

# Turtles do not Successfully Mate With Giraffes:

## *Pluralism Versus Cloud*

Lydia KALLIPOLITI

Every architect can find common ground in Charles Jencks's "Evolutionary Tree to the Year 2000." Originally published in Jencks's 1971 book *Architecture 2000*,<sup>1</sup> the soft, blobby diagram has become a comfortable space of mediation where fundamentally conflicting architectural traditions may happily coexist encased in pulsating attractor basins. The smooth flow of traditions, in what is claimed as reversible and irreversible time frames,<sup>2</sup> is to Jencks an analogue biological structure directly excerpted from Charles Darwin's theories of descent and the evolution of species. Jencks even goes so far as to suggest the precise differences between "architectural species" and "natural species," criticizing the former for jumping from one to another, marrying whomever they please and producing offspring; whereas in the case of natural species, for instance, "Turtles do not successfully mate with giraffes."<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, nevertheless, the evolutionary analogy is strategically used as a tool of prediction and a prophetic claim, given a series of not-yet-manifest species that lie in the underground (below the diagram) lurking to appear in the future. In fact, Jencks republished the diagram (with several modifications) in *Architectural Review* magazine in 2000, to validate how prescient he had been in 1971 and announce the end of the century.<sup>4</sup> Overall, Jencks's "Evolutionary Tree" has had significant disciplinary impact. Many have tried to emulate and reenact its blob pulsations and evolutionary lines, including *Metropolis* magazine's diagram coined "Our Charles Jencks moment"<sup>5</sup> and ETH Zurich professor Adrian Meyer's 2008 diagram "Synoptic Vision."<sup>6</sup> The "Evolutionary Tree" was a powerful representation of ideological currencies, not because it withstood the test of time as many have argued, but precisely because, graphically, it is not really a tree as its title suggests. In contrast to biologist Ernst Haeckel's

<sup>1</sup> See Charles Jencks, *Architecture 2000: Predictions and Methods* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 46–47.

<sup>2</sup> Jencks writes of his “Evolutionary Tree to the Year 2000”: “The method for determining the six major traditions is based on a structural analysis as outlined by Claude Lévi-Strauss, without the claim to completeness which he makes. Some of the relations are obscured because the diagram is only two-dimensional, but generally speaking the pulsations represent reversible time while the inventions and movements are irreversible.” *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Jencks, “The Century is Over: Evolutionary Tree of Twentieth-Century Architecture” *Architectural Review* (July 2000), 77.

<sup>5</sup> See Paul Makovsky, “Our Charles Jencks Moment” *Metropolis*, accessed September 29, 2012, <http://www.metropolismag.com/story/20110414/our-charles-jencks-moment>.

<sup>6</sup> Adrian Meyer, Susanne Kuhlbrodt, and Beat Aeberhard, *Architecture — A Synoptic Vision: Example of an Evolutionary History* (Basel: Birkhauser Verlag AG, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Ernst Haeckel, *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen: Allgemeine Grundzüge der Organischen Formen-Wissenschaft; mechanisch begründet durch die von Charles Darwin reformirte Descendenz-Theorie* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1866).

<sup>8</sup> See Anthony Vidler, “Cooking Up the Classics,” *Skyline* (October 1981): 18–21.

<sup>9</sup> This is Vidler’s full quote: “It is a surprise to find Dr. Jencks referring to styles as if they were some kind of living species as he does with this statement:

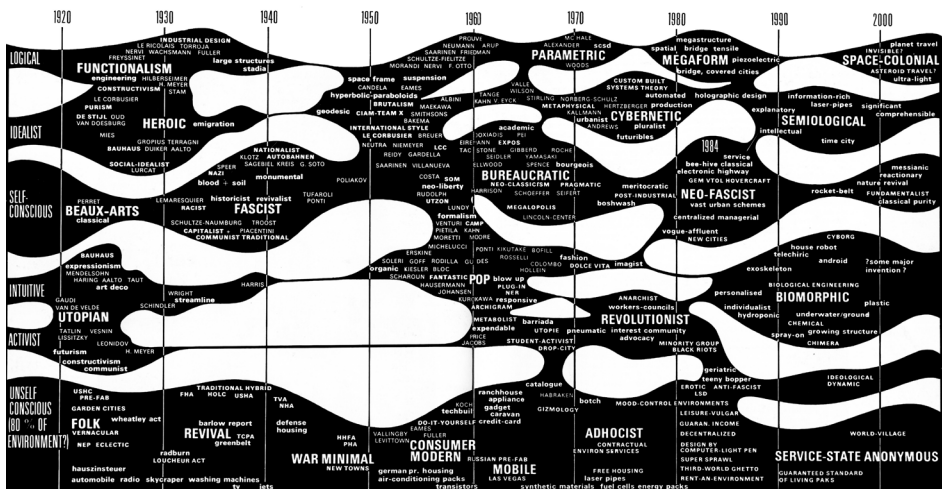
Charles Jencks’s “Evolutionary Tree to the Year 2000” as published in *Architecture 2000: Predictions and Methods* in 1971.

