

**Future
Architecture
Platform**

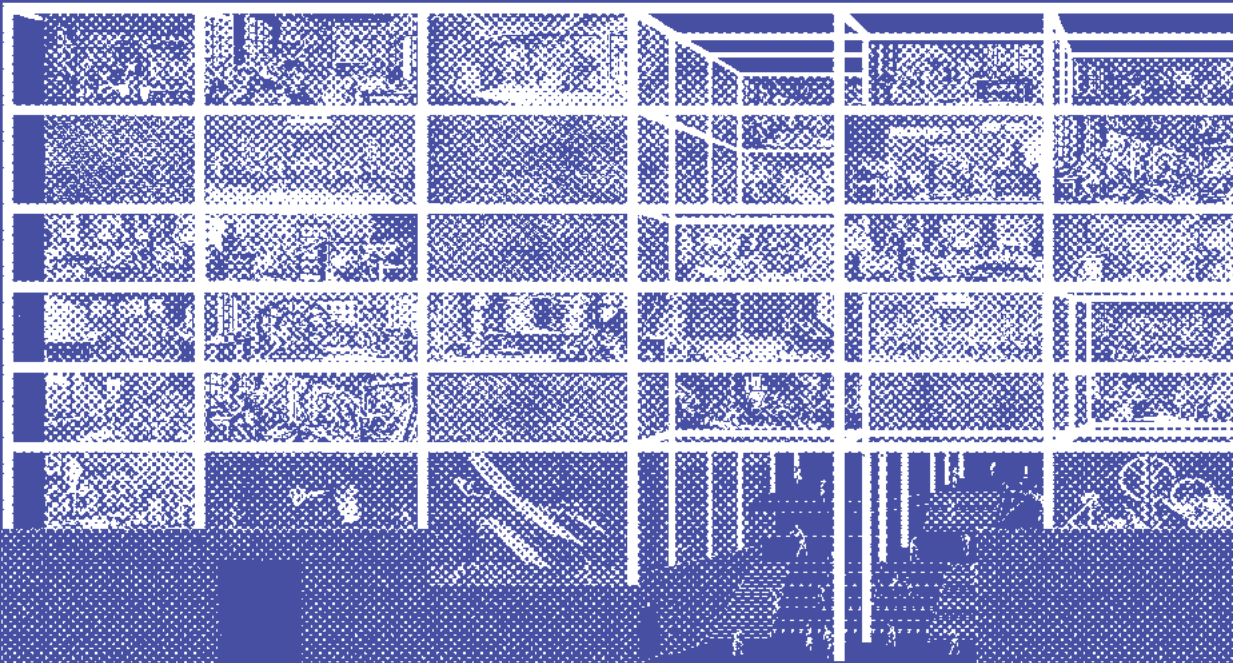
Archifutures

The Studio

**A field guide
to the future
of architecture**

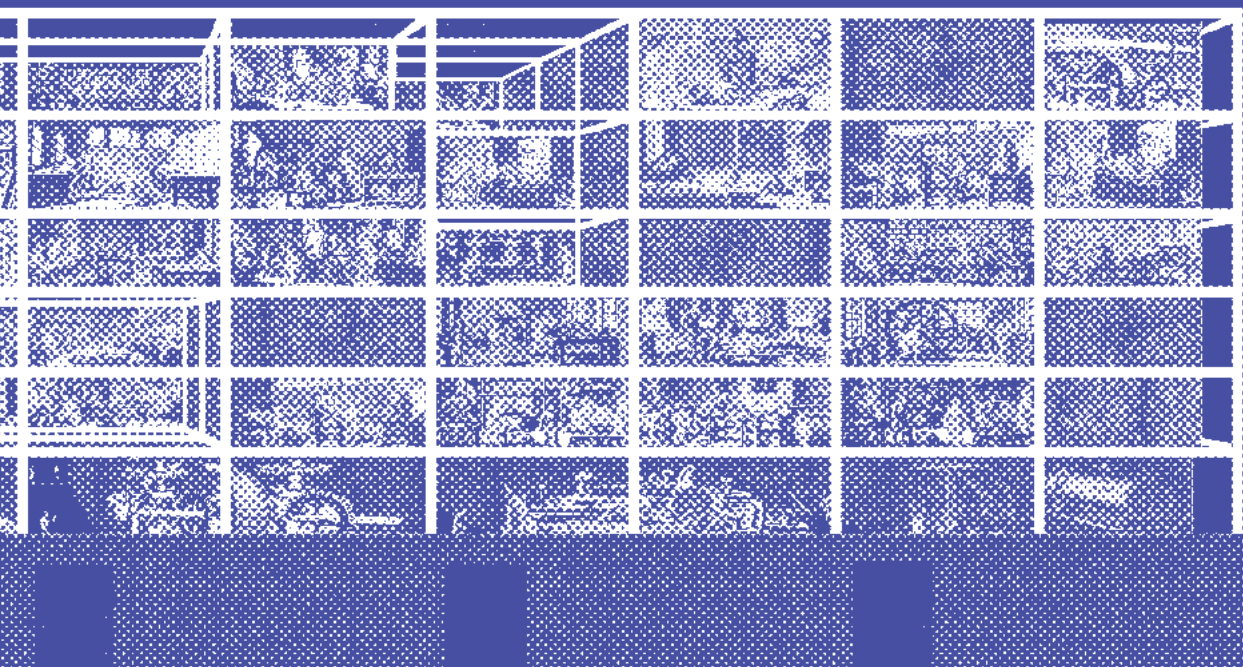
Edited by &beyond

**What doesn't
kill you makes
you stronger**



A prescription for contemporary architecture

By **Clément Blanchet**



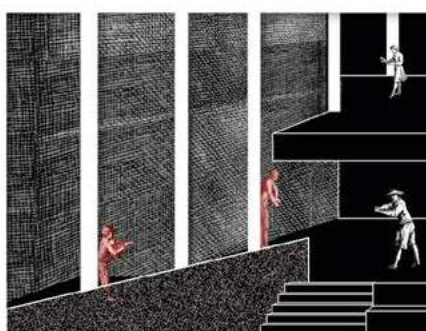
