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**Magazine del Festival  
dell'Architettura**

ricerche e progetti  
sull'architettura e la città

research and projects on  
architecture and the city

## **FAMagazine. Research and projects on architecture and the city**

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Two issues per year, out of the four expected, are built using call for papers that are usually announced in spring and autumn.

The call for papers provide authors with the possibility to choose between two types of essays:

- a) short essays between 12,000 and 14,000 characters (including spaces), which will be submitted directly to the double blind peer review procedure;
- b) long essays greater than 20,000 characters (including spaces) whose revision procedure is divided into two phases. The first phase involves sending an abstract of 5,000 characters (including spaces) of which the Direction will assess the relevance to the theme of the call. Subsequently, the authors of the selected abstracts will send the full paper which will be submitted to the double blind peer review procedure.

For the purposes of the assessment, the essays must be sent in Italian or English and the translation in the second language must be sent at the end of the assessment procedure.

In any case, for both types of essay, the evaluation by the experts is preceded by a minimum evaluation by the Direction and the Editorial Staff. This simply limits to verifying that the proposed work possesses the minimum requirements necessary for a publication like FAMagazine.

We also recall that, similarly to what happens in all international scientific journals, the opinion of the experts is fundamental but is of a consultative nature only and the publisher obviously assumes no formal obligation to accept the conclusions.

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The procedure for submitting articles is explained on the [SUBMISSIONS](#) page

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### number 47 january-march 2019. Mis-known Masters

At the end of the Fifties the young collaborators and editors of Casabella, directed by Ernesto Nathan Rogers, published articles and edited monographic numbers with the aim of contributing to the revaluation and the "discovery" of some masters that historiography and criticism had marginalized, if not completely ignored, such as Loos, Berlage, Tessenow, Perret.

The main objective of Casabella was to re-read their lesson and their position, thus providing an operative point of view to know the thought of these architects, considered at the time, proto rationalists, proto modern, if not even anti-modern.

Similarly to that experience, we set ourselves the task of investigating the work of some masters whose contribution is not known or has declined, or has been sunk by one of those phenomena of repression that have gone through the history of Modern architecture. and in which many ways considered anomalous compared to the scene of presumed historiographical, critical and operational certainties have been ignored.

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## Architecture and narration. The architect as storyteller?

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This issue of the homonymous call for papers was conceived by the Direction and curated by Giuseppina Scavuzzo. The articles were submitted to the Double Blind Peer Review procedure (see table on page 6).

**Giuseppina Scavuzzo**  
**Architecture and narration: the architect as *storyteller*?**

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**Abstract**

Since we are deeply involved in the era of communication, the interest in the relationship between architecture and forms of narration is not surprising. Amongst the many declinations in which the relationship can be interpreted, it's successful to combine architecture with a concept of contemporary communication: *storytelling*. Architecture and narration maintain, however, a deeper bond if we consider them in terms of the boundaries they create between humans and the real world. The common hermeneutic tension of construction and narration/poetize can be fully understood in the work of the architect-poet, or those architects whose work also includes poetic composition. The issue is how the application of contemporary techniques of *storytelling* influences the sense of hermeneutic narrative of the architecture, considering that the effectiveness of storytelling seems to reside more in explanatory simplification than in problematic complexity

**Parole Chiave**

Storytelling — Narration — Narrative — Ricoeur

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**1. Architecture and narration.**

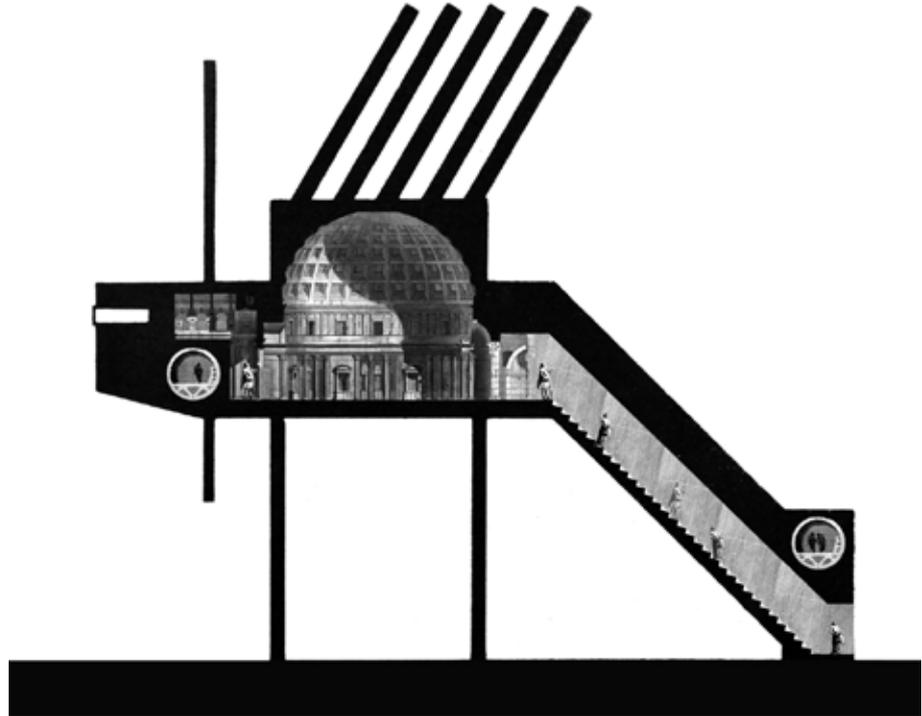
There seem to be motives in common between the two activities of construction and narrative, since both put themselves between – *inter* or *intra* – humans and the world. In this perspective, Architecture and narrative, seemingly distant in the materials with which they operate – stone and words, space and time, the heaviness of the one and the lightness of the other – do share various significant similarities.

Research and studies in the two disciplines of architecture and the human sciences have extensively analysed the associations between literary texts and the architectural imagery contained therein or, vice versa, between architectural texts and the literary imagery that inspired it.

But, beyond the resultant mutual influence or even the structural analogy, it is interesting to check the potential connexion of two actions, construction and narrative, which are also two forms of interpretive experiences.

Cultural psychologists, anthropologists, semiologists, and linguists have described, in several ways, the very human approach to organizing experience in a narrative form to build collective meaning. A sort of irreducible predisposition is recognized based on the very human need to bring shape and meaning to reality and personal actions, to communicate the meanings perceived in experience by correlating the past, present and future<sup>1</sup> transforming whatever has happened into a story.

In this dimension of interpretive, hermeneutic experience, narrative is not so distant from architecture, in the sense that it is an activity which humans have always carried out when building shelters: lessening the indeterminacy of their places by imposing a measure of the body's material needs, with forms that reflect a sense attributed to this being in the world,



**Fig. 1**

Piranesian Security. Collage based on John Hejduk's 'Security' project and interior. Illustrations by Piranesi. Student: Matthew Darmour-Paul, Iowa State University - Department of Architecture.

to the gesture of inhabiting the Earth.

The way in which narrative operates on time and construction on space are analogous since, as Paul Ricoeur wrote, 'narrative and construction bring about a similar kind of inscription, the one in the endurance of time and the other in the enduringness of materials.'<sup>2</sup> The 'logical abyss' between time told and space constructed is progressively reduced if one considers that space and time are both twofold: there is geometric space (which can be defined in terms of Cartesian coordinates) and the space of the places of life (which surround the human body), just as there is chronological time measured by clocks and time spent. The space of places lived becomes time and memory, just as a story gains space in narrative: 'The story of life unfolds in a space of life.' According to Ricoeur, both the act of narrative and the architectural act represent a 'provisional victory over the ephemeral': the first subtracts an event from the flow of time to become a memory, the second embodies the requirements and functions of inhabiting adapting them through construction operations. Each building is a living memory (and story) of its being built, the way in which it translated inhabiting into construction.

Ricoeur very clearly defined the singular relationship between construction and narrative in *Architecture and Narrativity*.<sup>3</sup> This essay was presented at the 19th International Exhibition of the Milan Triennale in 1994 dedicated to 'Identity and Differences', which hosted, along with Ricoeur, Jean-François Lyotard. Called to reflect upon the crisis of the certainties of modernity and the city that represents the outcome, both indicated narrative know-how as an option. Lyotard referred to a post-modernist narrativity, by then on the wane, that questioned the very legitimacy of the project, seen as the expression of a rationality that presented itself as totalizing since it opted for a form that defied otherness. Instead, Ricoeur referred to a hermeneutic narrative in which architectural design, after the fall of the Modern Movement dogmas, could again experience legitimacy in its potential narrative sense with respect to the human need to inhabit<sup>4</sup>.

In *Architecture e Narrativity*, starting from the parallel inscription in a mixed time and space (chronological and lived time/geometric space and place) a correspondence is established between construction and narrative by transposing onto the architectural plane categories already explained in his work *Time and Narrative*, and applied to the art of narrative: *prefiguration*, *configuration* and *refiguration*.

The ‘prefiguration’ of narrative is the phase in which the story is inserted into everyday life, in conversation, and has not yet been formalized in literature. The ‘prefiguration’ of the architectural act would coincide with the idea of inhabiting (in a declared resonance of Heidegger<sup>5</sup>), with the need for shelter that defines the internal space of the dwelling.

Instead, construction would be the equivalent space of narrative ‘configuration’, which takes place through the construction of a weft, or a plot, in which facts find order and coherence.

In the third phase, ‘refiguration’, which for narrative is produced through reading (with the expectations and reactions of the reader), for architecture is still achieved through inhabiting. In the first phase, inhabiting is the presupposition of the building, in the third it is the consequent and resultant condition. This is a reflective inhabiting that replicates the building and is a memory of it.

This sensible parallel reveals a profound analogy between narrative and construction in the relationship that both entertain with life, of rooting and elevation at the same time. The rooting consists in the existential need that leads humans to speak and live, the elevation consists in the raising of that need through the form assumed by the word and inhabiting, becoming respectively literature and architecture.

The reflective inhabiting of the third stage is one hoped-for, which Ricoeur called architecture to return to, recovering the hermeneutic value of the project, its adherence – at least as much as narrative – to a vital level of existence, is ‘an act of a human being already alive.’

In this adherence to life, word and architecture come to synonymy and eventually coincide.

In *Stanzas*<sup>6</sup>, Giorgio Agamben described Western thought as being split between philosophy and poetry, between *thinking-word* and *poetic-word*. A division brought about by a misunderstanding, since every philosophy is, like poetry, an aspiration to joy and every poem is a tool for knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to reconstruct the broken word.

The unit of the poem, Agamben reminds us, is the “stanza” which in Italian means room. The stanza is the portion or verse of a poetic composition, just as the room is the minimum unit of the interior of a work of architecture.

This Italian coincidence of significance is also present in other languages: in Arabic *bayt* means home, tent, but also verse, even indicating the main verse of a poem.

The Italian poets of the 13<sup>th</sup> century called ‘stanza’ the essential core of their poetry because in the poet’s ‘stanza’, understood as his room, desire was translated into words, into verse. The room is an ideal space in which it is possible to take possession, in the form of a vision and a word, of what the subject could not possess merely through the *thinking-word*, through philosophy. It is the place where the fissure between desire and its elusive object, which is also self-knowledge, comes to heal.

Thus, the room/stanza contains three different dimensions: it is the environment to which the poet retires, that accommodates and makes possible the relationship between the poet and his desire; it is the inner space from

which the poetic-word flows; finally, it is the form assumed, resulting in writing, the verse through which existential experience communicates. The *stanza* as the unit of poetry and the *room* of architecture are the concretization and representation – in some way the (poetic) narrative – of the opportunity for self-possession.

The possible structural analogies between architecture and poetic tale emerge in many texts of poets who have described the compositional process as construction, often using architecture as a metaphor for composition. Edgar Allan Poe, in *The Philosophy of Composition* describes the method he used to write his most famous poem *The Raven* as a matter of calculation and exactitude, a construction in which no detail could be explained by chance or intuition.<sup>7</sup>

Analogously, Paul Valéry describes the genesis of the greatest of his *Charmes*, *The Graveyard by the Sea*, with its abstract rhythmic figure, later transformed into a metrical structure, the decasyllable verse, and in the end ‘clad’ in words. The poetic root is indicated in an original act of construction as an expression of the human condition prior to writing.<sup>8</sup> This construction/poetic act aspires to bring the arbitrary disorder of the world to a need for form and measure, which is that extreme bid to live that poetry ultimately urges.<sup>9</sup>

In *Eupalinos*, the same attempt is expressly asserted as a vital tension to construct works of architecture.<sup>10</sup> The outcome is not taken for granted, the attempt is always teetering on the brink of failure, the tension never placated, driving relentlessly towards a deeper awareness in things. In architecture’s disquietude dwells the forever unrequited Eros of poetry.

The common hermeneutic tension of construction and narrating/poetize can be fully understood in the work of a specific type of poet, the architect-poet, or those architects whose work also includes poetic composition. It includes it because poetic expression exceeds the personal existential horizon, blends with the architect’s work, brings form in a different material to the research into the human condition and its meaning.

Le Corbusier, who on the ID documents obtained with his acquisition of French nationality in 1930, asked to be defined a ‘man of letters’, for eight years worked on composing his own poetic work, *Le poème de l’angle droit*<sup>11</sup>. This book, which consists of verses and drawings, was published in 1955 in a limited number of copies, signed by the author and featuring original lithographs.

The poem is divided into seven zones (all of which have a title and a corresponding colour, and are in turn subdivided into chapters) summarized at the beginning of the text in a diagram of the divisions that the author named *Iconostasis*.

This is a structure that can be paralleled with the arrangement of a typical Le Corbusier-style work of architecture given by the superimposition of free floors in a multi-storey building made possible by a load-bearing frame.<sup>12</sup>

Some of the lithographs for the poem represent the fundamental principles of the Swiss-French master’s architecture: the 24-hour solar day cycle, the Unité d’habitation system, and the *Modulor*, culminating in the representation of one of his best-known emblems, a monument built at Chandigarh, *The Open Hand*.

However, apart from the structural analogy and the inclusion of architectural references, it is the sense of the work that makes it an integral part of the ‘Patient Search’ carried out through architecture.

The meaning of the poem is condensed in the title of the work: the condi-

tion of man in the world defined by the right angle that his vertical body forms with the horizontality of the ground line. The increasing and decreasing curve of the solar cycle meanders along this line, with time being marked by day and night, and the seasons. Symbolically, the right angle is destined to revolve upon death.

The task of humans is to reach full awareness of this condition inscribing it in space and time: only a profound self-awareness can elevate humans from to a superior condition, from rooting to elevation, coming back to Ricoeur. This is demonstrated by the reference to the iconostasis, the historiated screen that in churches separates the nave from the altar, shielding the Eucharistic rites that only priests and initiates can attend, but whose images represent and reveal the path of salvation to the faithful. Similarly, the poem promises in a symbolic, cryptic form, a path towards salvation, not in the afterlife, but attainable through a struggle that must occur internally within humans: the freeing of awareness, the alchemical process that the verses of the poem refer to, is a poetic metaphor: “Mistaking too many mediate causes/mistaking our lives (...) Thus do not condemn those/who wish to take their share of/risks in life. Tolerate/the fusion of metals/the alchemies in any case commit you to nothing (...) A new time has begun/a phase a limit a transition/And thus we shall not/have mistaken our lives”.<sup>13</sup> Another architect-poet was John Hejduk whose poems were published in the two collections *Such Places as Memory: Poems 1953-1996*<sup>14</sup> and *Lines No Fire Could Burn*.<sup>15</sup>

Also in Hejduk’s poems it is possible to trace the structural similarities with his architectural compositions, in particular, the repetition and seriality that characterize the series of geometric and compositional experiments of the *Texas Houses*, *Diamond Houses* and *Wall Houses*, like the infinite zoomorphic variations of his small-scale ‘vagabond architecture’.<sup>16</sup> In the last of the poems in *Such Places as Memory*, entitled *Sentences on the House and Other Sentences*, we find, in a long series of personifications of the house (the *Sentences on the House* number 150), the continuous reference to the home as a place of life and death (in the remaining 82 *Other Sentences* Death is the protagonist) defined by the verticality or horizontality of a passage on the threshold of the house.

As in Le Corbusier’s “right angle”, verticality and horizontality define in an extreme synthesis the relationship between, *inter*, man and his presence on earth: “The height of a door of a house is for man’s entry/the width of a door of a house is for man’s exit: one dimension for life/the other dimension for death.”<sup>17</sup>

Everything that takes place in the house is a liminal ritual,<sup>18</sup> its meaning suspended between life and death. The same liminal ritual became architecture in the *Wall House* series of projects, fulfilling in the passage from the Past (as Hejduk called the service spaces of the house) to the Future (the ‘spaces served’) via the Present, the wall-threshold.

Here, the full inscription of construction and narrative is realized, returning to Ricoeur, the one in the substance of the other, the one in the enduringness of the material, and the other in the endurance of time.

Hejduk often subverted the conventional relationship between the project and the theoretical text that accompanied it for comparison and reciprocal verification. In his projects animated by personages who each bear their own story (the titles alone evoke this: *The House of the Twins* and their *Mother’s House*, *The House of the Inhabitant Who Refused to Participate*, *The House of the Suicide* and *The House of the Mother of the Suicide*, etc.)

the literary practice is directly incorporated in the architectural practice. As highlighted by Stan Allen, the fact that various works of architecture designed by Hejduk came to be realized by students or other architects reveals a new relationship between author/architect accentuating the distance of the architect from the execution of the work<sup>19</sup>. As for a literary work, whether theatrical or musical, the authenticity of these works of architecture is guaranteed by the text/drawing, which means that they can be carried out at a distance of time and space and told even without the physical presence of the author.

To renew and to be told each time is the question of sense of which these architectures are, just like Hejduk's poems, "Silent Witnesses"<sup>20</sup>, a question posed to each of us so that "we shall not have mistaken our lives", as Le Corbusier would say.

## 2. The architect as storyteller?

Given this interpretation, which establishes a parallel between architecture and narrative/poetry as hermeneutical experiences, the call, of which this number of FAM is the outcome, contained a provocation or at least raised a doubt, expressed by the interrogative form of the title.

In the era of communication in which we are deeply involved, amongst the many declinations in which the relationship between architecture and forms of narration can be interpreted, it seems to be very successful the idea of linking architecture to a form or, better, a technique of narration, which is key to contemporary communication: storytelling.

To explain what issues and perplexities this approach can produce, we proceed in an inferential form starting from two premises.

The first premise is that, as we have tried to describe above, the narrative and the architecture share the answer to primary needs, including that of interpreting the meaning and describing the reality of man's being in the world.

The second premise is that, during the twentieth century, the structures, the narrative plans, the languages of the different narrative forms were unveiled, dismantled and reassembled. This allowed the practice of telling stories to become a strategy of persuasive communication. This allowed the practice of telling stories to become a persuasive communication strategy in political, economic and business area.

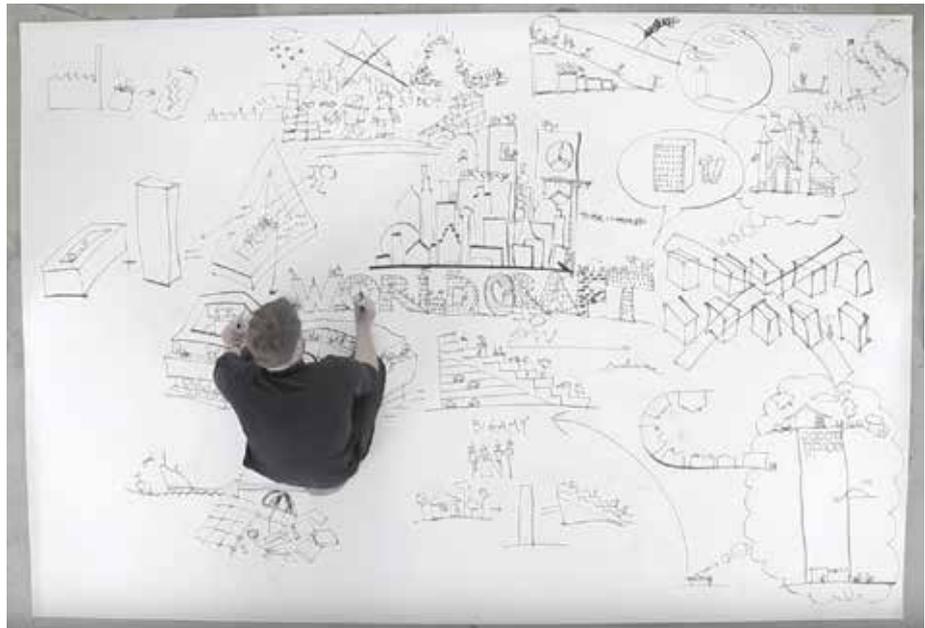
This is in fact the most common meaning of the term storytelling in Italy (and here we assume it in this sense) unlike the English-speaking countries where it literally and generically means tell stories.

In these different fields the figure of "storytelling managers" has been affirmed: professionals of the narration at the service of the interests of their clients, who can tell stories so well that often understanding what is true becomes difficult.

Given the two premises, the question is: if his traveling companion, the narrative, has gone to meet this destiny, successful but also compromising (at least compared to the hypothesized hermeneutical purpose), what happens to architecture?

Storytelling, after spreading in other area, today comes to be proposed as a useful tool for the architect. Web sites for architects and even different professional orders promote storytelling courses for their members.

This seems to suggest that the architect should not only update his tools to manage communication with the agents involved with him in the transformation of the physical context (public administrators, private clients, citizenship) but become a storytelling manager himself, able to communicate,



**Fig. 2**

Bjarke Ingels' "World Craft" explains how architecture can turn fiction into reality.

disseminate, explain and market his project.

The question that should arise is if and how the application of contemporary techniques of storytelling influences the sense of hermeneutic narrative of the architecture linked to the human attitude to living. A narrative that, as seen, mainly asks questions, making architecture a potentially critical practice towards the given conditions, while the effectiveness of storytelling seems to reside more in explanatory simplification than in problematic complexity.

The "active readers" of the FAM, those who in addition to reading the magazine propose their position by answering the call, apart from some exceptions, have dribbled provocation, often avoiding the contemporary and recalling *ante litteram* examples of storytelling in architecture. This is the case of the ideas of a Mediterranean home, of the holiday home, of the Italian house with its "*conforto*" told by a master of storytelling *ante litteram*: Giò Ponti, about which Lucia Miodini's article talks about.

Summarizing one can recognize here at least three ways to decline the relationship between architecture and narrative.

A group of authors has described architecture itself as a text, as a story. This is the case of the reading of some Le Corbusier's works made by Aliscia Mozzato, of the narratological analysis applied by Filippo Bricolo to the architecture of Carlo Scarpa, of *La Scarzuola* by Tomaso Buzzzi, interpreted as an architectural/autobiographical tale by Gregorio Froio, and of the intervention on the existing architecture, described by Chiara Barbieri as an exercise in rewriting architecture, between pre-text and con-text.

Another group of articles deals with ways in which architecture can be told. The authors recognize the value of a project to these stories, not only because they are interpretations and re-elaborations (like any story) but because through selection and sometimes transfiguration, these stories provide material for other, different projects.

This is the case of the architectural description, a literary genre very common in the past, of which Francesca Belloni deals, while, crossing architecture as a story and story on architecture, Anna Conzatti deals with the analogy between story and architecture in their position between space and time.

Within this group, the text of Ausias Gonzalez Lisorge occupies a place

in itself. In addition to telling stories, there is the tale of History. The way History is told makes History.

This of course would lead us to dramatically expand the text to more strictly historical issues. But the article by Gonzalez Lisorge considers the history, or rather different, famous, histories of modern architecture, from a peculiar point of view, that of the way in which the building's resistant structure was told, confronting structure in a formal sense, structure as a result of linguistic structuralism and structure as a resistant part. The way in which architects tell the structure (intended as a resistant or supporting structure), its evolution in relation to the evolution of the formal structure, affects the role that the resistant structure continues to have in conformation of architecture. Conversely, the use of terms and concepts inherent in structuralism affects the way in which architects describe the very form of architecture as a formal structure, as a system of signs, a code of languages. A third group of articles describes the tale as a form itself of the architect's project: it is the case of Superstudio's tales, which Giovanni de Flego deals with, which become autonomous and alternative to building, linguistic objects capable of prefiguring reality; it is the case of the text of Zissis Kotionis described by Fabiano Micocci as an assemblage, and it is also the case of the counter-story of the territorial project in some experiments of the twentieth century in which Marco Moro analyzes the role of narration. Gianluca Burgio's article, instead, deals with the contemporary use of storytelling, and describes the widening of the discursive strategies available to the architect (also the comic book, just to give an example) that allows complex reading able to reflect the status of multiplicity of architecture.

Finally, Kostas Tsiambaos proposes to us a real fantastic story that aims to make us think about how a part of storytelling of the architects involves the construction of their biography and how the influential role of the architectures is indebted to a persuasive technique that is not limited to telling architecture but often places it in exceptional biographies.

An emblematic case is that of Le Corbusier but the same happens for contemporaries like Rem Koohaas or Bjarke Ingels. The architect as a great storyteller, even of himself. To the extent that the self-narration is (as described by Tsiambaos) also self-construction, self-formation, *Bildung*, then this storytelling maintains the link with the original construction as a hermeneutical experience, as a research project.

Here is a trajectory, an itinerary, a wandering of the project's own discourse. It is produced, in that discursive field that measures the tension between architecture and narration, between architecture and storytelling, the figure of the "itinerancy" already suggested by Ricoeur.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990)

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *La memoria, la storia, l'oblio* (Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 2003)

<sup>3</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Architettura e narritività*, in *Identità e differenze* (Milan: Electa, 1996, vol. 1) reprinted in *Leggere la Città: Quattro testi di Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Franco Riva (Rome: Castelvechi, 2013)

<sup>4</sup> Franco Riva, *Decostruzione e narrazione*, in *Leggere la città: Quattro testi di Paul Ricoeur*, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Costruire abitare pensare", in *Saggi e discorsi*, edited by G. Vattimo, Mursia, Milan 1980.

<sup>6</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Stanze. La parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale* (Turin: Einaudi, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Philosophy of Composition', first ed. in *Graham's Magazine* (April 1846).

<sup>8</sup> Paul Valéry, *Le Cimetière marin* (Paris: Émile-Paul Frères, 1920).

<sup>9</sup> 'Le vent se lève ... Il faut tenter de vivre!' Paul Valéry, *Le Cimetière marin*, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> 'I am the act. You are the matter, you are the force, you are the desire, but you are separate.' Paul Valéry, *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte* (Paris: Gallimard, 1921).

<sup>11</sup> Le Corbusier, *Le poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Edition Verve, 1955).

<sup>12</sup> An attempt to rediscover correspondences between the structure of a poem and a specific work of architecture, the Governor's Palace of Chandigarh, was made in my PhD thesis, published as Giuseppina Scavuzzo, 'Iconostasi: la forma e i segni', in *Memoria, ascesi, rivoluzione: studi sulla rappresentazione simbolica in architettura*, ed. by L. Semerani (Venice: Marsilio, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> trans. by Hylton, Kenneth, in 'Le Poème de l'angle droit': Le Corbusier', in *Le Corbusier and the Architecture of Reinvention*, ed. by Mohsen Mostafavi (London: AA Print Studio, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> John Hejduk, *Such Places as Memory*, with a preface by David Shapiro (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998). This is the first collection of poems by Hejduk published outside the architectural writings in which many examples were included. Forty of his poems had already appeared in a limited edition from 1980 entitled *The Silent Witnesses and Other Poems* (New York: The Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies, 1980).

<sup>15</sup> John Hejduk, *Lines No Fire Could Burn* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> See the definition given by Anthony Vidler, 'Vagabond Architecture', in *the Architectural Uncanny. Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> John Hejduk, *Such Places as Memory*, op. cit., p.125.

<sup>18</sup> 'These last prose sequences of personified houses constitute a liminal ritual that any anthropologist would wish to prolong.' David Shapiro, *John Hejduk: Poetry as Architecture, Architecture as Poetry*, foreword in *Such Places as Memory*, op. cit. *Liminal* is defined in anthropology as the central phase of suspension between two different conditions in the rites of passage that, in various cultures, mark fundamental discontinuities in individuals' existence.

<sup>19</sup> Stan Allen, "Nothing but Architecture" in *Hejduk's Chronotope*, edited by K. Michael Hays, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> From the mid-1970s Hejduk worked on several projects under the title "Silent Witnesses" developed in both architecture and poetry: *Silent Witnesses*, exhibited in Venice in 1976, is a project consisting of five parts, with five distinct models. Each model is the representation of a period of one hundred and twenty years: "They are all part of one single model, as if time zoomed back into space. The model is a representation of the abstract concepts of time and thought." John Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa: Works 1947-1983*, ed. by Kim Shkapich (New York: Rizzoli, 1985).

*The Silent Witnesses* is the title of the photo-essay published in 1976 in a volume of the journal *Parametro* dedicated to the 50-year anniversary of the final issue of the journal *L'Esprit Nouveau*, edited by Le Corbusier. John Hejduk, 'The Silent Witnesses', in *Parametro*, 49-50 (1976). *Silent Witnesses* returned in poetry, in 1980, when Hejduk published *The Silent Witness and Other Poems*, op. cit.

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Chiara Barbieri

**Archite(x)ture: texts and pre-texts of architecture for ruin**

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**Abstract**

The contribution is about the concept of architecture as a text, analyzing its syntactic structures and its semantic questions. Specifically, it is emphasized how the project for the ruin establishes a dialogue with the ancient remains on the basis of a language and a common sense, through interpretations, resemantizations and integrations. The combination between architecture and semiology allows us to identify - case by case - possible design syntaxes in the archaeological field. Abandoning the idea that the architect should only guarantee the survival and the transmission of historical evidence with minimal, reversible and recognizable interventions, it is necessary to define a methodological approach that returns to the ruins a new aesthetic, cultural and use value.

**Keywords**

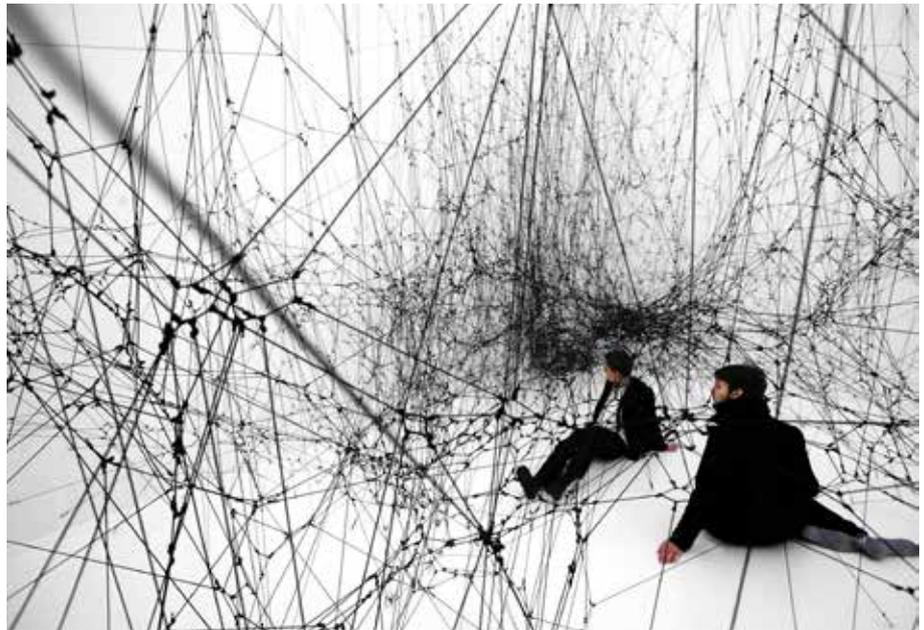
Writing — Ruins — Palimpsest

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Architecture is a form of language that aims to transmit messages: in the architectural text, observes Luciano Semerani, there is an intentional use of forms, a decision-making process that derives from the desire to achieve certain effects. Also the architectural work can be understood as a text to be decoded through the analysis of its syntactic structures and semantic questions, in order to reconstruct the process of formal choices that lead to a narrative construction<sup>1</sup>. The combination between the narration and the architectural field turned out to be open and complex, as it is able to constitute a discursive system within which to meet different opinions and orientations<sup>2</sup>. As Vittorio Gregotti writes, in fact, the story is one of the most concrete materials for architecture: «la narrazione architettonica (ma non mi pare molto diverso per gli altri tipi di narrazione) è un procedere dentro, per mezzo di un soggetto verso un contenuto che è anzitutto disciplinare, e muove attraverso di esso e per mezzo di esso, verso qualcosa che può divenire nel significato, oggi, domani o forse tra molto tempo, per gruppi limitati o per ampie collettività, senza che ciò possa essere in alcun modo predisposto»<sup>3</sup>.

The same idea of writing is nothing but the metaphor «dell'incessante spostamento e della conseguente, continua ricollocazione di materiali tematici e motivi formali, soggetti a una costante evoluzione»<sup>4</sup>, according to Franco Purini.

