THE ARCHITECTURE OF DEGROWTH: AN OPEN CALL
Clockwise: Fragment of Per Krohg, Byen og dens Oppland (The City and its Environs). © Per Krohg / BONO 2018; A Very Small Piece of Architecture by Sam Jacob Studio; zURBS; Imizamo Yethu, Cape Town by Johnny Miller
The engine of contemporary architectural production, and the basis of societies around the world, is economic growth. Global political orthodoxy declares growth is good, and that more is always more.

Throughout the last two centuries, increased economic growth brought with it many measures of prosperity, but for many decades now the limits to growth have been visible on the horizon. Social equity, health and wellbeing, quality of life, happiness and other non-monetary measures of success are faltering while resource extraction, greenhouse gas emissions, waste and toxicity, temperatures, sea levels, extreme weather, and many such indicators of climate breakdown make clear daily that the time of this worldview is running out.

In the coming years, those of us most entangled in the growth paradigm must make a radical shift in priorities, moving away from ever increasing GDP growth toward new measures of human and environmental wellbeing. Architects and urban practitioners toiling daily at the coalface of economic expansion are complicit in the perpetuation of growth, yet we are also in a unique position to contribute to emerging alternatives.

In 2019 the Oslo Architecture Triennale will challenge the supremacy of economic growth and investigate the architecture of alternatives. The festival will explore the buildings, spaces and institutions of a new culture in which economic growth is no longer the basis of societies. We are inviting architects, urban practitioners, activists, novelists, artists, researchers and citizens to explore the architecture of a new economy in which human and ecological flourishing matter most – the architecture of degrowth.

Degrowth is a diverse movement of thinkers and practitioners all over the world initiating a profound economic transition from industrial production and material consumption to cultural richness and social justice. Crucially, it is a propositional movement, confronting systemic issues with far-reaching alternatives rather than simply calling for a reduced net production. It’s a huge question: could a society without growth not only support but radically enrich the lives of its citizens? We have placed Degrowth at the heart of the Triennale as a challenge and invitation to architects to think courageously about their work and values in a rapidly changing world.
Envisaging transformative futures is a difficult process. Yet, overcoming our deeply ingrained perceptions of tomorrow’s possibilities is the critical challenge facing leaders and the public alike. OAT 2019 will tackle this challenge through the transformative power of stories, embracing fiction and performance alongside traditional architectural artefacts to create a performative framework in which glimpses of alternative futures can be experienced and felt.

These glimpses will include radical new propositions alongside the examples of extraordinary existing projects that already foreshadow degrowth futures. These glimpses will evoke architectural scenarios and propositions through formats designed to nurture participation, interpretation and translation. OAT 2019 will bring together people, performers and practitioners to extrapolate the potential and possibilities in our present society, not as escapism, but in order to shed light on critical questions ahead. The stories we share will redefine the limits of what is possible.

What kind of architecture will we create when buildings are no longer instruments of financial accumulation? What kinds of spaces will we inhabit when cultivation, rather than extraction, is the goal? What is architecture when it is seen not as a commodity but as a collective act of cultural ritual? What materials and technologies will we build with when our decisions are based not on capitalist ideals, but on our values and imaginations? What is the architecture of degrowth?
INSTITUTIONS OF SHARING

Consumerism doesn’t like sharing. The consumerist ideology promotes a sense of privilege achieved through amassing ever more material possessions for private use and discourages the sharing of resources by venerating individual ownership. It is a cultural paradigm predicated on fuelling demand for industrially-produced goods and economic growth, but which chips away at social bonds, depleting human interdependence and eroding the possibilities of experiencing prosperity through communality. Sharing flies in the face of the consumerist paradigm, offering a glimpse of a future without economic growth.

Libraries are institutions of sharing. For centuries, libraries have provided the spatial infrastructure for sharing knowledge, ideas, stories and entertainment freely and widely. As societies have changed, libraries have changed, both in their architecture and in that which they share. Expanding far beyond printed media, libraries now share music, film, tools, household equipment, community services, software, hardware, internet access and, perhaps most importantly, space. In 2019, the Oslo Architecture Triennale will explore how libraries – metaphorical and concrete – can play a central role in breaking free from the growth paradigm.