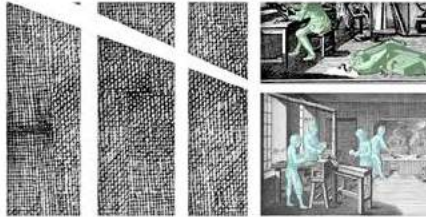
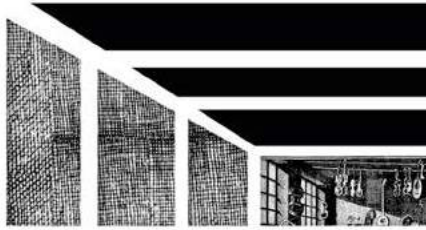
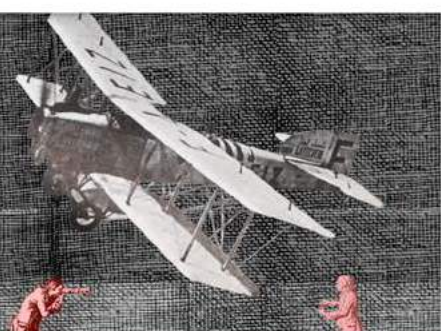
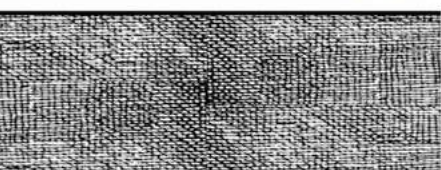
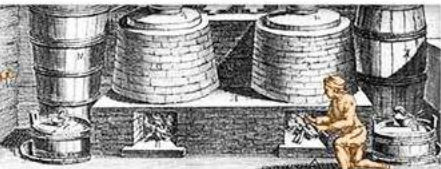
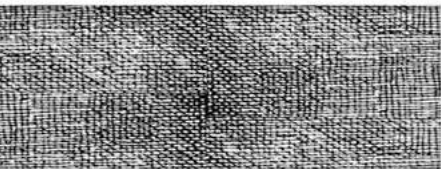
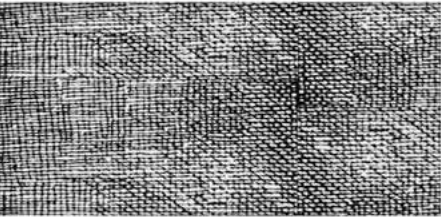
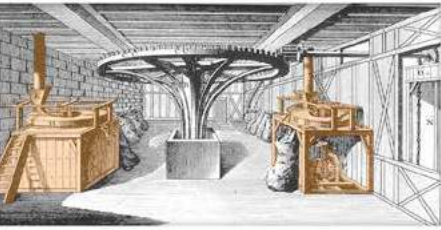
What doesn't kill you makes you stronger
A prescription for contemporary architecture