All architecture is presented as *text*, but only few cases are examples of *writing*: this is composed of *signs* but the difference between the linguistic sign and the architectural sign lies in the fact that in architecture there are no arbitrary signs because they have essentially a function - formal or structural - and they are always motivated, always present.



**Fig. 1**  
14 Billions, Bonniers Konsthall,  
Stockholm, T. Saraceno, 2009.

On architecture as a text much has been written, especially since the eighties of the twentieth century, thanks to the contribution of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida who has largely dealt with this issue. In architectural writing he experiments a writing able to subtract the elaboration of the sense of experience - therefore of thought - to the sovereignty of *logos*, understood as a living word conceived as *a unity of sign and meaning*.

The philosopher argues that we need to start from the spatialization of writing, understood as «irreducible condition of experience (...) constituted in relation to otherness in general, to the environment in which it inscribes, which it traverses, modifying it»<sup>5</sup> and imprinting its own traces for the time to come. If on the one hand, it is possible to think of architecture as text, in which the different scripts have stratified over time, in the same way, observes Derrida, it is possible *to think of architecture as a writing subject*: «we can understand that architecture itself is writing, which is not only written [written on] but also writing, actively writing»<sup>6</sup>.

In light of this dual nature, he rediscovers the characteristics of a multi-dimensional writing capable of retracing the dynamics of experience as a formulation and of a proper syntax that does not depend on the sovereign *logos*<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, it is possible to inscribe and articulate in architectural writing the experience in its multidimensionality<sup>8</sup>, since the factual dimension is included in the structure of the architectural device itself: sequence, open seriality, narrativity, cinematic, dramaturgy, choreography<sup>9</sup>. *Multitemporal* value is added to its multidimensionality: this feature - all within architecture - is even more evident when working within an architectural text, such as the ruins, which necessarily involves a reflection on the parts - existing and missing - to understand the changes over time.

The pre-existing *traces* in which architectural writing is woven, in fact, «no longer have the value of documents, annexed illustrations, preparatory or pedagogical notes»<sup>10</sup> but contribute to constitute «a voluminous text of multiple scripts» - which is architecture -, an «over-sedimented textuality, stratigraphy without bottom, mobile, light and abysmal, stratified»<sup>11</sup>.

This is particularly evident in the case of the project for archeology: this too is the hypothesis of a text that, as Francesco Rispoli writes, «orders successive 'postils'». As these become mute even the initial implant of the text and its final coherence is entrusted to the completion of this 'circular'



**Fig. 2**

Praça Nova Do Archaeological Site Castelo De São Jorge, Lisbon, J. L. Carrilho From Graça and J. Gomes da Silva, 2009.

*rewriting* operation<sup>12</sup>, in which past, present and future coincide.

In contemporary culture, there is the idea that the figure of the architect has the task of acquiring in his own memory the data collected by the historian and the archaeologist, reading them as a dynamic process and seeking the values of permanence precisely in the reasons of the necessary transformations<sup>13</sup> for the design of the new.

In his American lessons, Italo Calvino refers precisely to the theme of transformation as the main and vital characteristic of the literary work: «(...) l'universo si disfa in una nube di calore, precipita senza scampo in un vortice d'entropia, ma all'interno di questo processo irreversibile possono darsi zone d'ordine, porzioni d'esistente che tendono verso una forma, punti privilegiati da cui sembra di scorgere un disegno, una prospettiva. l'opera letteraria», e tanto più l'opera di architettura, «è una di queste minime porzioni in cui l'esistente si cristallizza in una forma, acquista un senso, non fisso, non definitivo, non irrigidito in una immobilità minerale, ma vivente come un organismo»<sup>14</sup>.

Like a literary work, even an architecture is such when it survives its time and transforms plastically and semantically to adapt to the needs and qualities of the epochs that happen to it. This concept is also expressed by Daniel Libeskind in *Radix-Matrix*, when he writes that «if I were sure (...) [that a] work will never be altered, then it would not be a work. A work must be left beyond your life, left exposed to manipulation or reinterpretation. This is the reason why you build. Fragility itself is part of the possibility of the work»<sup>15</sup>. The re-interpretation of which Libeskind speaks follows multiple interpretations that modify both the object of interpretation and the interpreter approach. This is because a relationship is established, a mediation that makes the investigated and interpreted past simultaneous with the present of the interpreter, with the contemporary unknowingly experienced by the designer<sup>16</sup>.

In this way, it is generated what Vittorio Gregotti calls 'semantic thickening' of a work, due to the narrative interpretation / modification of a context: the design of the new, therefore, must be considered in this light, as an interpretation of the relationship of mutual interdependence between *pre-text* (pre-existence, ruin, the past) and *con-text* (the landscape, the present and the history of places), because one manages to describe and give meaning to the other, in an always reversible process.

Alongside the interpretative role of the new project in relation to the pre-existence, however, it is possible to recognize a parallel and active role of

the project: starting from the reading, interpretation and understanding of the work just come to light, the project takes on a further meaning, becoming itself a text, because, as Torsello observes, «il comprendere non è mai solo un atto riproduttivo, ma anche un atto produttivo (...) secondo un ciclo produttore di senso che si rinnova sempre»<sup>17</sup>. It is by virtue of this operation of *rewriting of architecture* that the archaeological ruin can be described as an open and virtual work.

To work with the ruins, it is therefore necessary to carefully understand the orientations that they are able to offer, in order to transform them into sympathetic entities of the contemporary<sup>18</sup>: the way in which this process is implemented can not be univocal because univocal is not the meaning of ruin. Among the possible approaches there is what Andres Hild calls “*continue to write*”: this idea does not worry if continuity or recourse to innovation is necessary, but «is concerned with all its internal reason and not its linear classification»<sup>19</sup>.

The “*continue to write*” considers, in fact, architecture as a form of writing with its own internal rules but open to different interpretations, in which archeology becomes an active and foundational matter: archaeological ruins therefore present themselves as shreds of ancient texts, words that need to be re-circulated, through new languages and new narrative rhythms that have changed over time.

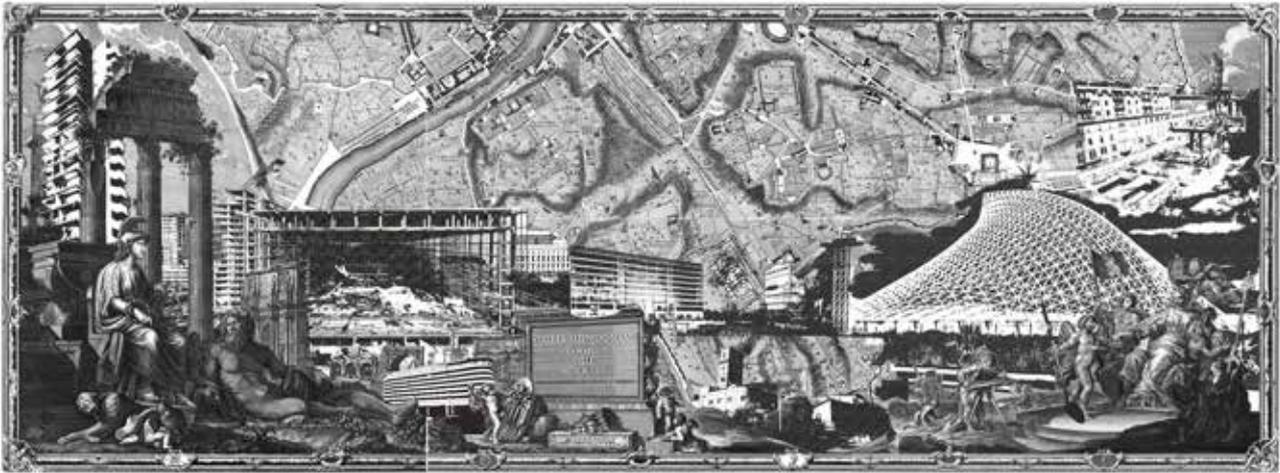
As Raffaele Panella writes, in fact, if we do not consider considerano «i resti (...) come materiale del progetto moderno, per essere più chiari, se essi non sono declinabili nello stesso sistema semiologico dell’architettura, è come se lavorassimo ad una grande tela con dei buchi. Abbiamo fatto un passo avanti notevole nel senso della continuità risolvendo le connessioni, i bordi (su cui in ogni caso c’è ancora tanto da esplorare), ma se dobbiamo entrare (...) in quello che Manacorda chiama “lo spazio archeologico”, con l’obiettivo di comunicare attraverso l’uso e la forma, quale che sia, il senso di quel luogo, non c’è altro modo che considerare i resti, i pezzi (...), come materiali manipolabili dall’architettura, in un rapporto che non può essere altro che di contaminazione. D’altra parte, tutte le grandi opere che testimoniano di una continuità realmente realizzata sono effetto di una contaminazione»<sup>20</sup>.

The great temporal distance between the past of archeology and contemporary poses the question of the language and the different interpretations of stratified texts at the center of the compositional problem. The overlap of the architectural layers manifests itself in the quality of the relationship - or of the relationships - between the new and the existing.

A possible choice, rich in unexplored potential, of designing in the archaeological field is precisely that of accepting the logic of the project itself as a linguistic act that, starting from the objects it has, ie the ruins - the same objects that Claude Lévi-Strauss would call *les moyens du bord*<sup>21</sup> - and from which it turns out to be disposed, it determines new sorting relationships, new forms that are critically modifying and meaningful, just as the *bricoleur* does.

Interacting with the pre-existences, with the relationships between the parts, with the materials and sometimes with «simple clues emerging from the interstices of torn plots»<sup>22</sup>, necessarily involves the selection of some available elements, some signs, to organize them according to criteria and techniques that determine hierarchies and sequences, through a *narrative rhythm*.

These relationships redefine connections with the ruins, revealing the potential and value of the places full of memories, rather than foreseeing a



**Fig. 3**  
La mappa delle sette rovine,  
Stalker, Alienlog, MAAM, 2014.

foregone contrast between old and new. Through the signs of the ancient, significant traces received as an inheritance, the designer identifies the permanencies and *long lasting* elements that determine the project, interpreting their past.

Considering the project as a narration and as a linguistic act, necessarily leads to analyze those that are the basic techniques of this process: the compositional control of new architectural ensembles comprising pre-existences and made up of different parts, linked by strong formal, functional and constructive additions, takes place in this light on the basis of linguistic, syntactic and typological techniques<sup>23</sup>.

Imitation, quotation, autonomy, hypothesis, parataxis, analogy, hybridization and contrast become the tools through which the designer can define a possible path that avoids mechanically finding its definition elements in the pre-existing contextual field and at the same time avoids referring to abstract models without any memory of the place<sup>24</sup>, continuing to write with the past future tales.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Marzo M. (2010) - "Postfazione". In: M. Marzo (a cura di), *L'architettura come testo e la figura di Colin Rowe*. Marsilio Editori, Venezia, 201.

<sup>2</sup> Purini F. (2012) - "Scrivere Architettura". In: F. Rispoli (a cura di), *Dalla forma data alla forma trovata*. Luciano Editore, Napoli, 57.

<sup>3</sup> Gregotti V. (1987) - "Della narrazione in architettura". Casabella, 540, 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Purini F. (2012) - cit., 58.

<sup>5</sup> Vitale F. (2012) - "Tracciare Disegnare Pensare. Jacques Derrida e la scrittura architettonica". In: F. Rispoli (a cura di), cit., 77.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Derrida J., Eisenman P. (1993) - "A proposito della scrittura. Jacques Derrida e Peter Eisenman". Any, 0.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Rispoli F. (2012) - cit., 80-81.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. Tschumi B. (1994) - *Manhattan Transcripts*. Academy Group, London.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. Cuomo A. (2015) - *La fine (senza fine) dell'architettura. Verso un philosophical design*. Deleyva Editore, Roma, 64.

<sup>10</sup> Derrida J. (1986) - "Point de folie - maintenant l'architecture". In: B. Tschumi, *La case vide. La villette*. Architectural Association, London.

<sup>11</sup> Ivi.

<sup>12</sup> Rispoli F. (1990) - *Forma e Ri-forma. Interpretare/ progettare l'architettura*. CUEN, Napoli, 100.

<sup>13</sup> Cao U. (1995) - *Elementi di progettazione architettonica*. Università Laterza Architettura, RomaBari, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. Calvino I. (1988) - *Lezioni americane*. Garzanti, Milano.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. Libeskind D. (1997) - *Radix-Matrix*. Prestel, Munchen-New York.

- <sup>16</sup> «L'essenza dello spirito storico non consiste nella restituzione del passato, ma nella mediazione, operata dal pensiero, con la vita presente». Gadamer H. G. (1986) - *Verità e metodo*. Bompiani, Milano, 207.
- <sup>17</sup> Torsello B.P. (1997) - “Conservare e comprendere”. In: B. Pedretti (1997) - *Il progetto del passato. Memoria, conservazione, restauro, architettura*, cit. in V. Bagnato (2013) - *Nuovi Interventi sul Patrimonio Archeologico. Un contributo alla definizione di un'etica del paesaggio*, Tesi di Dottorato in Proyectos Arquitectonicos, E.T.S.A. di Barcellona (Universidad Politécnica de Cataluña).
- <sup>18</sup> Cfr. Izzo F. (2014) - “Sostenere la civiltà. Contemporaneità e topografia del tempo”. In: A. Capuano (a cura di) (2014) - *Paesaggi di rovine. Paesaggi rovinati*, Quodlibet, Macerata, 276.
- <sup>19</sup> Intervista riportata anche in Hild A. (2012) - “Gedacht/ Gebaut. Valutazioni architettoniche”. *FAMagazine*, 21.
- <sup>20</sup> Panella R. (2014) - “Per la continuità”. In: A. Capuano (a cura di), cit., 66.
- <sup>21</sup> Cfr. Derrida J. (1971) - “La struttura, il segno e il gioco”. In: J. Derrida, *La scrittura e la differenza*. Einaudi, Torino.
- <sup>22</sup> Rispoli F. (2016) - *Forma data forma trovata*. Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, Salerno, 131.
- <sup>23</sup> Cfr. Cao U. (1995) - cit.
- <sup>24</sup> Cfr. Rispoli F. (2016) - cit., 134.

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Francesca Belloni  
**Descriptions of descriptions.  
(Suspended) exercises of written architecture**

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Abstract

Since its pre-classical antecedents, the whole history of architectural thought has been characterised by a descriptive literary form. Though not exhaustive in defining the role and cognitive task of the discipline, the description – as an analytical device – is one of the favourite operative tools of architecture and this is true not just nowadays, at the time of *storytelling*, but has always been so since ancestral times. A long tradition can definitely be traced, whom only recently a name has been given to, perhaps on the wave of that predisposition to self-reflection of architecture on herself, inaugurated with the century of Enlightenment, specified in the Short Twentieth Century and become today *way of thinking*.

Key-words

Description — Architectural design — Architecture

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Since its pre-classical antecedents, the whole history of architectural thought has been characterised by a descriptive literary form, clearly differing from history or criticism and their philological practices. It is a sort of speculative exercise that draws indirectly from the tradition of the Justinian era ekphraseis<sup>1</sup> (Kruft 1988, pp. 19-32), whose model are the Philostratus' *Imagines* of the II-III century AD: by describing sixty-four paintings adorning the portico of a villa near Naples, the author inaugurated the genre of the literary museum and gave shape to the no longer resolved conflict between word and image – declined in the following centuries according to the well-known Orazio's formula *ut pictura poesis*.

We could retrace the history of this practice and its particular fortune in the architectural field, starting from the descriptions of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem contained in the Old Testament<sup>2</sup> to the Tschumi and Koolhaas formal exercises, up to contemporaneity and beyond; it could be possible to identify the typical traits as well as the differences and ambiguities of this genre, practiced by architects and critics as well as by historians, but often also by poets and writers and even by artists – in different guises, but still in a “narrative” form. The *Bird's-Eye View of Paris* given by Victor Hugo, characterised by the presence of multiple glances and an evident taste for the excess, anticipates the imaginative visions of the postmodern city, or even the park of Eduard and Charlotte's *Elective Affinities* and the mastery with which Goethe traces the “pictorial views” concealing the premonitory signs of subsequent events<sup>3</sup>.

Though not exhaustive in defining the role and cognitive task of the discipline, the description – as an analytical device – is one of the favourite operative tools of architecture and this is true not just nowadays, at the time



**Fig. 1**  
Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs*, 1965.

of *storytelling*, but has always been so since ancestral times. A long tradition can definitely be traced, whom only recently a name has been given to, perhaps on the wave of that predisposition to self-reflection of architecture on herself, inaugurated with the century of Enlightenment, specified in the Short Twentieth Century and become today *way of thinking*.

The term *description* indicates both the act of describing and its content. In the sense that we want to consider here, describing is the way architects use to outline their field of investigation: it is a critical work on the reasons of the art, a concrete reflection on the tools of the profession and their usage. The *description* is both a cognitive moment, an analytical device and a technical representation; through the description a process is determined, which presupposes unity between object of observation and modality of the narration or, on the contrary, which operates for discrepancies and deviations.

The history of the architectural description as a “genre”, is complex and comparable to that of literary description. Moreover, like the latter, it plays on a double register: that of the genre itself – a complex labyrinth of *descriptions of descriptions*<sup>4</sup> – and the cognitive one, an only apparently neutral moment (as a product of analysis and observation), but in reality deeply conditioned by the viewpoint of the person who is describing: a sort of meta-text (perhaps meta-architecture) that makes architecture herself the object of the narration, a technique managed by architecture herself in order to stage, represent and speak of herself. Either a discourse developed through designing or, from opposite points of view – but often coincident – a written text in architectural guise.

Yet this intrinsically hermeneutical disposition of architectural descriptions requires an explanation. Unlike what may not happen in literature, where the question of the relationship between *fabula* and *plot* would arise, as well as the doubt that the role of the description is inevitably subaltern to that of the narration, in the architectural field the descriptive practices and variations of the genre over time show a close relationship with the elaboration of the design tools, according to their concrete application (Corbellini, 2016). This means that their meaning originates from the theory of architecture they refer to, as well as from the techniques of the project from time to time employed. Architects often describe objects that later play an active role within design practices, figures capable of triggering unconscious automatisms closely linked to compositional mechanisms; in this sense, analytical processes condition the relationship between description and project, producing, in some cases, a sort of project folding in the

analysis, in some deterministic ways, sometimes, on the contrary, activating virtuous circles in which the intelligibility of the project is built within an imaginative process applied to known figures. Subsequently, it could be superfluous to observe how the “rigorous and magnificent” volume raising above the cube of the novice hall, a crooked pyramid in the centre of the cloister of La Tourette, a volume capable of “playing masterly in light” is actually inseparable from the views of Le Corbusier’s sculptor art of Thoronet; the same applies to the walkway on the roof, with such a high perimeter wall to mark the line of a horizon that refers to other places, where, just as in Thoronet’s sunny Provence, one can meditate, in front of nature, closer to God.

Although much has been said and written about what may be, in such cases, the distinction between description and interpretation, between imagination and repetition, perhaps little has been said on how the description made by Le Corbusier of “his” Thoronet and the narrative process used to put it on stage has affected his project in Éveux.

So then, here it is how that descriptive gesture, which in architecture seemed to be very distant from the productive terms of the project, becomes the design moment, whereas the description assumes a more properly compositional role in the structure of literary narration.

We would like to investigate here how this happens and what purpose it is aimed to, since in many cases the only story we are told is that of the project (or its reasons).

And yet, regarding the meaning and the value of the description: if in literature they often coincide with a digression that assumes a specific role in the economy of the story – by introducing secondary characters and parallel stories or by contributing to characterize the protagonists – how intensely then do the descriptions participate in the definition of the project? This is in fact what we are going to investigate here, that is, if the moment of the description coincides with that of designing and how such coincidence is realized.

Descriptions are mostly part of the cognitive process – in its rational sense and perhaps also in other, less easily codifiable, meanings; they contribute to identify the character of the described object which, while maintaining that the object exists on his own, it is modified by the eye of the person who looks at it and by the vision of the world of those who describe. In fact, describing signifies for instance knowing the objects through their interpretation, but it implies at the same time the ability to identify the object’s typical and essential traits, distinguishing them from the accessory and secondary ones, or vice versa to insist on the latter ones.

Actually, observation and interpretation coexist in the descriptive practice, albeit in different ways from time to time.

For some one the final purpose of the description is the description itself, namely to openly reveal its content and the logical structure of its construction. In this sense, Giorgio Grassi assimilates the description to the analytical classifying processes and to the modalities for organizing facts, classifying objects and comparing the different elements: the description is built up and makes people aware of its own significance through the form it exhibits. Since lacking a status comparable to that of literary descriptions in the development of a story, although it may seem apparently tautological, the meaning and legitimacy of architectural description lies in the specific identification of connotations often taken for granted, as the result of simple observation, and in their exposure in a rational way. According

**Fig. 2**

Les affinités électives, 1996, directed by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani.

to Grassi, from a cognitive point of view architectural descriptions are made significant by a rational display ordering of concepts and a congruous enunciation in relation to a broader cognitive framework<sup>5</sup>.

A architecture constructed in a logical form: «[...] the term “description” [...] will be used to designate those works in which the cognitive purpose openly prevails over the object of study» (Grassi, 1967, pp. 38-39).

From this point of view, the objects being investigated belong to a communal repertoire and so their interpretation, as well as the criteria that lead their description, are linked to a specific theory of architecture – and of the city – and moreover to a theory of the architectural project: «The analysis carried out on architecture (e.g., classifications) identifies those elements that become vital to the *composition* throughout the process. I believe that this comparison between analysis and architectural project, between *elements of architecture* and *elements of composition* is essential to architecture, to her knowledge and her comprehension» (Grassi, 1980, p. 55). The validity of the analytical procedure in relation to the project lies in this, their “common cognitive purpose”, at least according to the accredited cultural tradition that is based on studies on the theory of architecture and the city, which flourished in Italy during the Sixties and Seventies.

However, although applied to a known object – or given for known, the result of a “good description” is nevertheless by its nature original within this vision of architecture: if not the object itself, at least the logic and criteria of the description are in fact independent from the object described and therefore the result of the cognitive process is somewhat unpredictable. Though on a divergent level, such a peculiar declination of the relationship between project and analysis is specific to Aldo Rossi, and yet somewhat in common with that of Grassi: «In describing architecture, I have always tried to refer the description back to the design» (Rossi, 1981, p. 51). With his Milanese and Zurich students, Rossi himself insisted on the importance of the “describability” of the architectural project, meaning with this an intrinsic characteristic of the artistic product, a specific quality of the project developed by rational means: «[...] this way of conceiving architecture returns continually in the ancient and modern masters, almost obsessively in the writings of Adolf Loos who declares that architecture can be described but can not be drawn: on the contrary, this character of logical formulation that allows description is distinctive of great architecture: the Pantheon can be described, Secession buildings cannot» (Rossi, 1968, p. 128). As in many others Rossi’s statements, here as well the «need to verbalise clearly

**Fig. 3**  
Thoronet Abbey, Provence,  
1160-1230.



**Fig. 4**  
Le Corbusier, Sainte Marie de  
La Tourette Monastery, 1953-  
60, cloister. Photography by Tim  
Benton.





**Fig. 5**  
Eduardo Souto de Moura, House for three families, Quinta do Lago, Algarve, 1984.

from which architecture [the architectures stem]» is superimposed on the need to say «how [he has] made some of [his] architecture» (Rossi, 1966, p. 4) and in such overlapping, though vague and indefinite, description and self-description tend to be superimposed or coincide (Bonfanti, 1970, pp. 19-20; Savi, 1976, pp. 141-152): theoretical conceits and project description, writings and drawings actually belong to the same genre – architectural and literary at the same time. The project description, or rather the attempt to say «how [he has] made some of [his] architecture», nourished by the Rossi's practice of self-description, experience the extreme possibilities of such research on objects (and on process), until they trace unpublished and unexpected (written) spaces, variations and repetitions of a single “general construction”. The names of the projects are indeed clues: *Locomotive 2*, *The Blue of the Sky* (and *The Chutes and Ladders*), *Trieste and a Woman*, *The Hot Life*, *The Theatre of the World* or even, in tribute to Roussel and surrealist friends, *Théâtre Rouge* or *Club des Incomparables*. In such an atmospheric and imaginative “discourse on things”, logical rigor dissolves into a similar perspective, within which the solute remains clearly visible although at the bottom. Boullée and Loos, Cézanne and Wittgenstein are fellow travellers along the same path.

Following Bonfanti and Savi's example then, one might ask how much has been present since the beginning and how much has sedimentation over time, whereas it is possible to separate the (logic) description from (biographical) self-description and how much the two moments can *compensate* or rather *add up* (Bonfanti, 1970, p.20). In fact, if Loos undoubtedly maintained: «I have no need whatsoever to draw my designs. Good architecture, how something is to be built, can be written. One can write the Parthenon» (Loos, 1924), Rossi, who does not hesitate to quote him on the same issues, admits instead that «[...] run[ning] through things or impressions, [...] describe[ing] them, or find[ing] a way to do so» (Rossi, 1981, p. 1) can sometimes reveal itself as extremely difficult.

On the basis of such considerations, we could assert that, in general, *observation*, *classification* and *comparison* refer to procedures typical of the scientific method as they perform interpretative tasks; but their application in architecture and, consequently, the descriptive practices analyzed here, are based on the sedimentation of materials – disciplinary or not – and their continuous coming out again in different forms and moments; like in literary description, even in the architectural one analogy and imagination intervene altering the (scientific) investigation of the real to open to the reflection on the work and its making, the multiple and the possible.

Each description appears as compact and unitary, so as to imply an intrinsic fragmentation of reality or at least of the disciplinary *corpus*, since the univocal determination of objects collides with the accumulation of elements and their meanings or, in other cases, with the plurality of the interpretations, according to «that swirling infinity of elements» to which Pasolini refers (1979, p. 485).

Moving along to the literary field, for example regarding Flaubert's descriptions, an analogue discourse can be traced, not so much in relation to the text itself – narrative in the specific case, but also to architectural “texts” – or better to the thought that the text itself reveals through the description. Unlike the previous literary forms of expression ranging from Homer to Balzac, aimed at reconstructing the unity of the overall picture, in Flaubert we witness the deflagration of the accomplished and reassuring space of the *Ancien Régime* to represent the loss of meaning that character-

**Fig. 6**

Le Corbusier, Sainte Marie de La Tourette Monastery, 1953-60, view from the roof. Photography by Olivier Martin-Gambier, 2004. © FLC/ADAGP.

ized the modern world, after 1848. Accumulating narrative elements is no longer functional to the unit of the story, but it gets so deep as to reproduce social contradictions in writing; it is rather a deconstructive description, so much to make one of his contemporaries say: «Flaubert's style is the description, an infinite description, eternal, atomistic, blinding, which occupies all of his book [...]»<sup>6</sup>.

We see how the descriptions represent both the awareness of the object investigated and at the same time its *re-presentation*, so as to produce a kind of transfiguration, a real interpretation.

Translation, transcription and betrayal are intrinsic moments of the descriptive activity. And if it is true that «translation takes place between different languages, but also within the same language, between different types of speech, often more idiosyncratic than vocabulary and grammar. And, even more, between forms of content transmitted by different expressive substances» (Fabbri and Marrone, 2001, pp. 361-362), then we must remember that «translating is rather contest and contrast than fidelity to the original work»<sup>7</sup> since the Renaissance.

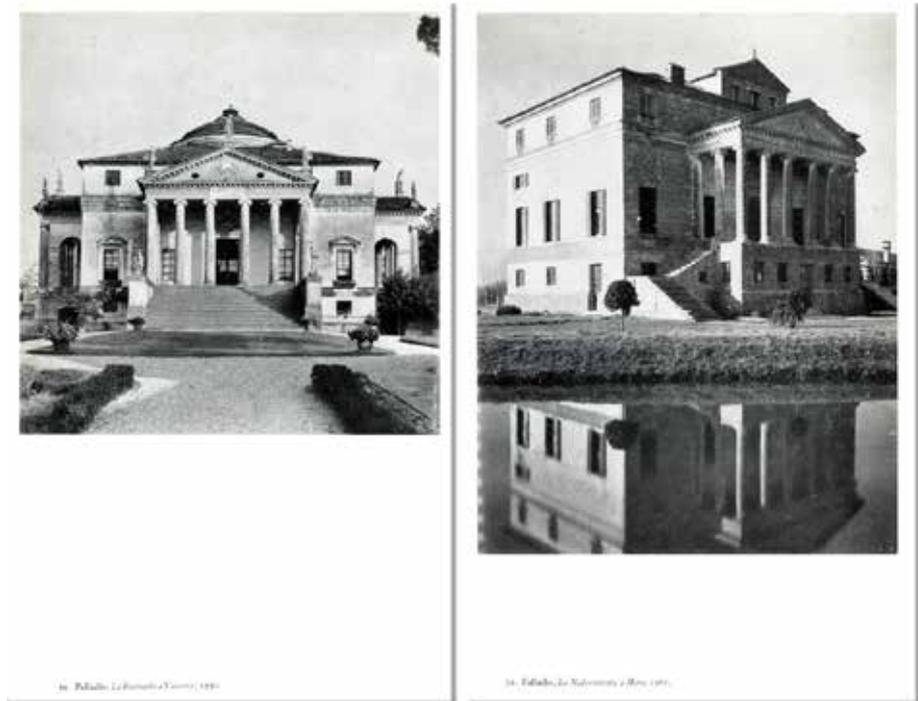
One may suppose that description and betrayal have, in architecture, a similar relationship to the one existing between analysis and project: in fact description and survey (which is a typical disciplinary tool of representation) presuppose a subjective point of view, an immediate betrayal of the objectivity and nonetheless of the presumed objectivity, thus admitting a plurality of possible interpretations.

The apparently typical central plan of Palladio's La Rotonda, so clearly described in terms of geometric correspondences and classical compositional principles by Rudolf Wittkower (1999, pp. 72-77), is transformed in the disturbing *physical* and *psychic trauma* due to the labyrinthine multiplicity of an image continually reflected in the mirror by Bernard Tschumi (1994, p. 124).

Take Palladio's Villa Rotonda. You walk through one of its axes, and as you cross the central space and reach its other side you find, instead of the hillside landscape, the steps of another Villa Rotonda, and another, and another, and another. The incessant repetition at first stimulates some strange desire, but soon becomes sadistic, impossible, violent. Such discomfiting spatial devices can take any form: the white anechoic chambers of sensory deprivation, the formless spaces leading to psycho-

**Fig. 7**

Double page of 1964 Rudolf Wittkower's book, *Architectural principles in the age of humanism*.



**Fig. 8**

*Don Giovanni*, 1979, directed by Joseph Losey. View of Palladio's Villa La Rotonda surrounded by the lagoon.



logical destructuring. Steep and dangerous staircases, those corridors consciously made too narrow for crowds, introduce a radical shift from architecture as an object of contemplation to architecture as a perverse instrument of use.

Moreover, in Tschumi the physical trauma of the architectural multiplicity mirroring itself substitutes the classical order and the dignified equilibrium of the cubic volume with the four juxtaposed pronais, whereas in Losey's film adaptation of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, the characters move in a Rotonda bordered by water, within a scenic interpretation that totally reinterprets the topography of the building to sink it into the misty atmosphere of the lagoon<sup>8</sup>. That of Losey is a third vision of La Rotonda which is no less true than the previous two nor even of that in bricks and mortar built on the hills behind Vicenza: simply another Villa La Rotonda or at least one of the possible Villas in the complex plot of its descriptions. The very same object and building participates into different interpretative levels, and so it changes according to its description like in *different repetitions*, each reliable and essential, but at the same time provisional. And so, the great many descriptions of a building contribute to its deconstruction, to the demolition (and therefore multiplication) of possibilities, as it happens both with the Palladian work and, in literature, with the Goethian novel, if I may paraphrase Jakob.

However, in order to avoid taking the risk of a defeat of both thought and discipline, but considering the complexity that the "postmodern condition" has advanced about the substantial multiplicity of possible interpretations, we might apparently go back to the tradition of *critical realism*, which interprets objectivity as always mediated by a theory, or that of *critical rationalism*, hypothesizing the need for a new *minimal realism* (Eco, 2012), capable of not smoothing the different layers of reality on a single level, but to reason for differences and overlaps.

