

# Regeneration Regeneration Regeneration Regeneration

Inauguration lecture  
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Fellow colleagues at the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture, fellow designers, and wonderful guests: it is an honor to stand here as the next Head of Architecture at the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture, a school with an incredibly rich tradition and history. I am very grateful for this opportunity, and with it the responsibility, and possibility to contribute and help pivot architectural education – and thereby our profession – towards a net-zero future at this critical time for urgent change. • The emphasis that the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture has placed on the Climate Emergency in recent years in its curation of lecture series, choice of year themes, research topics, calls for change in education and our professions, has been a critical motivation for me to pursue the position of the next Head of Architecture. • 13 Heads of Architecture have formulated before me these words of introduction and vision at the Amsterdam Academy since the tradition began in the mid 1960s. Words that have been spoken during different times, facing a range of social and political challenges and questions, and varying economic conditions, to which our profession, it seems, has always been able to respond, adapt, and imagine new ways forward. • It is well understood today that we are living in a Climate Emergency, and that we are facing several other global and regional crises simultaneously, including loss of biodiversity, emerging global economy shortages, which will likely continue to increase in the coming years, including construction materials and in the energy markets, the impact of digital technology on our strained physical landscapes, and the increasingly fragile state of democracy and freedom around the world. In the face of this, it is also important not to despair today, but to imagine and

collaborate, as individuals, and as a design community, across disciplines, and beyond other social, political, and physical borders. • The global agreement on the need to move towards a post-fossil fuel economy and the required economic and political paths towards that are finally – although still only very gradually – starting to form. At the same time, we as the architectural community, have a lot of conceptualization and imagining to do as well as in redefining our own profession and education, in order to become a post-mining practice – moving away from extraction, ideals of economic growth models, newness, perpetual expansion and set limits in our perception of time. Moreover, we need to go beyond the goals of sustainability and maintaining the status quo as the ambition, emphasizing that the current state is not a sufficient baseline, and we need to do better, to become regenerative. • Generally, the term generation refers to people born around the same time. In this context, our collective zero point is our active role as part of the architectural community, as architects and aspiring architects, which spans some 50+ years of professional experience. Together, we are the generation of regeneration – a collective of practicing architects, architecture students and aspiring professionals, lecturers, writers, thinkers, design researchers, and our collaborators in disciplines near and far – committed to making the necessary transition and changes to respond to the Climate Emergency, and that it is not passed on to future generations any longer. Working together to pivot our profession towards new paths, imagining and co-creating alternatives to the way we build, revising material sources, perception of time, models of transport, sources of energy.

## INTRODUCTION

I was born in the Soviet Union, in a science town, approximately a hundred kilometers south of Moscow. An urban vision in progress, a research satellite to the Moscow State University, devoted to scientific research in biology. The town had a simple layout, organized along three grand streets that ran east to west, guaranteeing beautiful sunset views almost daily. It hosted five research centers, which clearly marked the southern edge of the city – Institute of Microbiology, Institute of Soil Science, Institute of Bio- and Organic Chemistry, Institute of Protein Research, and Institute of Biophysics. At the time, a compact town for 17,000 inhabitants, a composition of five high-rise residential neighborhoods, three schools, one music school, one kindergarten, a cultural center, an international hotel and restaurant, one bus that ran in a loop all day, and only a handful of cars, all within walking distance, on top of a hill, surrounded by endless forest – a stage for international scientific exchange since 1956.

- Our apartment was often filled with guests from abroad – Cuba, Venezuela, Kazakhstan, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, Armenia, Dagestan, Mongolia, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and later the Netherlands. At the time I was not yet able to understand and was sheltered from the harsh geopolitical realities and logic of the 1980s, and of many of these international exchanges, but also the unique position of the Dutch scientists at the time; to appreciate in full the importance of culture, design and science in building strong lasting bonds and shared global goals between otherwise politically divided countries and economies.
- The town was dominated by two generations: young scientists and their growing families. Growing up, as the kids of biologists, we had a specific vocabulary – photosynthesis, biospheres, laboratory, hydrogenation, biodiversity, ecology, were some of our common early childhood words. Words that have caught up with us over time and are no longer the interest of a specific group of scientists and researchers; becoming our shared responsibility today, across all professions, including architecture.
- My parents travelled a lot during those years, to other research locations and conferences, both near and far. They also often