By Clément Blanchet

What doesn't kill you makes you stronger

Paris

“Architecture
cannot just be
a striptease with
good intentions.”



Clément Blanchet

Clément Blanchet is a French architect, teacher and critic, practicing in the fields of architectural theory, urbanism, and cultural investigations.

He is a former Associate of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, which he joined in 2004. In 2011 he became Director of OMA France. Blanchet founded his own practice, Clément Blanchet Architects (CBA), in 2014, which is structured as a laboratory, researching, informing and generating architecture and urbanism in all its forms. Blanchet is a graduate of the Architectural school of Versailles. He currently teaches at the Paris Val de Seine Architectural School and ESA as well as the University of Michigan in the USA.

Previous and this page: Collage section of proposal for the Institute for Research and Technology (IRT) Saint Exupéry, Toulouse, which reinterprets and reintegrates the Table of Contents of Diderot's Encyclopedia, through history and a positive reclaiming of nostalgia. © Clément Blanchet Architecture

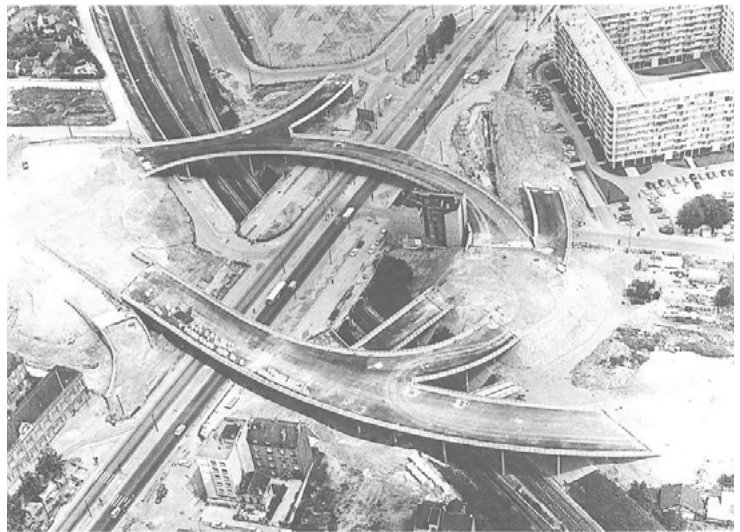
Architect Clément Blanchet proposes some radical, counter-intuitive treatment measures to cure architecture of its contemporary malaise.

Architecture and urbanism could be described as two fields attempting to achieve immunity from a variety of rather dangerous phenomena that include *resistance*, *nostalgia*, *image*, *seduction*, *fragmentation* and *overdose*.

Below is a kind of miscellany of what I believe to be contemporary architecture's most toxic substances.

The future hope for architecture might involve protecting itself against such poisons by self-administering microscopic amounts, then gradually increasing the dose in order to acquire immunity.

Resistance



What if architecture resists infrastructure? Photo: La Defense 1970's

The future is driven by a certain type of resistance. To generate progress from the current state of the fields of architecture and urbanism you need to resist several contemporary phenomena:

resist nostalgia, resist politics, resist nature, resist utopia, resist egos, resist beauty, resist consensus, resist planning, resist technologies, resist graphics, resist speed, resist media, resist publicity, resist risk.



For this project in Paris, modernity is seen as the result of a spontaneous process which extends the existing urban fabric (the base), and a new metropolitan piece (the hollow square).
© Clément Blanchet

What if architecture could help us rekindle a certain kind of hope? What if architecture could become a source of confidence, bolstering a sense of certainty and a continuity of thinking, free from the accidents of ego or of political vagaries? What if architecture could offer a specific kind of resistance again?

Architecture should resist and help represent the “unknown”, generate a new sense of endurance, in order to lead to future optimism.