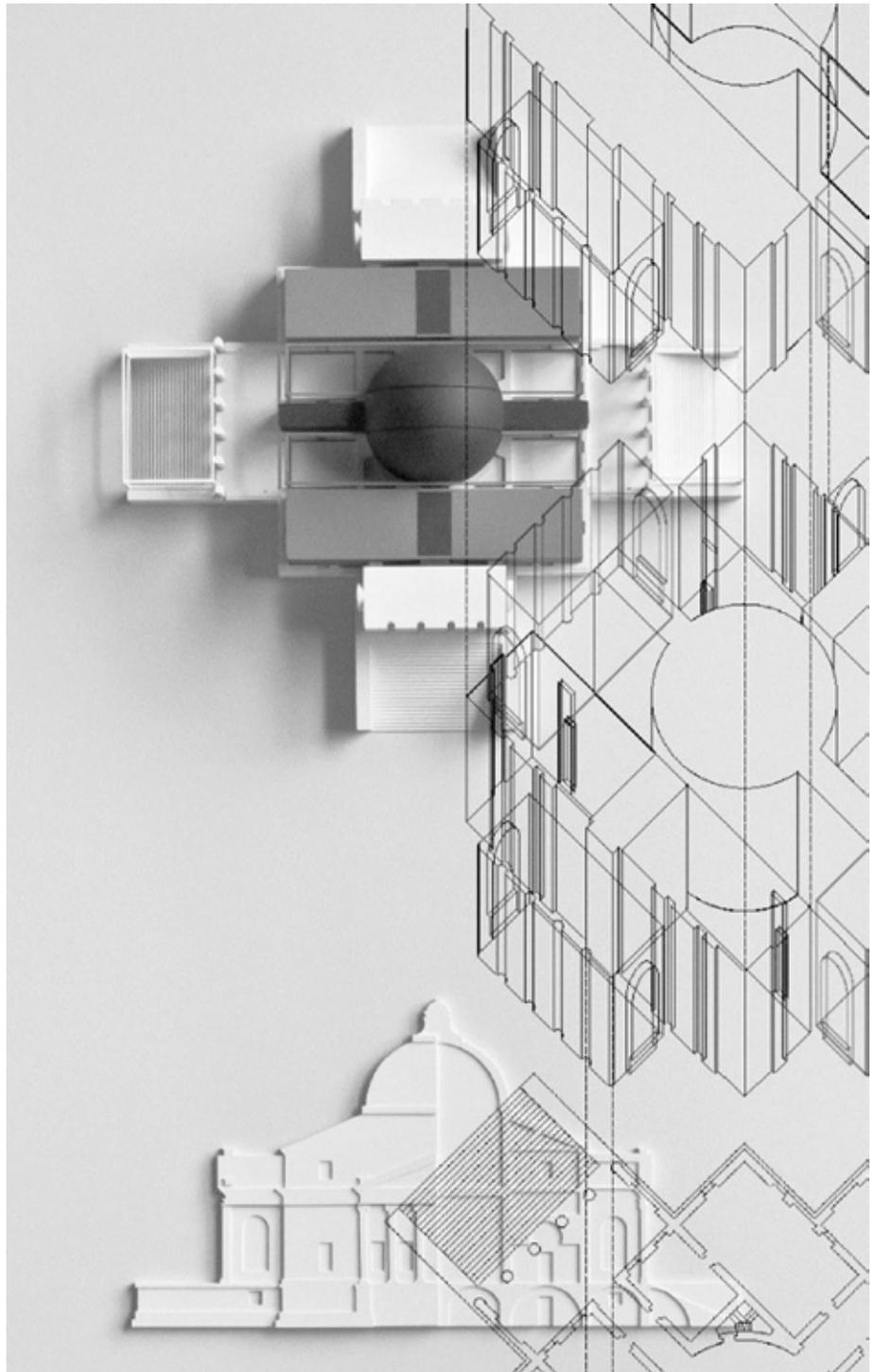
One and more Villa La Rotonda, then.

Indeed, the first is more true – if there is any sort of order at all, the one materially built following Palladio's project (which in reality, as reported in *The four books of Architecture*, shows us yet another, albeit only a little, different, La Rotonda), precisely because the others contribute to unveil the intrinsic values of the first one and to show its implicit possibilities, the unsaid or what still remains to be said.

However, so far we have in a certain way supported, not sharing the positions of an excessively orthodox realism, that an object or better their interpretation changes according to the investigator's point of view; but how can we agree with Loos on the fact that: «Can the Pantheon be described, Secession buildings no»? That is to say: how much do the characters of the object itself count? And, to follow Eco, are there "bad interpretations"?<sup>9</sup>. Every "good interpretation" seems to presuppose a sort of adherence to the form to be interpreted, a certain sense of loyalty or, in other words, of intellectual honesty not only towards the examined object, but even with respect of the cognitive process and the subject of study – admitting therefore in some cases also the possibility of counterfeiting the interpretation itself. In spite of all of this, we still may question what elements allow architecture to be describable or vice versa, which ones establish its definitive indescribability and especially whether this condition is linked to the cognitive dimension or not. Though oversimplifying, Eco stated that «there are some things that cannot be said», so why should this not be applied to architecture as well? Moreover, though agreeing on this, if we

**Fig. 9**

Peter Eisenman and Matt Roman, Palladio Virtuel Exhibition, Yale School of Architecture, 20 August - 27 October 2012. © Peter Eisenman, Matt Roman.



**Fig. 10**

Andrea Palladio, La Rotonda, 1550 (from *The Architecture of A. Palladio in Four Books containing a Short Treatise on the Five Orders*, edition curated by Giacomo Leoni, engraved by Bernard Picart, London, 1715).



asked ourselves which things cannot be done, what would the answer be? While quoting Loos in his discourse about the possibility for architecture to be “describable”, Rossi does not refer so much to a secret practice which requires learning how to refine one’s own speaking skills, but rather to a specific quality of the project – and therefore of the object itself, which includes the possibility of being described and therefore universally knowable, within which, according to a vision that is perhaps ideal, but certainly democratic, everything (the architectural content) is available to everybody: this is true for the Parthenon, for Losey and Palladio’s La Rotonda, but perhaps it is less true for Tschumi’s one.

What is architecture? Shall I join Vitruvius in defining it as the art of building? Indeed, no, for there is a flagrant error in this definition. Vitruvius mistakes the effect for the cause. One must conceive in order to realise. Our earliest ancestors only built their huts after having conceived the image thereof. It is this production of the mind, this creation that is constitutive of architecture, which we may consequently define as the art of producing and bringing to perfection edifices of all kinds. The art of building is therefore only a secondary art, which it seems to us to be appropriate to call the scientific portion of architecture. Art in the strict sense, and science, these are the notions that we believe should be marked out distinctly in architecture.

According to Boullée (1974, p. 83), this viewpoint seems to imply that architecture can only adhere to one single rigorous procedure that, starting from known images, does not refer her own representation and therefore her own explanation to any other instruments but to the architectural ones. So we are not looking for a purely narrative description that tries to capture experience manifesting itself, not even descriptive architectures that seek to give the elusive condition of reality a fixed shape. The significance of forms, their possibility of being described even in a

plurality of interpretations, belongs to the possibility of unfolding such a meaning, telling its reasons and showing its connections – in the best possible way or, if this is not possible, in the only way given to us.

«I do not strive for knowing everything, but for being able to unify what is fragmented. It is almost certain that such an endeavor is doomed to fail. However, even the slightest chance that it may succeed justifies every effort»<sup>10</sup>.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> «Ēcfrasi (or ècfrasis; also èkphrasis) s. f. [adaptation, or transliteration of the Greek ἔκφρασις, derived from ἐκφράζω, “to expose, to describe; describe with elegance”]. The Greek rhetoricians attributed this name to the virtuous, elaborate description of an object, of a person or to the circumstantial exposition of an event, and more particularly to the description of places and works of art; the style is characterized by virtuosity in order to compete in expressive force with the very object described» ([www.treccani.it](http://www.treccani.it))

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. *I Re*, 6, 1-38 e *Ezechiele*, 40-42.

<sup>3</sup> As brilliantly noted by Michael Jakob (2005, p. 223), the unsullied atmosphere of the Goethian landscape defines itself in open opposition to the aesthetic vision of the romantic garden and its untamed “creators”: «As far as the landscape is concerned, Goethe’s novel is charged with [...] great importance, because all the illusions of an aesthetic existential praxis are unmasked within it. The experimental structure of *Elective Affinities*, that is to say, the orientation of life towards panoramic seductions, represents an extraordinarily precise “lens” through which the landscape cult is closely observed. The Goethian novel unfolds the construction of a landscape as deconstruction, demolition of possibilities. The multiple aesthetisation of life (reading, writing, drawing, designing, building), whose crowning glory lies in the constructions of landscape architecture, is unmasked in its contradictory character».

<sup>4</sup> «I have provided some “descriptions”. Here it is, this is all I know of my criticism. And then, “descriptions” of what? Of other “descriptions”, because books are nothing else, indeed. Anthropology teaches it: there is the “drómenon”, the fact that has occurred, the myth, and the “legómenon”, its oral description» (Pasolini, 1979, p. 457). In choosing the title of the present essay we wanted to refer exactly to such a clear headed description of the process of reflecting on the object of criticism, in fact our title retraces intentionally that of the posthumous collection of reviews published by Pasolini in the “Tempo” weekly publication, between November 1972 and January 1975.

<sup>5</sup> «Therefore, [...] I shall deal with descriptions in order to highlight what can be defined as the most general aim of the analysis of the rational thought, that is, the realisation of a broader intelligibility of architecture» (Grassi, 1967, p. 38).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Barbey D’Aurevilly J. (1869) – “L’Éducation sentimentale. Histoire d’un jeune homme par M. Gustave Flaubert”. *Le Constitutionnel*, 29 November 1869. «Flaubert invented new ways of describing; or even better, he fused together style and description. While his peers, like Barbey d’Aurevilly, accused him because of this, [...], nowadays such invention appears as an honest, exact intuition, and as a tribute to one of the greatest transformations imposed on narrative writing. Flaubert’s purpose is often quoted: “I would like to write a book about nothing”. About nothing, that is, what about? A book where existence coincides with beauty, where the variation evades monotony at every moment: a book where life is transformed» (Bottiroli, 2002, p. XIX).

<sup>7</sup> *Non tam reddere quam certare* (Ermolao Barbaro).

<sup>8</sup> In the 1979 film adaptation of Mozart and Da Ponte’s work, the director Joseph Losey, helped by the scenographer Alexandre Trauner, sets the whole story in Palladian buildings: «The director chose to shoot a film on such a pièce, using all the devices belonging to filmic language and realised a path with some relevant symbolic moments: within this formal grid, he then inserted the disruptive actions of Don Giovanni. All of this work was set up in silent, composed but also melancholic Palladian Veneto, a little lost in the middle of nowhere. The effect created is that of a

film which [...] opens a complex overview on human action, which also contemplates the possibility that certain threads are held back by destiny» (Colazzo, 2002, p. 66).

<sup>9</sup> «According to the hermeneutical principle stating that there are no facts but only interpretations, we cannot rule out the possibility that there may be “bad interpretations”. [...] By now, everyone seems to agree on the fact that the real problem of any “deconstructive” argumentation of the classical concept of truth is not to demonstrate the fallacy at the basis of our reasoning: the world as we represent it, is certainly an effect of interpretation [...]. The problem rather deals with protecting us when trying out a new paradigm that others might recognise as delirious, pure imagination of the impossible. Which criterion allows us to distinguish between dream, poetic invention, lysergic acid trip [...] and acceptable statements when attempting an interpretation of the objects enlivening the physical or historical world around us? [...] Hence the idea of a Negative Realism that could be summarised, both speaking of texts and aspects of the world, in the formula: any interpretative hypothesis is always appealable [...] but, if one can never definitively say whether an interpretation is right, you can always say when it is wrong. Indeed, some interpretations are not allowed by the object itself» (Eco, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Canetti 1973, p. 55.

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Filippo Bricolo  
**Carlo Scarpa and the story of Castelvecchio.  
Narrative analysis of the Sculpture Gallery**

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Abstract

Forty years after his death, the figure of Carlo Scarpa still appears to be inextricably linked to distorted and interpretative critical clichés that obstruct a deeper analysis of the complexity of his work. Among the less studied and misunderstood aspects there is the narrativity. By this term is meant the complex system of deep structures that organize its architectural narratives. Such project machines escape from the typical tools used by the critics and can be understood only through a narratological analysis. The essay moves in this direction by addressing the analysis of the Sculpture Gallery of the Museum of Castelvecchio, one of the most intense narrative sequences of the Scarpian architectural corpus.

Key-words

Carlo Scarpa — Narrative architecture — Narratology

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Among the narrator-architects, Carlo Scarpa plays a leading role. In all his works, in fact, we can clearly spot pieces and passages that remind us of the mechanisms and devices typical of a story. All of his masterpieces, like *Castelvecchio Museum*, *Brion Tomb* or *Villa Ottolenghi*, are entirely based on precise narrative sequences. Such aspects have often been the object of misaligned elegiac inquiries triggered by the historical fascination surrounding his figure. However, his works have never been examined through the specific toolkit of narratology.

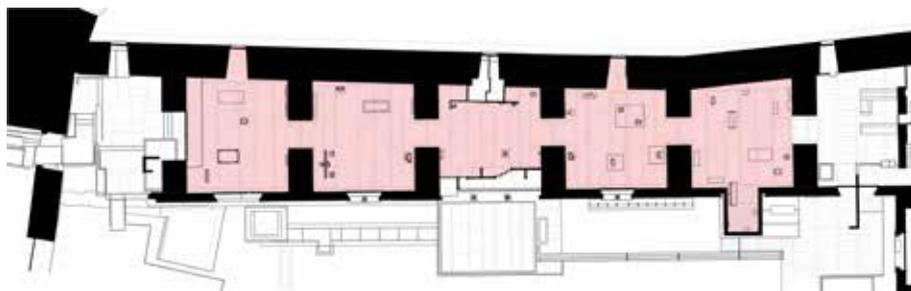
Moreover, the changes that affected narrativity in all of its variations - the influences coming from non-linear media and the spectacularness of the image - have firmly bound the figure of Scarpa to the iconicity of the fragments of his works. Nevertheless, in so doing, the consequential and intrinsically diegetic nature of its spaces has been overlooked.

Grounding the study of Scarpa's architecture on long-established techniques employed in film and story analysis can shed new light on the misunderstood identity of his figure, while, at the same time, offering an instance of how such analytical framework can be developed and included in the realm of architecture studies.

To offer a concrete example of the narrativity of Scarpa and the potential benefits of this type of research, due to the inbound space limitations of an article, the present paper will focus on the narratological analysis of a short fragment drawn from one of the most important works of the Venetian master: *The Museum of Castelvecchio in Verona*<sup>1</sup>. More specifically, our preliminary and synthetic analysis will focus on the narrative passage *The Sculpture Gallery*, which constitutes one of the most intense spatial sequences in the work of Carlo Scarpa and in the history of Italian muse-

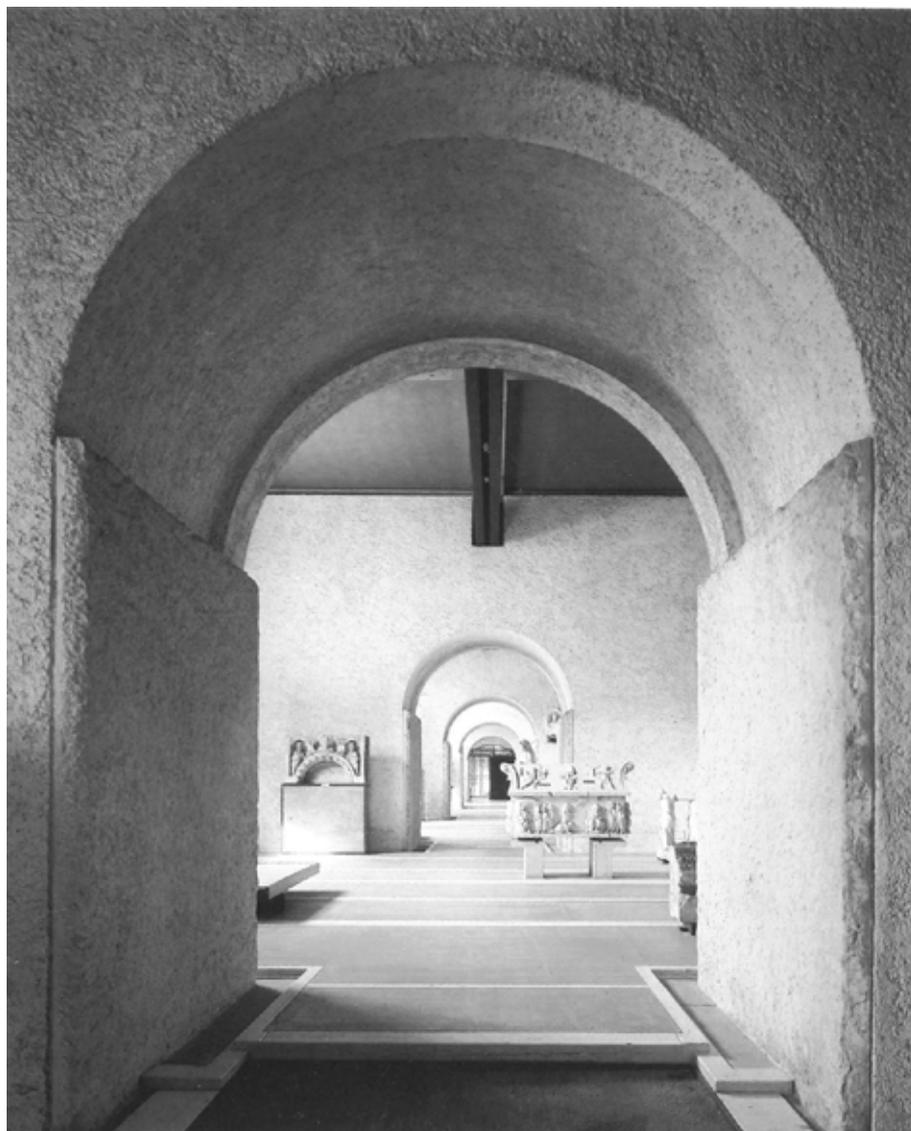
**Fig. 1**

The narrative sequence of the Sculpture Gallery at the museum of Castelvecchio designed by Carlo Scarpa (1964).

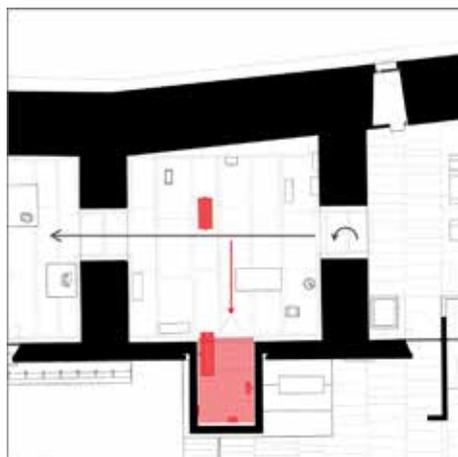


**Fig. 2**

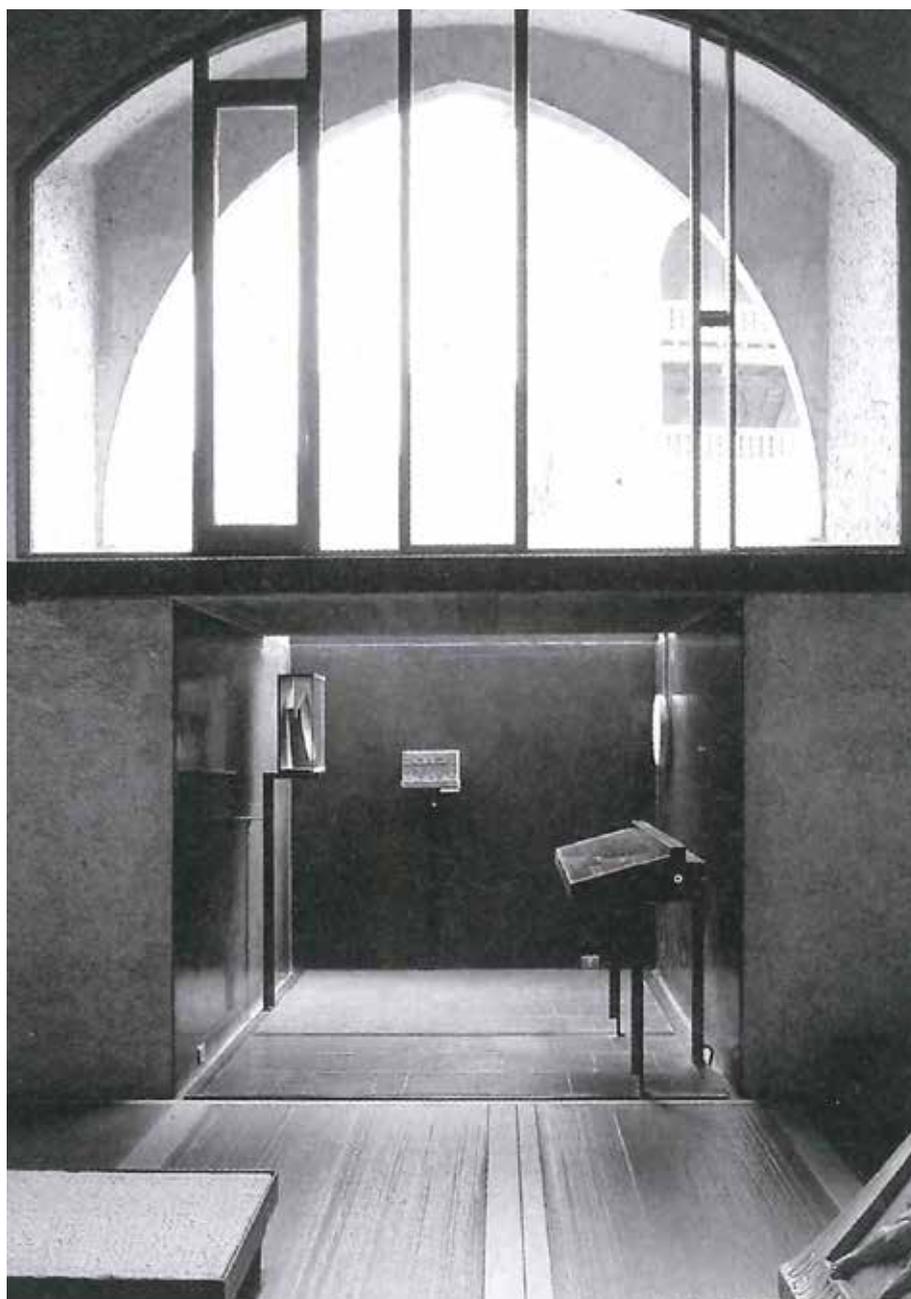
The entrance of the Sculpture Gallery at the museum of Castelvecchio in Verona by Carlo Scarpa (Photograph by Klaus Frahm).



**Fig. 3**  
First room: diagram.



**Fig. 4**  
First room: view of the Sarcellum.  
(Photograph by di P. Perina).



ography *tout court*.

The analysis' goal is to render intelligible the meaning-making mechanisms hidden in these interlinked spaces by decoding the narrative systems and communicative codes adopted by Scarpa.

The sequence under scrutiny starts in the entrance room on the ground floor, at the extreme east side of the *Sculpture Gallery* and ends on the opposite side of the same long sleeve, where the renown equestrian statue of Casagrande I della Scala is placed.

The visitor, to complete this pathway, must walk through five rooms containing masterfully positioned sculptures and stone elements original of the Verona countryside. The five rooms are connected to one another through a series of spectacular arch-passages shaping a high-impact perspective succession.

Contrary to what one might commonly assume, what makes this sequence narratively expressive and effective, is not the long perspective-driven *Spannung* (climax), but, quite paradoxically, the opposite forces aimed at wearing off its own one-directionality. Such opposite forces are represented by the composition of the five rooms of the Gallery, which, as we will see, act as narrative agents.

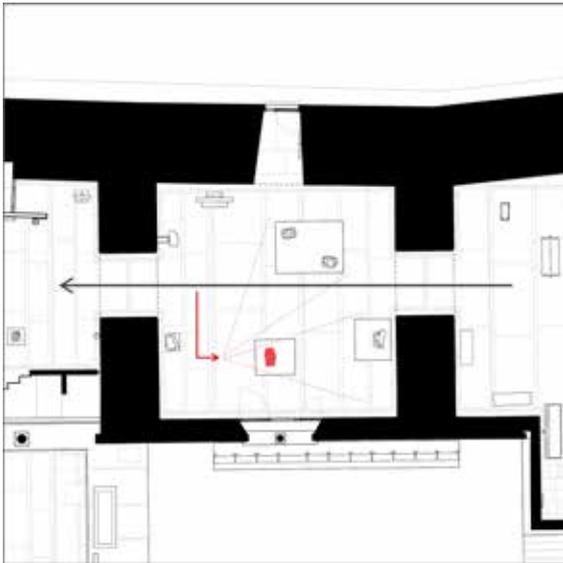
These, in fact, pull the visitor inward and, as she moves along, implement calculated *anti-climax* factors.

The preliminary analysis of the architectural text of the *Sculpture Gallery* allows us to identify – in the conflict between opposite tensions designed by Scarpa – the overlapping between such text and the deep structure at the basis of every narrative form. A structure involving *obstacles* (the five room-induced actions) that a subject (the visitor) has to overcome to reach her *object of value* (the end of the pathway). Along this dynamic pathway, the subject swings from an initial equilibrium phase, to a mid-imbalance stage, up to a final (r)equilibrium phase.

In the research theory on the deep structure of a story and its narrativity<sup>2</sup>, the aforementioned figures are called actants. To the aforementioned ones, three more agentive figures are to be added: 1) *the adjuvant* (all the elements moving the storyline toward its conclusion like, for example, the reiterated sequence of arches). 2) *The addresser* (the step in the first room, which signals the beginning of the plot and determines its subsequent twists). *The addressee* (in our case study it coincides with the *subject* i.e. the visitor<sup>3</sup>).

To further study the text of the *Sculpture Gallery*, it is important to analyze how these figures enter the architectural story by means of a *prolepsis-like* mechanism that is, by anticipating figures (physically) situated at later points along the pathway-story.

This non-temporal narrative device, highly used in literature and cinema productions, is deployed by Scarpa to scaffold expectations and rituals, and constitutes one recurring element throughout all of his work. Let us think, for example, about the entrance system of the *Brion Tomb*. From the propylaea, the window – framed along the shape of the *vescica piscis* – enables the view of the inner space, however impeding the direct access to it. Another instance is the rectangular opening in the access corridor leading to Piet Mondrian's exhibition at the Gallery of Modern Art in Rome. (1956-1957). This space, at the beginning of the chronological pathway, revivals a view of the painting *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, located in the final room of the exhibition and representing the culmination of the artist's development.<sup>4</sup>



**Fig. 5**  
Second room: diagram.



**Fig. 6**  
Second room: Statue of Saint Cecile on the left (Photograph by Klaus Frahm).

However, it is with the *Sculpture Gallery* in Castelvecchio that the so-called-Scarpian *prolepsis* reaches its apex. The single-framed synchronic vision (the first arch) of the final part of the pathway (the end at the start, a typically literary device of novels like *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*<sup>5</sup>) and of all the figures determine the overlapping of all the latent tensions. Only by analyzing this density of such intertwined meanings, can we grasp the strength of the framed space that initially welcomes the entering *subject-visitor*.

Here we can spot the little access garden leading to the rooms that transforms the crossing of the arch into a ritual-like threshold full of meanings (*addresser*). Here we can spot the final goal of the pathway (*the object of value*) and before it, the serial sequence of arches. Here we can spot the great stones that, leaning against the arches, set the rhythm of the series and the huge central beam supporting the ceiling that – like a red thread – runs in the pathway direction (*adjuvant*).

Here in fact, we can spot the white stone stripes cutting through the cement floor in the opposite direction to the one of the pathway. Here we can spot the items of the fitting, which threaten the force of the central axis by partially invading it.

Here, finally, we appreciate how, through this total *prolepsis*, the big arch of the entrance room of the Gallery, becomes a multilayered metonymy, introducing the plot and loading the story with suspense.

The first narrative semes, generated by the perceived anticipations at the entrance, start to yield fruits already in the first room, right after passing the arch leading to the “exhibition room”.

In this space, the central perspective gets half-invaded by the position of the *Arc with Saints Sergius and Bacchus*, which appears to advance toward the center of the room from the right. Such disposition plays the role of the opponent with respect to the main axis of movement.

The presence of the arc and its directionality, opposite to the one of the pathway and parallel to the white stripes on the floor, push the gaze of the *visitor-subject* toward the left and face her with an inviting dark cavity carved out of the Gallery walls, beneath a great outward looking arch.

This little chamber opens onto the main exhibition space and turns itself into a new *object of value*, attracting the *subject-visitor*. The result, in this particular case, is not just the vision of a new figure, but a real coupling

with the *Sacellum*, one of the leading narrative agents in the garden standing before the one that is currently under scrutiny.

In this episode, to activate the attention of the visitor, Scarpa strategically places some narratively contradictory elements. On the one hand, such elements lie between the inside and the outside of the *Sacellum*. On the other hand, they stand between the inside of the *Sacellum* and the inside of the room.

From the garden, in fact, the figure raises as a convex parallelepiped covered in white-and-pink Prun stones. This creates a contrast with the grey plaster of the outer wall. From the room, instead, the figure appears as a concave space, coated in bottled-green (almost black) shining Venetian lime, in sharp opposition to the raw, white plaster of the room.

In the first room, the overlapping of these balanced oppositions creates a crucial center of force for the narrative management of the conflict between the desired coupling and the de-coupling with the *object of value*. After the *Sacellum*, one goes back to the main pathway through the second arch leading in the second room. Here, the element that distorts the climax of the perspective sequence is the masterful disposition of the statue of Saint Cecile.

The museographic novelty of this piece consists in placing the statue with the shoulders facing the visitor coming from the previous room. In doing so, Scarpa wants to highlight the finishing touches and the posterior shape of the sculpture that would otherwise go unnoticed. However, the innovative aspect of the disposition resides in the clear metonymy formed by the co-existence – in the same point of observation – between the preview of the statue and the simultaneous impossibility of enjoying a “correct” frontal view of it.

In order to solve this masterfully induced duplicity, the visitor is prone to move by 180° into space and finally reach the front view. But in doing so, she responds to a specific rotary spatial dynamism aimed at breaking with the usual pathway projected toward the end of the process.

Moreover, this movement triggers a reverse shot of the room, allowing *the subject-visitor* to view the statue on the border wall with the first room (*Saint Catherine of Alessandria*). Were it not for this movement, this statue would be completely ignored by the tendency to normally continue on the main axis.

The relationship between climax and anti-climax assumes a different thematization in the central passage, halfway through the pathway story.

The sides of the room are fenced with two different sets of walls, which create a considerable spatial narrowing, and increase the tension along the main pathway.

Nevertheless, a vast gamut of expedients interrupts and even out this main pathway. As far as the meaning is concerned, there are two agentive groups acting according to different modalities.

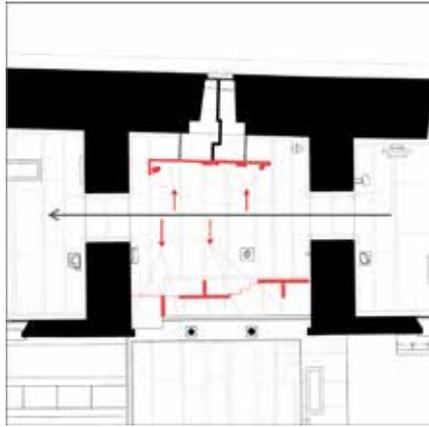
On the left side, the attention-grabbing narrative agents are the unframed windows underneath the reinforced concrete ceiling.

Scattered along the black Venetian lime walls, they allow, for the first time, a glimpse of the garden beyond the gothic arches. On the right side, the narrative agent is embodied by the color. Here, on a long wall decorated with red and azure attributes in pit lime, various little works like *Mary on the throne with the baby* and *the Crucifixion* stand in harmony.

After the main room – resting and transitory space – we enter the fourth room, which represents the emotional peak of the whole sequence. The

**Fig. 7**

Third room: diagram.



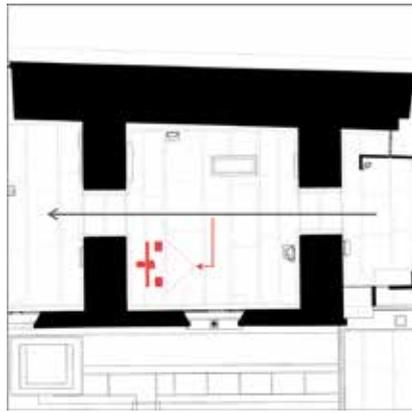
**Fig. 8**

Third room: red and azure pit lime boards on the right. Black boards and view of the garden on the left.



