

Matthew Butcher: 'Flood House' and 'Filter House'

How do we imagine our shared future?

In the future, the very ideas of 'landscape' and 'dwelling' will have to be renegotiated, not least as by 2100, in Eastern England and parts of the eastern Thames Estuary the flooded landscape will be constantly shifting – terra firma sometimes visible, but often not.

The 'Flood House' is a fictitious dwelling whose function is to imagine an inhabitable building-type that could exist in such a situation – indeed may have to exist – under future conditions of global warming, when sea levels have risen substantially. The project explored new ways in which we will have to change the way we live as the relationship between land and sea changes over the next 100 years. The proposed structure utilises the very materials which the flood will bring, making clear the way in which new logics are required to merge buildings, tidal sediments, and the sea.

'The Filter House' is a structure whose function is to purify and distil salt water at the times when the Thames will encroach onto dry land: the main materials that 'The Filter House' would engage with are steam, sediment and salt rather than oil, gas and coal. 'The Filter House' was triggered by the continuing policy by the London Development Agency to build thousands of new homes in the existing flood plains along the Thames. Due to the recent dramatic changes in the global climate and the continuing rise in sea levels, these areas are expected to be some of those most under threat from severe flooding. The site has developed further significance in that part of the area that is now to be developed as the site for the Olympics. 'The Filter House' asks what the appropriate nature and form of the planned architectural space for the area is: what changes to our way of life climate change may result in.

Butcher's projects start with data sourced from governmental agencies: speculative research by the Environment Agency into climate change and its effects on sea levels; the Port of London Authority Tide Research Department's understanding of future tide mechanics; and the Dept of the Environment's predicted energy consumption patterns. Combining these three sources, Butcher begins to imagine how we might live in the near future, by envisaging visionary, but genuinely viable structures with future applications.

Butcher's projects are novel takes on established themes in romantic art – the apocalyptic sublime and the grandeur of the English landscape. The 'Flood House' project presents a 'parallel world' in which narrative and imagery reveal a new environment. But rather

than presenting melodramatic imagery, Butcher's scientific drawing style lends credence to the legitimacy of his proposals.

'The Flood House' has been published in Jonathan Hill's 'Immaterial Architecture' (Routledge, 2007) and the magazine AD (Architecture and Design), 2004.

