PAUSE

This chapter summarises the key discussion points in the text and proposes strategies for advancing the principles and practices of liquid life.
Principles of Liquid Life

Through critical reflection of liquid apparatuses in experimental contexts, fourteen key principles are proposed to comprise the character of liquid life. These are as follows:

1 Liquid life is a primal force native to cosmic luminous matter.

2 It is a paradoxical, planetary-scale material condition, unevenly distributed spatially but temporally continuous. Flowing through and into myriad bodies at many scales, it is an open, ‘living’ infrastructure that underpins the metabolic webs of life and death.

3 Liquid life is based on the ancient idea that the character of ‘life’ is fluid.

4 Liquid life offers an alternative framework to the bête machine for considering the complex, networked, sensible, constantly-changing material events that constitute the living realm.

5 Liquid Life provokes an expanded notion of consciousness that is embodied, environmentally aware, and capable of observing its surroundings. It does not propose an a priori understanding of reality but constantly discovers its world, which is always tinged with mystery and so remains enchanted by the possibility of its own existence.

6 Liquid Life is a testable, pedagogical system, whose concepts can be interrogated, evolved, and ultimately realised. It offers a different relationship between humanity and the living world by materially augmenting its lively infrastructures.
Arising from the tensions between potent fields of matter/energy, liquid life emerges at lively interfaces to generate highly mutable, paradoxical structures at far-from-equilibrium states that give the illusion of ‘permanence’ through their sustained persistence.

The incessant transgressions of liquid life are not erroneous, but integral to its success. Continually devising metabolic resistance strategies that dawdle, flâneur-like, away from entropy’s call, it embraces multitudinous forms of expression, intermediary beings, and ‘monsters’ whose modes of organisation defy mechanistic explanations and established modes of categorisation.

Liquid life converses with ‘angels’ as vectors for knowledge, which manifest as transitional bodies that mediate between the living and non-living realms by invoking new languages, which generate alternative terms of reference to begin fresh conversations about the living realm.

Liquid life is a vital material force that commands an appropriate, ecological ethics and upholds the complex epistemologies of ‘being’.

The politics of liquid life enables life’s unbroken legacy to persist. Advocating active diplomacy between lively bodies through a choreography of events, it offers a platform for participatory decision-making. Continual negotiations take place at many levels of organisation including individuals, groups, communities, and ecosystems, where no specific species is privileged over others, although outcomes are not always equally beneficial for all beings.

Liquid life is not an antidote to the present ecocide, but an alternative paradigm towards imagining, encountering, and making the world than the bête machine.
Liquid life links the cycles of life and death through the metabolism of compost, where many different agents and bodies (re)incorporate organic matter into ‘living’ webs of matter/energy exchange.

Liquid life is what remains when logical explanations can no longer account for the experiences that we recognise as part of ‘being alive’.
Soul Substance

Two souls are locked in conflict in my heart,
They fight to separate and fall apart.
The one clings stubbornly to worldly things …
The other has an inborn urge to spread its wings …
(Goethe 1999, 35)

You were promised a materialist discourse of the soul, which makes itself known, whether we are sceptics or not. Without fixed shape, specific materiality, or particular trajectory to characterise it by, the soul resides within the liquids, flows, modes of emergence, transformations, and angels that permeate this text and may be difficult to recognise. Known through its many other names: life force, animating principle, vital essence, spirit, inner being, constant flux of vital functions, essential nature, aura, consciousness, yche, or a glitch in our material conceptualisation of the living realm, it is most dramatically experienced through its absence. Without it, living things tangibly fade and wither, as metabolic networks disperse and bodies lose their capacity for growth, transformation, or affinity for others.

Whether called or uncalled, they come by themselves from all sides, on all paths, from the mountains, from the oceans, from the stars. Who can prevent them? I am sure that I, such as you see me here, have lived a thousand times, and hope to come again another thousand times. (Carus 1910, 150)

While fundamental to the expression and experience of ‘life’, the nature of the soul is elusive and defies formal characterisation within our understanding of the material realm. Nor is it fully

1 The soul substance shares an indeterminate material status in a similar manner to radiation (see section 03.4), which interacts with matter, is created by matter, can create matter and is emitted by matter, but it is just too ephemeral to ‘be’ matter (Armstrong 2016, 36).
immaterial, as it interacts with matter, is generated by matter, animates matter, is emitted by matter but is too ephemeral to be classified as matter.

Indeed I feel even now as if I were not seeing things here for the first time, but if I saw them again. (Carus 1910, 151)
Towards a Liquid Architecture That Accommodates the Soul

Liquid architecture is an architecture that breathes, pulses, leaps as new form and lands as another. Liquid architecture is an architecture whose form is contingent on the interests of the beholder; ... Liquid architecture makes liquid cities, cities that change at the shift of value, where visitors with different backgrounds see different landmarks, where neighbourhoods vary with ideas held in common, and evolve as the ideas mature or dissolve ... Judgements of a building’s performance become akin to the evaluation of dance and theatre ... this identity is only revealed fully during the course of its lifetime ... and what is made speaks for itself, not in words, but in presences, ever changing, liquid ... (Novak 1992, 283–85)

