Visualisations of the 21ˢᵗ Century City

An exhibition by RIBA Building Futures exploring a range of future uncertainties

With work and responses from the schools of architecture at University of Brighton, University of Bath and Oxford Brookes University

Introduction

Visualisations of the 21st Century City is intended to explore how we anticipate change within our towns and cities and how we see the practicalities of these changes manifesting.

Over the next twenty years it is likely that many towns and cities will undergo considerable change as will the technologies, social climates, and environmental conditions that influence their forms; yet much of the buildings and infrastructure we see today will still be in use. This project aims to create visual representations of this dialogue between existing stock and emerging pressures and to discuss how this interface may develop.

Much work has been done to look at new types of buildings and urban forms whether it is sustainable skyscrapers, eco- villages or floating cities tethered to tax havens. Yet little thought has been done on how existing stock and infrastructure will mesh with emerging social and technological trends. It is this sense of collaboration between old and new, existing and forecast that the project seeks to reflect.

Working with schools of architecture across the UK, the aim of this annual initiative is to identify, hypothesis responses to, and create visual representations of future pressures on the built environment.

Conflict in Architecture

While places such as Palestine, Afghanistan, or Iraq are familiar to us as places that endure conflict, the extended sphere of conflict also exists in European towns and cities. Random terrorist attacks are the most political and high profile expressions of conflict that threatens our urban environment, but conflict can arise readily via gang warfare, territorial disputes and a variety of community divisions. These manifestations put ever more intense pressures on our urban territory and how it is interpreted.

Architecture of separation and control is the traditional response to conflict with walls and fortresses becoming anti-heroes of architecture symbolism. The increasing pressures we face in the next 20 years from competing claims on land, space and services will mean we can no longer afford to default to these norms unless we want to live in cities choked full of barriers and defences; whether these are to defend against terrorists, mobs or floods.

Working with schools of architecture from the Universities of Brighton, Bath and Oxford Brookes-Visualisations in 2009 takes Conflict as its theme and seeks to provoke debate about how a range of future uncertainties; of wars, terrorism, immigration, gang culture, uneven access to health or education, social deprivation, flooding, hooliganism or disparities between rich and poor may force us further in to an "Architecture of Conflict".

How can conflict be depicted? What are its characteristics? Can we read the existing landscape to reveal underlining tensions? How might we visualise such relationships and ties in the city?

The project also seeks to turn this on its head and envision how we can devise strategies for an "Architecture of Resolution." What will be the business of the future city and what systems would bind it together? How can the landscape be made sociable? What groups will be marginalized in the face of new pressures? Can architecture broker resolution? Can it be all inclusive? How would it work? How would it look and feel?

The project features a range of proposals that are playful yet serious, hypothetical yet grounded, to provide new visions of future cities and communities under pressure from conflict in its various forms.

Oxford Brookes University
Unit A:
Co-habited Infrastructures

Historically the River Thames has always provided a life-line for London. Locally separating, connecting globally and forming the city's largest open space, the river has contributed hugely to its identity. In his project for Hungerford Bridge, Cedric Price proposed a large platform spanning the river and transforming it into a fully accessible public realm. In this spirit, Unit A looked at the trajectories and spaces along the river's embankment to find out if this approach could be applied at a micro-context with potential for anticipating the future and a range of socio-economic uncertainties.

Public space is generally interpreted as a shared platform for the interaction of a wide range of user groups, inhabitants and visitors that each must negotiate issues of access, control, dispute and programmes of activity. Those relationships manifest specific contextual qualities, which may be referred to as "urban infrastructural life-forms' with their own set of rules and behavioral norms. The projects here are rooted within 'everyday' conditions of the present and those of a possible future. Special focus has been given to social issues arising from the site and the work shares a strong impulse to interact with the public spaces and existing structures they are based around. These approaches are meant as 'seeds' for the future with roots in the present, actively engaging users to resolve and adapt to the unpredictable conditions of tomorrow.

Who will inhabit this area? How will they live? How will they play? What issues will determine their choices? Will they get on? Can they co-habit limited space and adapt it to suit their requirements?

Conditions of the subtle, the neighbourhood, the 'daily grind', etiquette, manners and other practicalities have been a starting point alongside the functional themes of Public Security, Service, Transport, Health, Entertainment, Environment and Sub-cultures. The student's work demonstrates an understanding of the sources of possible conflict, but more importantly their position to this and proposals for how it could be manifested or resolved. The interventions surprise through the broad and inventive range of solutions engaging with the margins of public space dispute and propagating hybrid typologies.

