

**ARCHITECTURE
NOW! VOLS 1-3**
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The equivalent of a pulp paperback bestseller, Architecture Now dominates the architecture picture book genre. With the publication of volume 3, a combined total of over 1700 pages showcase what is new in contemporary architecture.

Compiled and selected by Philip Jodidio, Architecture Now aims to trace the shifting contours of architecture over the last four years. Faced with the dilemma of judging your own time, and of deciphering the diverse nature of the ephemeral, temporary and virtual output of recent architecture, Jodidio describes much of what has taken place as "...emerging from the shadows of modernism." He suggests our trust was misplaced in standardisation, which has obscured our relationship to architecture and its cultural, collective and symbolic roles.

As Jodidio zaps his way through the multiple trends, fashions and forms of global architecture, the principal recurrent theme is that of the computer as form giver. Having broken the mould of Euclidean space, the computer has opened the door (curved) to 'Blobitecture.' The work of Asymptote shown in all three volumes reflects this trend. They have designed the Guggenheim in Cyberspace, one of the first totally virtual buildings. Projects by NOX, Oosterhuis.NL, DECOL, Marcos Novak and Greg Lynn, pull us into an inescapable sea of digitisation, where practical completion certificates vanish in a vortex of pixels.

The virtual carries with it the ability to resurrect the unbuilt work of the masters. Architecture Now, shows Takehiko Nagakura and his Team Unbuilt at MIT, who have produced virtual models of projects such as le Corbusier's Palace of the Soviets and Tatlin's Monument to the Third International. Devoid of real time and space, these seminal projects will haunt the virtual with their unrealised shadows of genius on a Post-Giedion plasma screen.

MVRDV's Metacity/Datatown may well be a prophecy of what our cities will become if we ever decide to abandon the real and colonize the virtual. As we disappear further into our private universe of data and 'infotainment' it is Frank Gehry who pulls the wires. Using computers to



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map only what the hand has already drawn or made, he is careful how they are used in his studio. This 'reverse gear' approach to computers, affords Gehry a freedom that many of his digitally obsessed contemporaries' lack. His Disney Concert Hall, The DG Bank and the Experience Music Centre are in effect, all products of an arts and crafts process.

Fashion is never far from the wake of the star architects shown in Architecture Now. Architecture has become branding and marketing to lure shoppers into an endless consumption of 'newness'. As Koolhaas has suggested, little remains of civic life that is not in some way bound up with shopping. Urbanism, it seems, is a helpless bystander as the market economy dominates what is left of our public realm. Many of the projects shown in Architecture Now, expose this condition. The Guggenheim in Las Vegas -a unique collaboration between Frank Gehry and OMA and sadly now gone- was a blend of high and low culture to pull the art lover towards the strip, and ultimately into the casino. Revelling in architectures contradictions, it seems some of the profession are at last, finally learning from Las Vegas.

Shigeru Ban is shown in all three volumes. Moving between refugee housing, ecological design and sublime private houses, he best illustrates the schismatic conditions of contemporary architecture. Sammul Mockbee's Rural Studio -shown in Volume 2- is socially responsible to local needs and richly creative with extremely low budgets. The fruits of the Dutch architectural subsidy culture are apparent in Architecture Now: inspiring and nourishing ever-younger architects who are prepared

to push the boundaries of design and self-publicity.

Unlike the recent Atlas of Contemporary Architecture, Architecture Now explores a wider field than just built buildings. Artists like James Turrell, Anish Kapoor, Vitto Acconi and Olafur Eliasson have are shown to invest architecture with an imaginative abstraction.

With the publication of the third volume of Architecture Now, Jodidio has wisely increased the use of drawings and information to supplement a heavy dependency on photographs. Useful web sites and contact details are listed as well as all individual project details and references.

If we are still coming out from the shadow of modernism, in our high-resolution virtual blobs, is there an emerging world system to replace what has been lost? Architecture Now, reveals only that architecture is changing at an exponential rate. Floating in our seemingly limitless global and virtual time space, our computers will be our permanent companions to accompany us on our continuing quest to find meaning and values beyond modernism.

Architecture books will never compete with the sales of 'The Da Vinci Code' or 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time', but these three volumes, do offer an accessible glimpse through the virtual and fictional windows of our ever-changing 'architectureland.' ●

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