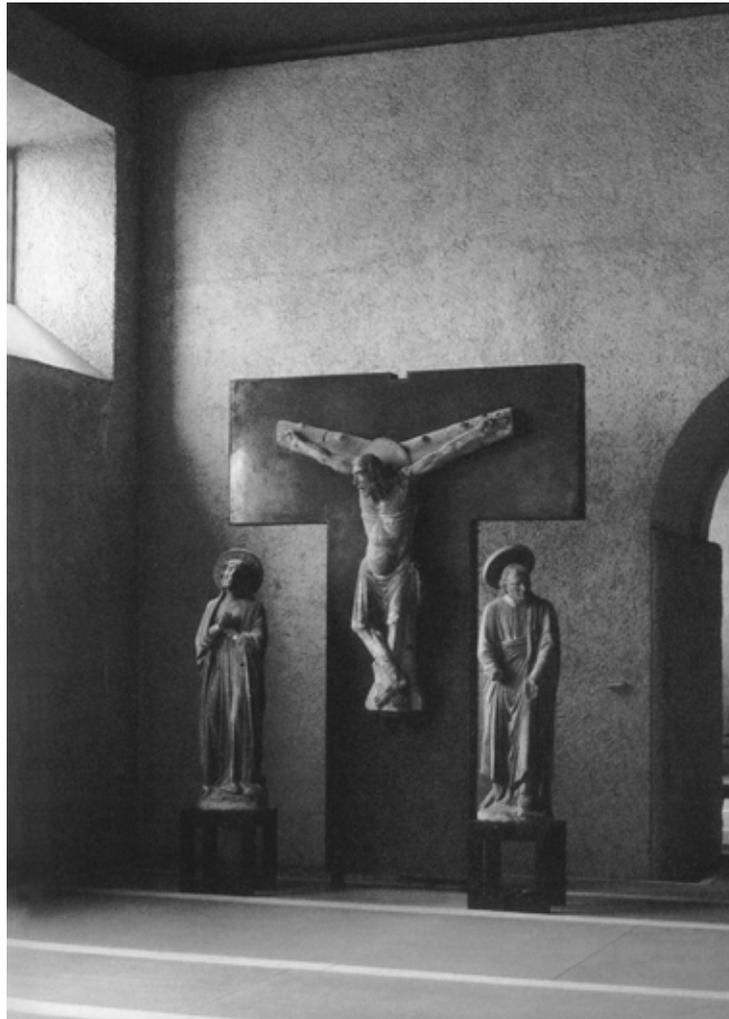
**Fig. 9**

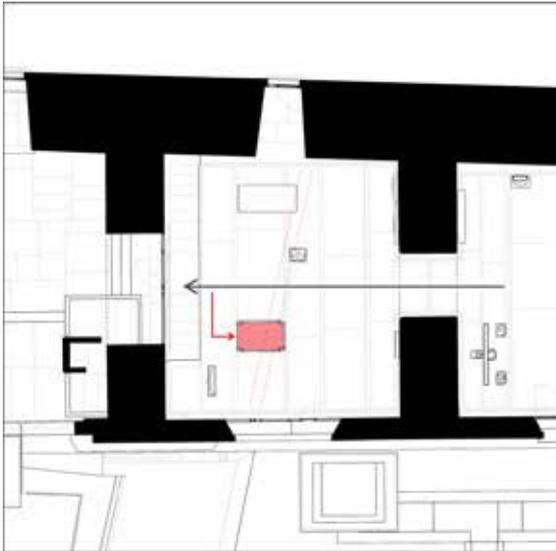
Fourth room: diagram.



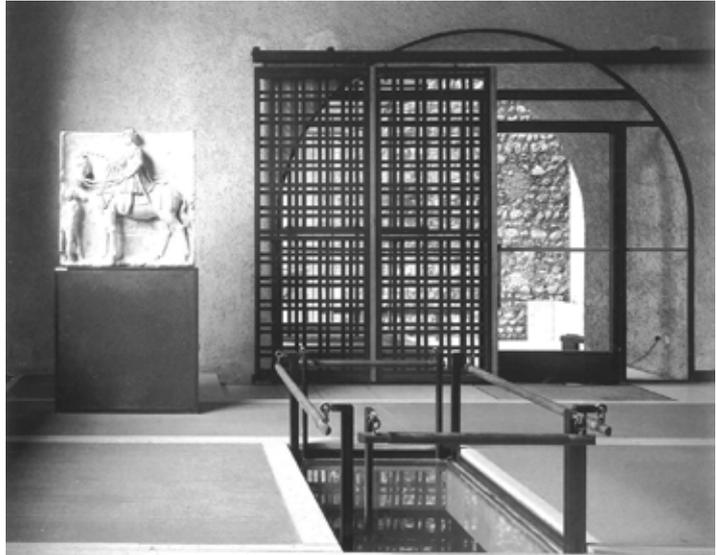
**Fig. 10**

Fourth room: Crucifixion (Photograph by Bianca Albertini).





**Fig. 11**  
Fifth room: diagram.



**Fig. 12**  
Fifth room: Floor opening on the ancient Wall.

room is dominated by the sculpture group of the *Crucifixion and Mary and Saint John* carved by the famous *Master of Sant'Anastasia*. The attention-grabbing shape and position of this work make the visitor-subject stop.

The fulcrum in this sculpture group is the screaming Christ. Scarpa positions this expressive work so that the light, penetrating from a high window, beams over the face of the suffering Christ sideways.

This way, one can appreciate his twisted eye sockets.

The analysis of this work allows us to grasp how Scarpa uses the light for narrative purposes. More specifically, the light dramatizes the meaning-making mechanism of the museographic pathway by establishing an intimate and intense relationship with the artistic work.

In the sublime cooperation between the work and the light, Scarpa's diegesis molds a signification process where the *visitor-subject* gets emotionally and cognitively involved. The natural light bathing the face of Christ grows into a metaphorical construct, thus amplifying its meaning attributions.

Eventually, after this high-intensity segment, we walk into the fifth room, coinciding with the end of the Sculptures Gallery and thus with the end of the story. Here, in fact, the subject-visitor can finally be coupled to her *object of value*.

However, before finishing the pathway, Scarpa gives, once again, proof of its destabilizing narrative mastery. On the floor of the last room there opens a rectangular window accompanied by an oriental parapet. Looking into the hole, we discover an inaccessible secret chamber hosting the remains of an ancient wall prior to the construction the Gallery. In the end, we figure out that the hole is a time machine constantly re-opening the story through analeptic mechanism right where the initial metonymy finds its resolution.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed museographic and project development analysis of this sequence, See a: DI LIETO A. (2006) – *I disegni di Carlo Scarpa per Castelvechio*, Marsilio, Venezia e MURPHY R. (2017) – *Carlo Scarpa and Castelvechio revisited*, Breakfast Mission Publishing, Edinburgh.

<sup>2</sup> See MARCHESE A. (1990) – “Teorie della narratività” in *L'officina del racconto. Semiotica della narratività*, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milano, pp.5-68 RON-DOLINO G. – TOMASI D. (2011) - “*Che cosa è un racconto*” in *Manuale del film*.

*Linguaggio, racconto, analisi*, De Agostini, Novara, pp.10-17.

<sup>3</sup> Such approach can be applied, bearing in mind the different peculiarities, to all the narrative architectures. The power of a work like *the Chapel of Bruder Klaus*, designed on Eifel hill valley by Peter Zumthor, lies in the tension marking the relationship between *the object of value* (the chapel) and the long pathway (*the opponent*) that the subject has to overcome to reach her *object of value*. The same of for the Liyuan library by Li Xiaodong where the emotionality is conveyed by the tension between the view of the *object of value* (the building) and the obligation for the subject to descend a cliff and cross a river (*opponents*) to get there. A similar approach can be distinguished also in the entrance sequence of two narratively alike buildings. Both in Stockholm Library by Gunnar Asplund and in Ljubljana Library by Jože Plečnik, the conflict rises in the crossing of the dark stairs (opponent) to reach the bright room of culture. (*the object of values*).

<sup>4</sup> Palma Bucarelli, *Mostra di Piet Mondrian a Roma*, in *L'architettura. Cronache e storia*, n.17, March 1957, pp.786-789.

<sup>5</sup> For example, see the chapter *La fine all'inizio* in Vincenzo Cerami, *Consigli a un giovane scrittore. Narrativa, cinema teatro, radio*, Giulio Einaudi editore, Turin, 1996, pp.66-73.

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Filippo Bricolo (Verona, 1970), architect, graduated with honors from the IUAV of Venice. At the same institute he obtained, with mention of publication, the title of Doctor of Research in Architectural Composition with a dissertation thesis on the Kampor Memorial by Edvard Ravnikar (speaker Luciano Semerani). He has taught at the IUAV of Venice and the University of Parma. He is currently an adjunct professor at the Polytechnic of Milan Polo Territoriale di Mantova. Among his publications: *On the tracks of Carlo Scarpa. Grafts in Castelvechio (Cierre)*, Set up in the Museum. Thirty exhibitions in Castelvechio (with Alba di Lieto, Marsilio). In 2003 he founded the Bricolo Falsarella studio with which he received several awards and reports. In 2017 he completed the recovery of the East Wing of the Castelvechio Museum left unfinished by Carlo Scarpa in his 1964 restoration.

Gianluca Burgio

**Words for Buildings. The narrative space, the build words**

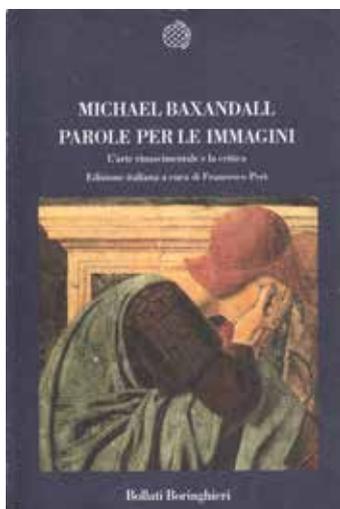
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**Abstract**

The aim of this article is to understand the complex, sometimes problematic relationship that exists between words and concepts, on the one hand, and architectures, on the other. This relationship must be deepened and critically problematized to understand - and possibly avoid - a phenomenon that is quite typical of our time: it seems that words and things have moved away. In some cases, the subtle and ineffable connection that linked the evanescent sound of the word and the material consistency of the building seems to have disappeared.

**Keywords**

Embodied storie — Architecture — Metaphor



**Fig. 1**  
Parole per le immagini book cover

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**Introduction**

The issue of relationship between storytelling and architecture is very fascinating and full of fruitful implications. The word and the architecture move on two different levels and, often, very far away: however, the so-called architectural *ékphrasis* exists thanks to the skilful combination of a discourse that must be coherent with the architecture itself. In this sense, on at least two occasions and through two very intelligent essays, *Forme dell'intenzione* (2000) and *Parole per le immagini* (2009), Michael Baxandall has opened a possible way of reading the relationships established between words and artworks. In short, the British art historian directs a reasoning about narrative language (whether understood as a description or as an explanation) that is generated from a work of art. Obviously, the reasoning, *mutatis mutandis*, can be easily transferred to architectural works, with all the implications that also derive from the social dimension and civil function that architecture plays in the human consortium. From this perspective, the key issue becomes understanding the complex and sometimes problematic, relationship between words and concepts, on the one hand, and architectures, on the other. This relationship must be deepened and critically problematized to understand, and possibly avoid, a phenomenon that is quite typical of our time: words and things seem to have separated from each other and, in some cases, the subtle and ineffable connection that related the words and the buildings seem to have disappeared.

A famous tale speaks of the non-existent clothing of an emperor, who had allowed himself to be convinced of his real existence. In fact, the narration that he had heard of his lying tailors had worked and, therefore, the em-

peror believed that he wore a beautiful clothing; those who had not heard the narration of this story perceived reality in a very different way. Here, therefore, a case *ante litteram* of storytelling in which it is demonstrated that an insurmountable abyss between architecture and narration can be opened. In fact, the narrative can be very far from the physical, social and civil reality of the built space. Architecture has an unavoidable material and social dimension and, in addition, very concrete and not very abstract. It would be easy to construct an ideological discourse in which the narrative, as fiction, is presented as actually foreign to the discourse of architecture and as Roscellino di Compiègne said, the concepts are reduced to *flatus vocis*, that is, a simple emission of a sound. However, man exists because he is the object of a narrative (Gargani, 1999); the life of all of us is made up of stories. The architect who goes beyond the pure instrumentality of architecture, injects in his works a vision of the world and, therefore, also a complex interrelation of stories. After all, architectures, especially good architectures, are embodied stories, or works made from stories that, in turn, build a story.

Today we are immersed in an era that has changed its cultural reference paradigm: modernity and its *grands récits* are in crisis, and now we have to reconstruct thought through the remains of a cultural and theoretical shipwreck. Perhaps we can cling to the pieces of ships that are no longer recognizable as such; and dispersed in the immense sea of liquid theories of our time, we can try to build a “story”. These words are “pieces” of stories, small metaphorical vessels that allow us to navigate at sight to build a horizon of plausible meaning. Leaving aside, for once, the architect’s lenses, often too caught up in their disciplinary language - and changing them with new ones - perhaps we can discover a reality made up of concrete and coherent words with architecture. Perhaps we will discover a world of live metaphors (Lakoff, Johnson, 2007) that produce a meaning and contribute to multiply and increase the dimensions of architecture, recovering another depth in the things and space in which we live.

### *Adequatio rei et intellectus*

The relationship between words, narration and things is very complex, due to the essence of the elements. The nature of words and the nature of reality are ontologically different; these two entities differ in time and space. In fact, while the events of reality (and in architecture, in our case ...) are multiple and synchronous, their representative description can only be linear and diachronic, like the words that are one behind the other, in a straight line of a sheet of two-dimensional paper. This insurmountable limit between these different entities has been the subject of debate for many centuries. The drama of man fallen from Eden is that words and things are no longer totally coincident; the unbridgeable hiatus between them has always been the fault of man – earthly and material being – who is not always able to “seize” the meaning of reality completely. Thomas Aquinas was one of the first to speak of the *adequatio rei et intellectus*, that is, of the adhesion of ideas to reality, or of the correspondence between the real object and its linguistic and conceptual representation.

Obviously, since we are not philosophers or semioticians who, with a propensity sometimes analytical and other continental, aim to give a more or less certain answer to the subject, we remain on the edge of this fascinating battlefield. However, from this battle we try at least to understand the

consequences and the effects it implies on the representation – critical and theoretical – of the world of architecture. The architects move in a field that needs to be very close to reality. The excessive “philosophical” abstraction, which sometimes we do not know how to handle, makes us build a theoretical castle that is only the pale reflection of the architectural and urban reality. In this sense, the lesson of Michael Baxandall is illuminating and is, in a way, a model that we can partially apply to architecture. The objective would be that the world of words that speak of architecture does not remain completely distorted and deprived of meaning.

### The Baxandall’s method

It is very fascinating and intriguing the system of reading works of art developed by Michael Baxandall that, as we have already widely anticipated, can be applied, in a kind of “disciplinary” transfer, to the architectural narrative. The sixth chapter of *Parole per immagini*, in which the British art historian deals with the Laocoon described by Jacopo Sadoletto, is exemplary. In it Baxandall raises a series of questions that are summarized in the last pages of this text dense and that, in our opinion, it is worth mentioning here: «What do our descriptions of a work of art cover? Evidently experience of the work rather than, directly, the work itself. But how far is it the narrative of an experience in progress and how far the map of a state of mind after having had an experience?» (Baxandall, 2009, p.136).

Further on, Baxandall says: «How to control slippages between interpretation and ekphrasis – that is, between the object treated as present to the reader and the object treated as absent – when its real availability to the reader is unstable?[...] In our time this seems very much a problem about the half-presence or pseudo-presence of objects in degraded or miniaturized or diapositive reproduction» (Baxandall, 2009, p.136).

The observations of Michael Baxandall, even in his brevity, open the doors to a universe of ideas that in itself deserves an essay. However, we try to focus our thoughts on the issues that seem inevitable to us and we try, therefore, to reformulate the Baxandallian questions. We could replace the term “works of art” with the expression “architectural works” and focus our attention on the main theme that is behind all our reasoning, that is, the narrative of architecture.

We could ask ourselves: what do our narrations of architectural works describe? First, like Jacopo Sadoletto, the critical/descriptive narrative around the architectural work is displaced – in time and in space – in comparison to the work itself: it was born afterwards and was born to define a direct or mediated spatial experience (through objects miniaturized or diapositive reproduction, Baxandall would say ...). Verbal language has an eye and body experience, but it also includes other narrative experiences that history often refers to. Hence, the comparative “games” that, however, run the risk of getting away from work: they intertwine with each other and combine with certain agility, since they are homologous languages. As we said before, in fact, grammars and compositional structures govern the linguistic system of work itself and the verbal system, including irreducible ones.

From these considerations arises the second question, also generated on the basis of Baxandall thought: how is it possible to control the deviations between the field of interpretation and that of the description (which is “simply” the verbal representation of the architectural work)? Here, the terrain begins to be slippery. Narrative fragments are often introduced



**Fig. 2**  
Forme dell'intenzione book cover

into *ékphrasis*, causing an inhomogeneous representation. From our point of view, however, the Baxandallian theory has consequences that can be almost nihilistic, since they could lead us to the conclusion that the work of art is almost “unspeakable”. In this way, the verbal language that represents the work could not capture the deepest essence of the works to which it approaches. On the other hand, the same Baxandall in the essay dedicated to the Resurrection of Christ by Piero della Francesca, towards the end of his fascinating reading of the painting, seems to withdraw from the battle to declare a kind of renunciation of interpretation, rather than a defeat.

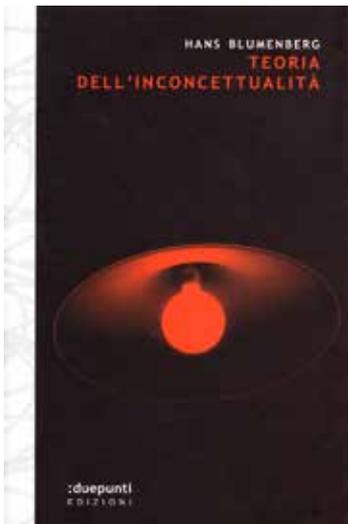
“This adds up to rather little one can actually say, all of it obvious but even so not all verifiable in a way that would prevent art historians from pursing their lips” (Baxandall, 2009, p. 190).

### Micro-récits

The narrative, in our opinion, can offer an escape and opening to other modes of representation that allow the construction of various descriptive and cognitive models of architecture and the city. Here, therefore, the role of the architect as the narrator can be central. In fact, he may be able to configure the physical space, but also to mold the collective imagination. Narration is a fundamental act of the human being, which exists also through history. Architecture, especially in recent decades, has not escaped this narrative condition. In fact, having experienced dramatically, like other disciplines, the decline of the so-called *grands récits*, architecture has gradually abandoned global theoretical systems. The monolithic theoretical *corpora* have gradually disintegrated, even to become *micro-récits* (small stories), fragments of stories or even minimal narrative that try to agglutinate around specific themes. The great theoretical frameworks give way to short narratives. Moreover, these narratives allow, in our opinion, to go beyond the obstacle posed by Baxandall. The micro-stories allow us to build an area in which these verbal concepts also become stories and metaphors.

In this sense, a few years ago, in the Sunday supplement of “Il Sole24ore”, a good review of a book by Hans Blumenberg (2011) appeared, which explained how the reality that surrounds us cannot be narrated only through conceptual and verbal constructions, because concepts are devices that allow objectifying something that is not present immediately for sensitive perception. This conceptual objectification becomes necessary in social communication: «But it is not realistic, warns Blumenberg, because by reducing reality in concepts, we believe in clarifying it. Instead, we lose a large number of non-transformable elements in concepts that are part of the “totality” in which we live. The philosopher recounts his difficulty when, in 1972, he was invited to scientifically explain his concept of “world”» (Li Vigni, 2011). Blumenberg maintains that the expression “world” is so vast that it can only be used metaphorically. All the reality that surrounds us is “absolute metaphor”, and only partially lends itself to conceptualization: this is what the German philosopher defines as the triumph of inconception.

Li Vigni says: «In the perception, representation and communication of life, the concept and the metaphor play, therefore, complementary roles. The analogical power and the figurative capacity of metaphor are the basis of linguistic creativity [...]. Copernicus would never have imagined his solar system if he had used the concepts available at that time and would not



**Fig. 3**  
Teorie dell'inconcettualità book cover

have dared, metaphorically, to unthinkable situations» (Li Vigni, 2011). Narration as a tool to describe, define, represent and theorize architecture, has a strong heuristic function, because it allows us to build a cognitive and representative system that is more open, less rigid, and more suitable for constructing metaphors that are closer to the essence of the works. Stories have the ability, in comparison with linear descriptions, to move through the pattern of correspondences. The linear and progressive discourse always places us clearly, through spatio-temporal coordinates, in a place or in a sequence of times and places arranged linearly. However, reality moves in many places at the same time, its complexity is intertwined and highlighted and cannot be reduced to simplifying schemes. The narrative contributes, on the other hand, to the construction of the multiple and «it is so that the discourse, the history and tragedy multiply the energies of thought, moving the subject in the path of the unconscious» (Rella, 1987, p.18).

The unity of place, action and time of Aristotelian origin, forces linear representations that reduce the scope of architectural reality. Stories that overlap, diverge towards other stories and explore even different territories. These stories allow us to open new horizons, since they have a much stronger heuristic load. A linear representation, guided by a clear central idea (the main tone of the composition) already knows where to get: it is a deterministic development, based on secure elements.

To explore, even in architectural criticism of contiguous domains, to move towards different registers (artistic, aesthetic, socioanthropological, economic, etc.) allows a holistic vision. Because architecture is not built by one hand.

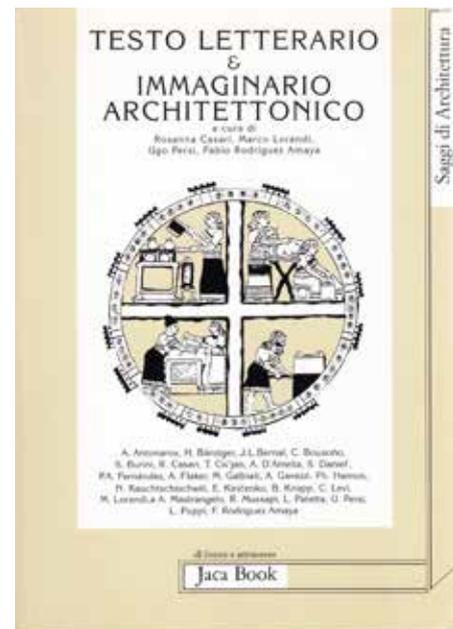
### **Rem Koolhaas: the lesson of a storyteller..**

Those who had the opportunity to have Rem Koolhaas' books in their hands will have realized the enormous difference that exists between them and most other architecture books. In particular, *S, M, L, XL* (1995) is a true explosion of narrations coming from completely different fields: from travel notes, comics, to a dictionary that meets the most different definitions and yet maintains a relationship with the world of architecture. The book, written in collaboration with Canadian designer Bruce Mau, is a “wild” cocktail of pixelated xerographies, homemade comics, pop quotes and extravagant typographic characters that challenge the dominant pomposity of the architect's profession.

However, although presented in this seemingly superficial way, Rem Koolhaas tells stories that surpass what – with snobbery – someone could define as the quintessence of a pop culture. It is a very far away from the pompous theorizations of the 60s and 70s. Koolhaas breaks that system and proposes an equally sophisticated one: a system in which narration is often the absolute protagonist. The psycho-narration of “Manhattanism” by *Delirious New York* (1978) is a clear example: even today, four decades later, that book constructs a story that, by adding fragments of other stories and pieces from other disciplinary worlds, opens towards a multiple and complex reading of an urban, economic and social phenomenon, such as New York. Koolhaas offers stories (in the narrative sense of the term) with which you can agree more or less. However, these stories allow us to reconstruct a new horizon of meaning, if we accept the narrative pact that Koolhaas stipulates with the reader. It is a different and distant dimension of classical theorization and representation; it is a narrative dimension, in



**Fig. 4**  
*Visioni di Venezia* book cover



**Fig. 5**  
*Testo letterario e immaginario architettonico* book cover

fact, in which the sophisticated game of references, metaphors and quotes is part of the flow of architecture that is, in itself, an open system composed of many questions and themes.

An example is clearly represented by a comic drawn inside the book *S, M, L, XL*. The issue addressed by Koolhaas is that of the relationship between investors and architects. Instead of writing a complex text that defines the balance of power between these two key players in the world of construction, the Dutch architect prefers to be represented in a comic as a kind of Hulk fighting against investors. Beyond the doubts that these modes of representation can be generated, the fact that we are in front of a very different narrative strategy. Moreover, this strategy has had a great echo and a great influence in the world of architecture: it is not a case, in fact, that the book on the evolution of modern architecture of the Danish studio Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), *Yes is more* (2011), is built as a comic story.

### **The narrative construction of architecture**

To conclude, let's try to understand what role narrative can play in the disciplinary field of architecture.

The compositional structures of architecture, despite their profound difference, have a certain analogical relationship with the structures of the narrative. Narrative strategies, therefore, are adequate for the critical and theoretical formalization of architecture, which often, to be explained and understood, must go beyond the narrow margins of the usual communications.

We have seen, from the ideas of Michael Baxandall, that it is difficult to maintain a direct correspondence between language and reality; this consideration helps to redefine the "classical" representations and forces the practice to a new awareness of reality: the idea of a constructive dimension of interpretations and praxis begins to open the way. The truths lose their absolute character to acquire the value of «principle of articulation and structuring of experience» (Gargani, p.132).

We can say that the contemporary architect behaves like a kind of sense-maker: he constructs systems of meaning, in which there are some non-absolute truths; but they have a «constructive and historical-temporal character, therefore discontinuous and heterogeneous» (Gargani p.113).

Probably, this is the task of a critique and a theory of architecture that wants to follow the thousand streams into which the discipline is divided. The storytelling, although it has to follow a linear system because this is the order of the words, allows a complex, varied and open reading, which takes charge of the multiplicity of the architecture that moves between the thousand plateaus of reality in which is.

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Anna Conzatti  
**Architecture and narrative.**  
**The dialogue of time, space and man**

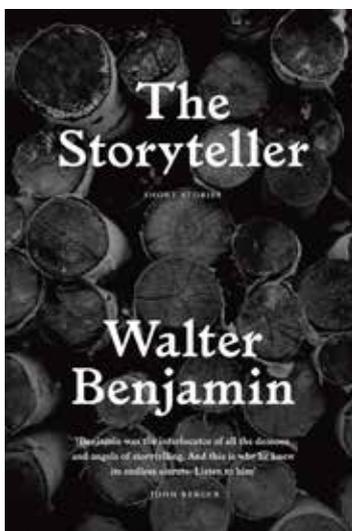
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Abstract

As the oldest way of interaction between people, narration is an archetypal form, like building, within man's daily life. The latter is enriched through the story, and it is sublimated through the spiritual experience of living space. Distant on the level of form and structure, of heaviness and impalpability, narration and architecture seem irreconcilable, but today, while in the contemporary every human experience is consumed by the speed of time, these two forms of communication find themselves investigating together the sense of time, space and human existence. Together they come to a new form of perception that goes beyond language and feeds on the sensibility of the architect, but also on the life that they are required to nourish and produce within a telling space.

Keywords

Storytelling — Time — Space



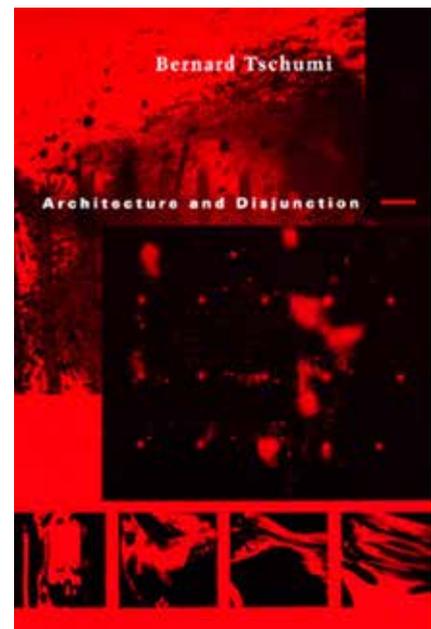
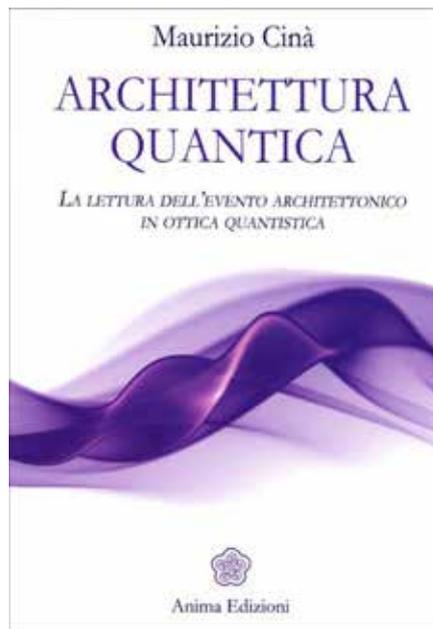
**Fig. 1**  
 Walter Benjamin (1969), *"The Storyteller"*. *Illuminations: essays and reflections*, Schocken books, New York.

Storytelling sometimes appears as a cynical and trendy epithet to describe the ability to tell stories typical of digital marketing. The main purpose of this strategy is the persuasion of the user, through emotional connections that try to involve the public with whom one wishes to weave a link. But it is simply a practice that has always existed, so much so that it can be defined as an archetypal form, through which human experience is expressed and charged with meaning.

The narrative, first oral and only subsequently written, is one of the most ancient and deeply rooted practices of society. An oral art can be traced in all the populations, so much so as to be able to affirm that the will to tell stories is innate in man. This art is soon submitted in favor of the written word, governed and guided by rules not only grammatical and lexical, but structurally determined by the conventions of time, the historical and cultural context that produces it and not least by the public to whom it is addressed.

The narration is guided by metrics, vocabulary and logic, space is governed by matter, relationships and proportions. Two distant fields, the architectural and the verbal tale, which apparently remain distant and autonomous. Massive and perceptible as well as building the first one, the other metaphorical and impalpable. Just as the story lives in the words of the narrator, the same can not be said of architecture, because where the work of the architect ends, that of the users begins within the architectural space and the words are lost between the steps, between the movements, in the interpretations and through the looks of those who live and change that architecture.

But yet it is also a story. Architecture is heavy, limited in space, the story

**Fig. 2**

Maurizio Cinà (2017), *Architettura Quantica. La lettura dell'evento architettonico in ottica quantistica*, Anima edizioni, Milano.

**Fig. 3**

Bernard Tschumi (1996), *Architecture and Disjunction*, Mass: MIT Press, Cambridge.

is like air, its presence is in the mind of the listener or reader and this peculiarity makes it one and infinite stories, based on the interpretation that each subject gives. Architecture has the time of discovery, of focusing, of the moment just before and the moment just after, the story lives in the linearity of the succession of events. But just in this last dissonance, the one concerning the use and the representation of time, here is that storytelling can approach that area, which is also an *arche*, which is completed with the *tecton*.

In contemporary times the communication of the story has changed. The word, whether written or oral, is consumed quickly, and never as now becomes incipient to understand the lesson *Show do not tell*. A warning also valid for architects. Show, even before telling, “Don’t tell me the Moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.”<sup>1</sup> says Chekhov. For architecture the task does not seem difficult, visual and material as it is, yet it too often turns to a different narration from that which expresses its structure, its spaces and its colors.

Storytelling is part of our communication and architecture is the same, if we consider communication as a language. Walter Benjamin himself explains how everything is a form of communication, a painting, an object, any human product is an expression of a particular form of language and the narration is one of these innumerable forms<sup>2</sup>.

Human action is the content of this communication, similar to the plot of a story and the spaces of a building. The human condition is a matter of the architect and through the story is constantly explored and taken to its ends to answer the big questions about the essence of existence.

### **The castle and the labyrinth: architecture as a metaphor**

It is no coincidence that in the expressive linguistic process, in metaphors to indicate the loss of man in front of the complexity of his condition, the architectural form of *labyrinth*<sup>3</sup> is often used. Emblematic and representative figure of contemporaneity, in the Castles of Atlas<sup>4</sup> in Ariosto (1532) is the trap that ensnares multiplying illusions, while for Calvino (1962) it is necessary to enter the labyrinth, as a challenge<sup>5</sup> for the man, who must prove to be up to the complexity of chaos and contemporary complexity. The Ligurian writer makes this figure his own, recalling a form so impor-

tant for Jorge Luis Borges (1941), that he represents through the labyrinthine library. Here we see what exists, but also what does not exist, in a multiplicity of forms and contents that amplify and reproduce reality. This architecture is the place where contemporary man moves: in the drama of his thoughts aimed at the realization of the precariousness of every action, in the vanity of every decision and the fragility of life but above all in the impossibility of freeing himself from this state. The library, in fact, does not have any way out. But it is with Joyce (1922) that the architectural metaphor of the labyrinth becomes a story and so in *Ulysses* the abandonment of traditional narrative structures is accomplished, reaching the extreme of the narrative form through the use of the flow of consciousness, dangerous and immediate, timeless in its authenticity.

The architecture then becomes first image of the story and then transmutes into the story itself, a story that takes place in its own dimension of time that, like the labyrinth, hides others, in an infinity of possibilities.