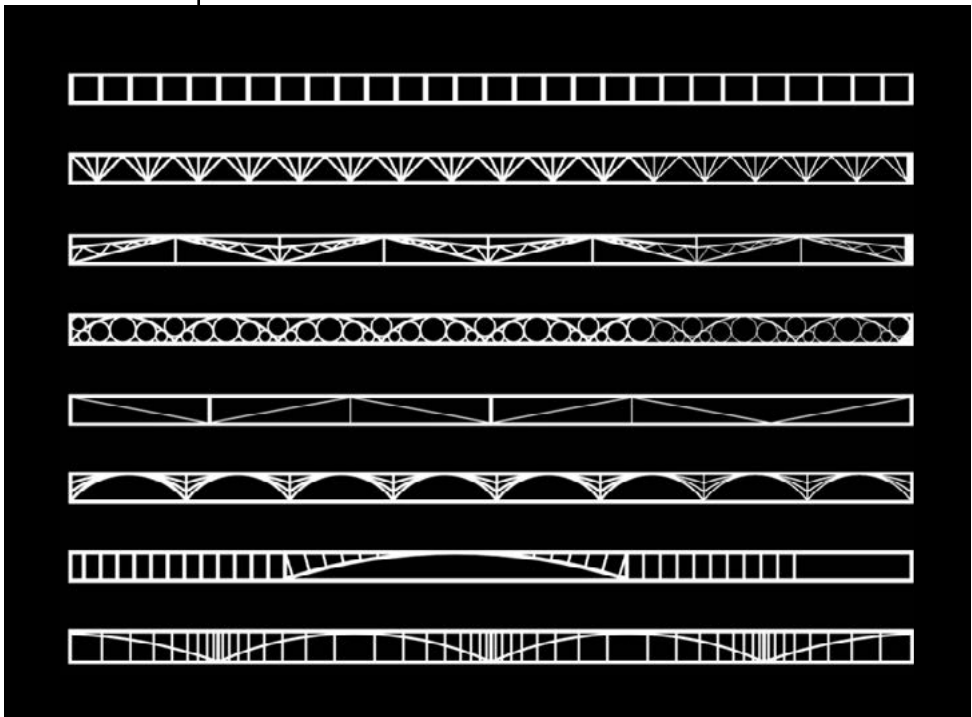
Architecture should not always be extra-ordinary. It should reconsider its ability to be ordinary within a new type of collectivism, to be the source of an extra-ordinary urbanism.

Nostalgia

What's wrong with nostalgia? Paradoxically nostalgia may be a proactive driver for nurturing progress. From the past nothing should be preserved or restored, but all should be respected. Nostalgia should remain as a medical term in architecture, a condition from which you are able to diagnose the future. Nostalgia should become a contemporary phenomenon in architecture.

Image

Present culture is dominated by the image, graphics and advertising. Their effects on architecture and on its modes of representation need to be looked at carefully. Through them the perception of objects is transformed. The image kills the picture. An open attitude must be adopted towards these changes. Therefore we should favour substance over image.



The desire to force a strictly visual order on the city by only controlling what is built is no longer plausible. Conceptualising the city involves a complex alchemy that goes far beyond visual representation. It needs to address issues and areas beyond the boundaries of architecture and urban planning, such as sociology, technology and media. The city is no longer being made as it was fifty years ago: policies change, the economy fluctuates. Strategic thinking must prevail in the city over unbridled and unlimited planning.

The current architectural world is double-sided. On one hand it wants to sell and on the other hand it wants to preserve.



Architecture should naturally attract. However, this unfortunately leads to the absence of consistency, and sometimes of the ordinary. Flexible, optional, spectacular,