travelled to nature, visiting conservation areas, biosphere reserves to conduct research. That is when I got to go with them. One trip stands out in particular, to an astronomy observatory in the Tien Shan Mountains of Kazakhstan. Where with wonder I stared at the stars at night and other astronomical objects, through the lens of a colossal optical telescope, followed by accidental encounters with indigenous shepherds in the area the following morning – effortlessly guiding their sheep along the steep mountain slopes, some three thousand meters above sea level. It was an unforgettable glimpse, even as a young child, into a close harmonious coexistence and respect for the different perspectives, traditions, and the important range in perceptions of time and space.

- The study of the Climate Emergency is becoming more and more precise. Each year, a multitude of scientific papers are published on the changing state of our planet and the growing emergency, each time more detailed and precise, the global assessment reports are further refined, and the scenarios and projections are updated. Information that we need to use as the basis for the transition and development of new paths for our profession.
- The change we need to make is very literal and physical. One potential challenge today is that the ongoing progress and experimentation in developing environmentally neutral architectural solutions are fragmented, across many mostly private projects of various scales and locations, while at the same time allowing for immediate action and experimentation, as well as incremental change. We also urgently need to find ways to resist market pressures, which dominate a lot of the design and process decisions today, for this incremental change to continue to expand.
- Another level of complexity is the minimal engagement of architects (caused to some extent by the fragmented state of the architectural community today) in large spatial political and economic decision-making processes related to the Climate Emergency. This is an urgent transition in itself, namely the need to build a productive connection between architects and policymakers, which is probably made up of two to maybe three stages from the perspective of the architect: nurturing collective professional knowledge and accumulating authority in relation to the subject and vision, and building a politically

engaged collective voice. In this context, at the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture, our focus is primarily on building collective knowledge and support accumulation of collective authority on the subject, in collaboration with other institutions and professionals in the community.

#### WORK IN PROGRESS

“Architecture today is in a time of crisis; while public debate rages over architectural styles, architects themselves are uncertain of their status in society, their role within the building industry, and their professional goals”. Without much editing (well maybe that there is not much public debate at the moment) these words – from a publication on the image of the architect, which is also the title of the book, published in 1983 by Yale University Press – could summarize the situation today, and many other moments in the history of our profession. A profession in nearly constant transition, in crisis, in search of a new identity, new economy, new political voice and in relation to other professions; but successful each time, managing to adapt, reinvent, and imagine a new form of practice. • Following the broader realization on the extent and time pressure of the Climate Emergency, we are facing a number of other major, global, generational challenges, which we have to address in an unprecedented simultaneity of multiple long-term questions, all of which warrant attention today. Themes that we need to address as a global community and as a professional community, without feeling overwhelmed or overpowered; themes which diverge in scale, relating to different disciplines, and timeframes; all of which we need to understand to at least some minimal degree, as together they offer valuable input in how to define resilient new paths for architecture. • **This time last year, together with a small team of architects and researchers, I was in the process of recording what ended up being an interview marathon, fifty-seven conversations with farmers, who were also writers, historians, activists and researchers, across the Great Plains, from North Dakota to the Texas Panhandle (our producer travelled 9,000 miles, or nearly 15,000 kilometers, to record the interviews) – an independent and large-scale cultural work, an oral and visual history project, which seeks to amplify the voice of the landscape**

