

Footprint no. 41: Leaps and Bounds

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Before his wings failed and his body fell into the water, Icarus threw himself into the sky with a form of anticipation and a demand for a future rooted in collective constraint and imagination. His leap is a speculative image grounded in boundaries, literally emerging as an active negotiation of gravitational forces. Sharing the same impulse, the Future People, in Konstantin Yuon's eponymous 1929 painting, wearing artificial wings and aviation-style outfits, prepare to take a leap from a green hillside. Some are jumping confidently, while others appear to be hesitating or helping. Leaping, in this register, extends beyond an individual physical act; it becomes formative within a collective imaginary. It indexes a past and bounds a future that attempts to reach beyond the given, to suspend the conditions that hold us back.

The playful imagery of running and long jumping, directed toward the improbable continuity of a flight sustained by beating wings, expresses the active tendency to extend the limits of human body capacities. This tendency is never one's own, and takes shape through the imagination of more-than-human conduct. In this context, toy-like configurations (such as artificial wings) are not naive technical experiments; they are speculative technologies, playful mediations between the human body and its physical constraints. These wings do not deny gravity; they acknowledge it as a generative limit, a condition that gives the leap its tension and meaning. To leap with artificial wings is to bind invention and play, operating in the space between constraint and desire, between friction and flight.

The 'leaping and bounding' question returns to the dynamic problem of how humans – and animals – manipulate their environment to exceed what already exists, continuously reorganising actors, affordances and affects in response to evolving desires. For digital culture theorist Seth Giddings in *Toy Theory: Technology and Imagination in Play* (2024), these acts are toylike manipulations, that is, improvised, provisional engagements that test the limits of what bodies, systems, and environments can do. As philosopher Brian Massumi writes in *What Animals Teach Us about Politics* (2014), each of these playful manipulations gives rise to its own sense-making process, producing novel meanings and configurations within contingent yet constitutive value systems. Giddings further argues that the value systems of civilisations begin with toylike or playful thinking, as modes of engagement that precede and prefigure their eventual instrumentalisation into technologies.

Rather than celebrating only the joy, immersiveness, and captivation of the playful act, this issue of Footprint examines playful architecture as a critical mode of engaging with genealogies of environmental manipulation, questioning how design practices operate dynamically and redefine behaviour, roles and relations. Playfulness here is not to be confused with decorative fun, design

gimmick, or institutional amusements. Instead of sliding down the colourful chute of a corporate workplace, it points to the inventive deviation and exploratory excess of a child descending a staircase backwards, sideways, or skipping steps, each time transforming the ordinary into a singular event through playfully testing and speculating what can be acted out. Through this lens, to play is to destabilise functional expectations, turning everyday structures into laboratories of possibility. It exposes architecture not as a fixed set of tendencies but as an open field of affordances: a medium that invites negotiation, misuse and detournement.

This issue aims to explore not surprising modes of space consumption, but the cultivation of epistemic frictions that probe the otherwise of environments and bodies alike. In simpler terms, this issue asks how architecture leaps and bounds, or how playfulness, reintroduced as a form of epistemic engagement, allows design to confront improbability and speculate within the tensions of the real towards the production of the novel. This shift moves the focus from asking what the actors want, to asking what the action itself wants, that is, how systems, constraints and tools participate in shaping outcomes, exerting their own forms of catalysts within a field of embodied speculation. Or, to use the words of philosopher Bernard Stiegler in his *Technics and Time* (1998), rather than questioning ‘who makes the what’, we ask you to question ‘what makes the who’.

Reversing the established dictum of ‘maximum result with minimum effort’, this issue is a plea for the provisional and the playful as epistemic practices of negotiating the improbabilities of our time, pushing architecture toward more-than-human, processual and imaginative registers. We welcome proposals from across architecture, art, design, theory, game studies, performance and beyond. It is an invitation to speculate on how one might collectively engage with the future through playful interactions with distributed actors within both actual and virtual environments. Submissions may be theoretical, historical, methodological, or practice-based, and may address – but are not limited to – the following questions:

What are the epistemic potentials of playful methods, tools and performances in speculative and experimental design contexts (including design studios)? How can playfulness act as a generative force within architectural epistemology across pedagogy and research?

In *When Faith Moves Mountains* (2005), Francis Alijs emphasises how collective performance endures in memory even without a material outcome. How might playful practices, through their exploratory and excessive character, generate forms of collective resonance – including non-instrumental labour – that question the habitual and open new relational entanglements?

Could we trace genealogies of technical imagination through playful, toy-like manipulations of the corporeal and non-corporeal (symbolic or mnemonic) environments?

How do playful interactions operate as speculative tools for collectively navigating, imagining and shaping futures?

How does playful architecture engage with more-than-human desires? How might playful interventions affect the collective conditions and resonate within the constraints and rhythms of urban fabric, or all other appropriated environments (which can even include uninhabited deserts)?

Authors of full articles (6000–8000 words including endnotes) can submit their contributions via Footprint’s online platform before 1 September 2026, with all submissions undergoing double-blind peer-review.

Review articles and visual essays (2000–4000 words including endnotes) will be selected by edi-

tors based on a 500-word summary emailed to the editors before 1 September 2026.

Authors should include a 100-word bio with their submissions and secure permission to use any images or copyrighted materials.

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<https://journals.open.tudelft.nl/footprint/about/submissions>

Correspondence should be directed to editors Lena Galanopoulou and Yasin Dündar at editors.footprint@gmail.com.

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