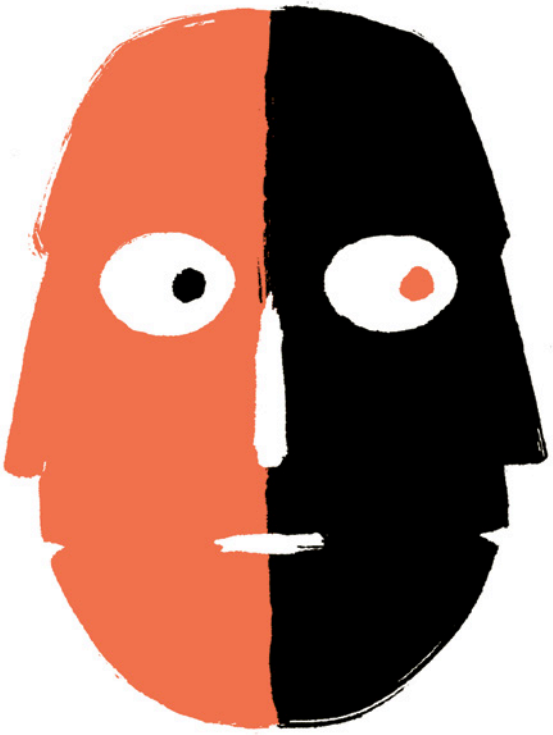

Originally headed "From the Editor," this was first published on the back cover of the third issue of *Real Review*, a recently launched architectural quarterly from London-based REAL foundation. Its timely sentiments, while not entirely overlapping our own, seemed well-worth re-publishing here for the sake of expanding a dialog regarding aims and motives in and for publishing, generally. We are grateful for the go-ahead to reprint something so recent.

www.real-review.org

Cover: Mascot heads from the covers of *Real Review* #s 1–4, 2017, © Real Review.

BoTSL#13 2017 SEP 02 11:56 AM

The Ancient Greeks believed there were two models of rule, democracy and tyranny. These were perpetually locked in a cycle of alternating power exchanges. Like the passage of the tides, there was a rhythmic, even predictable flow to their ascendancy: one system would rise, swell, peak, and then, eventually, ebb and recede. After a time, the old system would return. Sometimes these periods of rule were very long, and sometimes they were very short, but the cycle itself was considered eternal. When democracy dominated, the interests of the people were upheld and this was known as politics (after the word for the city-state, *polis*). But when aristocrats, autocrats, or mafia-like families came to power, the state suffered and the period was considered one of economics (*oikonomikos*, from *oikos*, or clan-household).

We tend to think of economics and politics as existing simultaneously. But if we imagine instead that they are ideological opposites, then whichever order happens to reign at a given moment is key to defining the contemporary condition. This dichotomy is also useful for interpreting the cause of certain kinds of public behavior; at first glance xenophobia, intolerance, nationalism or racism might appear to be political problems. Yet they all arise when one group feels its prosperity is at threat from another. In this sense, they are forms of tyranny—attitudes that prioritize economics (the principles of limited or private profit) over politics (the principles of the common good).

Aristotle and Plato differ in their details, but generally agree democrats promote stability and unity, avoid mob rule, and suppress privilege; by contrast, tyrants pursue private wealth, land ownership, and control by military force. Because the two ideologies are fundamentally and irreconcilably opposed, the moment when the tide turns is always marked by violence, or civil war. The Greek word for this was *stasis*—pausing civilization to resolve power disputes.

This concept of stasis captures the current state of global civilization. The world order is gradually slowing down, and democracy is grinding to a deadlock as politics becomes paralyzed by the overwhelming effect of dominant economic ideologies. In the West, a long era that began with political reform and produced mass enfranchisement, civic philanthropy, and social democracy (politics), is over. We are now almost half a

century into an era of greed and inequality (economics). The hope that the 2008 financial crisis would bring profound change — that rule by politics would replace rule by economics — has been thwarted. A general misunderstanding about who is to blame for this, and of the importance of non-economic solutions to our situation, has resulted in many national populations becoming extremely polarized, engaged in intense, localized struggles for power, and practically irreconcilable.

It is not just the West that has become incapacitated by domestic disputes. Almost every nation on the planet is currently engaged in some form of extreme civil conflict, on a sliding scale from protest, unrest, and disobedience, to armed rebellions, militia insurgencies, and wars. The effect is universal regional instability, or the condition of global civil war.

Over the last few months, the general mood has been that things were better the way they were before. Blunders have been made; we should backtrack as quickly as possible. Exactly which past you wish to recreate depends on your politics; visions range from pre-War nationalism through Cold War xenophobia to mid-century social democracy. A very large number of people have the modest aspiration to pretty much return to life as it was before last summer. The tone of public discourse is overwhelmingly vindictive and gloomy, even amongst recent victors.

Disaffected with democracy, fed up with economic stagnation, even bored by new fashions and consumer electronics, ennui is pervasive. The material evidence that life on this planet is improving — child mortality rates and absolute poverty levels are still falling — are drowned out by the feeling that progress has stalled. The search for something drastically different, a real alternative, has begun.

The idea of progress is a relatively recent invention, and many other models of reality existed before it. Renaissance thinkers believed that the past was utopian but had mysteriously degraded — Italians with streets made of mud and no running water kept discovering Roman marvels of art and engineering such as air-conditioned housing, gravity-defying stadia and aqueducts accurate to an inch over a mile. These thousand-year-old ruins seemed like those of an impossibly advanced alien civilization.

Antiquity was held up as the height of human perfection, against which the present era seemed to be the result of some horrible historical mistake. By learning to imitate the past, the hope was to reboot the present. Archaeology became a kind of science fiction. The future was not ahead, but underfoot.

We can never go back. However, by analyzing the material evidence of the past, and understanding the systems, objects and spaces it has produced in the present, we can use it to imagine new futures.

That is the essence of the review as a format of writing, and indeed it is the mission of this magazine: to look backward in order to move forwards; to search for the seeds of a new political project and its worldview from within the existing order.

*