

This written manifesto has been voiced for those who require auditory communication and subtitles have been provided for those who rely on the visual.

Below is the written transcript for this Manifesto.

An Architecture of Evolution & Empathy

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Our role as architects, given whichever programmatic context, is to study both the given and predictive characteristics of a society to establish a human impact for its architecture. Meaning, architectural design has the ability to serve, improve, and reimagine social function as it evolves through a series of behaviour-driven adaptations. Architecture is context aware – it is conditioned, given a set of societal and contextual surroundings, and when we alter the social circumstance, the architecture is massaged and re-shaped in response to the demands of that human need.

What we view as the “normal” baseline for today’s architecture, whatever that may be for any society, has developed over time as a response to an evolved social or public health crises. Bedroom windows became required by newly established health codes because tuberculosis was the largest cause of childhood death during the height of the Industrial Revolution in England. Building densities were controlled due to the fire safety regulations of the risk levels in various building typologies. And today in 2020, we will almost certainly see the emergence of a new approach to architecture as the COVID-19 Coronavirus global pandemic has drastically changed the way we move through and occupy space. While the idea of a six-foot circle around every individual may today seem drastic, as a design driver it will be immediate and profound as it evolves as a foundation for society’s health in the coming months.

The architecture within a given society demands change alongside the changes that affect its people. In this sense, architecture cannot be seen as the end result, since there is no “end” or solution to an evolving problem. Instead architecture should be looked at as the means of understanding human circumstance, questioning the predictability of human behaviour, and challenging future interpretations.

This is the evolution of architecture.

Due to the global mandates for isolation, our society will begin to recognize the social and psychological aspects of design, highlighting the importance of ‘good’ architectural strategy to the overall success of a space. Even more so, as the operational demands of our society change and we continue to develop new solutions improving collective behaviour, it will force societies to criticize what an archaic architectural ‘norm’ could do to the detriment and suffering of its users. The pivot point is when the existing framework begins to negate the opportunity for health and efficiency within a society. It’s oppressive, isolating, and frustrating, and it begs all designers to re-evaluate the existing framework through the lens of empathetic design.

What’s interesting, is that a similar problem existed long before this global pandemic, and yet is something, as architects, we continue to ignore. In our society, the emphatic approach to design is not new. In fact, it has been a “movement” that our society has struggled for decades to collectively recognize. This is the movement of inclusivity. Brought on by the recognition of alternative navigation, it is a movement for behaviour-driven adaptation that is often dismissed. Much like tacking on a ramp to an otherwise “complete” design, it is still common nowadays to look at our built world and see inclusive design as an added afterthought made to enhance an otherwise “normal” design baseline. This approach is archaic and socially dysfunctional and has been for years. Designing for inclusive function does not have to be looked at as a constraint or limitation but an opportunity for aesthetic expression and yet it is still deployed as a supplementary lens in design. If the inclusivity movement were to evolve into a new architecture, then handrails would no longer be considered as simply additive “features” but become an integral part of the shape of the façade. Floors and walls would function as visual, tactile, and audible languages for navigation and wayfinding. Our buildings would embrace the call for change and begin to

speak to us and respond in ways that assist our daily functions instead of restraining them. This is an evolution of an empathetic architecture, and this is what we need.

Architectural design has an extraordinary ability to provide empathetic reasoning to the spaces we create for people. Opportunities for architectural reach will always exist in a society that constantly requires adaptations for improved living. It is our responsibility as architects to embrace improvements and change the fabric of our environment by making those voices heard. Architecture is not an end but a means that allows us to address an evolving human condition. The people that inhabit our buildings will change but if we remember, on a fundamental level, that we are striving to improve human lives through our work then we are one step closer to embracing the needs of today and providing a more empathetic approach to the architecture of our future.

Thank you.