genealogical tree in his book *The General Morphology of Organisms* [1866],<sup>8</sup> Jencks’s tree does not branch knowledge from specific roots, nor does it impose a hierarchy based on a rule-based forking system. Moreover, neither is it a network, with all points interconnected in a system. Jencks’s tree is asystematic and ahierarchical; it suggests information floating, rotating, and as he suggests, kissing and mating.

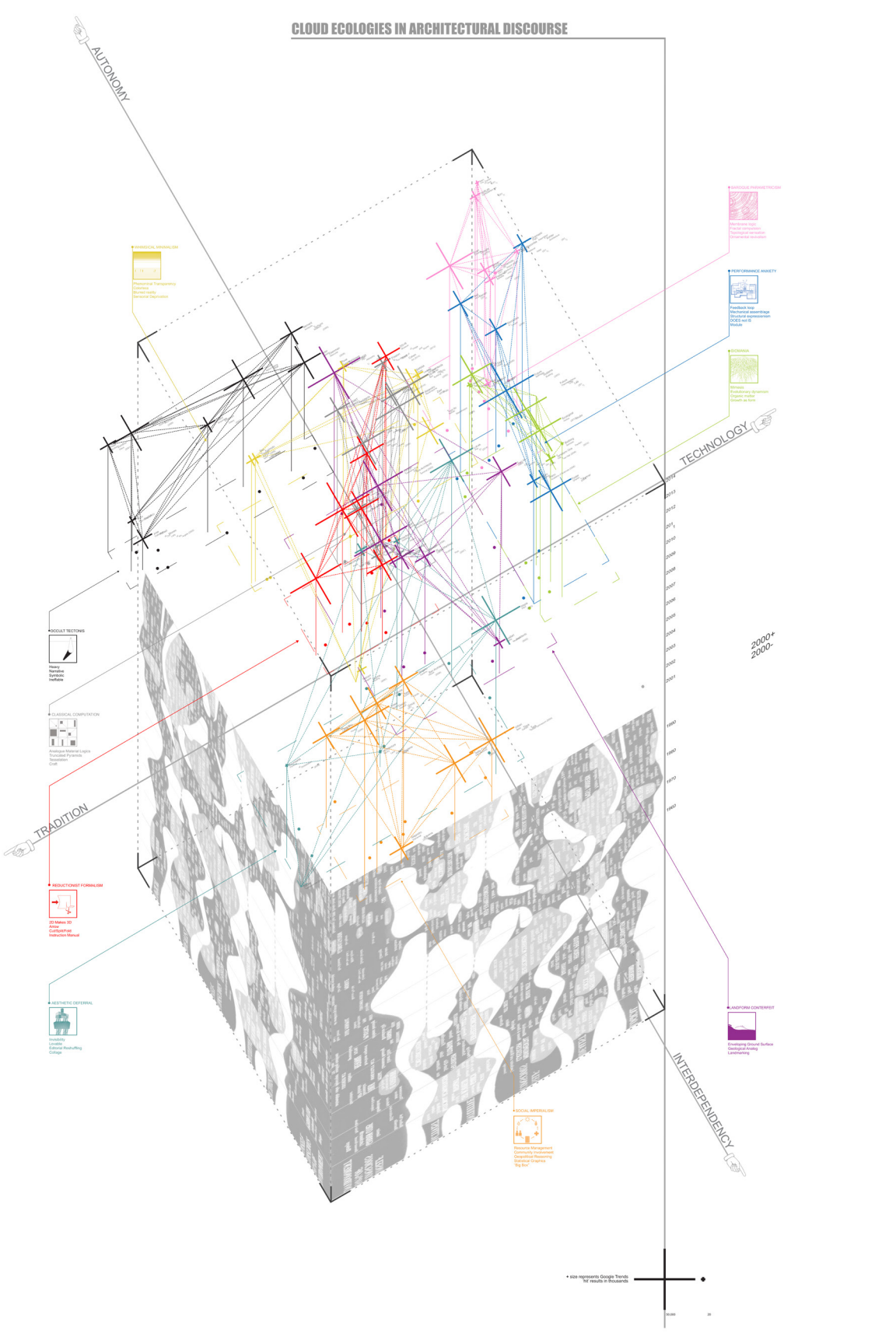
The story of the Evolutionary Tree diagram is quite well known. What is perhaps less well known is that Anthony Vidler published a potent critique of the diagram in *Skyline* 10 years after its fabrication,<sup>9</sup> arguing against Jencks’s blunt evolutionary analogy and his parallel between styles and living species. He humorously wrote:

