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Patrik Schumacher, *Tectonism: Architecture for the Twenty-First Century*, Images Publishing/The Arts Bridge, Melbourne, 2023.

It is the thesis of this book that parametricism in general—and tectonism in particular—is the most viable candidate to become the unified epochal style for the twenty-first century. Implied in this thesis is the subsidiary thesis that the current unresolved pluralism of incompatible styles is something to be overcome rather than to be celebrated.[1]

Tectonism: Architecture for the Twenty-First Century might best be understood as a companion to Schumacher's earlier work *The Autopoiesis of Architecture, Volume I: A New Framework for Architecture*.[2] Comprising 176 pages, this publication furthers Schumacher's original thesis, positing Parametric design as an architectural panacea of the coming digital age. Through the augmentation of designerly intelligence and creative praxis with computational cleverness and generative information modelling techniques, Schumacher posits *Tectonism* as a paradoxical silver bullet that will heal fragmentation of disciplinary discourse and the pluralism of architectural intent(ions).[3] Organised around the "Four Premises"—Parametricism, Computational Engineering, From Engineering Inspiration to Architectural Style, and the Expressive Utilisation of

[1] P. Schumacher, *Tectonism*, p. 6.
[2] P. Schumacher, *The Autopoiesis of Architecture, Vol. 1: A New Framework for Architecture*, Wiley, New York, 2011.
[3] P. Schumacher, *Tectonism*, p. 20.

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Engineering Logics—the book presents Tectonism as the next stage in our digitised disciplinary (r)evolution.

The first premise, "Parametricisim," foregrounds the evolution of Parametric design as a theoretical response to the intellectual and social demands of a post-Fordist society. Introduced as an opposing force to contemporary pluralism, this section espouses the need for an epochal architectural style, primed for the emerging socio-cultural conditions of the information age, whilst pitting parametric design as an opposing force against the purportedly defunct Postmodern and Deconstructive ideologies that were themselves radical reconceptualisation of architectural thought that attempted to address the social conditions of the later decades of the twentieth century.

Simultaneously, the first premise also leverages a timeous and compelling call for the revaluation of a highly conceptualised notion of "Style," as a means of iterating established architectural ideas and ideals as a "research methodology" that can accelerate the development of architectural enquiries. In spite of this adoption of a scholarly approach to stylistic sophistication, a number of key questions and issues are glossed over, leading to obvious questions around the lack of overt and coherent social purpose, societal relevance, and self-criticism. Indeed, whilst the author identifies these concerns himself,[4] the text offers little to assuage them.

The second premise, "Computational Engineering," charts the ongoing ontological and methodological shift, from typological to topological logics, within the field of engineering, through the development of more and more sophisticated computational simulations. Challenging prior practices and preconceptions, the formal logics that have dominated engineering thinking have begun to shift away from a reductive approach to finding basic geometric forms for the transfer of loads, to a more integrated particle-based system where wholistic modelling can offer more dynamic approaches to load transfer, offering a freedom of form and a resolution to the traditional tensions between architectural aspiration and engineering practicality.

The third premise, "From Engineering Inspiration to Architectural Style," develops this idea, offering "Tectonism" as a stylistic heightening of these engineering processes. Returning to the earlier discussion of styles, this section of the book presents Tectonism as the most "mature and potent" substyle of the parametric movement, arguing for its

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[4] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

engineered rigour, plurality of form, and its capacity to address programmatic and contextual contingencies,[5] and yet, despite this and overt references to both the phenomenological and semiotic capacities and concerns of architecture, we are offered little in the way of explanation as to how this style can engage with these complex, multifaceted matters. Indeed, much of the work offered serves to undermine these suggestions, with a conspicuous lack of contextual variance and formal variety, despite radically different programmes, functions, and socio-cultural contexts.

The last and by far the largest section of the book (comprising approximately 100 of the 170 or so pages of the book) is dedicated to the fourth premise, "Expressive Utilisation of Engineering Logics," exploring examples of this typology primarily through the work of Zaha Hadid Architects (now ZHA).

Whilst Schumacher's assertions that—in the wake of the post-postmodern fracturing and fractalisation of disciplinary discourse as a reactionary position—we have lost a degree of coherence and forward momentum are not without validity, this nostalgia for a globalised era defining style might be seen as a failure to learn from, or at the very least an overlooking of the concerns and criticisms levied against modernism's machinic modus operandi. Indeed, despite the well-intentioned call for disciplinary cohesion and the adoption of emerging technologies and design philosophies, concerns and considerations of degrowth, ecological and socio-cultural accountability, that have become increasingly dominant themes within our disciplinary discourse over the past decade, are scarcely discussed. Moreover, tendencies towards specificity and responsiveness are met with a disappointingly dismissive disposition.

Presented in perfect isolation(ism), these proposals appear to insist that, with the coming of the digital age, the architectural edifice is formed a new, the palimpsestuous slate of prior ages, swept clean, offering sterilised *tabula rasa*. Through this dissociative dislocation-ing, a strange form of object-ification occurs, presenting these proposals as precious objects rather than active, engaged, and occupied spaces and places. Beguiling and beautiful, we cannot help but be fascinated by them, and yet for all this seductive power, they leave us bereft. Lacking clarity of social purpose and semiotic meaning, these complex geometries take on all the exquisite strangeness of the antediluvian relics and ruins of some other, perhaps alien race.

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

But, perhaps, it is neither the point nor the purpose of this text to answer all the questions that might be raised by the emergence of a new architectural style. Perhaps it should be seen as a call to action—a call to act on, to engage with, and address the pressing socio-cultural questions that face practices and practitioners of this emerging design paradigm. Not seeking to offer answers, *Tectonism* should instead be considered an invitation for critical introspection, a way of moving tectonism beyond its emergent typology of fluid form-finding, towards its identity as a fluidic architecture for the future.