During the ten-week programme of the Triennale, Oslo’s National Museum of Architecture will undergo a transformation from a gallery of architecture past and present to a library of architectural futures. The library will comprise artefacts and experiences exploring the architecture of degrowth from multiple perspectives. Drawings, models, materials, artefacts, devices and ideas will be collected and catalogued, and some made available to library members to borrow and use. The library will be a space to linger and learn, a repository of useful and beautiful objects exploring the architecture of a Degrowth economy to be critiqued, measured, studied and enjoyed.

WHAT OBJECTS WILL FORM THE COLLECTION OF SUCH AN ARCHITECTURE LIBRARY?

Lendable items might be those which empower citizens to engage more deeply with creating and experiencing architecture. Tools for making, tools for seeing, deployable architectures for community gatherings, access to printers, cutters, looms, cameras and drones. Or those which, like books, take time to consider: cultural artefacts, models and material samples. These might also take the form of borrowing an expert, borrowing time in some form, or other ephemeral artefacts and processes.

Other objects and experiences, some specially commissioned, will be part of a curated reference collection. Here case studies, speculations and propositions for the architecture of this emerging new economy will be presented and made through installations, film, inhabitable spaces, specialist machines and pop-up workshops.

The library collection will challenge and shift the boundaries of what is considered permissible, desirable and possible for architecture and urbanism. It will extrapolate along trajectories of current changes, opening up discussion of how the architecture of a new economy will unfold and what it could look like. In particular, contributions which appeal to multiple senses and have been developed through multidisciplinary dialogue will find a home in this library.

The full OAT 2019 curatorial statement is online: http://oslotriennale.no/en/om-oat-2019/curatorial-statement
These four subthemes, described on the subsequent pages, delve into the possibilities of the architecture of degrowth through specific lenses. OAT 2019 will explore each through various projects, texts, performances and events. They are included here as jumping-off points to stimulate propositions and expand upon the Triennale theme.
LOSE YOURSELF

While preoccupations with individualism and a thirst for novelty seem to have saturated every corner of globalised culture, if we are lucky our private lives are still governed by a different and older code. Go on a camping trip or share a meal with your family and you will find that tradition and community are still alive and kicking. The campfire and the dining table are communal forms of architecture; they cultivate a sense of togetherness which affords effortless and sophisticated forms of cooperation. Move beyond the scale of the family unit though, and what we see is a rapid decrease in the capacity of our spaces to support us in cultivating cooperation.

The problem is that these changes in social structure will and already do determine the imaginative reach of our societies. What was once effortless and obvious becomes almost impossible to imagine. For architecture to equip society with the tools necessary to confront the challenges ahead we must holistically rethink our typologies from neighbourhood to doorknob. We need to build new spaces of commonality and relationship that have the potential to create democratic alternatives to the global condition of sovereign power, forged through networks of nation-states and international corporations.

In agriculture we grow great swaths of mono-crops only to find that soils die and crops fail, whereas permaculture offers abundance through symbiotic cultivation. Similarly, the aspiration to possess a private, ‘nuclear’ home, sharing as little as possible, is destined to fail. If homes were considered as places to live together, rather than financial instruments for the benefit of individuals, how would that affect our social relations? How can architecture promote new ways of living together through community vitality, defence of common goods and participatory democracy? What spaces and buildings can architects design that foster social bonding among people of varying classes, generations and backgrounds?

IMAGE: Student residence of the school of medicine at the University of Leuven. Designed by Lucien Kroll in participation with the students, 1970-72.
Visions of the 'smart' and digital city communicate beliefs about the relationship between the good life and technological sophistication. The development of data-driven and user-led systems claims to enhance our ability to engage with our material environment. The technology underpinning these initiatives is often portrayed as being objective and non-ideological, grounded in either science or common sense. This presents an image of user-led systems as neutral and politically benign. Degrowth encourages us to question and re-think the social and political interests, speculations and calculations that produce these systems.

A skilled craftsperson introduces new tools slowly and critically into their creative process. This is because the craft, not the tool, has the focus of their attention. An unskilled maker reaches for a tool to bridge the gap between ability and desire. The purpose of technology is what it does, not what it was intended to do. If we are to harness the real positive potentials of technology, we must first shift our focus from seductive new tools back to skills and knowledge. How can technology build public capacity and be responsive to problems rather than simply selling technocratic algorithms and quick-fix solutions? How can architecture make explicit the types of social and material relations produced by and represented within digital systems, and utilise them to question established classifications of the ways in which cities are developed? How can we utilise technology and digital systems to build networks and collaboration; to open up space for discussion and distribute ownership of the architectural process?
RUN THIS TOWN

The hardest design challenge we face is not the shape of buildings, but the shape of cultural systems. Cities are produced and reproduced by an interlocking web of political, economic and societal mechanisms which define our neighbourhoods long before architectural briefs are ever set. Redesigning the public practice of planning in the context of confronting robustly authoritarian institutions, proprietary relations and pugnacious geopolitics is a taxing challenge. How can architecture raise critical questions about societal norms while stitching together a refashioned settlement for the intersection of architecture and democracy?