*The species International style, for example, got up one day, and like some giant python, swallowed live expressionism, purism, de Stijl, industrial design, Art Deco, Constructivism, together with almost all the organic architecture of Wright. No wonder the resulting indigestion brought on an attack of post-modern.*<sup>9</sup> At first sight, Vidler’s attack was founded on the 19th-century tradition of stylistic classification in art history originating from German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann. According to Vidler, Jencks’s categorization of the six major architectural traditions is directly linked to the history of styles and tastes, which he evaluates as ahistorical. This type of classification, therefore, renders a surface understanding of history reducing art and architecture to an exercise of identifying difference between styles.<sup>10</sup>

Digging deeper, it was precisely the idea of favoring a generalized “pluralism,” devoid of all social, political, or even functional questions that enabled the poignancy of Vidler’s critique. Closing the article, he writes: *It is this last, the idea of “pluralism” as the spirit of the post-modern age, that is perhaps the most pernicious of Dr. Jencks’s historicisms. For, disregarding the fact that much the same phenomena of difference and diversity might have been identified from the late seventeenth century on, and most especially, in the modernist period itself, this assumption of a plural universe of culture covers a fundamentally antipluralist agenda.*<sup>11</sup>



# CLOUD ECOLOGIES IN ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE



AUTONOMY

TRADITION

TECHNOLOGY

INTERDEPENDENCY

2000+  
2000-

**HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION**  
 History of Architecture  
 Classical Architecture  
 Modern Architecture

**PERFORMANCE ANXIETY**  
 Feedback Loop  
 Feedback Loop  
 Digital Architecture  
 Digital Architecture  
 Digital Architecture

**ADAPTIVE COMPLEXITY**  
 Feedback Loop  
 Feedback Loop  
 Digital Architecture  
 Digital Architecture  
 Digital Architecture

**ADAPTIVE COMPLEXITY**  
 Feedback Loop  
 Feedback Loop  
 Digital Architecture  
 Digital Architecture  
 Digital Architecture

