

ERIC FIRLEY ED., DESIGNING CHANGE-PROFESSIONAL MUTATIONS IN URBAN DESIGN 1980-2020

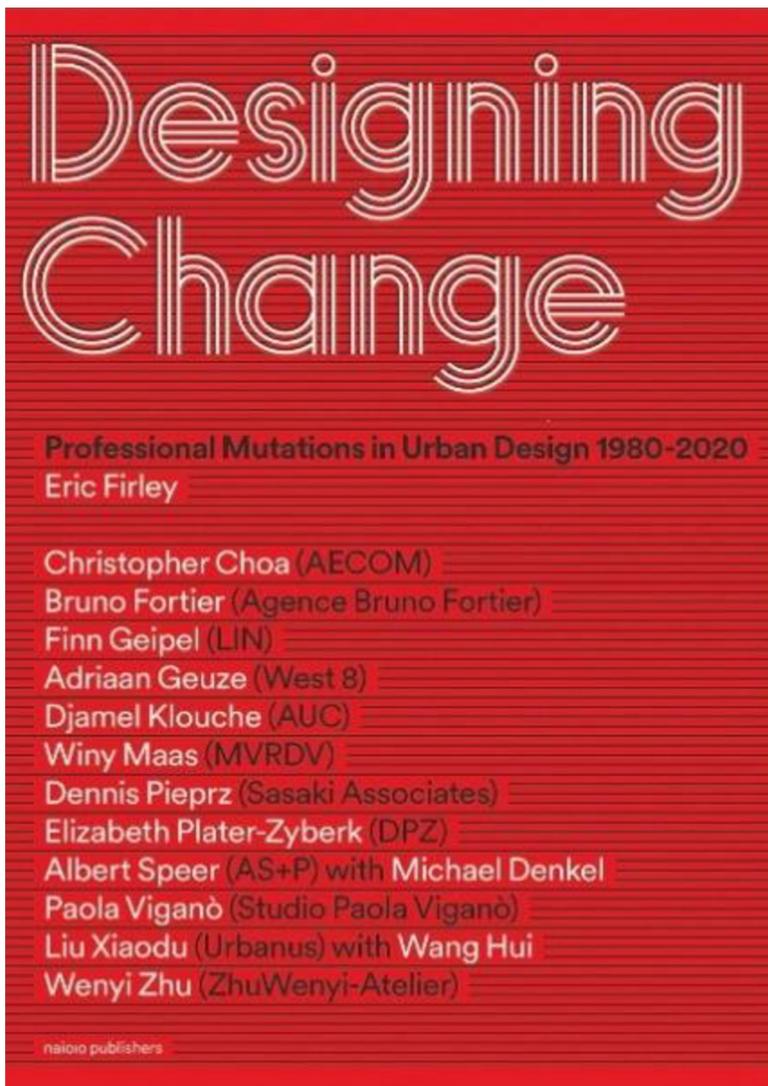
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In his volume *Designing Change, Professional Mutations in Urban Design 1980-2020* published in Rotterdam by NAI010 Publishers, which I suppose stands for Nederlands Architecten Instituut, following the somehow American tradition of very heavy books, let me underline here very heavy- the tome comprises de facto 512 pages- the author explores the most recent orientations in urban design and town planning. The book is based on interviews and projects. The editor interviewed each of the twelve architects taking part in this initiative, including for each one a number of colourfully illustrated projects. The book has a meaningfully red cover, showing the twelve authors in bold characters. The overall picture provided by the book is indeed very interesting as it outlines the most recent orientations in the complex and colourful discipline of architecture. To review this editorial initiative we will use a figure of speech, that of the metaphor. We imagine the editor here wearing the clothes of a German geographer fin de siècle exploring the intricate and unknown professional jungle of contemporary architecture and drafting on site a geographical map to be used for the orientation of future colonists moving to the new world. After a brief introduction Eric allows each tribe inhabiting the jungle to express itself with an interview, each text is delimitating on the map the territory belonging to the clan by the ostentation of its symbolic attributes: the projects. The twelve tribes here considered are Christofer Choa (AECOM), Bruno Fortier

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(Agence Bruno Fortier), Finn Geipel (LIN), Adriaan Geuze (West 8), Djamel Klouche (AUC), Winy Maas (MVRDV), Dennis Pierpz (Sasaki Associates), Elisabeth Plater-Zyberk (DPZ), Albert Speer and Michael Denkel (AS+P), Paola Viganò (Studio Paola Viganò), Liu Xiaodu and Wang Hui (Urbanus) and Wenyi Zhu (ZhuWenyi-Atelier). Like a totem delimitating its territory, each designer presents a number of projects and describes them within the interview, outlining methods, aims, orientations and models adopted within the professional activity. On each one of these texts delimitating on the territory the boundaries of the land belonging to its tribe, the editor has then conducted a textual analysis by elaborating a word cloud measuring the word frequency and showing them with a proportional font size.

It is here in the clouds, published in the second part of the volume, that we can finally see the map: it shows for each of the twelve architects a territory either delineated by the prevalence of national and local characters, such as London,



Paris, Miami, German, China, Beijing, or by the different methodological orientations, public, nature, space, culture, disorder, spectacular, planning, territory, research, code. Let's underline here this last word, code. Within the twelve cases herein considered, only in Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk's research we can find a disciplinary statute, that of the transect theory applied to urban design. Still today, regardless of the many attempts to invade the methodological territory by other tribes, such as the landscape urbanism, the spectacular architecture and the disorder urbanism, new urbanism still stands on its ground as the only methodologically rigorous approach to urban design. The editor though did not consider at all in his map a very important tribe, which is slowly conquering territories in Europe, that of Building Typology and Urban Morphology (Italian School). In the field of the application of a scientific method to architectural design and town planning, the Urban Morphology approach deserves indeed more attention in the international panorama, hence it can provide a roadmap to exit from architecture's current condition, torn by the opposite and arbitrary tendencies of sustainability and star system production.