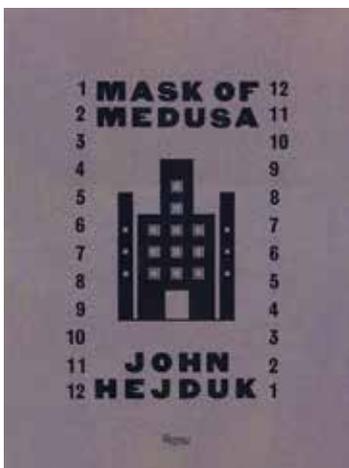
### Linearity and spatiality: time as a paradigm of words and space

It is often thought that the reading of a building is similar to that of film frames: a careful construction of points of view and events, through the manipulation of spatial experience.

In the case of architecture therefore time seems to be different from the linear one of narrative, but if attention is paid not to content, but to punctuation, narration is also a complex of pauses, moments, stops and summaries that the same user experiences discovering a building.

Architecture and storytelling face the same dichotomy: the time of the author / architect is the time of the listener / user. Often spatial manipulation of architecture risks to sacrifice individual human interpretation, even if the architect does not have complete control over his work. The timeline of events can be represented by the user experience, through the series of events that occur within the space and this is what decrees not only the immortality of the story, but also of the architecture. The spatial experience does not refer to the temporal linearity, but to the contemporaneity and in this sense John Hejduk (1985) is skilled in understanding the ability of architecture to tell the story without clinging to the linearity of space, but telling the simultaneity. His *Mask of Medusa* is a continuous and incipient emergence of stories that perpetuate and reconfigure each other, in an overlap of other stories that generate a new one. Disconnected and ambiguous elements, they become the cards of a story that is a city and as such it is a story made up of many other stories that develop outside the traditional narrative sequence.

The architectural building could be considered temporal, living a sort of dichotomy between historical time and the succession of events that characterize it, but time does not flow in one direction and in the graph of human existence the future is simultaneously fulfilled in the past. It is a sort of quantum context, that “relative to”, or relative to the one that the architecture observes and changes: the user. Maurizio Cinà clarifies this concept, defining precisely the space in which the architecture historian operates a quantum context. The decomposition of time in days, months or years of the architectural product is multidimensional and gets lost, because what matters is space, expressed in the multiplicity of forms that architecture generates thanks to those who experience and perceive this space. So to understand the close connection between narration and architectural experience, it is not enough to appeal to the succession of facts but



**Fig. 4**  
John Hejduk (1985), *Mask of medusa*, Rizzoli, New York.

it is also necessary to address the interpretation of the observing subject that lives in space.

### Interpretation: the secret lives of buildings

Just as the role of the listener or of the reader is essential for a story, in the same way the presence of the viewer is important in architecture, although often his figure is put in the background compared to that of the architect and his hand. The history of an architecture is perpetually manipulated to such an extent that often its initial meaning can result in time completely overturned. It therefore undergoes an evolution that is essential for its very survival and permanence over time. The composer of the story is not as free as it seems, in the choice of the information that is given of a building, as they can modify and influence the perception of space.

The building tells the lives of men, but a little also that of the architect. Architecture is the expression of existence, expresses the time in which it is produced and tells its story together with that of its occupants, stimulating the mind and sensitivity of its users, like a narration. And it is precisely by virtue of this narration that the conjunction between the world outside our mind and that within the minds of others takes place. Storytelling thus becomes a skill in the field of architecture, aimed at enriching the space without necessarily resorting to the manipulation of the user. It concerns architecture and at the same time architecture takes the narrative techniques to focus on each scene and involve the user, in a narration that does not concern the single interpretation, but creates thoughts and spaces that adapt to each experience and to the most varied understandings. In this way it is precisely architecture that tells one, many clearer and more authentic stories, exciting the user, making him live a spiritual experience that enriches him. Just as the psychological connection of events is not forced to the reader in the same way, an architecture is ultimately interpreted by him in the way he understands it, and so generates that multiplicity that makes the building and the story perpetual in time. where man can reach or at least approach that order which is the understanding of the world; through the dissolution of *chaos*, but accepting the complexity of reality<sup>6</sup>. A complexity made just by the multiplicity of stories and narratives, in a labyrinth in which the subject should not be lost. Because, as whispered by Muriel Rukeyser<sup>7</sup>, the universe itself speaks to us, all that is in it is a story, a multiplicity of words and discourses that clash like atoms, producing the marvelous existing.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Chekhov Anton; phrase paraphrased by a letter that the Russian writer and doctor wrote to his brother in 1886, explaining his literary ambitions.

<sup>2</sup> *Language in such contexts means the tendency inherent in the subjects concerned-technology, art, justice, or religion-toward the communication of the contents of the mind. To sum up: all communication of the contents of the mind is language, communication in words being only a particular case of human language and of the justice, poetry, or whatever underlying it or founded on it.*

Benjamin Walter, a cura di R. Solmi (2014) - *Angelus Novus. Saggi e frammenti*, Einaudi; Torino.

<sup>3</sup> *In the labyrinth you will not get lost. In the labyrinth you will find yourself. In the labyrinth you will not meet the Minotaurus. In the labyrinth you will meet yourself.* From Kern Hermann (1981) - *Labirinti. Forme e interpretazioni. 5000 anni di presenza di un archetipo. Manuale e filo conduttore*, Feltrinelli, Milano.



**Fig. 5**  
Sophia Psarra (2009), *Architecture and Narrative: The Formation of Space and Cultural Meaning*, Routledge, New York.

<sup>4</sup> Ariosto Ludovico (2012) - *Orlando furioso*, BUR editore, Milano.

<sup>5</sup> Calvino Italo (1962) - *La sfida del labirinto* (essay published on *Il Menabò* n.5), Torino.

<sup>6</sup> Calvino Italo (1962) - *La sfida del labirinto* (essay published on *Il Menabò* n.5), Torino.

<sup>7</sup> *The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.*

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Giovanni de Flego  
**“The only architecture will be our life” – or the tale of it.  
Narrative issues in the production of Superstudio**

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Abstract

This essay investigates the use of narrative in the production of Superstudio, considering the projects in which this aspect emerges the most. The use of narrative seems to increase during the development of the group's career: designs tend to look more and more like novels, until they become proper ones at the end after renouncing any possible idea of shape of the design itself, which in turn is dissolved into an architecture made of events and rituals, perfect subjects for a wide number of possible tales. After fifty years, the subject of narrative is surfacing again in the field of architecture: is it possible to recognize a continuity between contemporary storytelling and the one of Superstudio? Otherwise, are we facing a different scenario, even an opposite one?

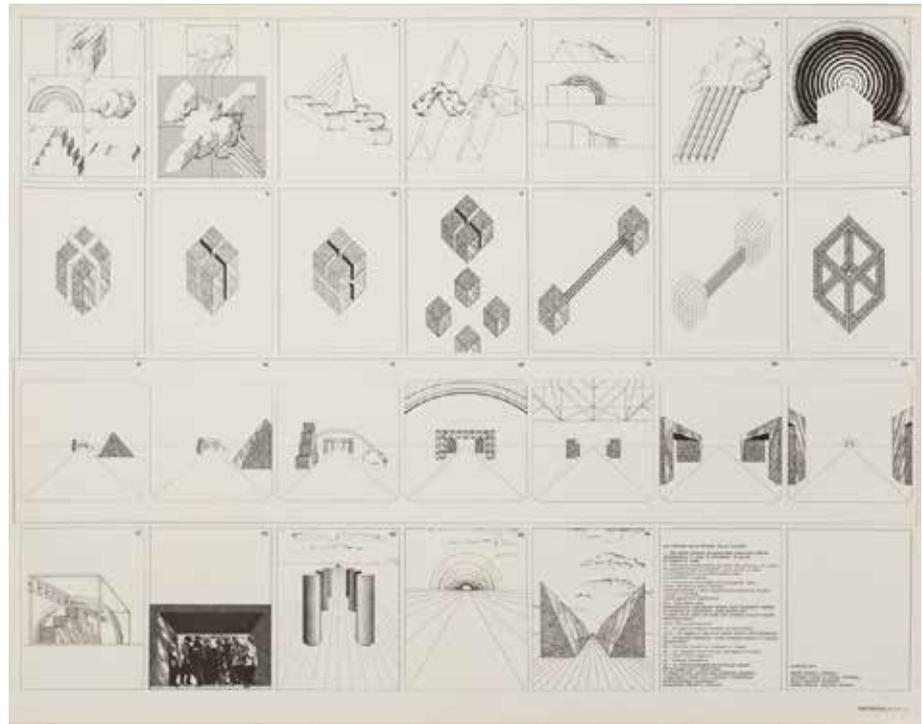
Keywords

Superstudio — narrative — critical utopia.

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This essay aims to investigate a particular aspect of the production of Superstudio<sup>1</sup>, which until today hasn't been subject of any specific dissertation: the role that narrative – intended as proper *tale* – played inside the production of the Florentine group<sup>2</sup>. I will deeply analyze this aspect in the middle part of this text, before doing it I intend to search for a partial reason of this use of narrative, which is not unique in the course of architecture history, but certainly is not that recurrent: in this first part some similarities with other examples amongst the discipline will be underlined, as well as some other episodes will be analyzed through the looking glass of narrative.

Proceeding with order, I believe that this insertion of a narrative factor in the design must be ascribed to two different origins, the first linked to the cultural and social framework in which the group moved, the latter inherent in the very nature of its components. The production of Superstudio took place during the second wave of avant-garde that have marked the course of the twentieth century. This was created by an heterogeneous collective of groups and individuals that have eventually contributed to a critical rethinking of architecture by inserting previously excluded themes and methods with regard to its task and its horizon of meaning. The approximate chronological limits of this phenomenon, often defined as Neo-avant-garde, can be placed between the second half of the 50s and the first half of the 70s. According to the present discussion, among those set in motion by the various protagonists, one in particular seems to be the aspect on which we have to dwell: the changing role of the architectural project. In fact, we can witness a sort of unprecedented shift of the values of “means” and “goal” within the design, which lead to a distortion of the usual sense

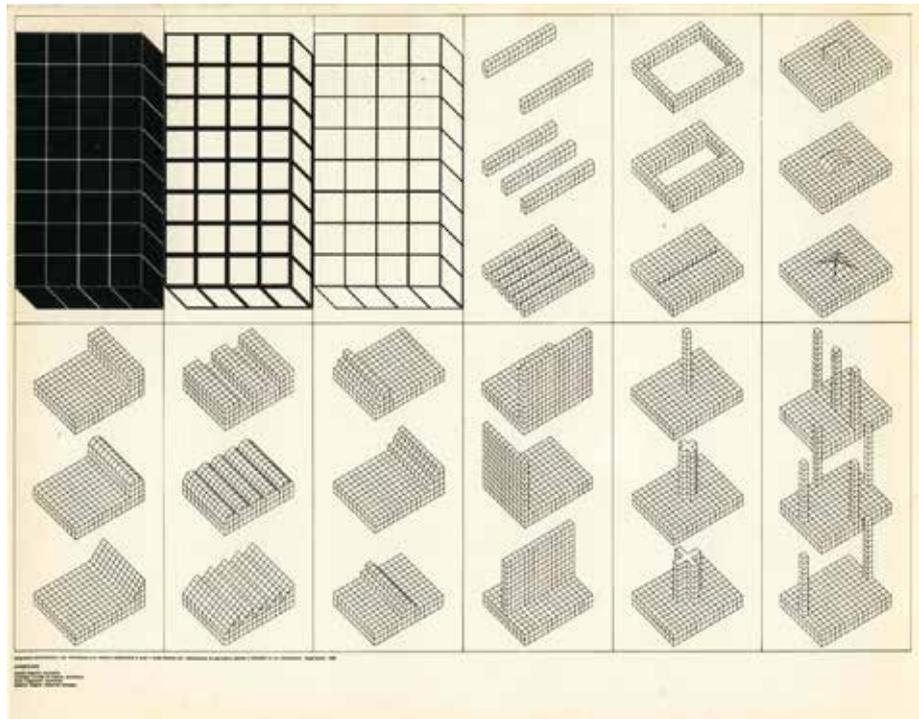


**Fig. 1**  
Superstudio, Viaggio nelle regioni della ragione, 1969.

of architecture. In other words, if the most common “goal” of architectural composition was the construction of an architecture, or an investigation of architecture itself as construction, this system of relations in the production of Neo-avant-garde changed radically, in favor of a diverse vision, within which architecture is a “means”, in this case a *critical* one. From this perspective many episodes of the era find reason for being, justifying aspects that otherwise would be deemed lacking: if the architectural project had become a critical device, then the actual constructibility, the realism of environments, details, technological devices and so on became off topic, issues of little relevance, or not relevant at all, being, as they were, overwhelmed by the purpose of a whole composition addressed to criticism. This criticism took the form of a profoundly antagonistic, often negative position, thanks to the socio-political climate of the time and the young age of the protagonists: it remains to be understood what the object of this position was. These were the years in which the critical interrogation was strongly present in almost every field of culture: its parameters, practices and preconceptions were deeply challenged. In the case of the young Neo-avant-garde groups, the issues were often the same that most of the young Europeans carried out: political and social antagonism towards the world of the near past as well as to the contemporary one, denial of that technical, technological and consumeristic world that seemed to be looming on the horizon<sup>3</sup>. This future, this world of tomorrow, revealed itself as one of the sharpest weapons before the eyes of the various protagonists: architecture thus had become a means of telling a new and different universe, capable of exposing and bringing out those contradictions that capital seemed to intrinsically trigger, only to suppress and smooth just afterwards.<sup>4</sup> “Imagining a different future” was a way - albeit brief - to say: “to make utopia”. Yet this “utopia making” of the Neo-avant-garde showed itself to be profoundly different from the episodes of the past, since that prefiguration of the future, as mentioned, was a critical means: the worlds that arose from the designs of the various groups were not utopian scenarios - and therefore desirable - but mechanisms that allowed an antagonism towards

the present, a denial of its values. In this way they sometimes took on the form of wholly undesirable, horrible places. This semantic difference with respect to classical utopia has led to the coinage of the term *critical utopia*. Whatever its specificity, utopia and narrative are deeply related since the birth of the original model, that Utopia<sup>5</sup> – capitalized, this time – which is the tale of a journey towards a far but reachable island, albeit with some difficulties. The binomial utopia-tale is justified by the undoubted communicative efficacy of the second factor: through narration it is certainly easier to transmit concepts and principles, by relying not only on the content aspect, but also on the emotional one. Utopia, communication and architecture do not meet for the first time in the Neo-avant-garde, and there are previous examples, among whose it is worth briefly highlighting two episodes, one more direct – the eighteenth-century French utopians – and one that can be interpreted according to this point of view – the Modern Movement. In the first example the term “speaking” architecture is often used: architecture not only prefigures the image of a new world, but also fulfills the role, through various expedients, of communicating to the viewer the symbolic, civil and revolutionary principles. Also with regard to the Modern, we can recognize a similar aspiration, perhaps even more radical: the modern city not only intends to fulfill the new tasks imposed by a mutating society, different from the past, but communicates in its own way, more or less clear, the utopia of a new world, of a different society, more just, efficient and above all egalitarian, a society that is not that of the present, but of the immediate future. If we can not speak in a strict sense of narrative meant as a narrative plot, it is certain that in both cases we are dealing with an architecture that is also communication, and that of communication, returning now to the Neo-avant-garde period, was certainly a very important theme for the various protagonists: essential studies had emerged on the subject<sup>6</sup>, there was a constant expansion of the mass media and their coverage, and most of the groups were dedicated to the drafting of independent bulletins<sup>7</sup> or regularly published onto official magazines.<sup>8</sup> Architecture as a critical tool, utopia, communication: in the light of what has been said so far, it is understandable how the dimension of the tale has played an important role in the Neo-avant-garde production, and how a considerable quantity of projects showed non-negligible narrative aspects. One could dwell here with numerous examples<sup>9</sup>, but we would go too far from the main theme of this text, exclusively focused on Superstudio; the latter, however, will in itself constitute an argument in favor of what was previously stated. As announced, in contributing to the appearance of narrative issues related to the architectural project, in the case of the Florentine group to the environmental circumstances so far disjointed are added factors related to the education and the interests of the various components. Although Superstudio was a heterogeneous group if we consider the cultural journey of the individual protagonists<sup>10</sup>, they were united by a common passion for science fiction<sup>11</sup>, above all the sociological one, which can be read in Italy on the pages of *Urania*: as we shall see, its influence is detectable in texts and images. We can appreciate how the typical predisposition to communication, criticism and narration of the Neo-avant-garde is supported in the case of Superstudio by a personal passion for the future as narration.

I will now proceed to a quick overview of the works, in order to demonstrate how the narrative dimension acquired more and more importance with the progress of the group’s production over time; for the sake of brev-



**Fig. 1**  
Superstudio, *Istogrammi*, 1970.

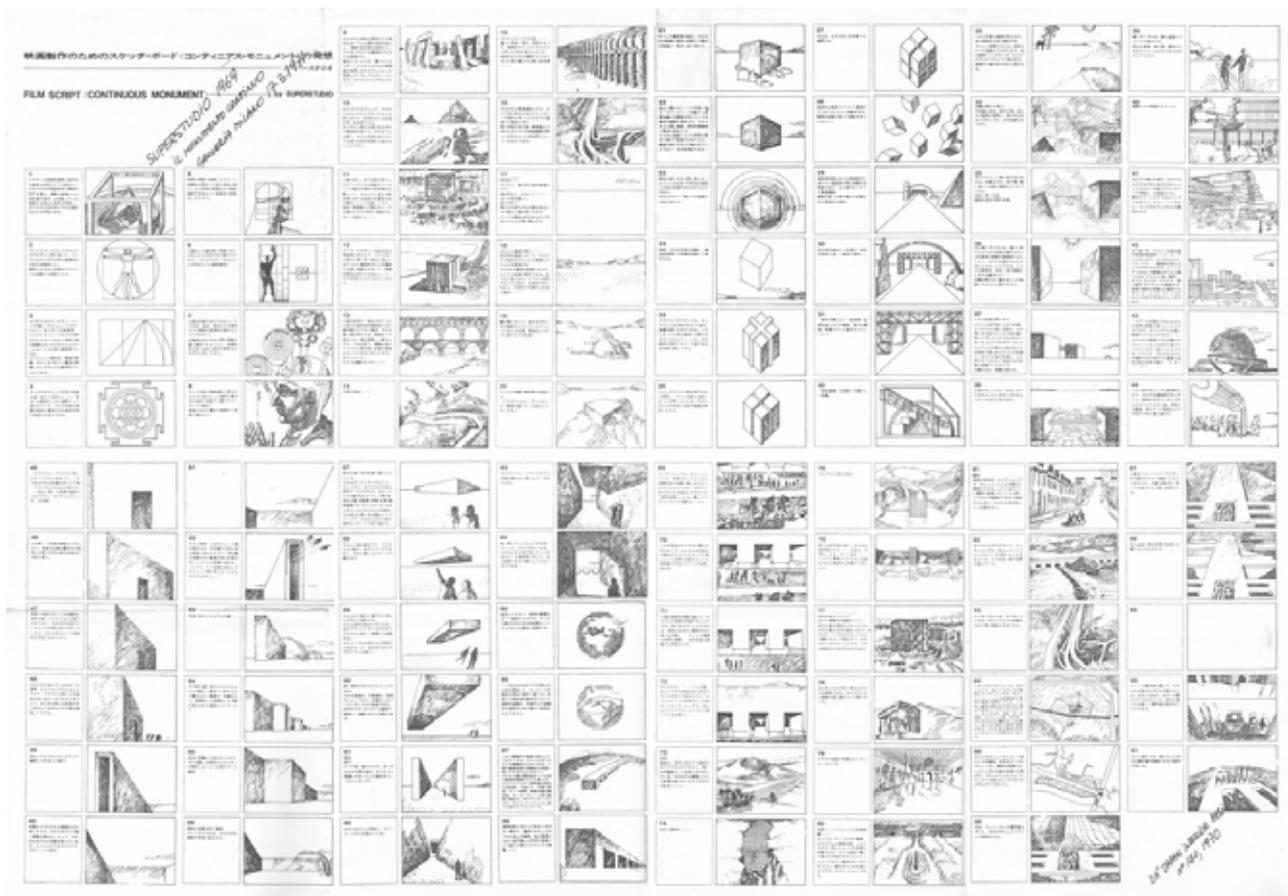
ity I will not consider all the works, but those that more than others allow a clear reading in this sense.

During 1969, on the pages of *Domus*<sup>12</sup>, the group published *Un viaggio nelle regioni della ragione*, a work that inaugurated the use of a strategy of representation that will be often used by Superstudio, inherited from the world of cinema: that of the storyboard, that is to say a series of images representing a chronological sequence of events. In this case the document is configured as a systematization of some drawings and projects, conceived by the group since 1966: instead of opting for graphic tools such as charts or synoptic tables, the Florentines inserted what they produced in a narrative frame, in a sort of development over time. Being heterogeneous starting projects, the result was a story with dreamlike, psychedelic colors, within which the projects themselves move as characters, partly distorting their primal sense and abandoning any limit of scale or material. It is sometimes easier to recognize the consequential description of simple primary compositional processes, such as that linked to the subdivision of the cube, a very important solid in the composition of Superstudio<sup>13</sup>, while in other cases the logical and chronological connections seem more complex to interpret. What is important in the present essay is how in this case we can recognize a first episode within which a clear narrative appeared in the group's production: it had assumed a cardinal role, on the one hand it was constituted as a poetic justification of previous compositional processes, on the other it modified and broadened the field of meaning. The narrative aspect is in this case mainly linked to the iconographic component, the short accompanying texts seem to be placed on a further interpretative plane, suspended between poetry and irony, and when read without images they seem difficult to understand, especially with regard to causal and chronological relationships. The document does not seem to show a single sequence, but different scenes, juxtaposed without interruption, some of which are limited to a single still frame.<sup>14</sup>

A passion for narrative also accompanied one of the short texts related to the project for the *Istogrammi di architettura*: the tone is almost reveal-

ing, biblical, the use of past tense is preferred<sup>15</sup>, however the thing seems to be more a stylistic and poetic expedient, rather than a compositional mechanism. The text moved towards territories which became typical of the group's second phase of activity. After beginning very close to Anglo-Saxon pop art<sup>16</sup>, Superstudio was heading towards a dreamlike realm, minimal and detached, made of *unique designs*, non physical architecture<sup>17</sup>, “effortless” composition and anthropological rites: a universe that will be fertile ground for the flourishing of much more complex narrations, as we will see later.

Analogous tones to those used for the *Istogrammi* can be found in the writing relative to the *Grazerzimmer*<sup>18</sup>, which started the planning process of the famous *Monumento continuo*. In the text *Lettera da Graz*, published on *Domus*<sup>19</sup>, the preparation of the exhibition to which Superstudio was invited to participate - and in which they exposed just a small portion of what becomes later the *Monumento* - is described in a narrative way with fabulous or legendary tones<sup>20</sup>, as if it were the point of arrival of a trip. Once again, the narrative does not enter into the composition, but accompanies the results. It is precisely with the *Viadotto di architettura* and then the *Monumento continuo* that we witness a breakthrough in this sense. The first images of the gigantic building show a sort of implicit chronological relationship regarding the contents, in other words they seem different, chronologically arranged phases of the same story: the first photomontage of the *Monumento* shows its emerging from the desert sands, as in an act of birth, and then we see it plowing the desert, the English cocktowns, Medina, and then land in the great metropolis *par excellence*, New York City. Notice how the hypothetical movement of the building is not only placed within a geographic consequentiality, but also a chronological one, as if it were an ancient, ancestral element. A typescript of 1969 includes a first storyboard, from which we can appreciate an increase in the narrative dimension inherent in the project: compared to *Un viaggio nelle regioni della ragione*, it is a larger and more homogeneous document, within which the consequentiality of the events is much easier to follow than the previous one. On the one hand it provides a reconstruction of the design genesis, on the other it helps to clarify poetic and compositional issues. A sequence of 92 frames leads us through various scenes: in the one we could recognize as the first, characterized by an argumentative and didactic slant, we face a sort of *prequel*, in which we reflect on geometry and measurement, read as elements of cosmic order, and therefore agents of peace and tranquility for the restless humanity. From the seventeenth frame things change, and we enter into the vividness of the story, with the dreamlike vision of a pure black cube emerging from the desert sands, then bandaging and partitioning in the same way seen in *Un viaggio nelle regioni della ragione*. The operation that comes to life in the third scene is quite similar: we recognize frames that refer to the same document, in this case drawings that describe a journey inside a “museum / drive in of architecture”. Other scenes follow one another, *Come arredare il deserto*, *Come illuminare il deserto*, until reaching a nodal point of the story in images: the group of events called *Le apparizioni*. In this quintet we witness deeply dreamlike sequences, enigmatic and dense scenes with a symbolic charge, in which references to the black square of Malevic and supersonic jets coexist; it is the fifth of them that leads the narration towards the *Monumento continuo*, in fact at its conclusion the point of view changes radically, moving away from the desert to embrace the entire planet Earth. Slowly, the im-



**Fig. 3**  
Superstudio, storyboard del Monumento continuo, 1970.

age tightens towards the ground and two lines, at the height of the tropics, seamlessly draw the surface of the planet, showing themselves as a single element, a unique design, a monument of cyclopic scale which is synthesis and final model of all those appearances seen in the previous sequences: in picture 67 it is interrupted, giving us back the idea of an element in rectilinear movement - and therefore a *rational* one in the Florentines' vision<sup>21</sup> - whose ultimate aim is that planetary embrace foreshadowed in the frame before. We zoom in and see the monument retrace more precisely that path in space and time of which we have spoken previously; the building is inserted first in the nature, then it affects and replaces the great monuments of the past, and finally reaches the great monument of modernity: the new city, the American metropolis, now outdated and reduced to "a bunch of ancient skyscrapers" by the *Monumento continuo*. We can here understand how narrative was assuming an important role in the design process of the group: without it, a considerable part of the images would not be exhaustive at all to reconstruct and justify the poetic and compositional level. After having investigated *non-physical architecture* and the *unique design*, the attention of the group deviated towards an ever greater dematerialization of the architecture itself, in favor of a renewed interest regarding its anthropological origin. This was the premise of the heterogeneous collection entitled *Atti fondamentali*, a five-films project, five "chapters", not all realized, precisely dedicated to those anthropological acts, which were recognized as generative both of architecture and of human life in a broader sense: *Vita, Educazione, Cerimonia, Amore, Morte* (Life, Education, Ceremony, Love, Death). A heterogeneous collection, it has been said: different are indeed the types of document that should contribute to the making of films, such as critical texts, images, storyboards and narrations, which, in this case, take the shape of proper tales. Sometimes it is possible to detect an absence of continuity, for example what begins as a critical text or a pseudo-technical essay can suddenly turn into a story. In the case of this document I will make a selection by focusing on passages that do not require overcomplicated treaties: there are numerous narrative examples present in the *Atti* that would require long reasoning, omitted here for brevity and relevance to the theme of this essay. Moreover, from the point of view of the sources, I will refer to the collection of works recently edited by Gabriele Mastrigli, which, from this point of view, certainly is the most complete text currently available.<sup>22</sup>

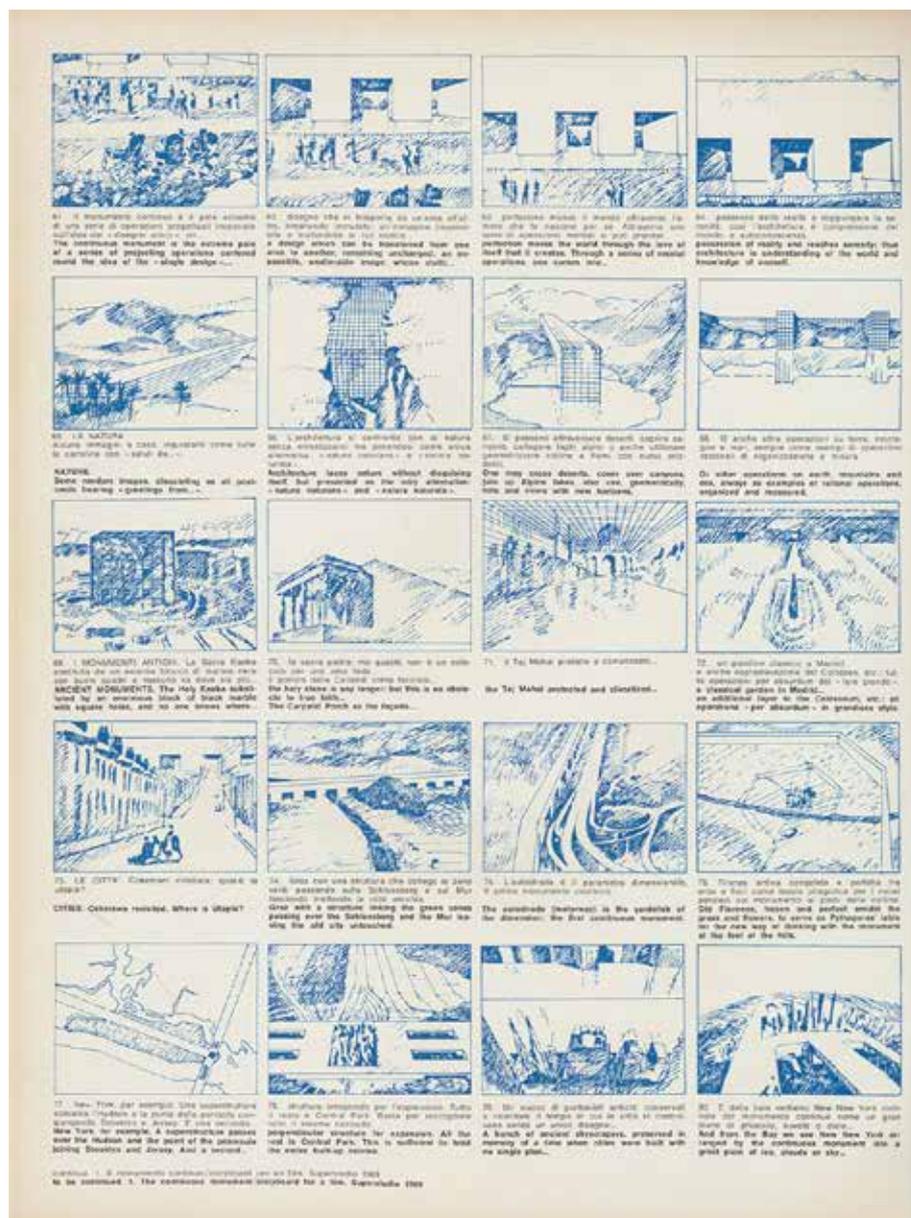
Coming now to the *Atti, Casabella* published in 1972 the collection of texts that the group simultaneously presented at the MoMA in New York<sup>23</sup>, concerning the first of the five macro-themes that make up the operation, *Vita: Supersuperficie*. This project - one of the most iconic and well-known of the group - will be analyzed in more detail in comparison to the other chapters of the document, precisely in the light of this greater notoriety. The *Supersuperficie* stands as an "alternative model"<sup>24</sup> of existence on planet Earth: accompanying the very well-known images, photomontages and installations, and also as commentary track on the explanatory video, there are texts of particular interest, characterized by that ease in change of register which was previously asserted. On *Casabella*, as mentioned, we can read some conspicuous excerpts from the video storyboard; from the first programmatic and technical paragraphs, the text moves rapidly towards a narrative turn, we recognize how the images produced are nothing more than illustrations to real stories of a future that is more or less possible. Short passages like *La montagna lontana* or *L'accampamento*<sup>25</sup>

seem like beginnings of tales whose continuation is given to the reader-spectator's imagination, to be stimulated by the fascinating images accompanying the text. In intense passages like *Cosa faremo*<sup>26</sup> the tone of voice changes again moving closer to the parable, the prophecy. It is worth underlining that narrative is no longer an accompaniment or a generative element of the architectural composition, but a substitute of it: *Supersuperficie* is the culmination of a reductive path on architecture, in favor of that Life (*Vita*) we find in the title, and in this sense it seems understandable how the technique of the story turns out to be much more useful to communicate this concept, effectively summarized in the well-known phrase "The only architecture will be our life".

If within *Vita* we have been able to recognize various moments of narration - or pseudo-narration, this aspect is even more present in the second chapter, the one dedicated to education: following two introductory texts, we come across a series of possible stories. The first is actually a meta-history, a sort of project for a story, entitled *Una vita intera* (A Whole Life): within it we encounter the idea of making a film, a very long one lasting as long as a person's life cycle, characterized by didactical and educational purposes. The second story is a fake conference - held by an element of Superstudio - concerning life and works of the fictional architect Almerigo Baccheschi: the tone is farcical, ironic and sometimes cynical. The technique of fake conference, with similar tones, is also present in another passage, entitled *Un esempio di cerimoniale* (An example of ceremonial), in which we find ourselves attending a hypothetical congress of ethnology: Italy is a country inhabited by "indigenous people" that must be studied. The mechanism put in place by the story is all in all simple but effective, according to an ironic critique of the education world in the Italian country: the school career is in fact figured and interpreted as a series of initiation rites, the education itself is painted as something related to a tribal world, in which Greek and Latin are nothing but "archaic dialects".