**SOCIAL TECTONICS**  
 Social Tectonics  
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 Social Tectonics

**CLASSICAL COMPOSITION**  
 Classical Composition  
 Classical Composition  
 Classical Composition

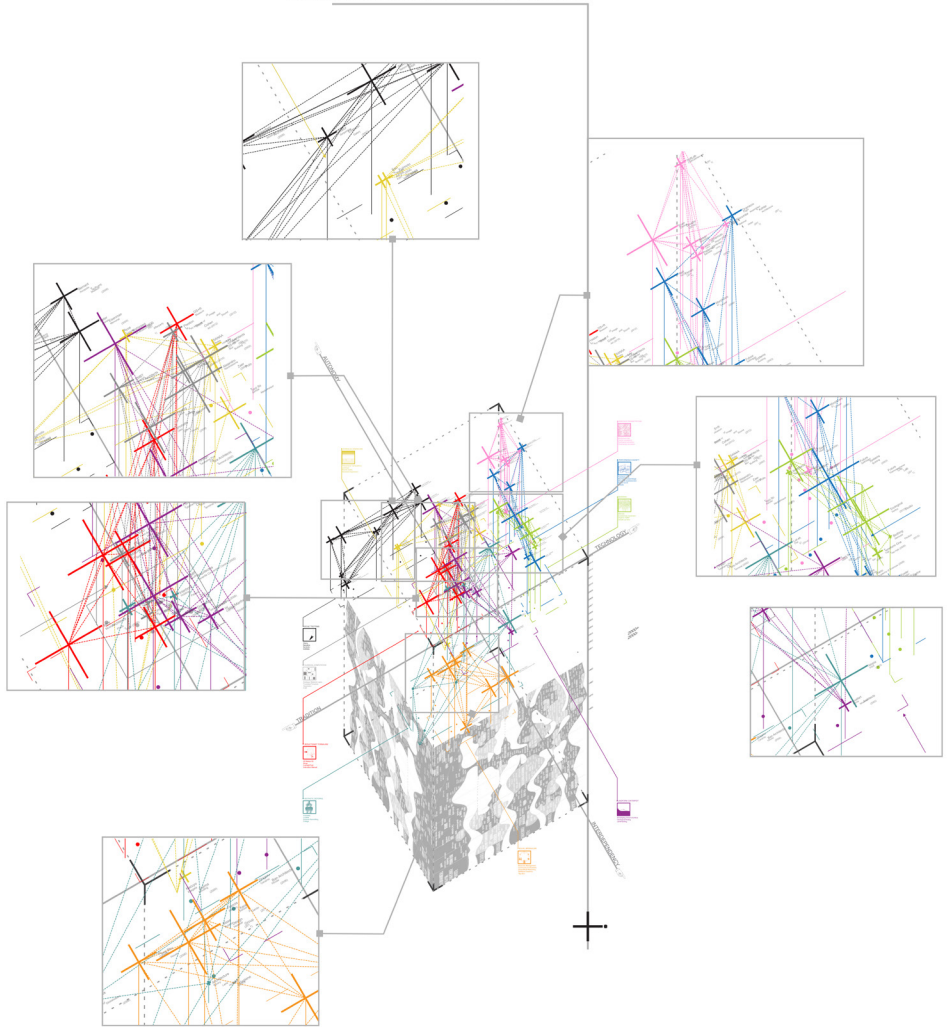
**REDUCTIONISM / COMPLEXITY**  
 Reductionism / Complexity  
 Reductionism / Complexity  
 Reductionism / Complexity

**AESTHETIC OFFERING**  
 Aesthetic Offering  
 Aesthetic Offering  
 Aesthetic Offering

**SOCIAL NETWORKING**  
 Social Networking  
 Social Networking  
 Social Networking

**ADAPTIVE COMPLEXITY**  
 Adaptive Complexity  
 Adaptive Complexity  
 Adaptive Complexity

## CLOUD ECOLOGIES IN ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE



*Zoom-ins to CLOUD diagram of architectural discourses. Research by Eduardo Alfonso, Gabriela D'Angelo, Andrew Lam and Shiori Sasaki within the framework of Lydia Kallipoliti's seminar at the Cooper Union (Spring 2012).*

*Opposite: CLOUD diagram of architectural discourses. Research by Eduardo Alfonso, Gabriela D'Angelo, Andrew Lam and Shiori Sasaki within the framework of Lydia Kallipoliti's seminar at the Cooper Union (Spring 2012).*

Eventually, the debate was focused on the visualization of the world as a collection of ideas, tendencies, and concepts that can all simultaneously coexist without friction or battle. The basic problem of pluralism is not the discipline's fragmentation into hundreds of different paths and directions, but the absence of resistance. Pluralism offers no ideology; no position; no argument; no fight; no ground for a conflict where we can all agree to disagree. Then, is the act of classification futile in itself? Is it the case that, by categorizing genealogies of thought and practice, these genealogies have already become obsolete by being classified as part of the *status quo*?

Jencks feels his predictions have been validated. We are still in a splintered era; a time of anxiety and ideological diffusion, with no prevailing schools of thought to mark the lines of paradigms and disciplinary canons. However, this splintering is changing and expanding the very nature of design itself in a very different direction than that of the evolutionary tree or even that of the network. We are observers of practices that suggest an open, collaborative, system-oriented approach: flying drones which create temporary WiFi networks in isolated areas; DIY construction kits; manufacturing at home through personal 3-D printers; a WikiHouse with open-source plans that can be replicated, improved, and updated anywhere; and countless other examples.<sup>12</sup> This certainly does not mean that the discipline is dead, but the identity of the architect as single author of space might be. So is the venture to classify disciplinary objects based on their iconicity. As Sylvia Lavin suggests, buildings now produce "mood boards" for collective action, deferring "iconicity to the Internet, where an endless supply of videos, maps, tourist photographs, tweets, logos, and blogs offer image after image of the lab in use, not in use, about to move, and in motion."<sup>13</sup>