Community participation and engagement are now rightly prominent features in the creation of new architecture. Yet too often what should be nourishing practices become cynical exercises in stifling local resistance with frivolous concessions which neither serve a community’s long-term interests, nor cultivate the imagination as truly great architecture does. Where participatory platforms exist, they can be so antagonistic that participants are forced to speak to issues in reductive polarising terms to get their points across. Urban planner John Forester argues that, in ‘failing to listen, we fail to learn, and we also damage our working relationships with others’. Our inability to listen meaningfully leads to crude, begrudging urban policy that depletes the potential of architecture and pits neighbours against one another. Downscaling finite resource use depends not only on applied expertise in rethinking material flows and deploying resource-efficient technologies, but also on the values and behaviour of citizens and consumers. Inclusive planning strategies that involve all stakeholders in meaningful ways are urgently needed, but rarely trialled. We must test new methods of listening to and acting with the voice of the people. What new planning practices are hidden in plain sight across state borders? Could the transformation of work or the advent of universal basic income initiatives coincide with more thoughtful, less mechanistic community engagement? How can experts and non-experts share in mutually-enriching discussion? Can new digital and performative tools inculcate a more meaningful democratic basis for city planning?

IMAGE: La Borda, Cristina Gamboa
When economic growth is an all-encompassing social goal, every activity of culture is co-opted toward this single objective: from making food and clothes as profitably as possible, to encouraging consumers to spend in the leisure industry. Art and culture become creative industries; scientific innovations become national exports; social networks become advertising markets; psychological therapy becomes professional coaching; architecture and design become surplus value.

If economic growth ceases to be the be-all and end-all of our lives, we can let go of our obsession that time and resources must only be spent efficiently on productive activities. In a Degrowth society it will be permissible to expend, rather than invest, energy on social, festive celebration. This is known as Depense.

Depense is to spend excess energy on autotelic activities – those done as an end in themselves – in order to relish in the process and the journey, not only the outcome or the destination. This is exemplified in ritual and folk traditions, in craft and in great architecture.

While Degrowth is categorically not about a nostalgic return to a pre-industrial era, we can afford to reflect and learn from the wisdom of our predecessors. We can afford to respect and enjoy tacit knowledge, flow state, and social festivity. Architecture has the potential to be a tantalising example of Depense; of social ritual. From the flow state of the design process, to the tacit knowledge embedded in the craft of making, to the social ritual and festivity of inhabiting spaces created for that purpose.

In what ways can architecture benefit from being seen as a form of Depense? What is the social potential of this form of architecture? What would innovation in architecture look like if innovation was no long guided by economically-focused efficiency imperatives but by maximising energy expended through expressive civic rituals? What is architecture not as a service but as a collective act of cultural ritual?

IMAGE: Derry Temple by David Best and Artichoke (2015)
CALL AND RESPONSE

Submissions to this open call should be concise, clear and include the following elements:

ABSTRACT: An illustrated 400 word abstract outlining a contribution to the Triennale.

CONTRIBUTORS’ INTRODUCTION: An introduction to the contributors with a captioned digital portfolio of past work.

MULTIMEDIA SURPRISE: One additional multimedia element of the contributors’ choice.

The contributors’ introduction should be sent in the form of a single PDF including text and images (max 5mb).

MULTIMEDIA SURPRISE
The final additional element can be of any format: film, audio file, poem, performance, software, artefact, scent, website, GIF, dataset or otherwise. This element is intended to give contributors space to include work which cannot be shown in a simple PDF and as a challenge to imagine how their contribution might appeal to a broad audience by addressing multiple senses.

The Multimedia Surprise can be sent in a format of the applicant’s choice (restricted to executable files) or in the form of a link in a PDF (max 10mb).

Due to practical limitations, we are only able to accept digital submissions; however, we welcome photographs or other recordings of physical objects or processes.