Seduction

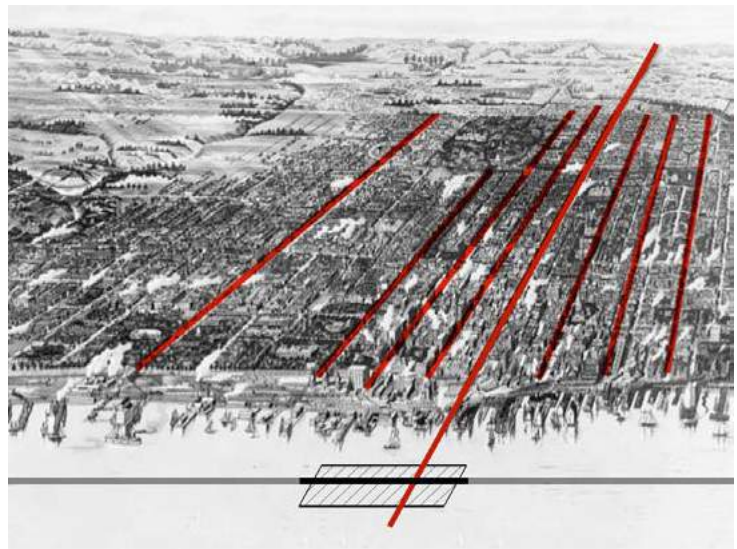
Opposite: Les Vedettes Eiffel.
Proposal for a boat terminal in Paris, where image is used as a tool to reflect modernity. © Clément Blanchet Architecture

This page: Le Chabanais.
A restaurant in Mount Street, London, completed in 2016, where an existing space is transformed by being wrapped in brass, transforming the material into a design tool. © Clément Blanchet Architecture

shiny, seduction should be considered carefully. It's tempting to ban all iconic architecture or phraseology: the profession could just become one of instant self-service. Architecture cannot just be a striptease with good intentions. This architectural hypertrophy values hyper choice, ending only in simple collage of common beauties without common sense, or even sometimes lacking any essence at all. The image overcomes the essence, which ends only in tragic design conclusions.

Fragmentation

What has been really learnt from architecture and urban planning over the past thirty years? Or more urgently: what has not been learnt, or even forgotten? In regard to planning, since the worst excesses of modernism, up until the 1980s, a vague consensus based on fragmentation has developed. Each site is now routinely sub-divided into smaller plots which are then themselves sub-divided into small groups of individual operations.



Proposal for the Waterfront Ferry Boat Terminal, Toronto 2014. Site concept proposing a new terminal that becomes a horizontal monument, engaging with the unity of the waterfront and balancing the verticality of capitalism. © Clément Blanchet Architecture

Terror of megalomania and the monolith has led to the embrace of fragmentation and fractalisation as an antidote

to our past follies. Desire for this fragmented approach came from the experience of the “failures” of general planning. But now there’s the opportunity to consider new alternatives to this accelerated, sometimes uncontrolled, fragmentation towards infinity.

After this global appetite for composition through fragmentation – which seemed at first to be a revival of traditional methods by which cities developed – the results, once so heady, now seem artificial and lifeless. Aiming simultaneously at variety and familiarity, this has resulted in an incapacity for either the brutal power of anarchism or the potential coherence of the truly planned. More and more architects feel compelled to demonstrate their peaceful existence and egocentric views. What we have lost is our ability to be unitary, our courage to demand big ambitions, our delight in being visionary.