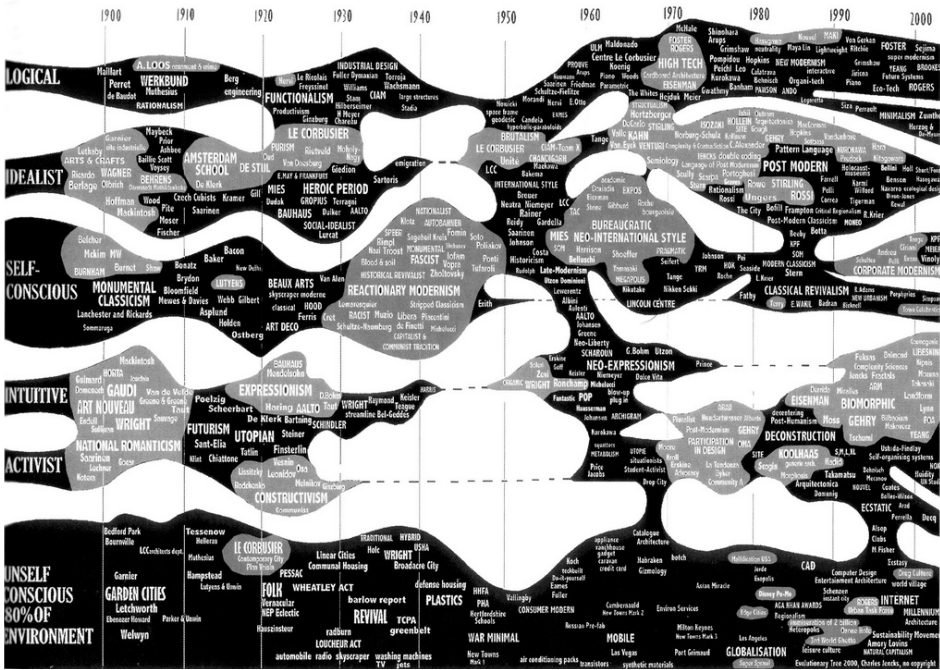
"When neo-classicism came in, rococo went out, or rather transformed itself and led an underground existence until it reemerged in another guise as Art Nouveau. The 'underground' history of Rococo, the 'chameleon' Art Nouveau might make good reading as a tuppenny dreadful, but it ain't history. At least, not of a contemporary kind. Dr. Jencks gives us our history as if we were later day Darwinians, or better, Spencerians, hot on the trail of the evolution of the species: he speaks of the 'evolutionary tree' or the 'evolutionary chart'; of 'cyclical tendencies' that lurk beneath the masks of conscious movements of species; of 'strands' and 'bundles' of strands that transform themselves in relationship to each other, or 'wax-and-wane-like evolutionary species.'" Ibid., 21.

<sup>10</sup> This is Anthony Vidler's argument, presented at the author's seminar review at New York's Cooper Union, May 7, 2012. Architects Michael Young and John Morrison, and students Eduardo Alfonso, Gabrielle D'Angelo, Shiori Sasaki, and Andrew Lam were present in the conversation.

<sup>11</sup> Vidler, "Cooking Up the Classics," 21.

<sup>12</sup> See Elian Stefa and Ethel Baraona Pohl, "NCR-01 [Agenda]: An Ad-hoc Revolution," *Istanbul Design Biennial*, May 24, 2012, accessed September 29, 2012, <http://istanbuldesignbiennial.iks.org/ncr-01-agenda-an-ad-hoc-revolution/>.

<sup>13</sup> Sylvia Lavin, "The Report of My Death," *Log 25* (Summer 2012): 159.



<sup>14</sup> See Chris Anderson, "The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete," *Wired* 16, no. 7 (June 2008).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> The team consisted of the author (instructor) along with students Eduardo Alfonso, Gabrielle D'Angelo, Shiori Sasaki, and Andrew Lam. The research was conducted as part of the author's seminar "EcoRedux" at the Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture of the Cooper Union during the Spring semester of 2012.

<sup>17</sup> In Jencks's words: "[T]he diagram has very serious deficiencies which should be pointed out. First, it is in two dimensions rather than three, so that all relations between traditions, except those lying side-by-side are obscured. A more truthful model of events would show many strands continually intersecting and bending 360° as architects shifted from one tradition to another and were deflected by external influences." As a reference to the three-dimensional science of prediction, Jencks cites art historian George Kubler, who discusses the history of "objects" (art, architecture, poetry, and so on) in terms of fibrous bundles equivalent to Jencks's "blobs." See Jencks, *Architecture 2000*, 48. See also George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962).

