



EXPERIMENTAL ARCHITECTURE

DESIGNING THE UNKNOWN

RACHEL ARMSTRONG

ROUTLEDGE



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PREFACE

“... we still don't know *where* fish go in a storm, we know a little bit about *when* they go.”

(Preston, 2015)

Opposing the overwhelming abstraction of architectural ideas and the encroachment of neoliberalism, experimental architecture prototypes are subversive, resisting control, componentisation and mechanisation. Their fundamental unpredictability and unruly pluripotentiality evade traditional design protocols, so that architects are required to continually negotiate their terms of engagement with such agentised bodies. Since the twentieth century has ill equipped architects to quell nature's monstrous transformations, or impose order upon their undifferentiated expanses, experimental architects draw upon the “wicked” principles of ecosystems to establish seven principles that renegotiate the terms of human inhabitation and the nature of a lively world:

1. Experimental architecture exceeds the human scale, embracing the ephemeral and material realms – from the subatomic scale to the cosmos – extending beyond the limits of its surfaces and deep into its own materiality.
2. Experimental architecture grows and develops from seeds of exchange between inhabitants and their sites.
3. Engaging in continual negotiation with contexts, people and materials, experimental architects participate in the formation of ecosystems and resource cycles.
4. Rendering indistinct its disciplinary ontology, ecological architecture embraces its radical transdisciplinary nature, assimilating countless disciplines, practices and worldviews. Experimental architects develop their own toolsets and evaluation systems through the production of prototypes that perform as avatars for shaping the process of inhabitation.

5. Remembering and considering the consequences of its actions, experimental architecture forges values within spaces, appreciating their multiple histories and emerging futures.
6. Integrated with the cycles of life and death, the prototypes of experimental architecture are not materially immortal but return to the soil when they are no longer inhabited. In doing so, they shape the memories of spaces.
7. Experimental architecture embraces hybrids, exceptions, monsters, "interlacing of opposites and of all contradictions, grotesques, inconsistencies: LIFE" (Tzara, 1918).

In this ground-breaking book, the first to provide an overview of the theory and practice of experimental architecture, Rachel Armstrong explores how interdisciplinary, design-led research practices are beginning to redefine the possibilities of architecture as a profession. Drawing on experts from disciplines as varied as information technology, mathematics, poetry, graphic design, scenography, bacteriology, marine applied science and robotics, Professor Armstrong delineates original, cutting-edge architectural experiments through essays, quotes, poetry, equations and stories.

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