Proceeding to the third chapter of the *Atti*, dedicated to ceremony, we are faced with various stories that again seem to be based on fictitious ethnologies: *Quelli che non alzano i muri e sono felici*, *Los esclavos*, *Il grande pellerinaggio*, *Un rito espiatorio*, *Gli uomini che vollero il deserto*, *Un edificio per una cerimonia sconosciuta* (Those who do not raise walls and are happy, Los esclavos, The great pealing, A rite of expiation, The men who wanted the desert, A building for an unknown ceremony). Because of the vastness of the issues addressed, this collection would need a separate treatment, in this case I simply intend to point out how these six ethnological stories actually turn out to be harsh criticisms - in the form of metaphors - addressed to some of the practices of design and commercial architecture, together with some typical mechanisms set in motion by capitalism.

In the fourth chapter, dedicated to love, all writings make use of narrative fiction: we encounter a series of short stories within which, in an original way regarding the document, the image of an infamous "macchina innamoratrice" (a love-creating machine) appears. A particularly interesting moment, in relation to this investigation, is recognizable in the passage entitled *Un edificio nella Giungla* (A Building in the Jungle), in whose frame we can recognize a sort of meta-history, a story that contains another; it is, moreover, one of the most focused parts of the document on architecture, now often abandoned in favor of critical positions involving larger specters of human existence. The story in question narrates the meeting with the architect of a building characterized by a high symbolic value, placed within



**Fig. 4**  
Superstudio, storyboard del Monumento continuo, dettaglio, 1970.

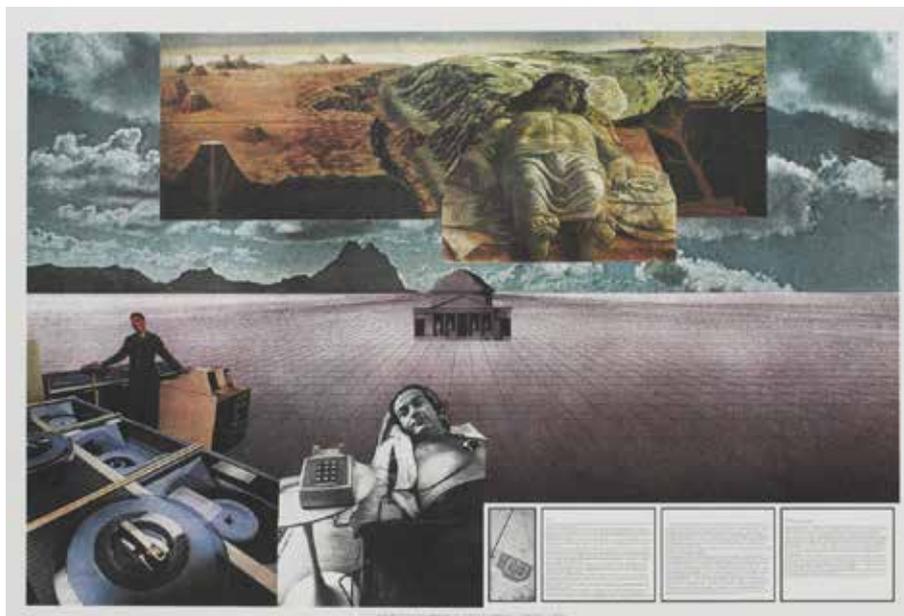
a vast clearing in the thick of a forest: the gigantic architecture is configured as a system of boxes in the box, in the form of parallelepiped. From the architect's words we learn how they represent successive phases of the construction of the building, in an inverse chronological movement in comparison to what we could presage: the central part, apparently ancient, ancestral, is in fact the most recent. The building is inhabited only by its designer and has been abandoned by its inhabitants, the story in the story - the words of the architect - proves to be a narrative tool capable of setting in motion a critical metaphor towards the architectural discipline, and this in terms of theory, history, composition and relationship with the client.<sup>27</sup> The last part, focused on death, begins with a typology of writing not yet encountered within the document, that is to say a catalog, a collection of what are the typical funeral uses of various parts in the world.<sup>28</sup> This is followed by other catalogs of quotes on death divided by subject area. I am interested in pointing out how - even in this case - narration is to be found in the passage *Morte, ovvero dell'immagine pubblica del tempo e della memoria* (Death, or the public image of time and memory). The tone of voice is that biblical and prophetic one we have learned to recognize in many of the previous examples, and even in this case we are faced with a

story within a story. The narrating voice is immersed in an unknown and surrealist environment,<sup>29</sup> which we understand to be a cemetery, or rather one of the models of cemetery now located along the entire surface of the planet, whose functioning is later comprehended through a sort of “sheet of instruction” by the protagonist<sup>30</sup> - precisely the story in the story we talked about. Here the colors of the tale are tinged with science fiction, what seemed like a mystical and symbolic world reveals itself as a utopistic satellite-based information technology, which is able to perpetuate the memory forever by turning the cemeteries into databases of deceased personalities and realizing at last a new and peaceful relationship with death. As for the aforementioned building jungle, this is one of the stories that still consider architecture as a focal point, and this tale shows references to the project drawn up by the group for the competition of the Modena cemetery<sup>31</sup>. It is true that in general, within this document, the architecture discipline seems to be put in background in favor of sociological issues: in this we can recognize not only the effectiveness but the necessity of the use of the narrative form as a means of communication capable to transmit more easily the desired concepts and the underpinning poetics. With this I intend to underline again how the story, as a compositional expedient, became an inevitable need in the late-middle phase of the group’s production. Intentionally I saved for last a document created shortly before *Atti*, between 1971 and early 1972, a document that can be recognized as the maximum point reached by the value of narrative in the production of Superstudio. Inside of it emerges a strong presence of architecture-related themes that, as seen before, often vanish at this stage. It is entitled *12 Città ideali* (12 ideal cities),<sup>32</sup> a non-systematic collection<sup>33</sup> of twelve stories, dystopias<sup>34</sup> of future cities, written only by Gian Piero Frassinelli, “anthropologist” and internal critical front of the group. Each chapter describes a city, operating in a similar way to science fiction literature, in its most critical and sociological fringe: increasing a single aspect of contemporary, considered to be negative. In this sense, these cities of the future are nothing more than metaphorical hypertrophy of the modern cities, in which their complexity of coercions, contradictions and injustices is dissected and returned in an augmented and dramatically resolved form. Central are the themes of the technique - understood as a rule practice to be applied on a large scale to individual critical issues - and technology - seen as an element in the implementation of this technique: we are still facing architectures, about which are defined more or less precise operations and mechanisms, but these architectures resemble nothing but complex and highly effective torture machines. The collection is an inhomogeneous catalog of horrors in the form of architecture, interrogative visions and criticisms against a present that is seen as directed to the catastrophe. According to the author, this catalog is the only project of Superstudio that actually is originated by writings and not by images: this generated many difficulties in the creation of the graphic accompaniment<sup>35</sup>. In a different occasion I have been able to deepen in detail the sum of themes, references and affinities that lie beneath the writing of the document<sup>36</sup>, which I will cover here briefly, in order to demonstrate how, even in this case, the use of the narrative does not represent a stylistic choice but a compositional and design need, in a critical key. The images are not sufficiently effective to transmit the antagonistic drive that animates the whole document: consider, for example, the first city, easier to deal with here, entitled *Città 2000t*. From the images in our possession we obtain partial information of

**Fig. 5**  
Superstudio, Atti fondamentali,  
Vita: Supersuperficie, 1972.



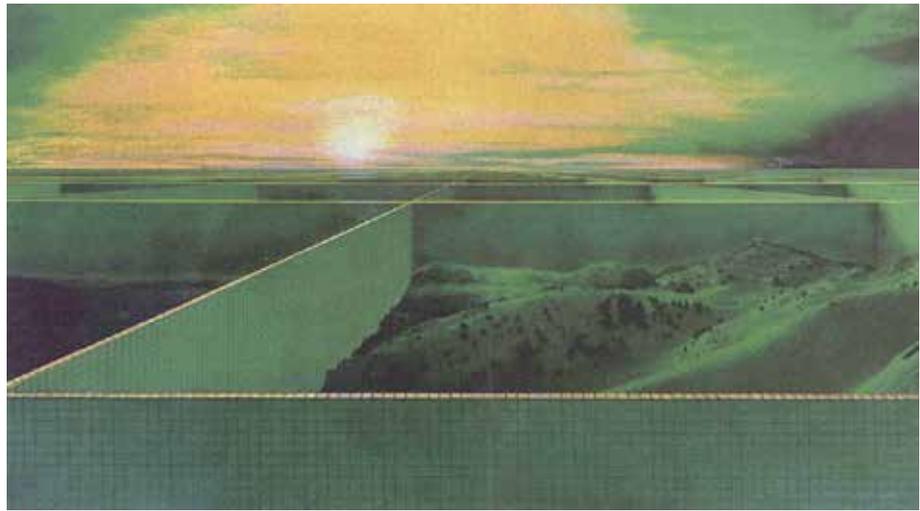
**Fig. 6**  
Superstudio, Atti fondamentali,  
Morte, 1972.



its macroscopic configuration - a grid of cyclic order, potentially extensible to infinity in two dimensions - and microscopic one - a second grid, made up of single cells of which we also know the measurements. However, the illusory and at the same time repressive mechanism that regulates the city is not transmissible through the use of images: we learn from the story that this it is a complex *apparatus*<sup>37</sup>, which applies a deeply coercive authority and control, exploiting the palliative of a eternal life, made of desires virtually fulfilled and renewed through a futuristic technology<sup>38</sup>. In fact, the inhabitants live an infinite existence, in an induced hypnagogic state, without relationships with each other, connected to a central computer that analyzes and satisfies the desires, acting in a technical way, that is making the summation of them and re-transmitting the most common ones to all individuals. Technology is a mother, who takes care of the lives of her childrens: there is no effort, work, competition, but lack ambition, commitment, sharing. As a real divinity, what the city provides, can also be removed: when the thoughts and desires of an inhabitant are not aligned with those of the mass, the ceiling of his cell comes down, turns into a press with the weight of 2000 tons, that puts an end to the existence of any dissent.<sup>39</sup> It is not difficult to recognize in this project an harsh critical metaphor in the form of architecture, antagonistic towards the society of conformism, the desires induced by unbridled consumption, the repression - even violent - of dissent. The other scenarios of the document operate in a similar way, hurling against conformism, hierarchies and social climbing at all costs, alienating work, entertainment as a collective outpouring of violent instincts, immorality and self induced fiction.<sup>40</sup>

Eventually, this concept of architecture as a critical tool, and not as ultimate purpose, emphasizes the effectiveness of the narrative in the work of Superstudio: the more the issues move away from disciplinary themes, embracing a transversal dimension, the more the narration acquires efficiency, for its greater communicative value. In the same years we can recognize a continuation of similar strategies in the work of Rem Koolhaas,<sup>41</sup> an admirer of the group, however in Superstudio the narrative has undoubtedly reached an importance that few, or perhaps none, have managed to approach.

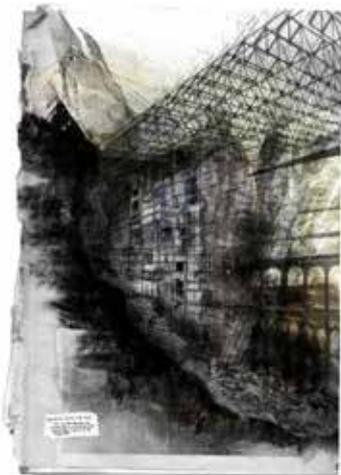
Nowadays, about fifty years later, we are witnessing a reappearance of themes related to narrative within architecture, and it makes sense to question ourselves, in the light of the contents so far treated, whether there is continuity, affinity or discrepancy between what is happening today and this previous disciplinary episode. As a first consideration, in several passages I have emphasized how narrative reveals itself as a very useful tool for the transmission of meaning, for *communication*, not only on the conceptual level but also on the poetic and emotional ones. We recognize here a first reason for today's adoption of the practice called *storytelling*: nowadays communication and emotion play roles often joined side by side, if not in rare cases superimposed, certainly important in a unique historical moment like ours. In this framework communication has become a precious product, and emotion is one of the most effective attracting elements within it. It seems that the narration has appeared or reappeared in the architectural discipline since *telling a story* has become important, more important than in the past. There is a parallel with the work of Superstudio: the inescapable necessity of the narrative; however, if the presence of this necessity is common, it's not obvious that the nature of it and its deep motivation are equally common. For the Florentine



**Fig. 7**  
Superstudio, Città 2000t, 1972

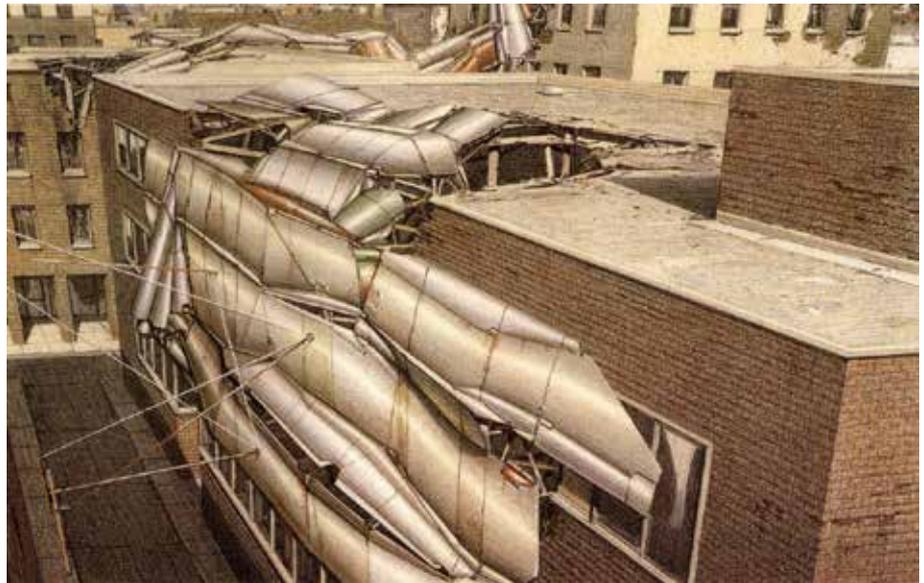
group, as we have said, the tale is the answer to a need for greater effectiveness in communicating a critical, negative and antagonistic position at different levels, which, with the advancement of production, passes from a simple representation technique to a part integral to the compositional act: it is not a superimposed element of the project, but part of the project itself. Can we support the same with regard to contemporary design? Being in this case the very wide area of investigation, I can only state *a priori* the partiality of the answer, however some critical reasoning can be put in place. First of all, when we are talking about *storytelling*, a term with a recent coinage and still without a single definition, we do not mean only the act of narrating a story, but in some fields the mere act of *telling*, in order to capture the attention and create interest. “In some fields”, it has been said: one of these is that of commercial communication, within which storytelling means telling a product, a brand, in order to create interest in the first case and raise *awareness* in the second one.<sup>42</sup> In this sense, the necessity we talked about comes back, but it is not an expressive necessity, rather a necessity of communication, or more properly a necessity related to the market. Consider also that in a mechanism of this kind an interesting reversal of roles is possible: if the important thing is to tell, then it is the content that serves the story, and not the story that serves the content. The latter may also have little importance, what matters is that you talk about it, and it will be important if you talk about it a lot and in a good way. As proof of what has just been said, it is worth mentioning the practice of *branded content* here: this term refers to the creation of contents related to a specific brand, that is to say potentially interesting stories that may be associated with a company, which maybe does not even produce any products or services directly related to those stories. There are many examples in this regard,<sup>43</sup> what should be emphasized is that it is a requirement bounded to marketing, which we are here interested in because of its role of *index*. In fact, it underlines that when we deal with the contemporary, perhaps something has changed in our relationship with narration, even before the relationship that architecture has established with it. This leads us to ask ourselves if it is possible to consider architecture as a product, and if therefore - in a contemporary way - it needs, like the other products, a certain part of narrative, of storytelling, in order to penetrate the market. In some cases I can give an affirmative answer, outside of any value judgment on the architecture itself. A relevant example seems to be the publication *Yes is more*, by Bjarke

Ingels, a volume that, as is well known, uses the cartoon tool to make storytelling around the production of the BIG studio. Ingels is probably one of the most conscious communicators in the field of contemporary architecture, and in this book he takes us through a sort of “behind the scenes” of some of his major projects. The ultimate intention does not seem to be explanatory, in this sense it would have been more useful and effective to use archival materials such as photographs of models and sketches, arranged in chronological schedules or compositional diagrams. However, Ingels does not act in this way, through the comics he tells not the production, but the design attitude, the vision of the world and the poetics of his studio, funny but not very thorough, and certainly seductive, especially for those who have poor architecture experience but are inclined to be fascinated by this kind of talk: its future clients, for example. In this sector, storytelling is becoming more and more important, as evidenced by the dedicated writing courses that are emerging in recent years. It should also be emphasized that many younger architectural firms are investing considerable energy in the field of the same narrative, effectively carrying out a daily storytelling work, whose subject is constituted by their own professional activity. Once again, therefore, we are not dealing with a particularly deep relationship between narration and architecture, the latter seems more considered as a series of daily events in the life of a studio, which more than others deserve to be shared. Meanwhile, the story seems to emerge more profoundly from the compositional point of view in some academic exercises carried out in the Anglo-Saxon area: an interesting project in this sense is for example *The cult of the infinite*, by Isaac Barraclough, of 2010, developed in Huddersfield University. In this case the starting point is a short novel by Jorge Luis Borges, so we are not dealing with a narrative developed simultaneously with architecture. Positive examples of architecture related to narration, closer to the case of Superstudio, can be recognized in the work of Lebbeus Woods, author of critical images that show a deeply narrative attitude, as if they were still frames of unknown but imaginable stories, similar to the visions of the Florentines. It is no coincidence that Woods is a largely paper architecture producer, without the pretension of a construction, and like him there are others.



**Fig. 8**  
Isaac Barraclough, *The cult of the infinite*, 2010.

In conclusion, Superstudio is a case that is not unique but certainly borderline, extreme even compared to the contemporary scene, so extreme as to make the narration become the predominant element, further alienating architecture. And certainly, when today we read again the *12 Cities*, we have to recognize in them a poetic which is diametrically opposed to that which has generated practices such as that *storytelling*, son of Internet, however their contribution does not seem useless. It is because, at the same time, that of Superstudio is also an effective case: where architecture is still present, narration engages a critical comparison with issues that, in the case of those cities, have then proved to be of considerable relevance. In other words, it has allowed to understand questions that have not been foreseen in other cases. The work of the group can therefore constitute an operative example to be added to the design in the strict sense, to broaden the critical contribution and the result on the contemporary, naturally in the light of a system of parameters that has changed over time. It is therefore worthwhile, at least a little bit, to fill the architectures we imagine with stories, before filling the history of architectures we build.

**Fig. 9**

Lebbeus Woods, Radical reconstruction, 1993.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Superstudio was a group of Florentine architects related to the so called *radical architecture*. Born in the second half of 1966 and disbanded by 1978, it included Adolfo Natalini, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, Gian Piero Frassinelli, Alessandro e Roberto Magris, Paolo Poli. The group is particularly renowned for the charming photoshopped images created to present their projects, among which *Monumento continuo* and *Supersuperficie* are the most well known.

<sup>2</sup> Laura Chiesa has partly dealt with this in recent times in the volume *Space as Storyteller, Spatial Jumps in Architecture, Critical Theory, and Literature*: in chapter 4.1, entitled *Fictionalizing the Extremes of Functionality*, the author delivers an interesting analysis about *12 città ideali* (Chiesa 2016).

<sup>3</sup> In the case of the groups dealing with architecture, this subject obviously translated into a distaste for the Modern and the International Style, accused of having an over-technical vision which focused too much on the mass and overlooked the man in his individuality.

<sup>4</sup> I here refer to that heterodox marxist interpretation which has been a common denominator in the setting-up of almost every European Neo-avant-garde, above all the Italian one: capital and contradiction were deemed one the cause of the other and capitalism is characterized by the repression of this perpetually self-caused crisis, a repression resulting in the transformation of any voice of dissent – of avant-garde – into something useless and often functional for the system to survive and develop.

<sup>5</sup> Written by Thomas More in 1516, *Utopia* book 2 describes the journey of the protagonist towards an ideal society conceived as a faraway island and characterized by positive and optimal principles, rules and socio-political praxis, different from those observed in England in those years.

<sup>6</sup> In Italy this topic has been deeply investigated by Umberto Eco, who, at the time, was teaching in Florence and had among his students some of the radical architecture protagonists (the UFO group, for example); although the most renowned work in this sense is certainly *The medium is the message* (McLuhan 1967).

<sup>7</sup> Thanks to these self-produced magazines Superstudio took the initial steps in defining their own poetics: Adolfo Natalini, by commuting between Florence and London for personal reasons, introduced in the faculty the first *Archigram* issues; the independent architecture editory of the time has been reorganized and analysed in the last decade thanks to the series of expositions and events entitled *Clip, Stamp, Fold*, later converted in the publication of the same name (Buckley e Colomina 2010).

<sup>8</sup> In particular *Casabella* was the one giving voice to Superstudio and radical architecture and largely contributing to their popularity: after becoming director of the paper in 1970, Alessandro Mendini marked a clear-cut change of course, at least until 1976, when he resigned. Since then, the participation of the avant-garde in the paper was dramatically downsized.

<sup>9</sup> It's impossible not to mention the situationist city project, that New Babylon de-

signed by Constant over and over, a global metropolis whose pivots are nomadism, seen as permanent condition, and playing conceived as major life activity. His illustrations, soaked with what was the typical narrative dimension of the situationists, look often like map-shaped inspirations for a tale which is still to be written.

<sup>10</sup> For example: Adolfo Natalini was more focused on art, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia had a scientific education – his father was a well-known professor – and was interested in photography, Gian Piero Frassinelli had an anthropological perspective.

<sup>11</sup> This has been stated by Gian Piero Frassinelli in an interview with Gabriele Mastigli and further confirmed to me by Frassinelli himself in an interview I held in 2016, during which we largely talked about science fiction (Mastigli 2015).

<sup>12</sup> *Domus* 479, October 1969, pp 39-40.

<sup>13</sup> In the poetics of the group, the cube is a recurring solid that bears conflicting meanings: in some cases it represents the peace conveyed by an effortless composition of pure reason, in other cases it is the aberration of the mental and compository mechanism itself. The cube dovetails with two persisting buildings of reference for the Florantines, namely the Kaa'ba and the NASA Vertical Assembly building.

<sup>14</sup> «1. A summary table to be used as a map for easy orientation: 1) cube, 2) rainbow, 3) cloud, 4) ziggurat 5) wave

2. Weather report with some easily predictable phenomena, to be listened at the beginning: a cube among the clouds, a parallelepiped, a super parallelepiped, a zigzag rainbow

3-7. First encounters with local geography: *natura naturans* and natured nature, hardware/software, esprit de géométrie and esprit de finesse. Hardness and softness. Some relevant apparitions.

8-11. A peculiar phenomenon. By observing a cube which has just been unleashed from its external straps, it's possible to witness its splitting, quadrupling etc. and its pieces going their own way, taking with them the memories of their own origin.

12-13. Two love stories <among the many cases of mutual attraction. Two similar elements can interconnect through a dissimilar element (or more than one). The bonds issue, which is particularly sensed in the «regioni della ragione», can only be solved through an intervention of the above requested by a precise will of the base.

14. A flying object completely still and identifiable.

15-21. A car journey in a drive-in architecture museum.

22. An allegorical souvenir: «in the historical perspective the reason rules everything».

23. A souvenir photo with the traveling companions.

24. An airplane journey with a perilous landing among the wisdom pillars.

25. Radiant perspectives.

26. A difficult passage through mirrors».

<sup>15</sup> Published in *Elementi*: study notebooks – news, research, 2, 1972: «Histograms. In those years it became clear that carrying on with designing furniture, objects and similar domestic ornaments wouldn't have solved architectural issues (...) We prepared a catalogue of tridimensional, non-continuous diagrams, a catalogue of architecture histograms referring to a scalable grid which could be transported to different areas and was aimed to construct a serene and immutable Nature in which it was possible to recognize oneself in the end. (...) The surface of these histograms was homogeneous and isotropic, being any spatial and sensitivity issue accurately removed. The histograms were also called The Architects' Graves».

<sup>16</sup> In this phase it is possible to detect both the influence of Archigram I've already mentioned before and the outcomes of the class held by professor Leonardo Savioli – of whom Natalini will be the assistant - in 1966-67 at the University of Florence, dedicated to the creation of a “participation space”: the students were required to design a *piper*, namely a place to host parties aimed to give space to free expression. This topic has been recently investigated in a targeted publication (Piccardo 2016).

<sup>17</sup> In short, *non-physical* architecture is to be understood as a vision of architecture as mental and critical exercise, far from the dimensions of construction and constructibility; the *unique design* was the striving to narrow down architecture to a unique, pure and definitive act that could finally resolve and create peace in the stirring human soul: Monumento continuo is its most relevant expression;

<sup>18</sup> The project was realized for the 1969 Trigon edition, namely the tri-national biennial of Graz. This event played a crucial role in the development of the group, since they could get in touch with the thriving environment of the Austrian artistic avant-garde,

one of the most important milieu of the time including, among the participants, personalities such as Hans Hollein, Haus Rucker Co, Walter Pichler, Raimund Abraham.

<sup>19</sup> *Domus* 481, December 1969, pp 49-54.

<sup>20</sup> «(...) and in the heart of this world made of woods mountains gnomes homes (...) there's Graz (...) and in the Stadtpark there is this building, the Kunstlerhaus, (...) and now, out of the tunnel, three rectangular pipes pop out, one green, one red, one blue, and inside, darkness (...) and of this enigmatic continuous monument (...) we've presented some random pictures, pretty postcardlike and therefore uncanny (...)».

<sup>21</sup> In a partially analogous way to what asserted before with regard to the cube, the straight line is for the group an other symbol, expression of an absolute rationality, at the same time pacific and uncanny, a recurring element to be spotted in many projects. It often symbolizes a mental process turned physical through architecture, in *Atti fondamentali*, for example, the process of how the grid formed by meridians and parallels turns real is described in the chapter *Morte*: «(...) At the intersection of these two lines (allegedly the physicalization of those meridians and parallels passing through the point) there was a neoclassic building, strangely bewildered in that Cartesian desert. (...)».

<sup>22</sup> The book was published concurrently with an anthological exposition, the most complete up to now, held at MAXXI in Rome from 21<sup>st</sup> of April to 4<sup>th</sup> of September 2016 (Mastrigli 2016).

<sup>23</sup> As a matter of fact in 1972 a fundamental exposition including all the major protagonists of the italian design at the time took place, namely *Italy: the new domestic landscape*, curated by Emilo Ambasz. On one hand the event was crucial because it strengthened the popularity and the value of the personalities involved; on the other, however, the most antagonist figures were pinned to a well defined role within the system and their Avant-Garde charge got detonated; at the same time the condemning of avant-garde themselves was being pursued by some leading italian critics, in particular Manfredo Tafuri. Casabella published some excerpts from the *Atti* in the issues 366-381, from June 1972 to September 1973. The catalogue of the MoMA exposition is available for consultation at [www.moma.org/documents/moma\\_catalogue\\_1783\\_300062429.pdf](http://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_1783_300062429.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> The complete English title is *Supersurface: an alternative model of life on earth*.

<sup>25</sup> «The faraway mountain – Look at that faraway mountain...what do you see? Is that the place to go to? Or is it just the optimal ability limit? It's both, because contradiction exists no more (...). That's what a very grown-up Alice was thinking while skipping rope very slowly, but without feeling hot or fatigue.

The encampment – Anybody can be wherever they want, bringing their clan or family. No need for shelters, because climatic conditions and corporeal mechanisms have been modified in order to assure a total comfort. If anything, one can build a shelter to play, to play Home, or rather, to play Architecture. (...) Nomadism becomes the permanent condition: the movements of individuals and groups react between them creating continuous streams. (...)».

<sup>26</sup> «What we'll do – We'll stay still and listen to our body, we'll hear the blood rushing through our ears, the faint creaking of joints and teeth, we'll inspect the texture of our skin, the patterns of hair and body hair. We'll listen to our heart and our breathing. We'll watch ourselves while living. We'll perform convoluted muscular acrobatics. We'll perform convoluted mental acrobatics. (...) We'll manage to create and infuse visions and images, maybe to make also some little objects move, just for fun. We'll play fantastic games, ability games, love games. (...) We'll go to far places only to look at them (...)».

<sup>27</sup> «As we drew closer, he opened his eyes and said: "I am the leader of the builders, I am the man they call architect. At first we opened a clearing in the wood and we built the mirror-walled steel building, but our mirrored image shocked us and so we went inside and built the yielding tent building. But its walls were intangible and there was no place to lean on. Therefore inside we constructed a building out of carved stones produced with all our mastery. It exhausted our strengths and its beauty let us dismayed. So we tried to find ourselves by using our hands, and inside we built the humble dome made of mud and canes in which we then lived. An underground tunnel lead outside to the forest, where we could find fruit roots and small animals. Not once we watched the buildings we had created. Afterwards, everybody went back to the forest. And, by now, I'm lying here on the dirt, in the point which I recollect to be the center

of the concentric buildings, waiting. But the constructors have fled to the forest for a long time by now, and for a long time I've been waiting the inhabitant, to whom the factory was destined. I have lost memory of him and his name, but he was a powerful man, who appreciated beauty." (...)).

<sup>28</sup> It's here clearly detectable the editing work of Gian Piero Frassinelli, who, as stated before, was interested in anthropological issues and had a strong inclination to stash and catalogue, as he himself revealed to Gabriele Mastrigli in the mentioned interview (Mastrigli 2015)

<sup>29</sup> «As we exited the city, there it arose before our eyes a large, evenly paved clearing, divided into big squares by thin slots. This sort of plaza spread out as far as the eye could see: one could catch a glimpse of its limits, or rather could imagine its limits, there where a tall greenery arose on one side, a hillside area on the other and the first, outskirt buildings on the other two.(...) The surface was perfectly flat and one could sense that the squares were orientated according to the cardinal directions. A small bronze plate placed where two slots intersected, more or less at the center of the clearing, had its astronomical coordinates carved on it. (...) I saw a group of normally-dressed persons coming closer from my right side, they were crossing the paved space heading to the building. (...)).

<sup>30</sup> «H. The moment of the corpse intake and its first restitution cycle. The corpse is submerged in wells dislocated in different places. These wells (...) have a double function of transforming the corpse into energy and memory. (...) The wells constitute also the element responsible for storing memories. (...) Their openings are peripheral equipments of a calculator. Several calculators are interconnected through retransmitting satellites. The stored memories can be accessed through memory capsules, namely individual terminals every living being is equipped with. (...) M. Memory as cosmic element. All of the memory-energy is retransmitted by the satellites. (...)).

<sup>31</sup> The group took part in the 1971 contest by adding a technical report which was very similar to some parts of the tale just analyzed.

<sup>32</sup> This is the title under which this paper is generally known in Italy. It was first published uncomplete on the issue n.12 of *AD Architectural Design* with the title *Twelve cautionary tales for christmas, premonitions of the mystical rebirth of urbanism* in December 1971, then on *Casabella* 361 in January 1972 with the title *Premonizioni della parusia urbanistica*, this time integrated with color images, otherwise absent in the english version.

<sup>33</sup> The author himself has defined it this way: there is no neat mindset behind the paper, but rather a proceeding guided by consequent inspirations, so much so that the cities are presented following the chronological order of writing.

<sup>34</sup> The term *distopia* was made up by the English philosopher John Stuart Mill and indicates an inside-out utopia, namely the vision of a negative future as the result of present principles deemed to be negative. At the time this word was not known by the Florentine group, which preferred to use the term *antiutopia*.

<sup>35</sup> During the interview I had with Gian Piero Frasinelli he informed me that, in respect to *Atti*, the starting point was constituted by images, around which the tales were built afterwards, right because of the practical difficulties faced in the *12 Città* project by proceeding in a back flow direction.

<sup>36</sup> My doctorate is configured as a research about the *12 Città ideali* aimed to analyze the document in a multidisciplinary approach by trying to reconstruct contents, poetics and affinities, both from a textual and graphic point of view.