<sup>18</sup> *Momentality* is defined in opposition to *Monumentality*—that is, as a documentation of things according to the moment they occur versus their meaning and diachronic existence.

<sup>19</sup> Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of Cloud: Towards a History of Painting*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 2.

This organizational platform, where different creators, collectives, and projects can mix and remix, and the open-source assemblage of information in mixed media clusters, relates to our data-driven culture and to the emergence of "cloud computing." The term *cloud computing* was coined in 1997 by information systems theorist Ramnath Chellappa to describe information storage in networked online clusters, as distinct from localized storage in physical data centers. Chris Anderson, editor in chief of *Wired* magazine, argues that information is now untethered from the archive, the library, and even the organization of complex three-dimensional classification systems, and that instead it renders an order of "dimensionally agnostic statistics."<sup>14</sup> The cloud necessitates an entirely different way of understanding the world, "one that requires us to lose the tether of data as something that can be visualized in its totality."<sup>15</sup> Growing out of Google's model of detecting correlations through applied mathematics and not through context, the cloud ranks fractional connections above holistic perceptions of phenomena. An embodiment and representation of change and self-organization, the temporal space of the cloud grows, crystallizes, and dissolves. What is essential about the cloud is the absorption and collection of data that crystallizes in a region, rather than the overall contextual interpretation of that data. In a world where complexity can no longer be decoded systematically, the cloud is a byproduct of incidental data accretion; it defies any precise definition of form and representation.

I, along with a small group of students at Cooper Union,<sup>16</sup> took it as an independent research project to redraw, redefine, and render obsolete Jencks's "Evolutionary Tree" by replacing it with a cloud of ideas in contemporary practice. Our cloud diagram is constructed as an open-source collaborative platform where different creators, collectives, ideas, and projects come together in a conceptual ecology of discourses. Following the unrealized vision of the "evolutionary tree" as a three-dimensional structure,<sup>17</sup> the cloud is designed in three dimensions, with time on the vertical z-axis. The horizontal x-y plane is dissected into four areas, between two contradictory disciplinary forces: the line between *tradition* and *technology*, as suggested by Reyner Banham's "Stocktaking" article series in *Architectural Review* circa 1960, and the line between disciplinary *autonomy* (formalism, tectonic language, and syntax) and disciplinary *interdependency* (social reform, environmental improvement, and political effect). In the cloud diagram, only projects are registered as independent events, not movements and traditions. Projects and ideas may be associated and form coalitions, yet they are not circumscribed within shapes. Each project is represented with a cross, the size of which reflects the disciplinary impact of the project according to data retrieval in Google Analytics; projects that were Googled extensively at a certain period of time receive a large cross at that time, whereas the cross diminishes along with their impact in the culture of momentality.<sup>18</sup> Objects, therefore, have no contour; only associations that can dissolve and reorganize, form and reform.

As philosopher Hubert Damisch writes, the cloud is a body without surface, but not without substance. Although it has no surface, the cloud is visible.<sup>19</sup> What is essential about the cloud is the absorption and collection of data that crystallizes in a region, rather than the overall contextual interpretation of the data. Meaning is not essential for the cloud; neither is the understanding of phenomena's complexity as a whole. Instead, the

*Opposite: Charles Jencks's revision of the "Evolutionary Tree for the Year 2000," as published in Architectural Review in July 2000.*

cloud evokes localized data collection and the fractional correlations between bits and pieces. In a world where complexity can no longer be decoded systematically, the cloud is a byproduct of incidental data accretion; it defies any precise definition of form and representation. It is impossible to map or draw the cloud, as there is no tectonic control over its formation. In this sense, the emerging ecology of the cloud is our contemporary obligation to translate.

This cloud would not like to conclude itself. Instead, the intention is to open a discussion and to leave open questions. At the center of the cloud's discourse lies the question: How does the cloud affect our relationship to knowledge? The permeation of organizational tools in our discipline is not innocent. It is not merely about facilitating and managing knowledge; it also transforms the nature of design, with no return. Is it not critical that we give equal attention to reconsidering our classification systems and how they are affecting architectural discourses? Stay tuned.