

Book Review / It's About Time: The Architecture of Climate Change

James Soane 11.06.25

It turns out it is always about time to write a book about the climate emergency, as no matter how many words have already been generated on the subject, few of them stick. Everyone should be given a copy. The message is clear. To those that care about changing the political narrative and ideology around earth systems, action is an imperative. The planet is out of balance. The only way forward is to co-create a nature-positive future. Our time is characterised by extensive disruption; *'today we are witnessing the destabilization of the fossil, extractive economic regime'*.

Much of the book acts as a primer, citing significant post-war milestones including publications, protests and scientific awareness. The silvered ink printed pages offer a clear timeline of historic moments that define an understanding of the polycrisis. It is a salient reminder that during the 1960's and 1970's many of the environmental challenges faced today, over fifty years later, had already been diagnosed. How shocking then to learn how the forces of capitalism and self-interest have successfully erased the science, silenced the debate and, quite literally, fuelled the fires of conspicuous consumption. Valuable ecosystems of thought have been destroyed. Horrifyingly, this has escalated in the past year since publication in 2024.

The core message of the book suggests that small scale experiments, radical local resistance and failed political messaging have seeded a process of change, *'in small incremental steps'*. The authors are hopeful that the events of the past fifty years have been necessary to reach this present moment of inflection despite systemic negligence on a grand scale. They ask how change in the world happens? A mass of ideas, movements and constructs are spliced together to form a three-dimensional architectural riddle, where the axis of time allows for introspection and reflection. The questioning of technology, either as a tool to overcome adversity or as a hubristic human obsession, runs through as a golden thread.

This is a book about collective constructed cultures rather than the specific architecture of our built environment, although there are some radical case studies. In 1972 Colin Moorcraft proclaimed, in the introduction to the RIBA exhibition Designing for Survival that, *'Architects are part of the problem and must be part of the cure'*. Examples of revolutionary form-making in response to environmental concerns provide a vision of possibilities never adopted by the market. This is an account of the heroes but not the villains.

The lens of academia has not helped the ecological movement because it tends to exist as a separate entity from the populous. It could be argued that this compilation sits within the silo of intellectual knowledge and views history as stepping stones towards a greater understanding. There are liberal references to Foucault, Derrida and Latour; thinkers cherished by academia. The text is also peppered with multiple instances invoking the 'we'; *'we need to understand how we got here'*, suggesting a cohesive global population searching for answers. This can be dangerous, as those with the most power have the agency to create the biggest difference. The economy is presented as an asymmetrical system of wealth accumulation for a few while exploiting the natural world and billions of people in producing food, goods and materials to power rich nations. There is an acknowledgement that there is little reflection on the Global South, which is a shame because this is a universal issue; *'most of the impacts of climate change, like droughts and floods, are felt in low-income regions, often with little political stability'*. Lastly, the assertion that, *'most architects are not just producers of built form; they make studies, do research, present ideas, talk to politicians, teach, write'*, appears naive. It ignores the fact that most buildings and infrastructure are not designed by architects (in the UK it is estimated only 6%). It is therefore a question to put to the global construction industry and forces behind it.

This comprehensive project is a timely summary of how the West has tried, and failed, to tackle man-made climate change. The issue is not the lack of inspiring visions, empathetic strategies and stories of transformation; the issue is lack of consensus and political will. It is recognised that market forces and self-interest has accelerated the crisis. The global socioeconomic system is at fault. Their diagnosis is to become *the accelerator, the activist, and the ancestor*. This means slowing down to reimagine past practices; to mobilise communities and to engender appropriate technological

innovation. Despite much of the analysis suggesting the contrary, the authors are hopeful. It is a credit to the publication that one might come away with the opposite point of view, given the evidence presented. Not because it is contested, but because much of the damage has already been done. How much time is left?

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