Foreword
Complex Entanglements

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ACADIA was formed at a meeting 35 years ago on October 17, 1981 at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Since its inception, the conference has served as an incubator for emerging ideas in feedback loops between academia, industry, and professional practice. Over the years, ACADIA’s members, leadership, and attendees have included some of the most inventive and important figures in the fields of architectural education, design, computation, and engineering. While ACADIA is the most selective peer-reviewed conference of its kind in the world, it is also an open setting to discuss and debate experimental ideas no matter who you are or where you come from. The fruits of these debates can be found in influential schools and research centers around the globe; in award-winning software, hardware, products, furniture, and installations; and in much larger constructions that define cityscapes from California to New York, London, Dubai, Beijing, and beyond. Ideas percolate at the ACADIA conference, and are iterated, prototyped, questioned, refined, built, and further interrogated as time passes, and they continue to evolve.

At last year’s event in Cincinnati, we organized a special session called Pioneers of Computational Design moderated by Robert Aish, featuring Don Greenberg, Tom Maver, and one of ACADIA’s founding members, Chuck Eastman. This remarkable session revealed that our founding members’ interests extended beyond "CAD" and included pioneering research in topics including virtual reality, computer graphics, and building information modeling. The session was also a reminder of how far ACADIA has come in 35 years, where computational and technical subjects are no longer partitioned from the complexities of the architecture studio. This year’s conference sessions and publications will no doubt epitomize this transition. Presenters will describe emerging pedagogies and research models from schools, labs, shops, and offices around the globe, where computation and design are now pursued simultaneously, most often entangled with other unexpected disciplinary and non-disciplinary concerns and possibilities.

During a coffee break at one of my first ACADIA conferences, I recall finding myself in a conversation with the late Professor William J. Mitchell (also one of ACADIA’s founding members). He had founded the MIT Media Lab’s Smart Cities Program and his book The Logic of Architecture: Design, Computation, and Cognition, published in 1990, was credited by The New York Times as having "... profoundly changed the way architects approached building design." Bill had just listened to me present a project and asked me questions that surprised and inspired me: "It is a beautiful project, but what if a city was filled with projects like yours? What kind of world would it be?" While Bill was known as a technologist, he was also deeply interested in broader ideas about the role technology could play to positively shape cities and society. In many ways, his attitude thankfully lives on today. Just look at the range of this year’s ACADIA papers, projects, participants, and speakers. In the words of this year’s Conference Chairs, one of the defining features of this event is to explore the "complex entanglements" and feedback loops between a radically diverse set of design ecologies; what they call, “autonomous and semiautonomous states.” Participants share a fascination with the interplay of these states where computation, artificial intelligence, and human ingenuity can yield radically new and innovative modes of designing, building, thinking, and interacting. In the spirit of William Mitchell, in the midst of our extraordinary experimentation and technological innovation, let’s not forget to ask ourselves and our colleagues: “What kind of world would it be?”
On behalf of the ACADIA Board of Directors and its membership, I want to acknowledge the 2016 University of Michigan Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning team for their extraordinary organization, energy, and thoughtfulness. Special thanks to Conference Site Chair Geoffrey Thün, Conference Technical Co-Chairs Kathy Velikov, and Sean Alquist, and others members of the team, including Matias del Campo, Workshop Co-Chairs Wes McGee and Catie Newell, Exhibition Co-Chair Sandra Manninger, staff members Kate Grandfield and Deniz McGee, and many others. As they have now discovered, organizing an ACADIA conference can be a little like using your own backyard to host a wedding, a graduation and a funeral—all in one weekend. Each event requires the hosts to assume different personalities: the strategist, the enforcer, the MC, the inspirational speaker. It requires a thankless series of meetings and tasks that require vision, energy, a sense of humor, diplomacy, and above all patience. That being said, Geoffrey, Kathy, Sean, and the extraordinary team they assembled, have patiently and generously worked with us over two years to not only craft a thought-provoking conference, exhibition, and workshop series, but also produced some of the highest quality publications ACADIA has ever seen. We extend to you, and the entire Taubman College community, our sincerest admiration, respect, and appreciation.

I would also like to acknowledge ACADIA’s many sponsors this year. Year after year, the support of sponsors allows us to host a world-class event with an unsurpassed roster of keynote speakers, awardees, exhibits, publications, workshops, special round-tables, events, and celebrations. Additional sponsorship from Autodesk allowed us to support more ACADIA Conference Student Travel Scholarships than ever before, and a new ACADIA Autodesk Awards Program will honor and financially support emerging paper and project research.

Lastly, I would like to thank the ACADIA Board of Directors and Officers. Through the leadership of this dedicated group of people, ACADIA’s organization, finances, sponsorships, marketing, and other outreach efforts have never been stronger. We look forward to continuing to build upon and evolve these efforts in the coming year as ACADIA prepares to host its follow-up conference at MIT in Boston, Massachusetts in October 2017.