FUNDING AND SPONSORSHIP
The framework of the library is principally funded by a core budget. However, the Triennale cannot provide full financing of all production and transportation. Contributors are therefore encouraged to seek and propose additional funding streams from external funders such as academic institutions, embassies and corporate sponsors. Sponsors will be credited in connection with the supported projects.

DEADLINE
The deadline for submissions is Monday 19th November at 13:00, Norway. Only digital submissions will be accepted. Documents sent after the competition deadline will not be accepted as part of the submission.

Contributors may submit questions by email to opencall@oslotriennale.no until Monday, 5th November. All questions and answers will be published on the OAT website on Friday 9th November.

The contributors are responsible for covering the costs of sending their applications.

A submission form is available here.
SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCESS

CRITERIA

Contributions will be selected on the basis of their proposed addition to the library collection and its relevance in exploring the architecture of degrowth.

The curators are especially interested in contributions that are created through multidisciplinary dialogue and expertise, for example through fruitful pairings of architects with people from other disciplines such as social and natural scientists, economists and philosophers.

A central strategy of the Triennale is using performative techniques to reach wide audiences. Contributions that propose additions to the library collection and/or library facilities that are experiential or which appeal to multiple senses are particularly welcome.

The submission of existing work including built projects, research, objects and stories is encouraged provided it resonates with or expands upon the core theme of the Triennale or one of its four subthemes. Contributors should be open to collaborating with the chief curators and library designers to frame their projects such that they resonate within the curatorial framework of the library.

Practitioners of all backgrounds are invited to respond to the open call including those without architectural expertise or formal design training. These practitioners may apply either in partnership with an architectural practice or individually.

PROCESS

The receipt of proposals will be acknowledged by e-mail.

The selected contributors will be contacted by the Curators by Monday 3rd December, initiating a development phase taking selected expressions of interest forward into specific contributions for the library, agreement on teams, budgets and a contract. In some cases, the curators may explore the pairing of contributors on the basis of cross-disciplinary overlaps and potentials.

Plans for the library will be finalised early in 2019. Contributions will be received in Oslo in August 2019 for installation. The Oslo Architecture Triennale opens on 26th September and closes on 24th November 2019.

OAT reserves the right not to select any proposal if none meets the criteria and standards required.
THE CURATORS

OAT 2019 is curated by Interrobang with a chief curatorial team consisting of:

Matthew Dalziel, architect, carpenter and educator. He has taught widely and worked on projects for clients ranging from artists to airports.

Phineas Harper, critic, co-founder of the international debating society Turncoats and Deputy Director of the Architecture Foundation think tank in London.

Cecilie Sachs Olsen, Norwegian artist and post-doctoral urban researcher. She is the founder of the artist collective, zURBS.

Maria Smith, architect and engineer. She is the founder of the transdisciplinary practice Interrobang and co-founder of Studio Weave, a narrative-driven architecture studio.

Interrobang, is a transdisciplinary architecture and engineering practice founded in 2015 within Webb Yates Engineers.

Interrobang is headed by Maria Smith, formerly a founding director of the multi-award-winning art and architecture practice Studio Weave, and Steve Webb and Andy Yates of Webb Yates Engineers. With Studio Weave, Maria has created a diverse body of work including the AR International Emerging Architecture Award-winning Lullaby Factory for Great Ormond Street Hospital; the Civic Trust Special Award-winning Longest Bench; and the RIBA South East Building of the Year 2013, the Ecology of Colour. Webb Yates Engineers was established in 2005 with the aim of creating a practice that combined bright thinking with technical rigour to realise artful and inventive structural designs. After twelve years, the company has won a raft of competitions and awards.

At Interrobang we believe that a person’s discipline defines the expertise they bring to a project, not the restrictive zone within which they can operate. Red-lined remits stifle good ideas, not only through ingrained ideas of role, but because conversations are held in parallel. Beyond the multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary working aspires to overcome the pernicious boundaries of language and culture.

Much of contemporary practice involves battling extensive, often conflicting constraints. To create meaningful intervention in our built environment therefore requires a collaborative and, critically, adventurous attitude to problem solving. Too often architects are divested of any power to innovate in the face of impenetrable engineering imperatives, and somehow at the same time, engineers are relegated to ‘making it work’. This debilitates architects, undervalues the innovation clever engineering can bring to a project, and squanders a host of potential designs. Interrobang rejects this bunkum? by colluding with and engaging engineers’ visionary, divergent thinking in every project from start to finish.