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From the call for papers

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We live in a time of crisis: global pandemic, environmental catastrophe, the rise of authoritarianism and the renewed threat of nuclear annihilation. At the same time, more of us are living longer and more prosperous lives than at any point in human history, principally through the developments of the very technologies that are posing these existential threats.

The uncertainties surrounding the future have tended to result in popular narratives that are nihilistic and reductive, if only for dramatic value, and it is clear that alternatives are necessary if we are to make positive sense of the increasingly complex technological opportunities that shape the world around us and the range of possible outcomes that we face.

Architectural design and Science Fiction (SF) share an important characteristic, in that they both, conceptually, take place in an imagined future, and potentially ask 'what-if' questions about the way we inhabit those futures.

In architecture the conclusions that are drawn are often seem prosaic though the effects can have far-reaching implications for millions. Many contemporary SF texts deal with more radical forms of futurity through imagining extreme forms of technology and otherness involving different expressions of identity, agency and

new forms of collective action, and while they may seem quite fanciful such conceptions also have a direct significance to the type of built environment the future may hold.

At a time when the need to reconcile individual aspirations with collective forms of action and responsibility takes on global significance, many authors have recognised the need to provide a narrative framework within which alternative forms of otherness can be situated within speculative and progressive versions of society and culture.

While this approach has found its way into other disciplines, within architecture such speculative approaches are still treated with suspicion and for many 'speculative' is used as a negative term rather than an acknowledgement of a progressive way of asking difficult 'what-if' questions. When SF is invoked in architecture it is more usual to simply describe a dystopian version of the future as it is preferable to be accused of cynicism or irony, rather than be considered naïve and optimistic. If other discourses may embrace SF in terms of its ability to conceptualise alternative systems they often do not address, or even seem interested in, the specific types of spaces that these futures might take place in.

The proposed issue of AIS will address how some architects are embracing forms of SF to represent the intersections of these technological developments and forms of otherness and most importantly articulate those ideas through the creation of progressive architectural design position and the representation of architectural ideas.

One of the objectives for a progressive speculative architecture would be to provide the visual and spatial forms that animate these narratives, giving them an immediacy and tangible presence that text alone is unable to communicate. We are living in age of great social and technological transformation: our spaces, societies, interactions and even our bodies are being transformed and the spatial consequences of our networked societies need to be fully explored as integral part of newly framed utopian architecture of the future.

Nic Clear 2021