

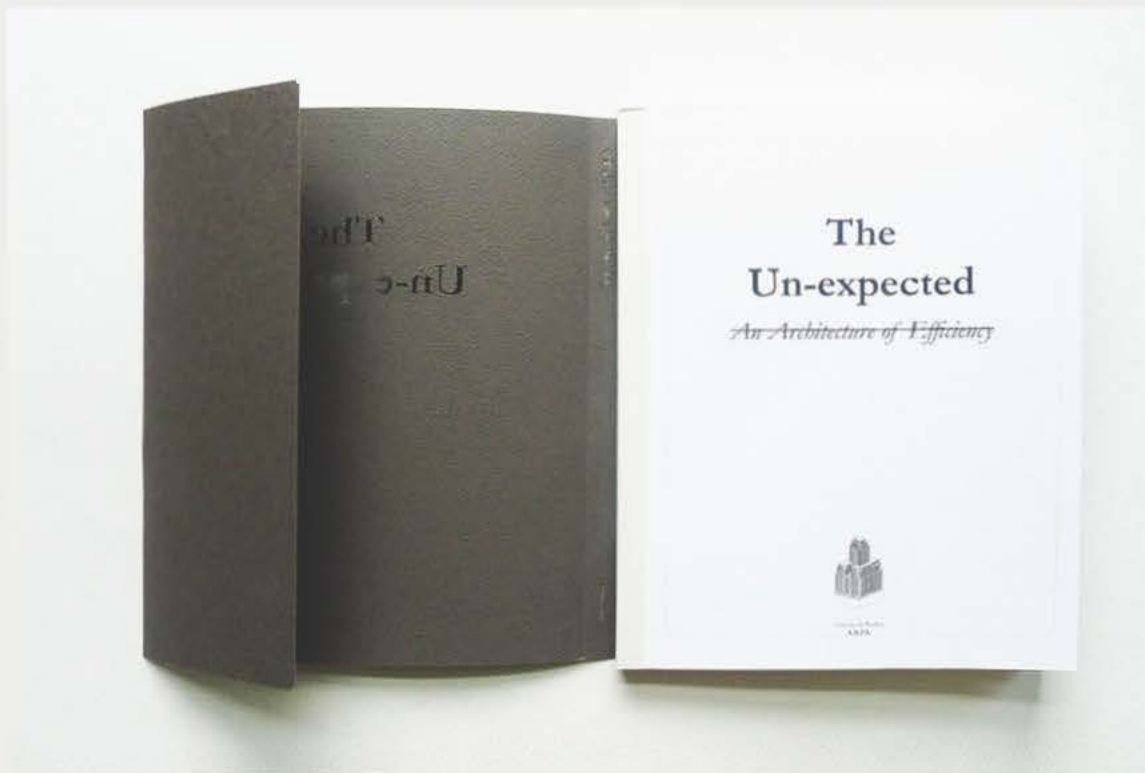
# ANOTHER EFFICIENCY



by Esteban de Backer

The architecture of Pragmatism.

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Book cover. Image courtesy of Esteban de Backer.

As Rem Koolhaas argued in the aftermath of the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, comfort, security and sustainability form a new twenty-first century trinity incarnate, which replaces the longstanding European values of liberty, equality and fraternity as the “dominant values of our culture, a revolution that has barely been registered.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, the consequences and potentials of such a quiet revolution are still being unveiled.

Efficiency is the scaffolding, albeit unstable, on which this new trinity stands. In the context of a market economy, efficiency promises to maximize profit, time or effort in a way that bars any other possible interpretation. Efficiency, in turn, is hosted within the framework of a reductive interpretation of pragmatism. In this sense, certainty and control prove necessary to realize the market’s wildest dreams. Performance—the ability to affect these conditions—and efficiency are pragmatism’s best tools. They are typically regarded as incontrovertible criteria used to justify any decision possible.

“The Un-expected\_An architecture of Efficiency” is a research project completed at the Applied Research Practices in Architecture initiative at Columbia University GSAPP in May 2015.<sup>2</sup> The project brought together a series of conversations and original drawings of infrastructural sites in New York City into a book to question the status quo of efficiency as a driving force in the design fields. Selections from this volume, including conversations with architects Juan Herreros, Yoshiharu Tsukamoto and Kersten Geers, as

well as engineers Mahadev Raman and Craig Schwitter, are presented in this issue of *ARPA Journal*. The series destabilizes assumed definitions of efficiency as a tool of pragmatism through an open dialog, to unveil the polyvalent nature of efficiency. Each piece opens up a qualitative redefinition of the notion of efficiency—they revisit ideas such as architecture's social responsibility, deferred efficiency, economy of means, technical determination, political agency and aesthetic reappraisal. What has emerged is an interpretation of efficiency at different scales, a design strategy rather than a set of requirements and a qualitative necessity rather than a quantitative one. These approaches allow us to switch from efficiency as guarantor of certainty and technical calculability to a progressive tool for architecture.



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## EFFICIENCY AS DESIGN

A conversation with Juan Herreros  
An instrument to simplify the world.





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**EFFICIENCY AS INTEGRATION**

A conversation with Mahadev Raman  
Triple bottom line.



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**EFFICIENCY AS BEHAVIOR**

A conversation with Yoshiharu Tsukamoto  
Within limitations.



A.R.P.A. Journal > Issue 03, Performance > Projects > Another Efficiency





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## **EFFICIENCY AS PRODUCTIVITY**

**A conversation with Craig Schwitter**

**Actually, we have extra.**



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## **EFFICIENCY AS NECESSITY**




**A conversation with Kersten Geers**

**An economy of means**

1. Rem Koolhaas. "Rem Koolhaas Asks: Are Smart Cities Condemned to Be Stupid?" *ArchDaily*, 10 Dec 2014. ^

2. Special thanks to Juan Herreros for serving as an advisor for this project, to Diana Martinez in thorough insight as an instructor at Columbia GSAPP and to Janette Kim for her continued support and advice. ^

Esteban de Backer received degrees in architecture and environmental sciences from the School of Architecture in Barcelona and UGR, Spain. He worked at No.mad Architects as a Arquia Foundation fellow. As a recipient of the La Caixa Foundation fellowship, de Backer also earned a Master of Science in Architecture at Columbia GSAPP, where he completed the ARPA initiative. He currently works as an architect in New York City and serves as an adjunct faculty at the GSAPP.

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