The present principles for human development are framed by economic systems that establish how natural resources are distributed and shared. By setting up the extreme conditions of scarcity and excess, multiple inequalities are established throughout society to feed the peristalsis of supply and demand of ‘the market’. From an ecological perspective, these scenarios are fundamentally hostile to ‘life’, where ‘survival of the fittest’ equates with the ‘richest’, this cannibalistic state of affairs determines how our living spaces are constructed and settled. Buildings are impenetrable fortresses with no ‘living’ relationship to their surroundings that neither care for the soils we depend on, nor clean the air we breathe, and remain oblivious to our water becoming infiltrated with hormones, neurotransmitters, heavy metals, and microplastics. As ‘dead things’, the inert surfaces of buildings are maintained only for their capital value, rather than as an expression of any moral duty of care for our living spaces. This fundamental indifference to the natural realm, is reflected in the consequences of how we make and occupy our living spaces, which presently contribute 40% of our...
total carbon footprint. No matter how much we propose to ‘re-
duce’ the impacts of this worldwide approach to human settle-
ment, its consequences are damaging the natural world, where
the wastes of our excesses become environmental poisons. Even
when we vow to perform our acts of daily living more consid-
erately through ‘sustainable’ approaches towards resource and
energy consumption, we are still trapped in a toxic relationship
with the biosphere.

An ecological ethics and associated construction toolset is
critical to inverting the established order between human set-
tlement and environmental health, so that we may establish a
symbiotic relationship with the planet. Rather than serving as
industrial sumps, we must imagine, design, prototype, and con-
struct buildings differently so they operate as infrastructures of
life. An alternative portfolio for space-making than Le Corbusi-
er’s doctrine of building-as-machine is required to catalyse this
vital transition away from the ‘brute’ buildings of the industrial
era, and midwife an ecological era of human development by
making ‘living’ architectures with ‘souls’.

Liquid life establishes the appropriate values, ethics, and
principles of inhabiting the living realm for an ecological ear
by foregrounding the infrastructures of life within our living
spaces. By thinking through and constructing with fluids at far-
from-equilibrium states, ‘living’ buildings can meet our needs as
well as respond to changes in our proximate (resource availabili-
ty) and global environment (rising waters, increasing frequency
of extreme weather, brownfield sites, garbage patches). Enfold-
ing dynamic liquid spaces into our habitats (Living Architec-
ture 2016) unleashes an irreducible, material potency that is
sustained by liquid life’s protocols of matter/energy, which per-
sists within spandrels, occupies transitory structures, leaks into
unoccupied spaces and expands into new sites by virtue of its
own agency. Comprising an ethical, ecological approach to the
built environment, where the way we take care of our buildings
affects their ability to meet our own needs, ‘living’ architectures
provide spaces that modulate the flows and exchanges of fluid
substances — gasses (air), liquids (water, snot), flow-friendly amorphous solids (glass).

The liquid qualities of ‘living’ architectures are associated with movement (running, jumping, flying, falling, climbing) and character (liquid cats, ‘slippery’ people, amoebae that move by constantly changing their body shape, fluid flames). They are not formless, but dynamically structured through their persistent patterns within iterations of pulses, waves, vortices, and oscillations, which are augmented and sustained by our presence. Their uncertain terrains and fuzzy spaces nurture a ‘soul substance’, which flows through, moulds around, and embraces their inhabitants, imbuing them with empathy. Evading hard control by conventional apparatuses, liquid architectures instead prefer to respond to the presence of slow, soft technologies and elemental infrastructures (Armstrong 2018b). The turbulence brought by dramatically changing environmental conditions is set to transform the world we know into a surreal landscape colonised by regressive attitudes. Offering alternative strategies to making barriers against the systems that sustain — and are capable of destroying — us, liquid architectures generate protocols for space-making that resist the Anthropocene’s unfolding legacy and inevitable urban collapse.
Epilogue

Every epoch not only dreams the next, but dreaming impels it towards wakefulness. It bears its end within itself, and reveals it … by ruse. (Benjamin 1997, 176)

Liquid life is a provocation and ecological story of the living world that increases our portfolio of choices in (re)constructing our relationship with the natural world through the choreography of countless acts of liquid living that uphold life’s unbroken legacy. Introducing concepts and apparatuses capable of providing such a critical perspective, like dynamic droplets, liquid life does not attempt to reduce the strangeness of life’s processes but rather to create a context in which existing assumptions may be considered anew, so that alternative ways of sorting, ordering, agentising, and valuing our world become possible.

Through its deep attachment to the unique physics, geology, chemistry, and cosmology of this planet, liquid life conjures forth the irreducible soul substance and uncategorisable bodies of slimy creatures such as the mucus-secreting, flesh-dwelling hagfish, paradoxical frogs that defy the anticipated order of development and fishing bats that skim the membranes of life. Such ‘monsters’ evade conventional modes of classification and take on new significance in allying with the weird and lively material systems that defy the bête machine’s persuasive logic.

(Re)empowering, (re)enchanting and (re)connecting us with the Earth’s fundamental strangeness, liquid life raises the possibility of locally-initiated, global-scale, orchestrated material transgressions that are capable of reaching escape velocity from the pending Sixth Great Extinction and bring alternative futures to functionality.²

² This phrase is inspired by Haraway’s observation in Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble, which invokes Hannah Arendt’s notion of the banality of evil in reference to our own incapacity to think the world that is actually being lived. Noting that our inability to confront the actual consequences of the worlding that we are engaged in, and the
limiting and thinking to functionality of our actions, and inactions, means that we continue ‘business as usual’ while catastrophe unfolds around us (Haraway 2015). Liquid life’s ambition is to escape the conceptual trap of this deadly ‘banality’, by releasing the limits of possibility through first the imagination and then, through re-empowerment by access to liquid technology.