<sup>37</sup> The term is to be understood under the meaning elaborated by philosophy at the same time of the editing of *12 Città*, which defined a device as a mechanism designed to induce a precise behaviour. A very powerful example is the Panopticon by Jeremy Bentham in the interpretation by Michale Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1975)

<sup>38</sup> «(...) Every cell has in fact two facing outer walls; the walls of every cell are made of a material which is matt but permeable to oxygen, rigid but soft. The North-orientated wall (or, if this is an outer wall, the West-orientated one) is able to emit tridimensional images, sounds and smells. (...) But it is indeed the ceiling which is the essential part of the cell; this is constituted by a unique screen that catches cerebral impulses. Every cell is inhabited by a man whose cerebral impulses are continuously detected by the panel and retransmitted to the unique electronical analyser, whose complex equipments are clustered on the top of the building under a continuous semi

cylindrical vault; the analyser picks, compares and mediates the individuals' desires by programming step by step the life of the whole city through the emitting wall (...). From time to time, it may happen that someone lets himself be taken by absurd thoughts of rebellion against the perfect and everlasting life bestowed upon him. The first time the analyser ignores the crime, but if it reiterates the city decides to deny the vital space to those who turn out to be as ungrateful as that. The ceiling panel falls down with a 2-tons power until it matches the floor. (...).»

<sup>39</sup> Above all, it's the failure of the 1968 movements to be understood here, as Gian Piero Frassinelli claimed in the interview I had with him.

<sup>40</sup> Conformism is a criticized target in many cities, but it's in *Città dell'ordine* that we find the most scathing remark: the inhabitants have been substituted with obedient robots, efficient members without personality of a very orderly world. Ierarchy and climbing the social ladder are the pivot of *Città cono a gradoni*, an isolated megas-structure representing ierarchy itself, in which those who are on top rule those who live in the lower levels, who in turn are persecuted by the everlasting longing of climbing to obtain less duties and more privileges. The topic of alienating work is faced in *Città nastro a produzione continua*, a urban agglomerate which is continuously decaying and continuously being built, in which people continuously work to allow themselves a new house. Similar topics are also present in *Ville machine habitée*. Unethical entertainment, seen as violent safety valve, is the central issue of the *Barnum jr city* tale, a virtual amusement park shaped as a city in which, under a specific fee, it's possible to commit with complete impunity any kind of vicious acts. Pretence is the subject of *Città delle case splendide*, a housing system designed to give the collectivity an image representing the houses' owners in the way they want to be represented, far from who they really are or from their identity.

<sup>41</sup> Apart from the well known 1972 project *Exodus, or the voluntary prisoners of architecture*, also *The city of the captive globe*, appeared in 1972 as well, deserves to be mentioned. In the project, characterized by a strong narrativity, it's possible to detect some references to Superstudio's *Istogrammi*.

<sup>42</sup> This means, in a simplistic way, the *awareness* the consumer has of the brand itself, not of its products: what is the brand's attitude with regard to wide-ranging matters such as work, ethics, life, other brands. It is a very important topic in relation to contemporary *marketing*.

<sup>43</sup> Among these, one of the most relevant is surely Red Bull, an iconic energy drink company also producing a wide universe of contents, effectively narrated on several different platforms.

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Gregorio Froio  
**Narrative and autobiography in architecture.  
 The Scarzuola by Tomaso Buzzi**

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Abstract

The relationship between architecture and narration is a widely debated theme in the contemporary world. At the base of possible convergent themes with apparently so distant disciplines there are a series of knots not yet completely resolved. In particular the spectacular dimension has swept away all areas of knowledge, with the problem of a continuous rethinking and adaptation of artistic (and therefore architectural) work. Especially in relation to the theme of communication, we can verify a paradox: between narrative languages and immediacy of media, the conceptual (and temporal) short circuit generates interpretative ambiguities. One of the most effective form of communication, the image, plays an increasingly persuasive role as well as pervasive.

What forms of narration support this unprecedented acceleration of communication? What is the role of writing today? Can the architecture measure itself with the narrative and imaginative dimension of the storytelling?

Keywords

auto-narrative — sedimentation — fairy-tale

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**Introduction**

The connection among narration, writing (literary, artistic, architectural writing) and architecture was studied by several authors.

A particular link between novel and history was investigated by Roland Barthes. A common bond, for both, implies «la construction d'un univers autarcique, fabriquant lui-même ses dimensions et ses limites, et y disposant son Temps, son Espace, sa population, sa collection d'objets et ses mythes»<sup>1</sup>. This research implies the definition of a literary world based on the identification of a language or (on a deeper and more personal level) of a writing.

What is the meaning of writing that underlies every form of telling story? Beyond style and language, as objects (the things of literary doing), writing, as a function, is defined as «le rapport entre la création et la société, elle est le langage littéraire transformé par sa destination sociale, elle est la forme saisie dans son intention humaine et liée ainsi aux grandes crises de l'Histoire» (Barthes 1953). In this social purpose there is an intrinsic nature of compromise: between choice (freedom) and tradition (memory). Writing as a narrative process includes in itself a component of temporality that unfolds through times, sequences, rhythms, pauses.

Tale, time, memory: among these terms there is an indissoluble and circular function according to Paul Ricoeur. In *Temps et Récit* (1983) he describes three phases: in a pre-figurative phase the story requires an action and a world (symbolic and temporal) within which it takes place; in a second configurative phase the content of stratified norms interlaces with innovation; in a final stage of 'refiguration' the story becomes an instrument for decoding and understanding the world (Rocca, 2008).



**Fig. 1**  
The Great Mother (Photography  
by Matteo Benedetti, 2012).

In *Architecture et narrativité* Ricoeur progressively reduces the distance between telling (as language of spoken and written signs) and architecture (as language of building materials and structural forms) making out recounted time and built space. Connecting the spatiality of the story with the temporality of the architectural design, narrative praxis implies the creation of a new fact, an unpublished work. In this sense «every narrative composition starts a story that we can define fictitious in a broad sense, including also historical narrative insofar as there is a verbal composition separated from real events, a *story* distinct from a real *history*»<sup>2</sup>. The category of the *plot* involves a reflexive operation in which the time turns up twice, as time of story and time of telling. In analogy, in the configuration of architectural space the act of building includes a temporal dimension. The new building becomes petrified memory: time is incorporated in a space. The inscribed signs, as inscription, bring within the space the act of the story assuring its duration: in the same way the hardness of the material confers durability to the built.

The textual character concerning the matter of a single building is transferred in relation to the city in terms of sedimentation of the literary space: «In the same way that the narrative has its equivalent in the structure, the phenomenon of *intertextuality* has its own in the network of already-there buildings that contextualize the new building. (...). It is a matter of the historicity of the very act of inscribing a new building in an already built space, which coincides broadly with the phenomenon of the town» (Ricoeur 1996)<sup>3</sup>.

### **Narrative and autobiographical architecture**

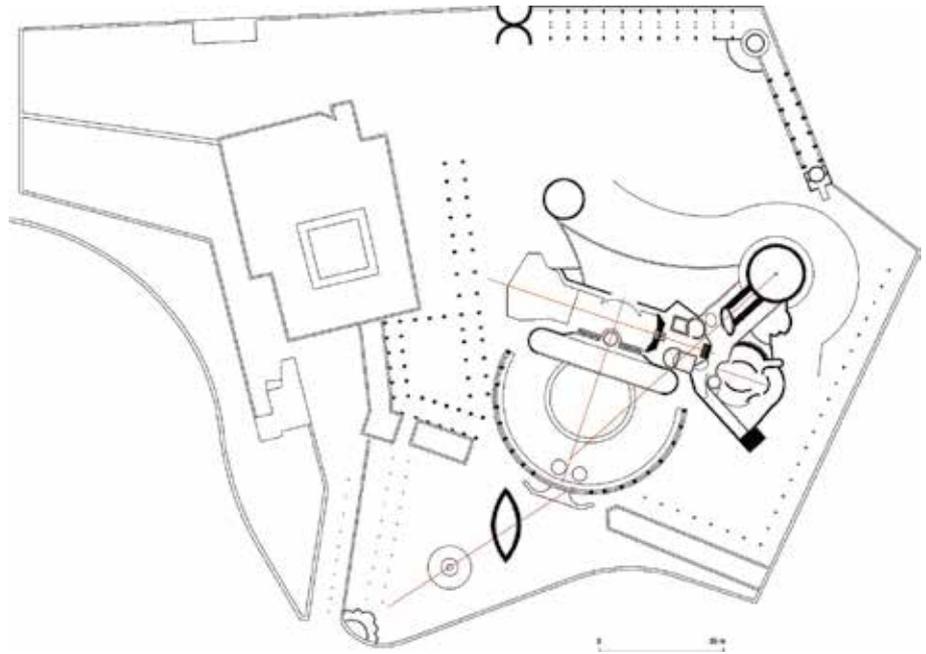
The concept of narrative architecture describes a set of theoretical reflections widely debated over the past decades, in a dense thematic reference between literature, art, cinema, architecture, urban planning. So we can make the difference between analyzes and narrations. While analysis have a scientific character, using models based on the description of data and quantitative testing, etc., architectural and urban narratives have an imaginative character that brings them back to the sphere of the story. In this way they imply a collective operation that aims indirectly to create a real *epos* (Purini 2007)<sup>4</sup>.

If this is true above all about the city we can transfer this theory to individual architectures whose peculiar character transfers the narrative dimension into a self-reflective and personal sphere.

In another paper we have spoken about Villa Adriana as a narration of memories (Semerani 1991) as well as a collection of memories by Hadrian (Ungers 1979). The composition of plan, from the open and unfinished layout (Malfona 2012), the pavilions system of the individual buildings with a *paratactic* (MacDonald and Pinto 1997) or *hypotactic* disposition (Caliari 2013), defines the narrative traits of a historical exemplum whose evocative power increases interpretive links and references to other modern architectures.

An example of narrative architecture is provided by the personal residence of Tomaso Buzzi, the Scarzuola. Buzzi built it from the late fifties until his death (in 1981), incorporating the historical pre-existences into a single project<sup>5</sup>.

There are only a few schematic plans of the whole structure, which are closely related to the personal way of working by Buzzi. From these and others reconstructions it is possible to identify a plot of architectural liter-



**Fig. 2**  
General plan of the Scarzuola  
(Froio, 2012).

ary connected to symbolic and religious themes. The setting in a natural context intentionally refers to typology of ancient Roman suburban villas (above all Villa Adriana in Tivoli), with many references: the eccentric architectural plants in the English gardens or the Italian gardens, like Villa D'Este and *Bomarzio*; the quotations of the eighteenth-century fantastic projects by Ledoux; the esoteric gardens built in Europe between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries<sup>6</sup>.

We can read literary descriptions of ancient villas by Pliny the Younger Buzzi knew well.

But what is actually the narrative character of this work?

Tale. The Scarzuola tells a story, about its author, his personal impression and a vision of the world: it is a collection of memories, echoes and suggestions.

But it is also *a story in the story* of his writings, a diary of memories. There is a continuous reference between construction and description and back. An autobiographical memorial, in the shape of a museum in *plein air*:

Ho raccontato sere fa, in società, delle mie costruzioni nel giardino alla Scarzuola, paragonandomi, per celia, all'emigrante che, ritornato in patria, si costruisce, secondo dei paesi stranieri in cui ha soggiornato e i gusti dei tempi, lo chalet svizzero, l'isba russa, la pagoda cinese o il padiglione arabo o il giardinetto giapponese; o all'estremo opposto, al modo con cui l'imperatore Adriano, nella villa di Tivoli, ha riunito, in un solo luogo la valle di Tempe, il canopeo, ecc. ecc., in costruzioni che gli ricordavano i paesi dove aveva soggiornato e che gli erano cari: a metà distanza potrei porre quegli ambasciatori che hanno riunito nelle loro case porcellane e icone russe, bronzi e lacchè cinesi, stampe giapponesi, sculture maya e messicane o peruviane, totem africani<sup>7</sup>.

Theatre. The Scarzuola can really be read as a textual work: there is a clear and literary reference to the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* by Francesco Colonna, an obscure and mysterious text of the humanist age. Buzzi carefully studied it drawing the complex symbology of illustrations and the mysterious and initiatory plot. But it is, above all, a theatrical work, staging the visions, the dreams and the obsessions of its author-narrator<sup>8</sup>. A petrified fantasy, as it has been defined, in which the mater and consequently the materials become an expression of the flowing time. Time. Temporal dimension is another key of reading, as quotations of other



**Fig. 3**

The detail of steps from *Teatrum Mundi* (Photography by Matteo Benedetti, 2012).

architectures (by miniaturized archeological sites): from the idea of poetical fragments, but also, and in a more properly compositional way, as sequence of linked spaces: a sequence of doors, metaphysical passages in a meridian light; the detail of steps rising next to the *Teatrum mundi*; the evocative value of the column in the atrium of the Tower of Babel or the ruined architectures as refined quotes from the Garden of the Desert de Retz; the compressed and Hadrian space of the *Nymphaeum*; the sensuality of the female figure as a portal; the small pavilions silent apparitions as guardians of the garden. And again: the *Teatrum Mundi* with the Theater of Arnia, the Camera of the Eye and the Acropolis; the *Nymphaeum* of Diana and Atteone (in the part below the central scene); the Aquatic Theater or the *Naumachie*; the Temple of Apollo with the sacred cypress; the Theater of the Infinite, of the Unfinished and of the Human Body. In this stratification of themes and Names, a narrative plot is constructed with its rhythms, pauses, paths, stops and arrival points<sup>9</sup>. Fairytale dimension. Outside of Time and history (in an anti-historical dimension), the fairy tale ties together, as an enchanted garden, the themes described above. The container-content reveals the hidden plot: the run of Narrator from Poliphilo/Buzzi to Polia/Wisdom becomes research of an architectural self-communication's (or self-narration) form with an incessant springing up of interpretations<sup>10</sup>.

The eyes of the Architect (and his vision of the world) finally become a narration form, a serial sequence that wisely takes up the forms and its materials. Lastly, the protagonist of this investigation becomes the idea of an absorbed and meditative Time that the architecture incorporates as a secret element, full of mystery.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Barthes R. (1953), *Le degré zéro de l'écriture suivi de Nouveaux essais critiques*, Éditions du Seuil, p.27.

<sup>2</sup> Ricoeur (1996), *Architettura et narrativité*, in «Urbanisme», nov.-dic. 1998 n.303, pp.44-51.

<sup>3</sup> A second thesis, in antithesis with Ricoeur, was investigated by Jean-François Lyotard: the fracture and the crisis of the story in modernity is reflected in a “weakening” of post-modern narrativity and an eschatological rethinking of the architectural project (Riva 2017).

<sup>4</sup> The narrative sphere has a strong link with an imaginative representation of the city and the story through images, The city as a text or hyper-text has powerfully inspired the twentieth century narrative: urban descriptions in *Manhattan Transfer* by John Dos Passos, *On the road* by Jack Kerouac, *Cosmopolis* by Don de Lillo.

<sup>5</sup> The Scarzuola is located in Umbria, in Montegabbione (in the province of Terni) in the place where, according to tradition, Francesco d’Assisi founded a small convent and a church. The name seems to derive from the word ‘scarza’ a local aquatic plant with which the saint built a small hut in the garden of the convent.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Cazzato, V., Fagiolo M. e Giusti M.A., (2002). *Atlante delle grotte e dei ninfei in Italia, Italia Settentrionale, Umbria e Marche*, Electa, Milano.

<sup>7</sup> Tomaso Buzzi, *Lettere pensieri appunti 1937-1979*, a cura di Enrico Fenzi, Silvana Editoriale, Milano 2000, p.60-61 (12/1/1967).

<sup>8</sup> «Perché ho scelto l’architettura teatrale, moltiplicando i teatri (esterni e interni)? Per una mia vocazione teatrale che non è stata mai sviluppata per la nequizia dei tempi (...). E poi perché era il vero modo, l’unico legittimo in architettura, per ispirarsi, riprendere, riecheggiare forme del passato, modi di espressione, uso di materiali, manierismi ecc., senza cadere nel pericolo delle ricostruzioni: per dar libertà alla fantasia (anche surrealistica: ma non quella nella pittura e nella scultura), ma solidificandola, pietrificandola». Ivi, p.63.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. Cassani A. (2004), “L’autobiografia in pietra di Tomaso Buzzi”. Casabella, 723 (maggio-giugno), pp.62-87 and: Mantovani S. (2004), “La Scarzuola, ovvero opera Classica, medievale, manieristica, e anche, perché no, decadente”. Quaderni della Rivista Ricerche per la progettazione del paesaggio. n 1, vol.3 (settembre-dicembre), pp.61-71.

<sup>10</sup> The Scarzuola was defined by many authors: a neo-manneristic and kitsch *capriccio* (Bisi 1983), an eschatologic allegory (Alighieri e Moncagatta 1997, p.156), an esoteric (Fenzi 2000) and piranesian work (Purini 2008).

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Ausias Gonzalez Lisorge

## **Structure Telling. How architectural criticism tells the relationship between Formal structure and Resistant structure**

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### Abstract

It is necessary to situate the gaze in the criticism of architecture to throw a certain light on the issues that this discipline deals with. The story, the logos, fulfills a double function both descriptive and constitutive of the reality. Continuing the way that Panayotis Tournikiotis began in *The Historiography of Modern Architecture*, the following article tries to highlight how critics of modern architecture have understood the resistant structure in their respective works. Martin Heidegger proposed the *tekné* as a process to 'bringing-forth' the abstraction. Thus, the technique ceases to have the sense of 'means'. That is, it stands as something necessary to realize an idea. Thus, the study of technology and, therefore, of science turns to be fundamental to understand how architectural projects have been conceived.

### Keywords

Historiography — Resistant Structure — Structuralism — Organicism

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It is necessary to situate the gaze in the criticism of architecture to throw a certain light on the issues that this discipline deals with. The story, the *logos*, fulfills a double function both descriptive and constitutive of the reality. The historiography of modern architecture played an active role in conformation of styles, focusing its targets. Some of the main architectural tendencies of the twentieth century were consolidated through publications and exhibitions. To show this, it is enough to remark the importance of Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson in the development of the International Style, and the role of latter in the Deconstructivism. In this sense, Emilia Hernández Pezzi states<sup>1</sup>:

The written history of the Modern Movement is an exception in its kind because it was not written with the distance that the historian seems to need to interpret or narrate facts from the outside; on the contrary, it was done directly from within. The critics actively participated in the construction of the theoretical framework of this new architecture and promoted their analysis of historical events from contemporary clues that contributed to their programmatic and ideological equipment ...

An important work in this regard is that of Panayotis Tournikiotis *The Historiography of Modern Architecture*. Where the author tries to analyze both illocutionary and perlocutive acts of the texts, that he considered most influential in the evolution of modern architecture. In fact, Zevi in *Profilo della critica Architettonica*, affirms that the text by Tournikiotis is one of the scarce books that deals with this topic.

Following this argumental line, the following article tries to highlight how critics of modern architecture have understood the resistant structure in their respective works. Martin Heidegger proposed the *tekné* as a process

to 'bringing-forth' the abstraction. Thus, the technique ceases to have the sense of 'means'. That is, it stands as something necessary to realize an idea. Thus, the study of technology and, therefore, of science turns to be fundamental to understand how architectural projects have been conceived.

This article presents a part of the conclusions of my doctoral thesis<sup>2</sup>, *From Empiricism to Invention, Engineering and Design in Modern Architecture*, where the question of the resistant structure is studied more extensively. The terms used in this article must be defined. According to Paolo Portoghesi<sup>3</sup>:

In architecture the term s. [Structure] is used with different implications, according to the field to which it refers, according to the general meaning of organization of the parts and the elements in a continuum whose scale is assumed as a unitary reference. Referring to the purely technological field, for s. the static organization of the elements of construction is understood: punctual s., trilitic s., bridge s., etc. [...] Speaking, instead, of the formal s. or architectural is generally understood as the three-dimensional organization of architectural work, in contrast to a plot [...] that designates certain types of bidimensional orders. The concept of formal s. is, therefore, of fundamental importance for the theory of architecture, since it means the 'form' that represents the solution of the architectural purpose in question. Also the architectural use has its s. (often called 'pattern'). The solution is found, generally, by abstracting from it the spatial consequences and, therefore, translating it into an isomorph formal.

Two concepts are opposed here, formal structure versus structure as something technological. This comes from a historical development, that corresponds to the diffusion of structuralism, after the Second World War. From that time, the term structure is understood, in almost all disciplines, as the internal rules that allow a coherent relationship between the parts and the whole. In this article it was decided to talk about structure (as formal structure) and resistant structure (as technology), that refers to any assembly of materials that resists certain loads.

Once the terms were delimited, an analysis of the texts of architectural criticism proposed by Tournikiotis was carried out. However, due to their heterogeneity, different analyzes were made in order to better study each of them.

On the one hand, there are some books that were analyzed from a qualitative point of view, that happened with *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier* by Emil Kaufmann; *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture (1750-1950)* by Peter Collins; and Manfredo Tafuri's *Teoria e Storia dell'architettura*.

On the other hand there was both a qualitative and a quantitative approach to some of the books. In which it was quantified: the quantity of buildings in which the authors talks about resistant structure, its uses, the architects of those buildings, and also the terms in which critics refers to those questions. Those books are *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration* by Henry-Russell Hitchcock. Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius. Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* by Sigfried Giedion; Bruno Zevi's *Storia dell'architettura moderna. Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* by Reyner Banham, and Leonardo Benevolo's *Storia dell'architettura moderna*

In addition, two new books *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, by Kenneth Frampton. And *The Story of Post-Modernism*, by Charles Jencks,

were added to include opinions on what happened in the last decades of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st. In the following pages the analyzes of these books and their conclusions are presented.

In the analyzed texts, at least four different critical lines can be found: the mechanist, the structuralist, the organicist and the metacritical. The mechanistic attitude considers that the modern architecture is the logical and universal result of the socioeconomic and intellectual conditions after the Industrial Revolution. Among those who defend this perspective, are: Hitchcock, Pevsner, Benevolo and Giedion. However, the texts studied by the last two authors evolved towards a structuralist attitude, in which Jencks is also situated

In addition, in the analyzed books of Pevsner and Hitchcock, the architecture prior to World War I is studied in one, and World War II in the other. Therefore, they only develop a mechanistic perspective. However, the evolution of these authors deserves a separate treatment.

For Pevsner, technological development was one of the foundations of modern architecture. Although other issues such as aesthetics, etc., were also very important. Therefore, more than mechanist, one could affirm that he was a convinced positivist; that considered that he had to operate through reason. However, in 1973 he published *The Anti-rationalists* where he recognized the value of *art nouveau* and expressionism, not as isolated and marginal styles; but as a case that deserved to be studied. However, in *An Outline of European Architecture*, he affirmed from the experiences of the 1950s<sup>4</sup>:

...The resurgence of Art Nouveau is not the only response that has been given to criticism against mechanization and the lack of humanity of architecture. There are other buildings of recent construction in which the challenge is accepted and fully overcome without dispensing with the conquests of 1930. They are those that in a future history of twentieth century architecture will represent evolution in the face of the revolution illustrated by Ronchamp ...

That is to say, Pevsner continued betting on an architecture that started from reason. In this way, his position on the purpose and responsibility of architecture hardly changed during his career. In fact, in the prologue of 1962 to the second Spanish edition of *Pioneers*, he wrote<sup>5</sup>: «...I am convinced as always that the style of the Fagus factory and the Cologne model factory is still valid...»

On the contrary, Hitchcock did evolve from his initial mechanistic stance. Thus, in 1942 he wrote *In the Nature of Materials, 1887-1941: The Buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright*<sup>6</sup>. What led him to recognize the influence and importance of the American master, beyond his role as the father of modern architecture, as he had done in *Modern architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration* and also in *The International Style: Architecture since 1922*<sup>7</sup>. Later, in 1958 he published *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. It is a text that he expanded in 1977 and in which he affirmed<sup>8</sup>:

..., the historian can only end up wondering if within the confusion of novelties of the 1950s and 60s are the seeds from which the architecture of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries will be developed; if the stylistic evolution of this quarter of a century corresponds to the mannerism of the central decades of the sixteenth century in Italy, to use another equivocal historical analogy. Can we wait, perhaps by the year 2000, for an immanent movement that is at once a synthesis of the many preceding stylistic and technical innovations and a return to at least some of the principles of

the earlier 'high phase', but above all, a new vital creation with a life expectancy of more than one hundred years as it was in Baroque around 1600? ...

This fragment gives a key to the criticism that Hitchcock developed in that book. The historian based his discourse -as Tounikiotis affirmed- in the idea that<sup>9</sup> «the history of architecture is the great succession of styles.» In this way, Hitchcock tried to maintain a neutral stance. His speech no longer advocated exclusively an architectural style based on the machine; but he described the different tendencies that developed until the middle of the 20th century.

As it has been said, the texts by Benevolo and Giedion were revised and expanded several times. What allows to observe an evolution in the discourse of these authors; from a position that advocated architecture based on reason and industry (and that developed an aesthetic close to cubism); to accept radically different approaches.

Thus, Giedion affirmed that the third generation included in its works: psychological and cultural components, etc. On the other hand, Benevolo maintained that, in the decade of 1990, the invention was reached, thanks to combining the different factors that came together in the buildings. That is, both critics ended up understanding that architecture was a language composed of different signs that could generate a coherent code. What reveals certain points in common with the structuralism. However, unlike Giedion, Benevolo hardly addressed the symbolic component in his text. Charles Jencks also admits that structuralist interpretation; in fact, he recognizes the influence of Michel Foucault. In this way, the historian understands and reveals that architecture is a code, which must respond to the symbolic needs of a plural society in which minorities have a great importance.

Perhaps, Giedion was the one who best knew how to combine the evolution of the machine with the development of the third generation. Thus, the author accepted the necessity of the monument and the symbol and understood that the architecture was based to achieve it - to a large extent - in the development of the structures towards aerodynamic forms. That is to say, the historian was able to unite an almost mechanistic perspective, with the new concerns of the architects for the psychology, the simbology, and so on.

Kenneth Frampton goes a step further in the integration of mechanistic and structuralist criticism. With a wider historical perspective than the previous authors (except Jencks), Frampton adopts the concept of tectonics as a way to resolve the conflict between both positions. The historian gives a double meaning -constructive and symbolic- to technique and detail.

The critics by Bruno Zevi, were developed according to an organicist perspective. The historian understood that architecture was a complex organism, which evolved according to its internal needs and its boundary conditions. The criticism of this author was not only organicist; it was also organic. That is to say, he did not only present organicism as the most accurate response to architecture, but also his discourse was evolving and adapting itself to each topic that the author dealt with.

In addition, since - as the same historian claimed - Frank Lloyd Wright did not define the concept of organicism, Zevi maintained an open criticism of change. What allowed him to develop a calculated ambiguity with which he could carry out a coherent and quite unitary discourse when analyzing all periods and architectural experiences.

Finally, metacritical perspective is the one that carries out a critique of criticism. In it, it can be inserted the texts by Banham, Collins, Tafuri and Tournikiotis. However, Collins and Banham were not reduced to analyzing exclusively the different criticisms of architecture; but, also, they studied the different aesthetic, philosophical theories, etc. In this way, they did not propose an analysis of architecture through its examples, but -mainly- through its theoretical evolution. This does not mean that Banham did not carry out a review of the characteristics of the most representative buildings.

Curiously, all these critical lines -except the metacriticism- have a parallel with the work of the masters of modern architecture. Thus, Le Corbusier evolved from the mechanism of the Dom-ino system, to the symbolism of Chandigarh. On the other hand, the work of Mies van der Rohe would have inspired Frampton. And Wright would be responsible for the organic criticism. Among these designers should be added the work of Alvar Aalto, who was halfway between organicism, the International Style and constructivism.

Now, what is the role of the resistant structure in each of these types of criticism? As for mechanists, one could say that the text that best answers this question is Banham's; that studies the relationship between the machine and the genesis of modern architecture. In fact, the Dom-ino system created an image of the resistant structure as the key of the *machine à habiter*.

In that sense, the mechanistic critic defends a positivist attitude. According to which, the architecture gives a scientific response to the problems that arise. So the evolution of the technique (which includes the calculation of structures, new materials, etc.) was a very important factor, if not the most transcendental, in the birth and development of modern architecture. Because of this, Hitchcock, Pevsner, Benevolo and Giedion supported the aesthetic derived from Cubism, which was followed by some architects of the modern movement; since industry and abstraction seemed to coincide formally.

However, Banham maintained that, in reality, industry had less influence on the formation of modern architecture than the mechanists claimed. For which, the critic argued that this formal coincidence between cubism and the machine was temporary. So, when the technique evolved, they could not continue to defend a positivist stance - in terms of choosing that aesthetic for scientific reasons.

However, there is a question that the critic did not develop at all; although it is latent in his speech: the machine as a symbol and not as an object. It could be interpreted that, when referring to it, modern architects appealed to the new economic and social order that appeared after the Industrial Revolution. Something that William Morris apparently recognized when, on a theoretical level, he rejected the use of the machine; because it had led to the degradation of artisans into workers. In this way, modern architecture may use the image of the machine as the metaphor of a society polarized into the proletariat and bourgeoisie, as well as the symbol of new technical and scientific developments. So, one could say that industry influenced modern architects beyond the coincidence between science and abstract art.

However, little by little, the evolution of thought since the late nineteenth century influenced architects and critics. So psychoanalysis, the Theory of Relativity, phenomenology, the Frankfurt School, structuralism and semiology, advances in psychology, and so on. Those facts indicated new

perspectives and psychological, cultural and symbolic needs. For all this, positivism - the machine - ceased to be a reference (symbolic and formal) for architects.

For this reason, structuralist criticism was developed, which appeals to the possibility of the architect to choose a series of signs to work with. These levels have not an *a priori* hierarchy, but are decided by each designer, at each moment. This caused Benevolo to adapt his criticism to each situation, to each example analyzed after the 1970s. And Giedion, when analyzing the third generation, made a great emphasis on the idea of monumentality. For structuralist criticism, the resistant structure is a significant level; that can have more or less weight when designing a building comparing with other significant levels.

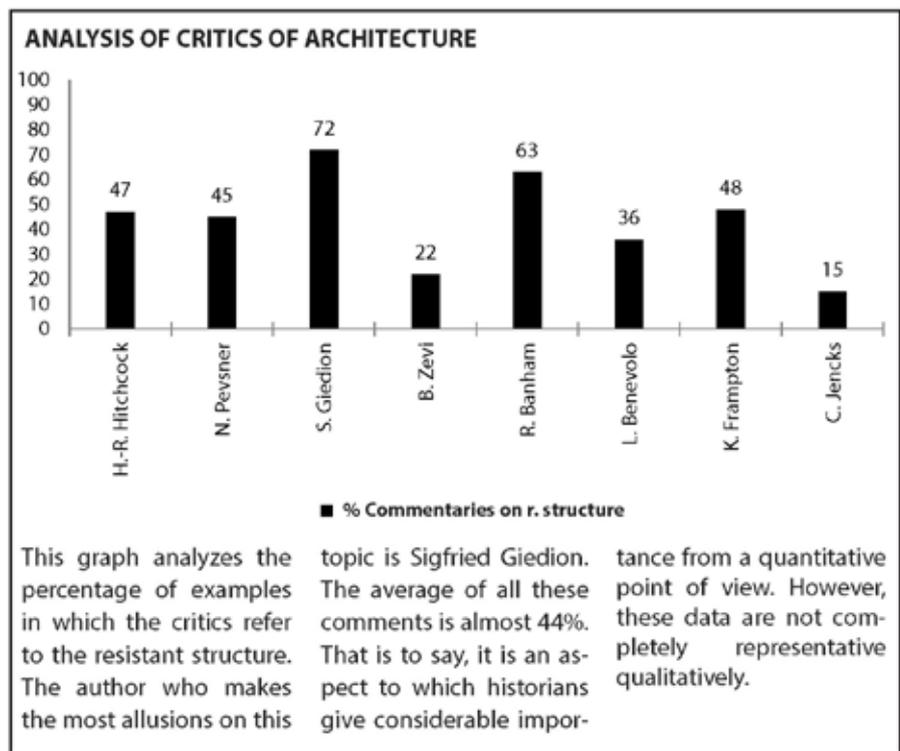
In the organic criticism, we must study the seven invariants of contemporary language to understand the role that the resistant structure has in it. Zevi proposed these invariants in the latest edition of *Storia dell'architettura moderna*; these were: the list of contents and functions, the dissonance, the anti-perspective three-dimensionality, the four-dimensional decomposition, the structural implication, the temporalized space and the environmental continuum. Thus, the author gave a series of examples that represented the structural implication; Among those were: the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis by Gunnar Birkerts, some examples by Norman Foster and Kiyonori Kikutake's projects. That is to say, it seems that Zevi was referring to a series of buildings in which the resistant structure had been fundamental in its conception and that, in addition, the resistant structure was the most important feature in their form.

However, in *Profilo della critica architettonica*, the author used those invariants to expose the characteristics of architecture close to the third millennium. In which the structural implication was placed as one more level with respect to the other six characteristics. Therefore, the author did not refer only to buildings in which the structure had a strong presence. What recalls a comment he made in *Storia dell'architettura modernain* where he claimed that the development of the structural calculation accredited neoexpressionism.

So for Zevi the technique was one more of those invariants that formed the architecture. So it did not have to be the inspiration of the rest, but it had to corroborate them. As an example of this, the following comment<sup>10</sup> «... Wright penetrates the volumes, the third and fourth dimensions: it is related to spaces, for which it requires structures in cantilever, shells and membranes ...»

