

# Climates: Architecture and the Planetary Imaginary

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Encounters with Climate:  
A Dossier of Architectural Precedents

In what sites does a concept like the planetary inhere? Where might we locate the nebulousness of climatic thinking in the built world? The answers can be obvious, but more often than not they are surprising and may well be fanciful. Architecture is comprised by myriad imaginaries and multiform realities, always intersecting and messily overlapping. From arctic villages to Noah's Ark, from log cabins to electric cars, from human waste to utopian landscapes, design is inspired by objects both fictional and real, millennia-old and still-unfinished, at the world scale and the microscopic.

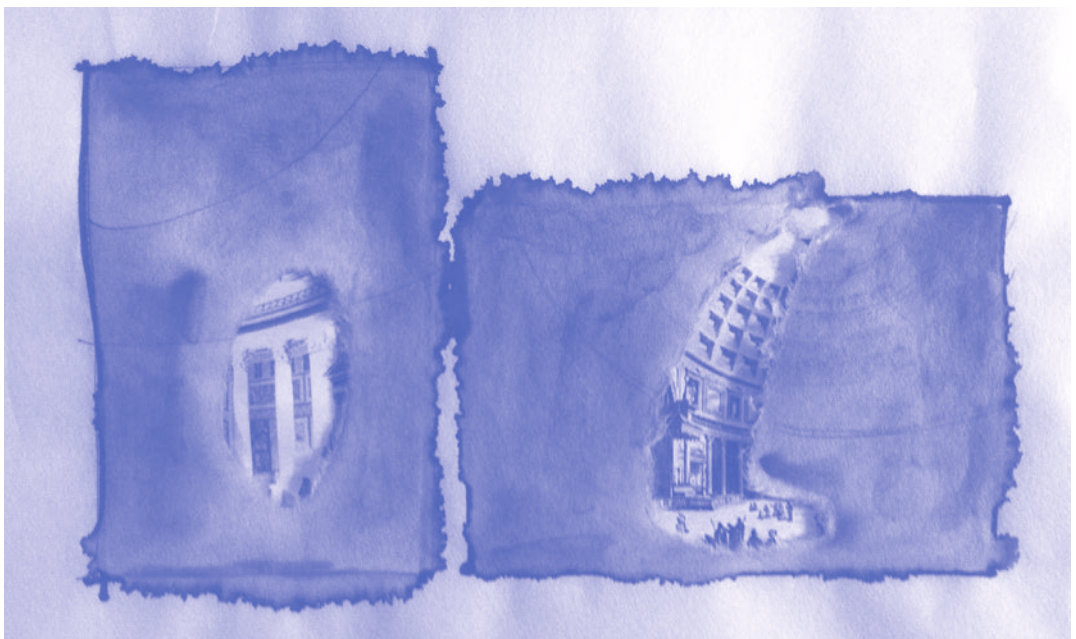
The *Avery Review* asked a group of thinkers and designers to each propose a single precedent project—represented by an image and short text describing its significance—that has informed their understanding of “climate.” Taken together, the wide-ranging and incisive responses begin to offer something of a cognitive map of how designers might imagine climate anew.

FEDERICA M. SOLETTA'S  
*OCULUS*

Federica M. Soletta's 2013 *Oculus*—an iterative sequence of visual inquiries into what is probably the most significant aperture in the history of architecture (the circular lacuna at the summit of the Pantheon in Rome)—stands, for me, as a paradigmatic instance of generative obliquity at the intersection of art and research. A hybrid sketchbook/lab-report in the form of a scroll 30 feet in width and 24 inches high, *Oculus* offers a highly original window (series of windows?) onto the nexus of weather, thought, and the built environment. Roofs are, of course, “epistemological,” in that the history of being sheltered from the elements is inextricable from the history of rational inquiry. By these lights, holes in roofs (and particularly an intentional hole 27 feet in diameter and originally gilded at its lip)

merit close attention in any effort to triangulate building, dwelling, and thinking. It is also the case, however, that holes—which are, after all, conditions of local absence—are difficult to see clearly. In this sense, *Oculus* can be understood as a visual aid: it works as a viewer for a key void. Notable, for those of us who concern ourselves with climatological cyclicities and secular drift, is the way in which the Pantheon's oculus transforms the interior space of this significant edifice into a microcosm of celestial dynamics, registering the seasonal and diurnal movements of the sun as the play of light and shadow on the circumferating walls, even as the entire structure is made to center on an axis of direct columnar access to the rain and snow.

Is there a moral? One can always try: *Those who build glass houses leave home to throw stones. Those who close their temples to the sky eventually need smokestacks.*





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