and the farmers throughout the Plains in the United States – exploring farming practices and communities which have historically often been absent from the narrative about this landscape and its future. • In this project we focused on producers invested in healthy farming, regenerative land use and rebuilding communities, viewing this distant landscape up close. Based on individual efforts, beliefs, and physical context, this series of discussions offer a glimpse of possible and amplifying change in farming practices, using regenerative and soil health farming principles, with the potential for positive global impact on climate and food. • In essence, regenerative farming is an approach to farming which focuses on soil health, the local context, soil type and indigenous plant species, the importance of biodiversity, and continuous coverage of soil. A practice that could be applied in any agricultural setting and would lead to growth in biodiversity of soil organisms, insects and plants, massive sequestration of carbon over time, and extensive reduction in chemical use, machinery, and fuel needs, also here in the Netherlands. • My self-initiated introduction to the landscape was in 2017. Together with a different group of architects, we set out on a month-long adventure to film this strip of central North America with a drone, capturing over 1,000 miles, or 1,600 kilometers in footage. A key landscape in global food production, but one which is rarely filmed. • “Why are you interested in this topic [regenerative farming] as an architect?”, is a question I often received from the farmers before we would launch into a debate on different aspects of their farming operation and social context. For me, this project has been about finding new ways to explore how various social, economic and political mechanisms have silently shaped our productive landscapes around the world in recent history; about the pressure for growth embedded in traditional large-scale industrial agriculture, and the impact it has had on the rural physical and social landscapes; about understanding how regenerative farming is a significant healthy global alternative in food production that also offers an opportunity for conservation of our landscapes; about new interdisciplinary collaborations and new concepts, such as regenerative; and what they could mean for the architectural practice. • Over time, regenerative farming practice eliminates the pressure

to increase in size, as the production of a field relies on soil and plant and species biodiversity for balanced plant nutrition, growth and control of pests, and not on an increase in chemicals being applied, or efficiency and size of operation. Many of the farmers we spoke to are still high-tech farmers, many have started to farm smaller acreages – finding it more enjoyable, and a growing number of farmers no longer own a complete fleet of large agricultural machinery, and have found ways to share, co-own. • There are many concepts already on the way in architecture to make our profession sustainable – with focus on technology, materials and their reuse, circular thinking, extension of lifespan cycles, and local energy sources – which need to be brought together and infused with more radical thinking on how to alter the economic system as well. As architects, I think we have a lot to discover about how to move away in our spatial production from models of growth, and linear ideals of time and progress based on expansion by studying and collaborating with other professions. Moving away from single-minded rough indicators of growth, cost-benefit analysis, that fail to take into account survivability of our planet, and away from absolute models of what a market is and what types of economic relationships are productive. • Architecture has never been solely about style, design, or construction, but it is maybe even less so today. As scientific knowledge in many fields becomes more precise, we have a responsibility to be able to interpret and to build on the growing scientific knowledge in our design work. It is an exciting condition of disciplinary complexity that potentially requires additional analytical and communication skills from architects, and which we need to embed in design education, to allow the student to continue to shift and adjust with precision to any new emerging social or political or environment condition in the future. • We are entering a new period in architecture; a period of new aesthetics, new economy, degrowth, new perceptions of time and lifecycles. Renewal and renovation are becoming an ever-increasing component of architectural practice, and will continue to grow. The materials that we can permit ourselves to mine have already been mined, and we must find new ways to create places and spaces using materials that have been



created at least once before. This also demands a major adjustment to the way in which we teach architecture. One of the proposed early steps will be to introduce expert tutors in studio project teams – researchers, writers, theorists, economists – working together with design tutors and students; opening up our studios to be highly creative spaces, which they always have been, but where we can now design-based on newest scientific insights, or by testing recently adopted global political agreements and local policies, translating and testing this knowledge in their spatial qualities, and offering design based insights back to the research teams. • Another key priority will be to fully reshape the internal Architecture curriculum around Climate Emergency and Ecological Crisis, in conversation with students, team and tutors; to potentially become one of the first complete curriculums for Architecture in the Netherlands to do so. So, when we talk about design projects in studios, and in our lectures and seminars, we also discuss, for example: Where and how materials are sourced – reuse, before recycled or biobased;

Biodiversity and ecology at project sites;

Limits of logistics;

Spatial politics and design;

Indigenous knowledge and lessons from history on sustainability;

World economy's shortage problem;

Energy sources on-site and energy footprints off-site;

Material passports standardization;

Engage in imagining new economic models beyond linear growth and time models, to economy based on reuse, ecology, and regeneration;

Conservation in the Anthropocene;

Climate Emergency knowledge gaps and blind spots in building regulations;

Obvious gains in construction and assembly.

