This is one of the most conspicuously provocative titles of *AD* that I have ever worked on. It immediately provokes with its alarming, gory, often carnal fleshy imagery. It is certainly not a publication for the faint-hearted. (Being one of those people who flicks channels whenever a medical procedure comes on telly, I have to admit to choosing to print out the proofs in black and white rather than colour.) The guest-editors, Marcos Cruz and Steve Pike, are certainly intending the articles in the issue to provide a wake-up call for architects and designers, and to incite debate. *Neoplasmatic Design* is not, though, about ‘making waves’ and shocking for shocking’s sake. As they outline in their introduction, Cruz and Pike are intent on the investigation of the impact of ‘emerging and progressive biological advances upon architectural and design practice’. This covers a wide range of disciplines, encompassing biology, microbiology, biotechnology, medicine and surgery. They are not dilettantes. They have both already invested a considerable amount of time in their own specialist research before coming together for this issue: with Cruz writing his doctoral thesis at the Bartlett on the ‘The Inhabitable Flesh of Architecture’, and Pike collaborating with microbiologists on a series of installations/experiments. Accordingly, they carve out their own specialist areas within the issue, while also calling on the knowledge of other contributors – architects, engineers, medical authors and artists/researchers – from around the world.

Why this title is so provocative from an architectural point of view is that it puts forward a wholly new proposition for architecture. It challenges the very notion of what the substance of architecture is and what it can be: in medicine the ‘neoplasm’ of the title alludes literally to a tumour, but here Cruz and Pike adopt the broader definition of artists/researchers Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr, for neoplasm as a ‘semi-living entity’; stretching that entity from primarily that of tissue to other bio-architectural composites. Whereas architecture as we currently know it is almost exclusively confined to dead matter – timber, brick, steel and concrete – the neoplasmatic of this *AD* is made up of emerging organisms, whether they are cultured flesh, algae or vegetation. This is not only a matter of mass, but also constitution. At its most far-reaching, the vision is one of architectonic nervous systems, organs and human hybridisation – personified by Cruz’s spectre of the cyborg.

The concept of the neoplasmatic communicated in this *AD* is made all the more potent by Cruz and Pike’s heady mix of projects, with no real differentiation being made between the visionary, speculative and built. For instance, it encompasses Cruz’s Cyborgian In-Wall Creatures and Kol/Mac’s well-developed INVERSAbrane project as well as the very real, green Wonderwall of VenhoevenCS’s Sportplaza Mercator in Amsterdam. This not only suspends our sense of disbelief, but also shocks us with the realisation of what is already possible. It hastens the prospect of the neoplasmatic, placing it within our grasp.

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Marcos Cruz, Synthetic Neoplasm, 1998

Collage of human organs showing the inner side of a synthetic neoplasm. Latex imprint 2,500 x 450 mm [detail].