationship between sound and body, exemplified in the discovery of feedback as a musical technique by the immortal Jimmy Hendrix.

In a conversation about the nature of feedback between object and subject in some of Coop Himmelb(l)au's early work (pp 46–53), cofounder Wolf D Prix provides an insight into the driving forces behind some of the group's radical installations, such as *Hard Space* (1970) – albeit he still, and rightfully so, prefers to look forward instead of back. It seems there is a multitude of explanatory models for the different aspects of 'mood' in architectural production, and indeed Marjan Colletti delivers in his essay 'The Awesome and Capricious Language of Past, Present and Future Digital Moods' (pp 118–25) a highly detailed forensic analysis of the term. Etymological considerations and the lingual specifics of the expression serve as a launching pad for a plethora of thoughts on its ontology and use in symbolic culture at large.

Andrew Saunders, on the other hand, interrogates the historical dimension of 'mood' (*Stimmung*) and 'will to art' (*Kunstwollen*). His article, 'Figuring Mood: The Role of *Stimmung* in the Formal Approach of Heinrich Wölfflin and Alois Riegl' (pp 34–41) illuminates the relationship between the thinking models of Wölfflin, the doyen of Baroque art theory, and Alois Riegl, the main proponent of Formalism in fin-de-siècle Vienna. Saunders thus treads a line between late 19th-century and current modes of design thinking. Both Saunders and Colletti circumscribe the navigational charts on which the speculative projects in this Δ find their ground, a very useful cartographic achievement that helps readers navigate safely through the sometimes murky yet adventurous waters that this issue has to offer.

In a Mood for Architecture

Evoking through design tends to be underdiscussed in conventional architectural discourse. There is always the chance to slip into the esoteric, putting such an idea forward that to a certain extent can be considered absolutely subjective. But that would be an outdated mode of thinking, as it would position human beings at the centre of every perception. Novel conversations on subject-to-object and object-to-object relationships are required that yield the opportunity to observe the problem through a speculative lens. In this universe of thinking, a set of architectural properties can evoke mood. On the other hand, do objects in themselves have a mood? This issue of Δ poses these and other related questions through a group of architects whose work, either intentionally or coincidentally, tackles the problem from the vantage point of speculative realism. Δ

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