



## Editorial

When most people are asked where they would like to live, they will answer quite categorically the town or the country. Yet fewer and fewer people worldwide actually inhabit city centres or truly rural surroundings. Home for most of us is somewhere in between, whether it be outer- or inner-city suburbia, urban sprawl or a makeshift shanty town. This is a trend that is set to intensify with the growth of the world's population from 5 billion in 1987 to 6.7 billion in 2007. According to the UN Habitat 2006 Annual Report, for the first time in history half of the people worldwide are now living in towns or cities; this shift towards urbanisation is only set to continue with 60 per cent of the world's population living in or around cities by 2030. Whereas growth and diffusion of urbanity has been most famously associated with the 'edge city' of Los Angeles or the unharnessed development of illegal housing in India and South America, it is a situation that affects us all. It is most apparent in some of the small wealthiest nations of northwestern Europe, such as Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK, where space is scarce and, despite falling birth rates, their buoyant economies continue to attract migrant workers, boosting their ageing populations. This is epitomised by the Dutch conurbation of the Randstad, made up of the four major cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague, and their respective satellite towns, which form a continuous rim around a green heartland. One also only has to drive along the M4 corridor to wonder where London begins or ends.

Rafi Segal and Els Verbakel's title of *AD* represents an important shift in mindset and aspirations. It squarely positions the dispersed city as a fertile territory for architectural intervention. Whereas outer urban areas have conventionally been the stronghold of the house builder or commercial developer, it places architects and urban designers' sights on exurbia. Segal and Verbakel regard 'dispersal as an opportunity to reinvent urbanity', and specifically to question the notion of public space, which was traditionally positioned in the centre of cities. Featured projects range across the world from Macau in southern China to Copenhagen and Mexico City. Sometimes the investigations are theoretical, but always the focus is on application. Both guest-editors have undertaken projects in this field; Segal here publishes his own project for Beer Sheva in the Negev Desert of Israel, and Verbakel her scheme for the town of Bonheiden in Flemish Belgium. What all the contributors share is an understanding of the possibilities of reinventing and re-editing the given built environment. Abandoned is the notion of Modernist control; to have a place in this setting one has to be deft and flexible, content to engage with the world as it is rather than to recast it as one would like it to be. ▴

*Helen Castle*

### **Guy Saggee, Digital print, 2007**

In a response to the theme of this issue and in collaboration with its guest-editors, graphic artist Guy Saggee explored images of dispersed cities. Similar to the production of collective space in dispersed urban conditions, his graphic technique of dithering produces a blurred image interspersed with emerging patterns.