

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION: AT THE THRESHOLD OF BEFORE AND AFTER

What is a moment in time if not a marker between past and present? We might be surprised to find that what comes before and what follows any given instant are often not so different from one another—time and events have a way of finding a certain consistency, a rhythm and flow that can tend to resist change. But then, suddenly, all hell breaks loose. The power goes out; dams break; tires go flat; governments collapse. To quote a statement famously attributed to Vladimir Lenin, “There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen.” Meant to reference the punctuated equilibrium of history and to give primacy to the chaotic tumult of revolution, it bears noting that inflection points can happen by other means as well. For *Thresholds 50: Before | After* we parsed history for subtle moments of massive change, for instances where the beginnings of upheaval and long-running transformations might be found. Our goal? To look at a collection of in-between moments that hint at the future and remind us that the past is sticky, persistent, and, in many ways, always with us.

Through a collection of new peer-reviewed essays, short essays, and critical creative works, *Thresholds 50: Before | After* helps uncover how inflection points play out in real time, in hindsight, and across media. Inflection points can be both literal and spatial, as **Amy A. Foley** writes in the case of doorways. This spatial dimension can expand also to the desire of a speculative future that forces us to imagine a different urban reality, as **Andrew Witt** and **Hyojin Kwon** explore in relation to the aerotropolis; or a reality invoked and inspired by representation, as **Barbara Prezelj** writes about the flap. **Christopher Alton**, **Eric Robsky Huntley**, and **Zulaikha Ayub** further explore representation through maps and extraction, and **Joelle Deeb** and **Samer Said** use speculative images as a tool that critiques and reimagines architectural ruin and destruction in Syria. Inflection points, however, can also be intangible instances and moments in history that complicate linear understandings of progress. These muddled spaces of before and after can result from new technologies, as **Shane Reiner-Roth** describes; or from contact between different cultures and traditions, as **Andrea Knezović** posits. **Lisa Haber-Thomson** offers that matters of law, as in the case of precedents, mark major turning points in the frameworks that guide thinking, and **Batoul Faour** sees inflection points as cyclical happenings flowing from overlapping occupations that leave traces exploited by later forces.

The phrase “before and after” implies a linear relationship between events, a shift explained through the simplicity of cause and effect. But one only needs to look at history to find that nothing is so neatly organized by causality. More often than not, social, political, and economic shifts intersect along a spectrum of chance, choices, and decisions—some known and others forgotten. To understand “before and after” as a process and not two separate static moments in time requires an unfolding of history that aggravates the “pre-” and “post-” prefixes that define much of history. These prefixes demand a subject, a “before” and “after,” while inviting the questions, for whom, and for what? Reading the process of what stays and persists on the one hand or what becomes a remnant of time on the other is a never-ending negotiation between what is let go or left behind in the past and what is carried forward into the future. Indigenous and borderland epistemologies have complicated the concept of time for centuries. Colonial interventions transformed into hegemonic knowledge have split and reordered people’s relation to time, while absences, stolen lands, and identity have forced the present into a constant attempt to try to understand and resolve the past.

Throughout these spatial and intangible explorations, Before | After moments are not static. They are influenced by and traverse through time and space, moving back and forth, slow and fast. **Nancy Floyd** photographs a personal progression of time through a cycle of self-portraits. **Marielle Ingram** frames the murder of George Floyd as the end of multiple lifeworlds within the larger framework of an entrenched society. **Jeffrey Landman** visualizes the changing speed of our consumer culture on architecture’s surface, and time slows as **Kwan Queenie Li** navigates the disruption of Hong Kong’s underground as a space figuratively and literally beneath the political protest. Time then expands with **Camila Galaz’s** exploration of computer histories before and after the Chilean military dictatorship and **J. Cabelle Ahn’s** investigation of fictional archaeology in Daniel Arsham’s work. Time takes on the dimension both of long-spanning geological time in **Dane Carlson** and **Tshewang Tamang’s** exploration of temporalities in Nepal’s Terai plains, and its immediacy in **Liz Galvez**, **Lizzie Yarina**, and **Claudia Bode’s** writing on the building envelope in relation to the impact of geological and natural crises in our contemporary world after climate change.

Short reflections by **Rebecka Katz-Thor** and co-authors **Doris Kincade** and **Elizabeth H. Dull** reflect on the reality of being at the end of history, whether as the last survivor of genocide or in a small town in North Carolina. **Daniel Jacobs** and **Brittany Utting** briefly discuss change through the blockchain, and **Elizabeth Pigou-Dennis** highlights a geographical shift by discussing change in Papine, Kingston, Jamaica. Finally, **Zahra Asghari** offers a personal rumination on Before | After with a few key thoughts on post-memory. These works

and others contained within this issue seek to mark change and to problematize any neat or clear understandings of history that we might fall prey to.

In celebration of the 50th issue of *Thresholds*, the conversation also takes the chance to turn “meta” through a collection of nine previously published essays that revisit ideas and moments of struggle *Thresholds* has grappled with in the past. Through a mix of past contributors, former editors, alumni, and current MIT Architecture students and professors, we work through a series of “annotations” meant to dissect these previously published texts and offer commentary from a present perspective. Topics include: ruminations on the effectiveness of the thesis as a pedagogical tool, as explored by **Timothy Hyde** in conversation with **Deborah Garcia** and **Xiomara Alvarez**; a grappling with the socio-political history of the first pro-gay St. Patrick’s Day Parade by **Ernest Pascucci** in conversation with **Stratton Coffman** and **Malcolm Rio**; revisiting the table of contents for *Thresholds* 17: “asian” by **Constance Lai** in conversation with **Nushelle de Silva**; interrogating the tension between epistemological frameworks that prize “place” over “people” by **Lucia Allais**; problematizing the question of architectural representation with **Hashim Sarkis** in conversation with **Mohamad Nahleh**; social media and protest with **T.F. Tierney** in conversation with **Mariam Elnozahy**; settlers and settlements by **Leonie Sandercock**; disinvestment in industrial American cities by **Mitchell Schwarzer** in conversation with **James Heard**; and authorship and technology by **Daniel Cardoso Llach** in conversation with **Farzin Lofti-Jam**. These instances and more offer an opportunity for the journal to reflect on itself, to double back and revisit how ideas have filled its pages through the pens of the contributors, editors, and advisors who helped bring those ideas to life. Our goal with these annotations is to actively undermine the static quality of published scholarship, and to pluralize authorship through commentary and reaction.

To delve further into this meta-history of *Thresholds*, a roundtable discussion between current *Thresholds* faculty advisor **Timothy Hyde**, former *Thresholds* faculty advisor **Mark Jarzombek**, *Thresholds* Advisory Board member **Ana María León**, and *Thresholds* founding editor **Alona Nitzan-Shifan** considers the history of the journal and its ongoing role in academic scholarship.

For us, these themes are central to the creation of *Thresholds* over the years; they speak to the function of the publication, its positioning as a bridge between MIT and the larger scholarly world, and its status as a platform upon which emerging scholars and venerated voices can come together in exploration of intellectual ideas and their real-world implications. It is our hope that this issue marks an inflection point in its own right, one that takes the task of turning the history of the journal inside out as an opportunity to chart new courses.