

Don't Postpone Joy!

A Stitch in Time Saves Nine

or

Do It Now, I Don't Want to Wait, I Want Everything, and I Want It Now

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Raising subquestions concerning causality and time, the issue of Next Generation Building (NGB) presents itself as a problem that is relatively difficult to solve intellectually: how to create something today that is to see the light of day only tomorrow? This makes NGB a self-referential architectural issue, something to be called into question. As architects understand themselves as belonging to the avant-garde, they, as planners of the future, have to dedicate themselves to NGB. Whether they like it or not, whether they can or cannot, they are bound to deal with it – at least in the form of a pastime along the lines of “NGB is the answer, but what was the question?”

Architects are self-proclaimed all-rounders. They are paid and honored for having everything under control, including what is “next” – which, not least, brings forth an autocratic pattern of behavior. What is clear, of course, is that designing NGB today in preemptive obedience, as it were, and propagating it by networking will bring you the planning commission for it tomorrow and the offer of a professorship as yesterday's avant-garde. Tomorrow will be yesterday the day after tomorrow, and today's NGB project will be tomorrow's cold-storage stuff. At all events, planning and publishing NGB seems to be reasonable as an acquisition; it is part of our everyday world, our professional image, our vocation.

The issue of NGB might just be a sign of old age, on the other hand: each one of us wants to prove that there is life in the old dog yet and hopes that NGB will help us to remain young. The issue, however, is one only raised by the establishment; the kids, the next generation, are not concerned with it. Generations before us have already pictured next generation buildings. As history shows, caution is called for: most prognoses for NGB have been off the mark, and things developed faster and turned out different from what we had thought or planned.¹ However, we are now able to derive

¹ McLuhan's generation could hardly foresee what the Internet would confront us with.

rules and patterns of behavior, and evaluate them with theories of the second order, reassessing the system of NGB.

All plans for the future are conspicuously fuelled by the tacit assumption that all things “next” will be better (who hasn’t heard people say that their children should have a better life?). That everything will be better is a myth architects, being self-proclaimed do-gooders², are fond of cultivating – NGB as a machine for improving the world.

Yet, oddly, the plans for the future are actually extensions, projections, derivations, extrapolations of traditions, prognoses, inferences from yesterday and today. Their basis is a set-up of chains of cause and effect in time to proceed tomorrow like the day before yesterday.³ This is why they are fundamentally retro-oriented system reinforcements, a priori standardized, hardly revolutionary and new. It is also boring to solve today’s issues or readjust them a little for anticipating the future.⁴ The most embarrassing thing, however, is their structure: we are here now, but we will be admitted to paradise if we behave well, will gain entrance to NGB if we plan well. In order to verify or accelerate this, it is obviously necessary to make NGB a subject of its own like in the “*hybrid open access journal*.”

The electronic world teaches us that what is the cause here has its effects there – dislocated and siteless. In terms of time, we may say that the consequences will be causes. If space and time are condensed, it is only a small step to understand the paradigm of cause and effect as completely uncoupled. This is why architects should cease to refer to necessities and situational constraints, not even if it comes to finding a justification for what they do.

Obviously, today only seems to be an effect of yesterday, which is why tomorrow cannot be reasonably regarded as an effect of today, and neither can today be considered as a basis for tomorrow. Planning, however, proceeds in the opposite direction with additional vigor: it defines causalities for tomorrow, even more than those already in existence. And there is a further dilemma: while things are put off from today until tomorrow (next) on the one hand, it will be too late tomorrow because there is a need for action today on the other. This is why the planning algorithms regarding NGB dreams have to be questioned in order to arrive at a second order action (architecture).

² The know-it-alls have always known better; cf. <http://plottegg.tuwien.ac.at/VO060302.pdf>.

³ Seen from this point of view, raising the issue of the next generation is presumably a wrong approach, misleading in the sense of determinism.

⁴ Which is not the end of the world because autogenerative dynamics brings about something different from what has been planned in every which way.

More recent system theories help us ascertain that developments are dominated by autogenerative systems.⁵ The first problem is whether we can understand these systems at all; the next problem is whether we can intervene, control these systems. If so, this would mean to eliminate the autogenerative and act demiurgically again.

The paradigm of all planning is planning today and concreting tomorrow what is to last for as long as possible – which is sheer determinism on a meta-level, enhanced by today's common quest for sustainability.⁶ Sustainability as the architect's perpetuated know-it-all attitude. Everything is supervised in regard to whether it is as perfect as planned. If necessary, the goal is achieved by employing brute force in the case of divergent undesirable outcomes, giving determinism a helping hand, carrying the control to extremes. These very revisions testify to the failure of determinist planning.

The issue of NGB is less a matter of innovation aimed at driving the future of the building industry than of how to escape the latent planning determinism. Planning determinism has to be suspended. The most beautiful, truly radical NGB does not know what will be.

