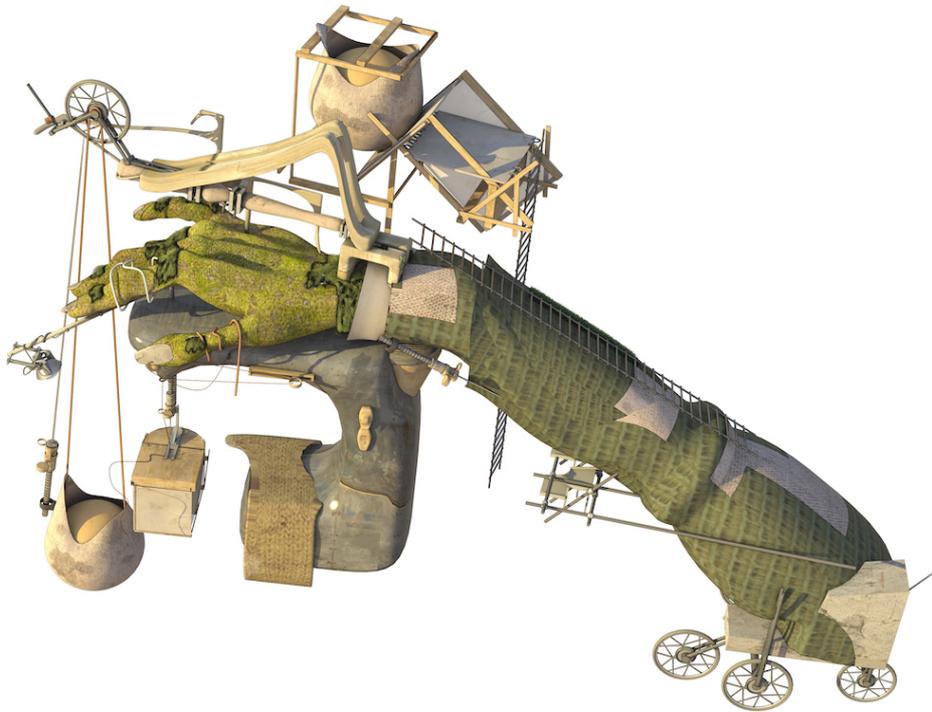


## **MArch Unit 12**

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### **What is New?**

The desire for the new is seen in our need to consume the latest fashions, technologies, artworks, products, and even foods. The promise of the new stimulates the recurring cycles of production, obsolescence and waste that feed consumption in a capitalist society. But it can also be a creative, critical and radical stimulus to cultural, social and technological innovation. This year in Unit 12 we will explore these ideas and their effects on the ways we think about and produce architecture. We will seek to understand what *newness* is and how it can be a decisive context for design processes.

Challenging preconceptions and clichéd responses, Unit 12 will ask ‘what is new?’ Too often, what is presented as new is actually not new at all, but a repetition or revival of an earlier form, idea or practice. It is not enough to be new in the same way as before. We are interested not only in ‘what is new’ but also in innovative ways to be new. To ask ‘what is new’ involves other questions: why is it new, how is it new, and where is it new? Alongside a wider social, economic and political investigation into notions of newness, we will ask what is *really* new in art, communications, fashion, food, medicine, science, technology, travel, or any subject that concerns you.

The modernist Avant-Garde movements of the early 20th century—Constructivism, Dada, Futurism and Surrealism—can be understood as the quintessential advocates of the new. They sought to discover new forms of architecture, art, literature and film that would question bourgeois traditions and completely transform society culturally, socially and politically. In hindsight, they have been accused of naivety and were quickly assimilated into the artistic and cultural establishment. But to explore the possibilities for a new and better world, we will ask what is a new Avant-Garde today, what would it propose, what values and systems would it question and why?

To understand what is new, we will investigate the present, the past and the future; we will think historically. Defining something as new is an inherently historical act because it requires an awareness of what is old. We are not interested in unquestioning newness for its own sake, and we do not wish to reject the past or negate its value. Sometimes the old is even more radical than the new. Rather than the modernist *tabula rasa* in which the new destroys the old, we propose an evolving, creative dialogue between the new and the old in which one informs and changes the other.

Over the course of the year we will propose a new state of the new. Thomas More's *Utopia* is celebrating its 500-year anniversary this year. And accordingly many are looking at it again and testing its relevance for the present. A translation of its full Latin title concludes: 'the state of, new island Utopia'. During the year we will look at the nature of translation—literary, verbal, aesthetic and architectural—and apply this research to the design of a new state. More was reputed to have refused to translate his *Utopia* from Latin. But we will look at translation as a means to imagine the new.

Our site is Berlin. More than any other European city, Berlin offers a cavalcade of buildings that were once *really* new. And it is continually reinventing itself. Berlin offers an architecturally, historically and politically fecund environment in which the unit will propose a new state, an island or a quarter of considered newness. Initially this new state will be remotely imagined. In Berlin we will set its foundations, and on our return to London this new island state, within a city, will be designed and inhabited.

Image: Ifigeneia Liangi, *A Primary School for a Future Nation*.