–and we build this knowledge gradually, together, based on existing practice and growing collective experience, and imagination. • Since the 1980s, architects have managed to adapt and design exceptional buildings, practical buildings, necessary buildings in complicated economic conditions, often challenged by the demands of a growing market economy, increasing political and financial risk management, and a continually shrinking role of government in spatial questions. The effect on architecture has been far-reaching – on the quality and quantity over the years – and design and building is a significantly differently process today than it was 40 years ago. During this period, architects have had to reinvent themselves in many ways – architects as businessmen, writers, entrepreneurs, developers, investors, but all moving away from a public role and a political voice. Looking at the situation today and the global questions and challenges that we need to respond to, we need to acknowledge that certain crucial values for successful achievement of set environmental goals and the necessary transition will remain unfeasible in a market trade-off, and with the extremely marginal political voice that architects have today. Spatial design is political – how do we rejoin the political conversation? • To be able to implement change and pivot professionally in the coming years, we need to support and build collective authority on the subject of Climate Emergency and transition and a political voice or mandate. • The social architectural landscape in the Netherlands is deeply fragmented today. Following the 2007-2008 financial crisis, many of the medium-sized architectural offices have disappeared, replaced by a growing number of smaller practices. Part of the collective political power and strength of the imagination often lies with the collective of medium-sized offices. In comparison to other branches of the building industry – developers, contractors, material producers – the architectural community in the Netherlands is also fragmented in another way, across different organizations that represent shared and overlapping interests: the union, the registration of architects, grant organizations and research

institutes. A fragmentation that we need to address and imagine new ways in which we can collaborate in pivoting our profession, and to create the needed collective authority to be part of the political and economic decision-making process in the Netherlands and internationally on spatial issues in the context of Climate Emergency.

#### AT WATERLOOPLEIN

The close connection to the arts, the focus on design, and being a part of the Amsterdam University of the Arts, offers the Academy of Architecture a uniquely strong and rich base for exploration and imagining of scenarios, methods, and collaborations in addressing the Climate Emergency and developing new paths for architecture. It is a space where we can be much more activism driven, taking the lead, emergency focused, and with more room for experimentation in proposed concepts, outputs, and research proposals and tools.

- Finding inspiration in philosophy, the arts and social sciences, going beyond technology focused solutions, which seem to dominate the field today, but encompass only one type of approach relating to the Climate Emergency and material questions; often still based on models of economic growth.
- The Amsterdam Academy of Architecture has a rich history in design and design education. Building on this tradition – in facing the Climate Emergency in relation to design – we need to focus on the connection between research and design, on how to position research in relation to design, to explore a range of design research methods, and clearly understand the set ambitions for education. There are numerous directions and positions to explore.
- During my time as a student, which took me to Delft, Valparaiso, Chicago, Geneva, Barcelona and later to London – along with courses directly related to architecture and spatial design, I also followed classes in the fields of philosophy, cultural geography, art history, economics, environmental studies, sociology, political science – the content and relevance of some of the subjects only became clear to me as a practicing architect and researcher, gradually over time. The specific content of education programs should not always simply be assessed and focus on imme-

diate relevance and disciplinary definitions, especially in relation to design education; exposure to new topics, innovation, social themes, different perspectives, and concepts, and creating the possibility for accidental connections and moments of inspiration are incredibly valuable. • The Amsterdam Academy of Architecture sets itself strongly apart through its robustly integrated Architecture-Urbanism-Landscape Architecture curriculum. Over time, each generation of architecture students and architects has been shaped by specific social, political, and other dominant conditions of the time. But we often forget to talk about architecture in those terms; the mechanisms that have a direct impact on our profession. Looking ahead, there is a need to stand closer to other disciplines in practice and study of architecture – in how we address the Climate Emergency, and other social questions, the need for formulation of new paths for architecture, and the silent impact of economic, political, technological processes on the architectural profession. And to make progress, we need to bring the notion of large external mechanisms that co-shape our profession into our daily discussions at the Academy, with precision and knowledge: So when we talk about classical architectural orders or the Roman villa, we also talk about Otium and Negotium and social injustices at the time, and how these may have been at the basis of, and are reflected in, spatial and architectural forms?

In conversations on vernacular architecture, we talk about local sourcing of materials, material shortages, reuse, limitations in transport and logistics.