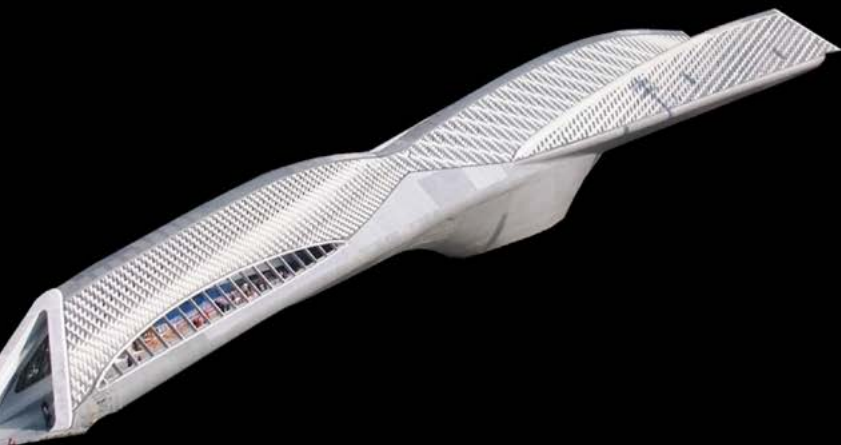
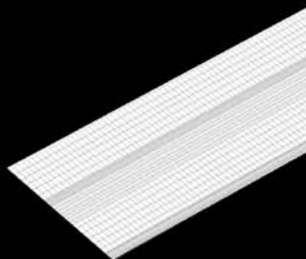
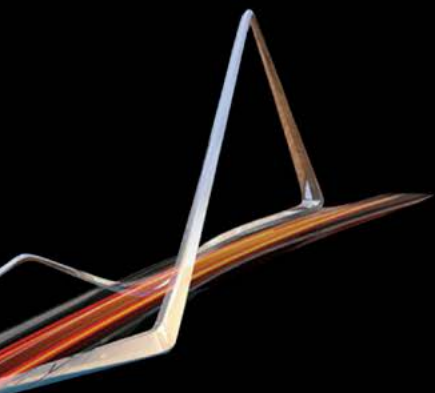
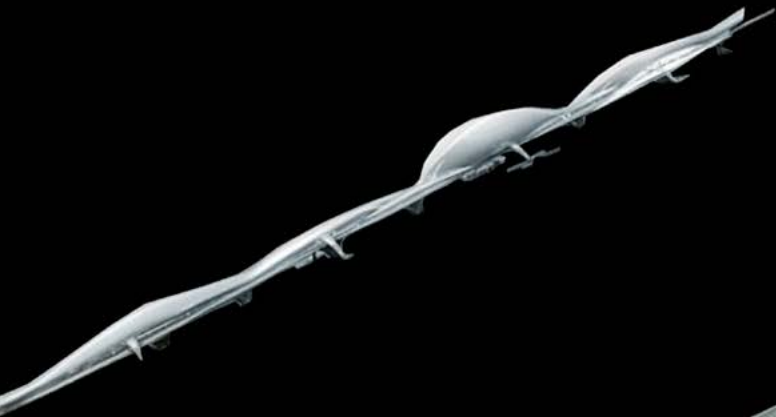
A world bamboozled and distressed by an overdose of “beauty”, has created over-exposure to a mirage of signs, colours and whimsical explorations in architecture. The architect survives in a model of practice activated by signals from the immediate consumption of beauty. It is necessary to rethink this model and move a critical distance away from this often unreadable bombardment of superlatives.

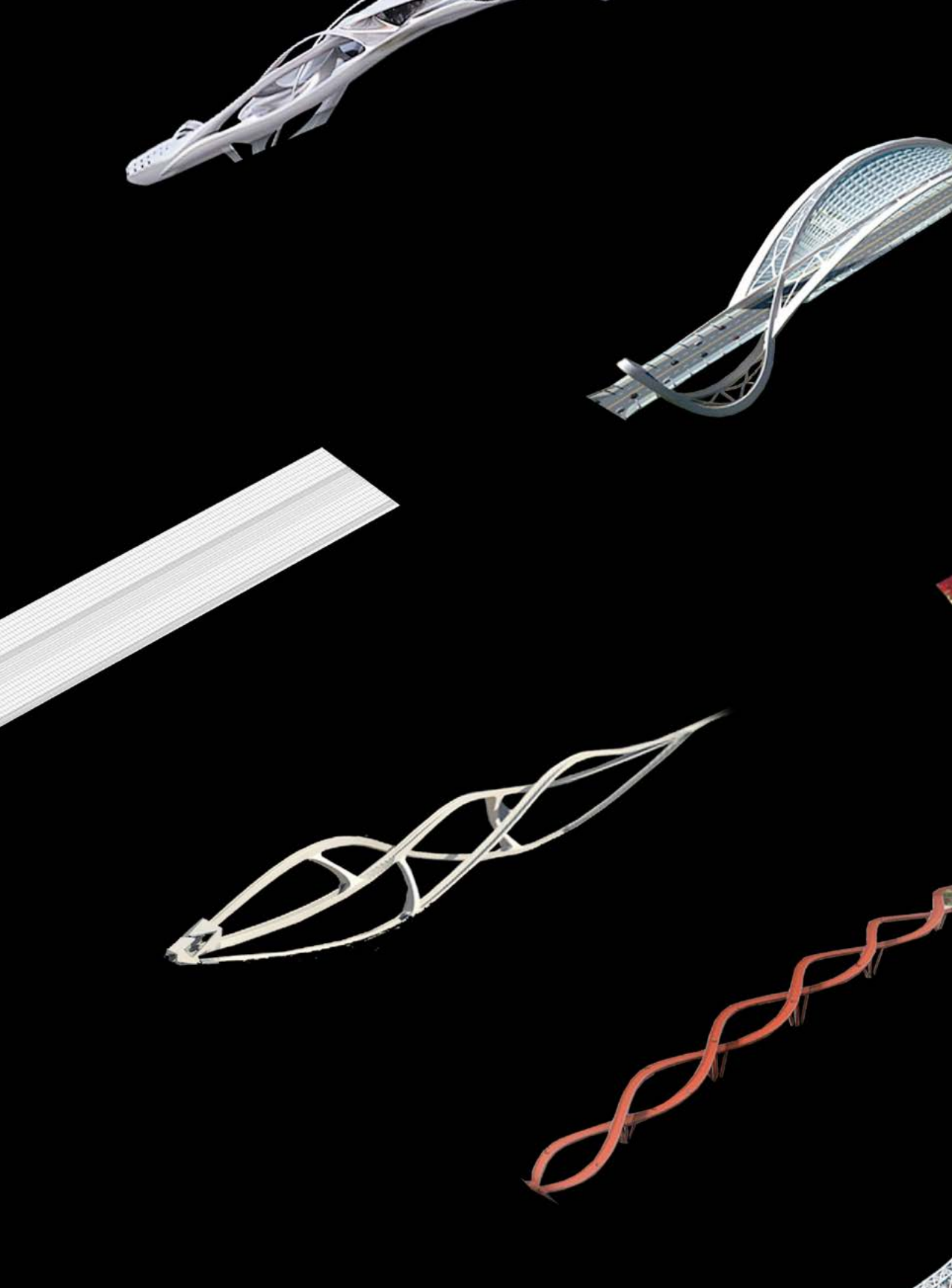
Architecture could be seen as an organism whose organs are exposed to a range of toxic substances. Shared values are key to its health and survival. Defining the meaning of each of these values is a way of offering coexistence.