I will not succumb to the temptation of describing how NGB will look like or even “define” its characteristic features. It would already be a large step to open up currently practiced systems and planning variables to initiate a paradigm shift from product to process, from an object-oriented architecture to processual architecture. This would mean not being concerned with buildings or pictures of (future) buildings, but with governing processes.

We know that the product is determined by algorithms and not by intention or input. We should change our planning algorithm for NGB. To escape the prison of determinism we simply do what we want to do instead of what is laid down, changing the planning algorithm from causal and consecutive to random, refrain from getting personally involved, suspend time and place and the dialectic between inside and outside, global and local, situated and nomadic, individual and collective and, with it, all architectural logorrhea.

The first measure for NGB could be the instruction “Don't postpone joy! Do it now!” This is no concept of real-time communication but real time action, 1:1 architecture without any delay.

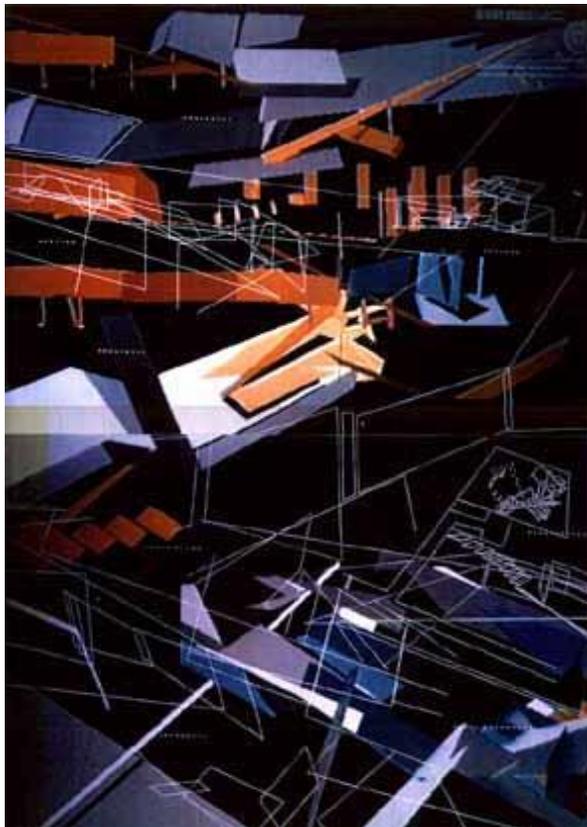
NGB will be no field for wish/function fulfillment, will not be autocratic, but autogenerative and independent of predefined structures. NGB will not be static, but processual architecture, comparable to a continuously renewing work of art, similar to

⁵ Such as the development of megacities.

⁶ Sustainability as an addition to determinism.

the social media in its dynamics. NGB is anti-determinist and will be a surprise – you want to wonder about things unseen. Whatever the building industry says: planning new generation buildings must not eliminate the dimension of surprise.

I already planned my first real next generation building twenty-five years ago: The Binary House.⁷ It is still unbuilt because it is too much next, too far away from today and its demands – which goes to prove that a concept offered too radically entails a corresponding delay. Therefore, I am already planning the next but one project since I am sure that the transition from planning determinism to an open system will not be possible within the next generation. It will take more time.



The Binary House

In the meantime, we have come to understand how architecture as information and data processing works. We also know how freeform architectures emerged and became inflationary after the implementation of early programs providing formal solutions. This was a development nobody foresaw or propagated as NGB. The always

⁷ Cf. http://plottegg.tuwien.ac.at/bin_haus.htm.

alleged loss of design inherent in radically digital projects was beyond all planning. Presently, we are in the middle of scripting, without a subject, where sitelessness prevails as much as the randomness of forms. It does not matter what next generation buildings look like.⁸ Autogenerative systems require no architects as agents of the future. Architecture has emancipated itself from the architects.

Without prior announcement, without objective, without declaration of intention we find ourselves within hybrid architecture⁹ and hyper-functions, and I am curious what NGB will turn out to be.

NGB is not about design objects and their form, but about algorithms, which is why it will be a building of a higher order. The basic constituents are not stone, wood, steel, or membranes any longer, but binary codes, Hex, ASCII – machine languages are multilingual. Virtual or real, the representations go as far as real virtuality – virtual is real. A truly radical NGB concept modulates data, line, plan, model, cement or concrete, wanders between different media, extends the scale up to 1:1, heterogeneous and postmedial, who or what. Algorithms supersede archetypes, rituals, opinions, attitudes. Everything has different identities. Architecture unfolds as information processing in a variety of manifestations, appearances, and editors.

It is not difficult to describe NGB in a few lines of code on the algorithmic meta-level: nothing is laid down, neither a general set-up nor exactly specified relevant data – fuzzy logic prevails. This incompleteness should be enough to keep the system open. The radicalism of NGB lies in abandoning the planning determinism and in the uncertainty.

⁸ Thus, both the outer walls and the dividing walls are put into perspective; it does not matter where the chair is tomorrow.

⁹ Cf. http://plottegg.tuwien.ac.at/genera_h_h.htm#English%20entire%20version.