Unit A:

Public Security	I can see you / Antler Security Inc. / Polyscopic:CCTV
Service	Romantic Rendezvous / Unsuspect Baggage Hall / Rete Mirabile
Transport	Taxi-Node / LTTS / Taxihut Exelixis
Health	Pro-Local Monument / Magnetic Barcode / Sonar Samaritans

Entertainment	Ministries of Sound / FT Reading Room / Waterloo Park / Anti-24Hour Theatre People
Environment	Osmotic Landscape / Eco-πier
Sub-cultures	Parkour Way / A Place for Belonging

University of Brighton
Third Year- Studio two
Social Climates of Dispute

Over the next twenty years towns and cities will undergo considerable change, as will the technologies, social make-up and environmental conditions that influence their forms. Brighton's work explores the dialogue between the existing built environment and emerging societal pressures arising from a set of distinct scenarios; some fantastic, some more subtle, but each proposing future social mechanisms and resulting built forms.

Working along a narrow strip from Brighton's Pier to the South Downs to the city's north, students evaluated the social and local dynamics of contested spaces charting wider trends, or stories, that have potential to lead to conflict in the future – both conflicts of interest and of physical and possibly violent action. In the analysis of these future societies, Brighton sought to remain positive and optimistic about the future. They identified what might be at the heart of local tensions, but also what makes communities work and cities function, rather than force people to resort to conflict. Future habitation and the notion of community is likely to alter, but as certain as there are problems there will be solutions.

Studio Two is divided into five groups which take on five themes or scenarios around which proposals are based: **Consumerism, Immigration, Plugged-unplugged, Technology and Earthquake**. These headings are deliberately intended to exploit current day concerns and advance them to a critical degree that could be felt in 20 years time. Our current demands for energy, our aspirations for greener technologies and continued affluence are drivers behind the projects.

What might be the business of the future city? What will power it? How will the built environment respond to supply and demand? What kind of lifestyle will characterize its inhabitants? Will it be all embracing? Or will groups be marginalized in the face of new pressures?

Outputs describe graphically the resulting society, transactions and morphology which inhabit an element of the Brighton strip. Students work depicts infrastructure and systems that question how the future city subverts, stalls, isolates or connects and interogates traditional notions of utopias and dystopias. They each speculate how inhabitants will tailor and tweak their surroundings and adopt a cultural, climatic and material approach to design, generating experimental concepts for sustainable, user-oriented architectures.

UNIVERSITY OF BATH
Design Studio 3.2
Conflict, Identity and Resolution

'All life is conflict, both in art and life, this conflict remains unsolved - it is not perfect' Henry Moore

Architects are often asked to undertake buildings for uses which are unfamiliar and often given projects of which they know very little at inception. This is likely to be as true in future as it is

today with old world certainties replaced by future ambiguities. The task then is to establish, understand and interrogate the requirements of the 'brief' as given and develop the architectural possibilities deriving from it.

Creativity is the act of recognising conflict, intensifying that conflict and resolving it efficiently. Implicit in the resolution of a problem is a sense of the solution. The etymology of the word conflict derives from 'to strike together'; implicit then is the idea of a relationship between two entities (con- together). Working with a series of sites across the city of Barcelona, Bath sought to propose and speculate how an architectural language could promote resolution.

 'All this I give you' Catalan expression (of biblical origin).

The approach from Bath is two fold; bringing together social objectivity with urban typologies.

- The first: design an assembly chamber, a place complementary to the established parliament of the Catalan people that could tease out the complex stories of the future city.

What will be the future narratives of this international, but proudly regional city?
In what setting would people come together? Who will yield control? How would confrontation politics be mediated? How would inclusivity be encouraged, while supporting identity? Would it be focussed on cultural politics or that of the everyday? Would it be a formal building or a flexible- even notional- space, open to interpretation?

- The second: to use the intervention of the assembly to address stresses in the urban fabric. Barcelona is a city of distinct concentrations of activity and architectural types. Between these, there are a series of liminal spaces that have to handle physical and social transitions. There is the gothic of the medieval city and the 19th century modernity of the city of the grid, the industrial port and the cultural capital, the boulevards and the side streets, the vernacular and the international. With spatial and aesthetic changes come subtle, but no less significant shifts in user groups and social characteristics.

Does the architectural language of the city demonstrate the characteristics of tension? Is it already in a state of conflict? How might edge spaces be vulnerable to dispute in future? Could a strategic intervention reveal and exploit the complex relationships between people, territories and neighbourhoods?

The responses form Bath tackle a range of scales and experiences. Students were charged to use their investigative skills to visualise and make real their understanding of the political, social and cultural condition of the city. Barcelona has its distinct curiosities particular to its own history, but there is a commonality in its make-up that can be applied to many international facing cities. The propositions express the theme of conflict, identity and resolution on the micro scale of an individual building or space with the macro scale of historical and future narratives.

'Visualisations of the 21st Century' and 'Conflict in Architecture' are initiatives of RIBA Building Futures.

Building Futures, the RIBA's think tank, was established to create space for discussion about the needs of society from our built environment and, consequently, the built environment professions over the next 20 years. Its programme is ongoing and includes a range of publications, workshops and exhibitions that are used as tools to provoke debate and campaign for design quality rather than providing definitive research conclusions.

For more see www.buildingfutures.org.uk