The changing connection between art and architecture, how it has been a weakness and a strength during different periods.

The progress in sciences – from geography, to chemistry, to physics, to mathematics, manufacturing and engineering – a necessary context for the complexity of the architecture of the Renaissance period to thrive.

When we talk about early modernism – we also speak about mecha-

nization, new modular building methods, Fordism, introduction of the car, and with it new perceptions of speed and place.

From the era of the architect as the hero and the period of individualism in the history of architecture, to an era of collaborations and the role of friendships, role of design schools, and life-time bonds linked to architectural progress.

When we talk about iconic residential complexes and public buildings of the post-war reconstruction period, we also talk about the role of the public architect.

When we talk about the lavish public buildings of the 1960s, we place them in the context of almost no material constraints, the optimism and economic boom of the time. But also, the first signs and realization of the beginning of what has become the biodiversity crisis, and the climate crisis, and the rise of the modern nature conservation movement, which inspired a generation of architectural experimentation and new collaborations.

The disappearance of the public architect and spatial planning in the 1980s and early '90s stemming from an overall shrinking of the public sector and economic crises, which has created new type of housing and public architecture.

The boom of the economy, private markets overpassing economic strengths of governments, and environmental economics.

And in the discussion focused on work-in-progress today, from circular economy and

design to net-zero, we should also bring into focus the persistent social global injustices in the way the Climate Emergency is being addressed today.

We will draw attention to common lack of diversity and inclusivity in the historic architectural narratives. Who wrote the main narratives in architecture, and what do we need to do differently today?

By bringing the economic, historic, and social conditions into the study of architectural history and design, we offer students methods and skills to be able to analyze and actively respond in their design processes to any future condition and emerging new context.

• As a professional community, I am convinced that we know much more about environmentally neutral design and construction than we are able to reflect on individually or collectively here today. • Part of the issue lies in the way in which we have come to communicate about architecture over time – in bite-size statements, PR stories, limited to success narratives, leaving ideas derived from experiments or work-in-progress out of the conversation, and we don't have a culture of a critical peer-review system or another system to fall back on. • The concurrent education model at the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture, students working and studying at the same time, the rich international nature of the school, and the international team of tutors, together offer a unique base to stimulate change in addressing the Climate Emergency in education, in theory, in formulation of regulations, and in practice simultaneously. • As a design profession, we need to imagine and initiate new formats of collective knowledge – in carefully curated open talks, interviews, panels, building scenarios, and experimental publications, supported by open data projects – in openness and with shared reflection, while systematically documenting a growing body of knowledge. With its central location, the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture is a perfect space, a physical platform, for inclusive collaboration with other architecture schools, educational institutions, professionals, experts, landowners, politicians, and scientists, to come together to share without a hierarchy of successful versus failed attempts, discussing all relevant insights, and where the blind spots lie. Focusing on experimentation and collective knowledge, as we try again. • We

are the generation of regeneration – not passing on the responsibility to address the Climate Emergency to future generations any longer, focused and working together to adapt our methods, ideas, and practices, in a multitude of collaborations, us – tutors, students, researchers, practitioners, thinkers, artists.

## BIOGRAPHY

Janna Bystrykh is an architect and researcher based in Rotterdam. Janna holds a master's degree in Architecture from Delft University of Technology (with Honors), and a master's degree in City Design and Social Science from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Since 2008, she has been working in the Netherlands, at KCAP and OMA\*AMO, where she was an associate until 2018. In 2019, she founded BYSTRYKH, a design and research agency for the natural and built environment. She is currently working on a research project on permafrost, and the unsettling of the Arctic region due to thaw; a publication titled PLAY!, a collection of reflections on the politics of public spaces through the lens of playgrounds; and a documentary titled Great Pla(i)ns, on spatial impacts of agriculture and technology in rural areas and prospects of regenerative practices for global and local food production and environment, both forthcoming in 2022. • In education, Janna has been connected to Wageningen University, Delft University of Technology, The Berlage, Harvard GSD, and she contributed to the launch of the Strelka Institute's education program. She also regularly acts as visiting critic in the Netherlands and abroad.

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