

Inflection: Journal of the Melbourne School of Design vol. 4

Permanence within the discipline of architecture

Architectural permanence is widely associated with the Vitruvian definition of *firmitas*: mass and solidity crafted to endure. It is a lineage that runs deep in the history of architecture, from the marble and stone edifices of the past to the concrete steel skyscrapers of today. The architect Leon Krier claimed "[the very condition of architecture to exist as a public art is to attain material and intellectual permanence...Without such permanence, without architecture transcending the lifespan of its builders, no public space, no collective expression such as art is ever possible.](#)"

In observing the use of the Vitruvian term today, a disconnect becomes evident: absolutism in a society defined by relativity. Speculative development, volatile real estate markets, international warfare, mass migration, a changing climate and throw-away attitudes which prioritise quick and temporary fixes for ongoing problems have repositioned the value placed on the material durability of architecture. Given the instability of today, society has seen an embrace of the architecturally impermanent, a transition from immutable buildings to a deformed architecture that embodies its inherent transience, creating structures that are more responsive to change, more rapidly deployable for environmental and humanitarian crises, or which capitalise on an intentional impermanence affecting the future trajectory of cities.

Architectural historian Antoine Picon argues that [a new materiality of architecture, heralded by the digital revolution, will bolster this shift from permanence and immutability, to events and action.](#) Performative materials, ones that can self-heal on the molecular level over a building's life-cycle, provide the unprecedented possibility of buildings that can adapt to the ravages of time and their environment rather than resisting them.

In the Age of the Anthropocene, where construction and demolition are among the biggest producers of pollution and waste, should architecture aspire for longevity? Or can architecture successfully assimilate its own obsolescence, reflecting the ephemerality and velocity of the digital age?

And what of those buildings from our past which we fight to preserve? Of the 180,000 steel members of the Eiffel Tower, each has been replaced at least once, where the original construction was only intended to endure 20 years. So do we seek to conserve the buildings themselves or rather the ideals and spirit the people and epochs in which they were conceived? An enquiry into architectural permanence is not only an exploration of physical and material endurance, but also of cultural and symbolic endurance. It prompts an investigation into what our architecture says about our collective psychology, across time and cultures.

How does an understanding of architecture as occupying a point on a journey between existence and extinction shift our approach to the practices of conceiving and making space? A thorough examination of permanence in architecture will reflect upon past, present and future modes of practice; it considers the ruin and the monument, the pavilion and the 'pop-up', the owner and the tenant, the creator and the context.

Inflection journal vol.4 invites submissions from students, academics and professionals to explore and unpack the complex inter-relationship between permanence / impermanence in architectural discourse. We welcome both academic and practice-oriented written pieces (up to 3000 words), visual essays, interviews and fictional works that engage with the issue in relation to architecture, design and their related fields.

We look forward to your contribution!

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Please submit your abstract to inflectioneditors4@gmail.com by Monday, December 19, 2016. Previous volumes of *Inflection* can be found at the AADR publisher's website, <http://aadr.info/category/publications/journals/>