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## CLOSE, CLOSER: LISBON TRIENNIAL

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In its third edition this year's Lisbon Architecture Triennial brings us Close, Closer, curated by London based critic and writer, Beatrice Galilee. Set in a radically different direction from previous editions, Urban Voids (2007), and Let's Talk About Houses (2010), the festival begins with questions – and seeks to raise many more over the next three months during its run.

Like the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the Architecture Venice Biennale, - Out There: Architecture

Beyond Building (2008) - curated by Aaron Betsky – this year's Triennial does not focus on buildings but rather on ideas and narratives related to architecture. As we have seen in the 12<sup>th</sup> - Kazuyo Sejima's People Meet in Architecture (2010) – and the 13<sup>th</sup> edition of the Venice Biennale's – David Chipperfield's Common Ground (2012) – there has been a clear return to including the built form of architecture in exhibitions. So it's interesting that Close, Closer intentionally leaves out architecture in its traditional sense.

Geographically dispersed across Lisbon, the Triennale is set up around four main exhibitions and venues: Liam Young's Future Perfect, Mariana Pestana's The Real and Other Fictions, Dani Admiss's The Institute Effect and José Esparza's New Publics. Aside from this there are also the activities going on in the Lisbon Architecture Triennial headquarters at Palácio Sinel de Cordes, plus a myriad of other projects spread out all over the city.

Exploring the theme of 'speculation,' Future Perfect exhibits an imagined futuristic city in an old imposing electricity power plant. Some of the current ongoing developments in technology are presented and investigated within a fictional non-linear narrative. Whilst we were there, we caught up with Liam Young, the curator of this curious event to discuss Future Perfect – stay tuned for our interview which is being published in TiP soon.

The theme of 'intimacy' is investigated in the exhibition The Real and Other Fictions, which inhabits the 400-year-old building Palácio Pombal. Here the empty rooms of the palace are refurnished with a fictional tale, awaiting user interaction. One of the most interesting events taking place here are the meals served in The Planetary Sculpture Supper Club, which gathers together prominent figures of the Portuguese culture at the dinner table to discuss and debate design, architecture and other topics with the general public. It's an extended 'family' meal in the true Portuguese tradition.

On the theme of Agency, the program New Publics opens up a dialogue on a rounded stage set in the public square Praça da Figueira. During the opening week, under the sharp sun, people were invited to take part in scheduled speeches and 'body acts,' very much in the vein of performance art. For the next three months the stage will be open for use by anyone, raising awareness of the importance of public space as a civic stage within the realms of architecture. (An interview with curator José Esparza's is also being published in a forthcoming issue of TiP.)

The Institute Effect, under the theme 'dispersion', brings together a series of workshops developed between participants and international companies all around the world, who share their knowledge and know-how. It's a work in progress, occupied by a different institution each week in which the empty exhibition space is turned into a productive one complete with installations.

So what questions does the Triennale raise?

What is architecture in a time of crisis?

This first question sets the stage for the group of positive exhibitions commenting on the current state of the architectural scene. The shows bring awareness to the functioning role of architecture today and its impact as a tool to comment and help solve socio-economic problems. In Portugal the youth unemployment percentage hovers around 42% and the construction sector is paralyzed – so it's a relevant topic to be explored.

So far it's clear that the show is raising discussion and non-consensus among professionals. Sometimes criticized and questioned for its ambivalence, there is at least one point that this triennale seems to have highlighted: Portuguese professionals must diversify their work and move towards more interdisciplinary and crossover collaborations.

But we should note that whilst Portuguese architecture professionals must of course try to expand their discourse to embrace other ideas and narratives, they must also not forget the more pragmatic issues that are of concern to the industry. The Portuguese architectural practice needs to learn how to self criticize, how to learn strategies of internationalization, how to amend cost management, how to improve construction quality, how to take part in related legislation, how to be more active in public and private urbanism strategies, how to reframe and refocus the practice, and last but not least, understand how to enlarge their clients portfolio to include more social groups.

For now, let's wait and hope that the Triennale will continue to delve deeper into Portuguese architectural practice and culture, the city of Lisbon and its inhabitants. And that answers will come soon.

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