The field of architecture should introduce a culture of experiments. It should reinvent itself through interrelated phenomena. It should allow failure again as it allows

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Overdose

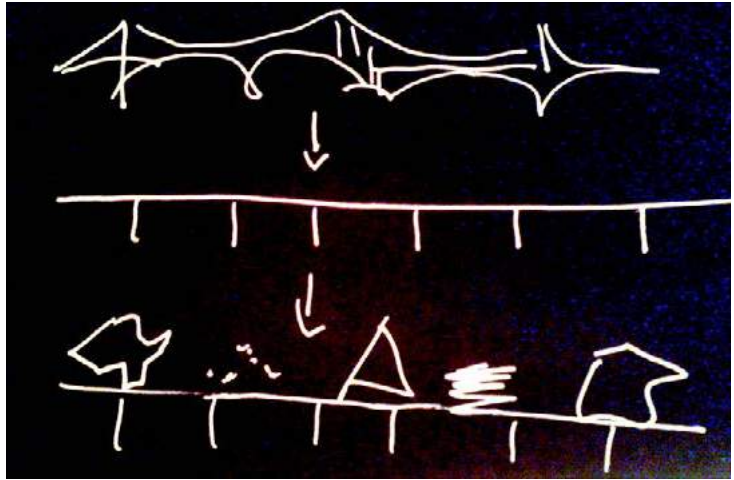




progress. It should consider absorbing local knowledge, or medicines. Architecture would become a stronger body or organism as a result.

Previous spread: Proposal for JJ Bosc Bridge, Bordeaux. First Prize-winning competition entry by Rem Koolhaas and Clément Blanchet. An analysis of bridge types: *from an overdose of shape, simplicity may win.* (Image courtesy OMA)

This page: Proposal for JJ Bosc Bridge, Bordeaux. First Prize-winning competition entry by Rem Koolhaas and Clément Blanchet. Sketch by Clément Blanchet. *The bridge is not the event, but allows events to happen. We offer a platform revealing the essence of a bridge.* (Image courtesy OMA)



It's important to offer an architectural setting that allows for the production of optimism, a context of freedom, and possibly an appetite for learning. We should allow for cultural associations more than architectural associations. In this way architecture can become a kind of dispensary for all kinds of treatments. ■