On the other hand, it might seem that Zevi had adopted a critique in some way, structuralist, while appealing to language. In fact he wrote<sup>11</sup>: «The new language of the 'seven invariants' has full legitimacy *also* under the semiological profile. It rejects any code based on the past, and any code that intends to determine the future ... »However, that *also* - which in the original is not in italics - gives the key that, rather than language, the author appealed to a series of formal and spatial characteristics of the architecture and not to a set of signs.

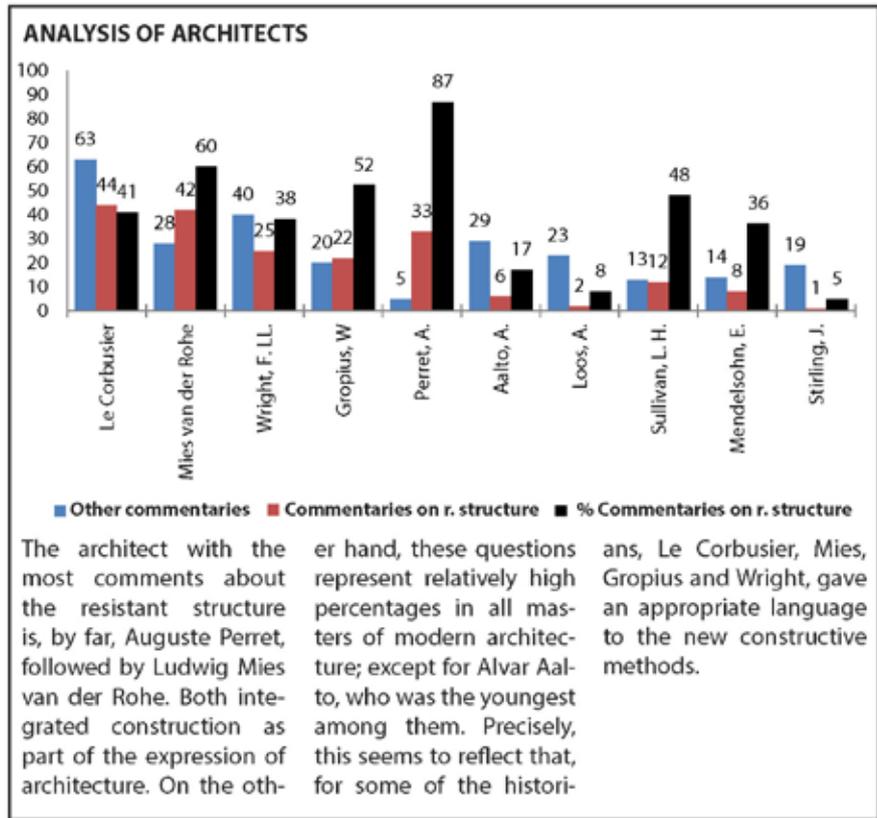
Finally, for Frampton, *tectonic* expresses the relationship between the load and the resistant structure. In addition, it also manifests the poetic and the cognitive. Therefore, the structural strategies must be legible and must be an important part in the final configuration of the architecture. Something that could be applied to the architecture by Mies van der Rohe, the Eiffel Tower, Mendes da Rocha or Felix Candela, among a wide range of



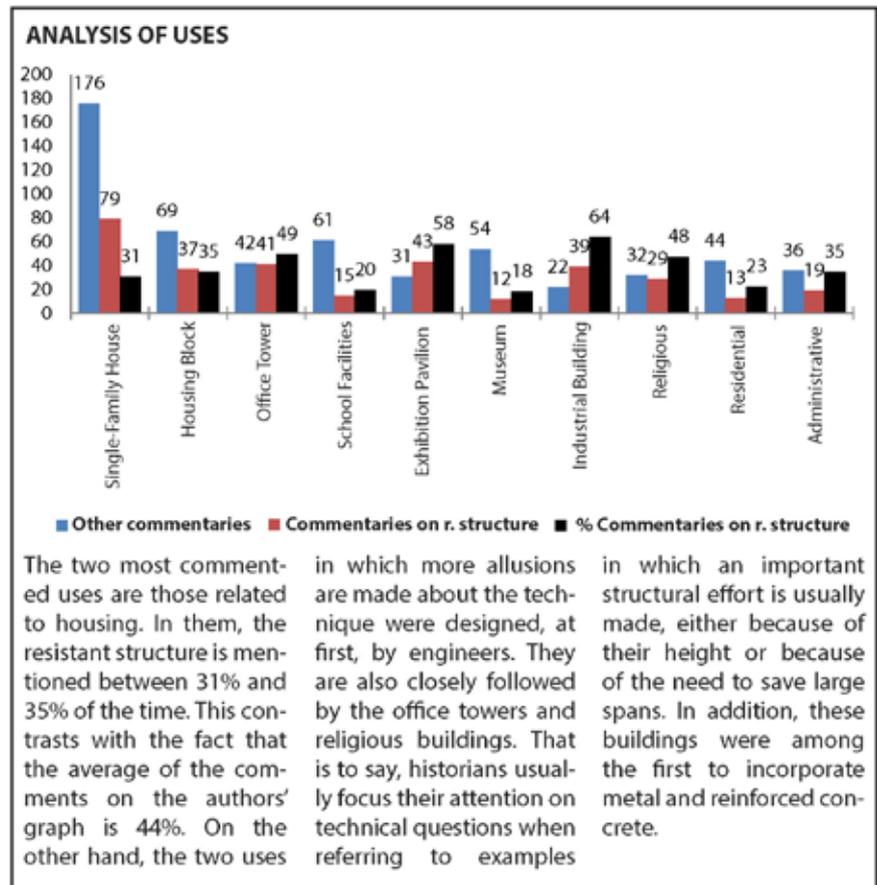
**Fig. 1**  
Analysis of Critics of Architecture.

names. Thus, unlike Gottfried Semper, Frampton does not refer to a single type of construction, but to a coincidence between expression and resistant structure. By means of which the material sense of the construction can be transcended to reach a symbolic level, that is, the tectonic can be reached. Historians do not use the expression 'resistant structure'. Instead of that the main terms that they use to refer to that are: engineering, machine, construction and technique. These words are often used almost as synonyms. They also make references to constructive components such as: pillar, vault, column, slab, etc. And some of them, to the science of structures. In addition, in terms of materials, the main protagonists are reinforced concrete and steel. Likewise, critics refer to the resistant structure through them on many occasions. That is to say, a metonymy is produced in which meronyms (materials) replace holonyms (resistant structure, technique, etc.). Also the difference between technique and technology is not usually expressed. Something, however, that is worth discussing. According to some philosophers<sup>12</sup>, the birth of science points out the difference between these terms. After science the word technology should be used. However, there is no universal consensus on this. In general, historians of modern architecture use both terms synonymously. Moreover, the word technology can be used in two different ways, either to designate procedures and resources with which to carry out a particular solution, or take a deeper sense. Thus, Martin Heidegger claimed<sup>13</sup>: «Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth. This prospect strikes us as strange. Indeed, it should do so, should do so as persistently as possible and with so much urgency that we will finally take seriously the simple question of what the name "technology" means. The Word stems from the Greek Τέχνικον means that which belongs to τέχνη» Something that José Ortega y Gasset<sup>14</sup> and Lewis Mumford also defended. In fact, the latter uses the English word *technics*; however<sup>15</sup>, «... is not a

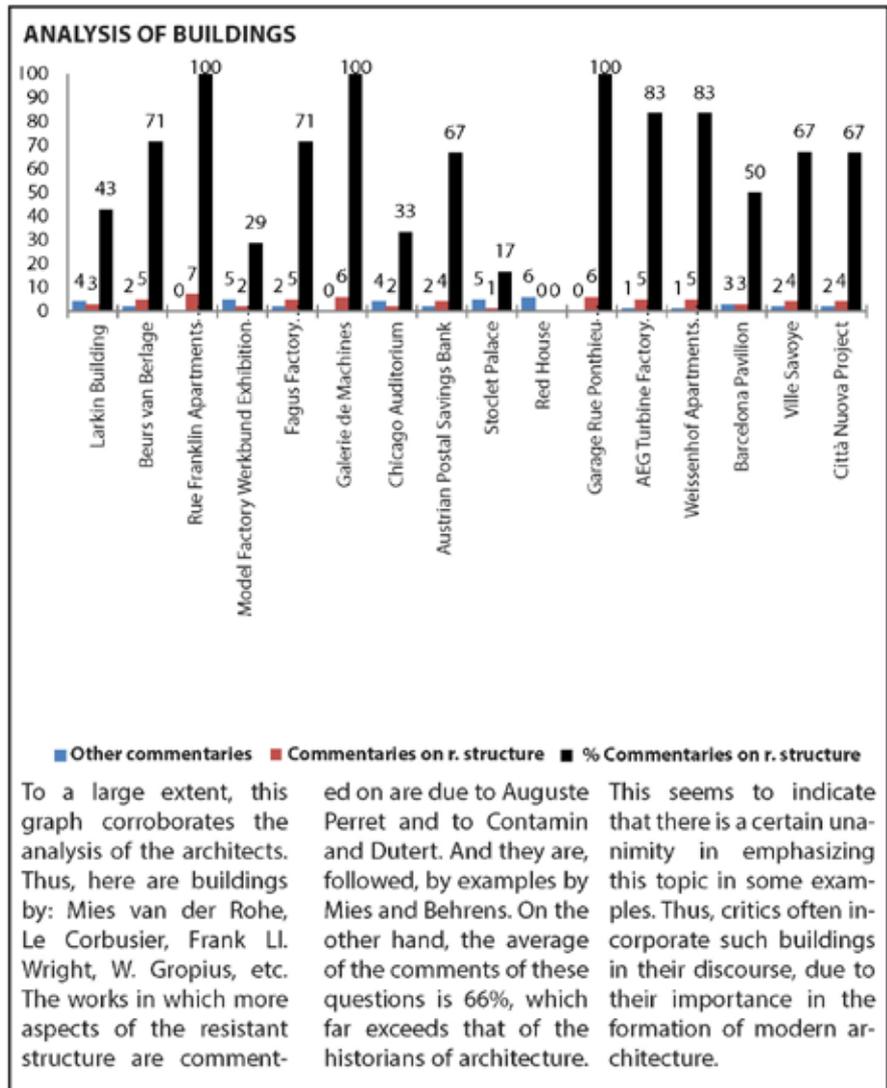
**Fig. 2**  
Analysis of Architects.

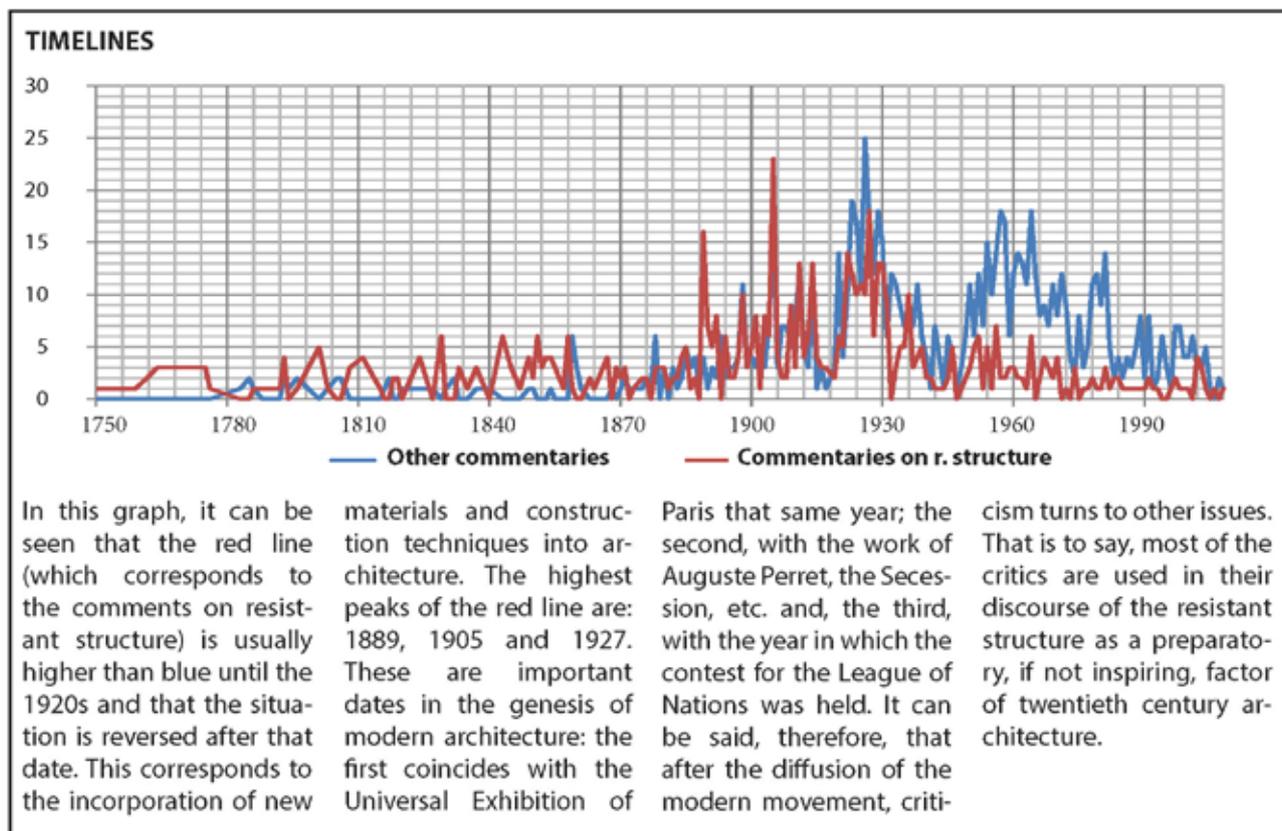


**Fig. 3**  
Analysis of uses.



**Fig. 4**  
Analysis of Buildings.





**Fig. 5**  
Timelines.

common word in [that language], and Mumford uses it deliberately as a synonym of the Greek *tekne* (Τέχνη), a term that refers not only to technology in a narrow sense, but also to art and craftsmanship, and by extension to the interaction between the social environment and technological innovation. »

Thus, most critics of architecture, which have been studied, refer to technique as a means. However, Frampton adopts the Heideggerian sense of the word. In fact, it integrates it within the concept of tectonics, but giving it a constructive reality.

If the graphics of all the books are studied, (see figures: Analysis of critics of architecture/Analysis of architects/Analysis of uses/Analysis of buildings/Timelines) it can be seen that among architects and engineers quoted by historians, Auguste Perret is by far, the architect who is proportionately most quoted regarding this resistant structure. Moreover, within uses, industrial and exhibition pavilions are the highest percentage in this regard. On the contrary, the use of single-family homes (which is where the most comments are made) only appeals to this issue in 30% of cases.

As for the most talked about buildings, three in which the resistant structure is mentioned in 100% of cases are Rue Franklin Apartments and Garage Ponthieu by Auguste Perret and the Galerie des Machines. These are followed by the AEG Turbine Factory by Peter Behrens and block houses for the Weissenhof by Mies. Also, if we look at time lines, it is noted that before 1920, commentaries on structures (in red) exceed or equal the rest of the commentaries; but since then the red line decrease with respect to the blue line. In addition, there are three highest peaks; 1889, 1905 and 1927. So, roughly speaking, it can be affirmed that the resistant structure seems to be important for historians -fundamentally- before the 1930s; and very especially before the 20th century.

If the quantitative and qualitative data are compared, several conclusions



**Fig. 6**

From left: H. R. Hitchcock; Pevsner.; S. Giedion; B. Zevi; R. Banham; K. Frampton; C. Jencks; P. Tournikiotis.

are obtained. Critics often make two types of analysis of the technology: as an isolated or integrated object in their speech. As to the first, all the critics that address the evolution of the technology, carry out a review of the evolution of metal since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution to the Exposition Universelle of 1889. Thus, the authors usually talk about the production of iron and its first examples in: bridges, greenhouses, exhibition halls, and so on.

That is why one of the peaks that appears is 1889. Which, in addition, underlines that the Galerie des Machines of Contamin and Dutert is one of the buildings in which this topic is always discussed. Also in that year, they mention: the Eiffel Tower, buildings of the Chicago School as the Tacoma Building, and so on. Precisely, when referring to the construction of the towers of the Chicago School, critics usually speak of the use of the typical structural system of the factory buildings.

Once this tour is complete, historians addressing these dates propose a review of the development and evolution of reinforced concrete, from Paul Cottancin to François Hennebique. This tour is usually finished by explaining some of the bridges and slabs by Robert Maillart, as well as historians give examples of Eugène Freyssinet's work. In fact, at the peak of 1905 there are works such as: the bridge over the river Rinn in Tavanasa by Robert Maillart and the garage of Rue Ponthieu by Perret. In addition to other experiences in metal; among which the transporter bridge in Marseille by Arnodin and the building of the Sammaritaine stand out. Therefore the numbers underline that the uses in which the resistant structure is usually commented are those uses referring to industry and exhibition halls.

In the peak of 1927, works of modern architecture are discussed: the building of the Weissenhof by Mies van der Rohe, the Villa Stein by Le Corbus-

ier, some projects for the League of Nations, the Lovell House by Richard Neutra, etc. Unlike the previous peaks, in this case the structure is usually a part of the discourse of the authors.

These data corroborate that there are two attitudes with respect to the development of new techniques. Thus, for some historians, it had a fundamental role in the birth of modern architecture (Hitchcock, Pevsner, Giedion, Benevolo, Frampton) and for others, it was just a factor (Zevi and Banham).

The majority of the comments that the authors make of the evolution of the technique are almost identical. What indicates that, as an isolated object of study, technology is seen as a block. Critics do not produce a critique of science, nor their motives, nor its successes and its failures. Thus, the architects are impelled to be either passive users, or instigators of the technique. But it seems that architects can't have a decisive role in the evolution of technology that is relegated to engineering and industry.

Moreover, since 1920 the weight of the technique goes down considerably, with respect to other issues, and one could argue that the technology has become an element of the discourse of authors. It is indicating that the mechanistic positions were abandoned, giving way to a structuralist critique.

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> GONZALEZ L. AUSIAS (2016)— *Del Empirismo a la invención, cálculo y proyecto en la arquitectura moderna*, PhD presented in Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid, Madrid

<sup>3</sup> PORTOGHESI P. (director) (1969)— *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Architettura e Urbanistica, Roma, Volumen VI*, Istituto Editoriale Romano, 1969 [translation by the author]

<sup>4</sup> PEVSNER N. (1943)— *An Outline of European Architecture*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books (Spanish translation by María Corniero y Fabián Chueca, *Breve historia de la arquitectura europea*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1994), p. 366 [Translation by the author]

<sup>5</sup> PEVSNER N. (1936)— *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius*, 1<sup>a</sup>ed., Londres, Faber & Faber (Spanish translation by Odilia Suárez and Emma Grefores, *Pioneros del diseño moderno: de William Morris a Walter Gropius*, 1<sup>a</sup>ed., Buenos Aires, Infinito, 1958, ( 5<sup>a</sup> edición, 2011))...., *op. cit.*, p 14 [Translation by the author]

<sup>6</sup> HITCHCOCK H.-R. (1942)— *In the Nature of Materials, 1887-1941: The Buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright*, Nueva York, Dwell, Sloan and Pearce

<sup>7</sup> HITCHCOCK H.-R. (1932)— *The International Style: Architecture since 1922*, Nueva York, W.W. Norton (Spanish translation by Carlos Albisu, *El Estilo Internacional; arquitectura desde 1922*, Murcia, COAT, 1984)

<sup>8</sup> HITCHCOCK H.-R. (1958)— *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books (ed. of 1968) (Spanish translation by Luis E. Santiago, *Arquitectura de los siglos XIX y XX*, Madrid, Ediciones Cátedra, 1981) pp 626-627 [Translation by the author]

<sup>9</sup> TOURNIKIOTIS P. (1999)— *The Historiography of Modern Architecture*, Cambridge, Mass., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999 (Spanish translation by Jorge Sainz, *La historiografía de la arquitectura moderna*, Madrid, Librería Mairea y Celeste Ediciones SA, 2001)Panayotis, *op. cit.*, p 127 [Translation by the author]

<sup>10</sup> ZEVI B. (1950)— *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, 1<sup>a</sup> ed, Torino, Einaudi (Spanish translation of the 5th Italian ed by Roser Berdagué, *Historia de la arquitectura*

*moderna*, Barcelona, Poseidón, 1980), p 322 [translation by the author]

<sup>11</sup> ZEVI B. (2001) — *Profilo della critica architettonica*, Roma, Newton & Compton Editori, p 105 [translation by the author]

<sup>12</sup> This difference is found in: GARCÍA SIERRA P. «Diccionario filosófico» En: [«http://www.filosofia.org/filomat/df177.htm»](http://www.filosofia.org/filomat/df177.htm) (26/03/2015)

<sup>13</sup> HEIDEGGER M. (1954)— *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Pfullingen, Verlag Günther Neske (English translation *The question concerning Technology* Garland Pub 1977 p 3-35)

<sup>14</sup> ORTEGA Y GASSET J. (1982)— *Meditación de la técnica y otros ensayos sobre filosofía*, Madrid, Revista de Occidente en Alianza Editorial, 1982 (ed of 2004). [It is a course that Ortega y Gasset gave in Universidad de Verano de Santander in 1933]

<sup>15</sup> MUMFORD L. (1952)— *Art and Technics*, New York, Columbia University Press, (ed. year 2000) (Spanish Translation by Julián Lacalle, *Arte y técnica*, La Rioja, Pepitas de la calabaza, 2014), p 49 [This is a note from the spanish translator, who continues saying: «Given the alternative of translating it as tekné or as a” technique “, we have preferred this second option ...»] [Translation by the author].

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Fabiano Micocci  
**Zissis Kotionis. The Text as Assemblage**

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Abstract

The texts by Professor Zissis Kotionis, a Greek architect and artist, declare two urgencies: on the one hand the needs for theoretical speculation as a support for architectural production, and on the other the need for writing as an indispensable element of design research. The centrality of the text as a project is therefore affirmed. The narrative structure of these texts is made of collections of fragments assembled together, which indicate a multiplicity of operational possibilities rather than codes. It does not matter if they are texts of criticism of architecture, theory or poetry: the same structure is repeated and updated giving new meanings to the process of assembling in form of a text.

Keywords

Assemblage — Greece — Fragment



**Fig. 1**  
 Zissis Kotionis, *Anaximander in Fukushima. Genealogies of Technique* (2017).

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Texts and books have a fundamental importance for architecture as a place for investigation and experimentation. The book has often been a moment of verification, exploration, and systematization of thoughts through catalogs, collections and essays. Today, in a historical moment in which great theories have disappeared and theoretical speculation is fragmented, sporadic and continually contradicted, it is legitimate to ask for what role a book of architecture may cover inside the discipline of architecture.

In January 2017, in the old library of the Onassis Foundation in Athens, Zissis Kotionis, Greek architect and university professor at the University of Thessaly, tells his work as a writer presenting his books in a speech that runs throughout his 30 years of activity. The books were presented in chronological order using projects, realized or not, only to support the description of the books as a sort of attempt to give physical substance to theoretical investigation. This event declares two complementary urgencies: at the one hand the necessities of research theory as anticipation of the design activity, and at the other hand the necessity of writing itself as a tool both for theoretical speculation and for formal research. In this way Kotionis sanctions the centrality, but also the inevitability, of the text as a project.

Kotionis eschews from writing any scientific investigation, preferring instead a text that stands between criticism, personal history and theoretical speculation, and he moves easily, and ambiguously, between these. In this sense, although apparently they look to be essays, these books try to tell stories. The distance from a pure scientific reasoning is explained by the same author by quoting the German romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin who in *Hyperion* vividly described Greece without ever having visited it.



**Fig. 2**  
Zissis Kotionis, *Camp\_Med*  
(2016).

Hölderlin's is an imaginary journey in a real place that combines the collective imagination with the desire for physical contact of the body on a certain place. Writing is therefore a mean that unites fantasy to experience in a narrative where imagination and reality can meet.

This type of narrative acquires the distinctive character of the works of the romantic painters who have represented the places they visited - or never visited - of the *Grand Tour* as a *collage* of fragments and ruins both real and fantastic, mixing codes, places and personal memories. The texts of Kotionis seem to be constructed in the same way: they are collections of texts that give rise to a heterogeneous composition made of fragments, pieces that belong to different moments or written for different occasions, personal memories and built projects, which all together meet in the physical place of the book as in a canvas.

These collections take the form of archives, where various texts are collected without a real beginning or an end, a characteristic that determines a sort of incompleteness. The archive, as Superstudio writes in a manifesto published in 1968, is an open tool in constant evolution that avoids to set principles, but that makes hypothesis, ambiguity and doubts as a prerequisite for any research (Superstudio, 1968). In the same way Kotionis avoids to establish codes in favor of a formulation of multiple operational possibilities. The book *The Madness of the Place* (2004) has its roots in the architecture of the Second World War in Greece identified essentially in three fundamental figures for the Neo-Hellenic architectural culture and with the legacies they gave birth: Dimitris Pikionis and the vernacular, Aris Konstantinidis and the modernism, Takis Zenetos and the electronic technology. In reality it is difficult to relegate these architects to clear definitions, as their research and their works transcend any -isms. Kotionis' texts transversely investigate their works avoiding issuing judges but rather identifying three different complementary conditions of existence that cannot exist simultaneously.

By getting together these different conditions, Kotionis reaches the liberty of not to choose and not to take side. It is the freedom to work on new research hypotheses without any constraint. As Peter Turchi points out in *Maps of Imagination: the Writer as Cartographer* (2004, 12), this is a prerogative of the act of writing understood as an act of exploration. This pro-



**Fig. 3**  
Zissis Kotionis, *Tel me, Where is Athens* (2004).

cess of exploration is indeed based on the premeditated and undisciplined combination of various parts. But while the research phase is rigorous and assertive, its assumptions are uncertain.

On this basis Kotionis adopts the technique of *assemblage* in all its production as a precise operational program. In an interview for the exhibition *Terra Mediterranea: in Action* in Leipzig in 2014, he offers an explanation for the installation he presented at the exhibition, called *Camp\_Med*, which can be useful to better understand the narrative structure of his books. *Camp\_Med* consists of objects found along the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea and then reassembled in the unprecedented configuration of a village-camp.<sup>1</sup> This creative process refers to the *assemblage* technique in which objects found somewhere are de-territorialized and juxtaposed without any precise order, eschewing the use of any physical or mechanical joints. *Assemblage* is by definition a process without any principle of order, without any privileged point of view, and that can spread indefinitely (Barilli 1963, 84-95). Furthermore, for DeLanda (2016), who refers to the work of Deleuze and Guattari who firstly defined the *assemblage* theory in their text *Millepiani, Capitalism and Schizofrenia*, this technique involves the use of heterogeneous elements that are codified and de-territorialized while they still keep their singularity. Kotionis' texts can be interpreted in the same way: an archive of thoughts, projects, and researches, assembled together but incomplete, and with the potential to grow.

Perhaps the clearest example in which this narrative structure is employed is the book *Anaximander in Fukushima. Genealogies of Technique* (2017), a publication that presents the exhibition set up with the same title at the Benaki Museum in Athens in 2010. It is a collection of objects, fragments of texts, and images taken from the work of the Greek pre-Socratic philosophers, combined with texts and works by the architect himself. The narration develops as a series of fragments, without any apparent continuity. What keeps everything together is the fact that Kotionis builds a cosmology that is a world-space where every element belongs.

If we aim to investigate the origins of this narration, we need to look at the past and specifically at Kotionis' first published text, *The Search for Dwelling in Dimitris Pikionis* (1994) which collects the research carried out during his PhD thesis at the Polytechnic School of Athens. Pikionis was one of the leading architects of Neo-Hellenic Architecture and a promoter of Regionalism whose importance is internationally recognized (Frampton, 1980). The famous walk under the Acropolis, a long quasi-oriental style stone and concrete carpet, is a retrospective narration that explores individual and collective stories. It is a non-linear text composed of new and old fragments: the stones found *in situ* are recombined like disordered fragments from the past, together with some long strips of concrete and the sequences of the views of the actual landscape of Athens as frames taken along the spiral path that climbs up to the hill. This project poses the question of the research for a contemporary narrative form realized through non-linear paths that moves between physical, visual and historical fragments.

The construction of the text as an *assemblage* allows us to discover and collect apparently incompatible elements, figures and places through the literary journey. This journey is nothing but a movement that does not follow a linear path, but is a succession of spatial-temporal displacements in the

memory of real travels or travels of the imagination. The literary journey is therefore a spatial dimension in which lurks the search for what has been abandoned or forgotten, re-contextualizing it to open up new possibilities. The journey as a story, however, is not intended as a linear story similar to the *Journey to Portugal* by José Saramago or the *Balthazar's Odyssey* by Amin Maalouf. On the contrary, it is a fantastic construction that emerges from the collection of real fragments, lived experiences, artistic performances. The writer Milan Kundera (2004) points out that the novel 'The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman' by Laurence Sterne was the first destruction of the story because it is composed by scattered episodes that are simply linked together by the repetitive presence of some characters. As the story disappears, existential questions about the human nature come forward. This *assemblage* becomes the true narrative form implemented by Kotionis as a continuous travel between places, ideas, and forms.

In *Tell Me, Where is Athens* (2010), Kotionis narrates the transformation of the urban landscape of Athens in the last decades. The texts are collected in three groups (theory, rhetoric and projects) and present a fragmented panorama that does not indicate privileged directions. For Kotionis Athens cannot be resumed in a single image but always suggests the existence of some other places in front of us, almost like a *flâneur* that moves on the rough soil of the peninsula of Attica searching for something to discover. The book has a fractal structure that imposes to the reader a continuous change of the distance of the point of view, thus constructing new relationships between inside and outside, large and small, distant and close. It is the same geography of the Attica peninsula that is narrated, but Kotionis' worry is not so much the need to reveal something, but the attempt to elaborate hypotheses for what is not included at a first glance.

*Farewells* (2008) is a rapid travel among places with the speed of the airplane. It combines the omniscient view of flying together with the archaic need to physically stand on the ground. A fast rhythm guides the reader between distant places, whose stories are juxtaposed without any particular order. The description of physical places, clearly named in the title of each chapter, is combined with photographs of other places, as a sort of fantastic journey towards an elsewhere. The narrative does not cause disorientation, but on the contrary it provokes the desire to be in a specific place, or better in the many places of the book. Like Hölderlin, the place of memory or expectation is merged with the physical characteristics of a specific place. A third form of travel is narrated in *Trans Europe Express* (2010) that collects nine journeys through the geography of Europe. Here personal stories overlap with imaginary journeys: each chapter combines two or three names of places, also very distant from each other, and which often seem to have nothing to do with each other. Kotionis builds a new psychotropic map of the genealogy of memory like Ulysses that had images of Ithaca, his home, overlapped to the places he visited from time to time during his trip along the Mediterranean. But unlike the circumnavigation of Ulysses, Kotionis' journeys are constellations where lines, shapes and names generate a myriad of potential and imaginary connections. And yet, while the journey of Ulysses is cyclical, in *Trans Europe Express* every place becomes a pause waiting for a departure in a non-linear journey.

*Assemblage* is an artistic practice, as evident in the incredible number of artists that have used it, from Pablo Picasso to Damien Hirst. In the text



**Fig. 4**  
Zisis Kotionis, *Trans Europe Express* (2010).

*Formativity* (2007) Kotionis investigates more accurately how writing and creative process can work together. He involuntarily refers to the seminal *Theory of Formativity* by Luigi Pareyson (1968), where contemplation as an aesthetic experience is substituted by the process of creation as an aesthetic practice. The active action of the artist in forming a work of art represents a radical inversion in the relationship between the artist and his work. *Formativity* indeed focuses on the act of making something and therefore on capability of altering the physical form.

In the same way, Kotionis' stories do not offer an image to be contemplated, but many images that are evolving and can be often contradictory. The narrative of Kotionis in fact avoids any kind of objective description. For example, his built works are never explained in their entirety, but he refers to them only for some specific aspects, appearing often somewhere within the text as necessary counterpoints. It is an attempt to understand more accurately the principles of the research that are at the base of the architectural process. In this way Kotionis not only affirms that a project is close to an artistic practice but that the same writing belongs to design practice.

However, it is necessary not to confuse a simple collection of texts, a widespread format among architecture production, and the narrative project of Kotionis. These are not collections of texts from a particular period or from a specific research. Instead, the whole personal archive made of various materials is used each time to construct new narratives rather than theories. In this regard, two similar publications, and perhaps the best-known works abroad because they are translated in English, help in this regard: *The Ark* (2010) and *Multidomes* (2011). The first is the catalog for the Greek Pavillion at the 2006 Venice Biennale of Architecture curated by Kotionis himself together with Phoebe Giannisi. On a wooden ark, that is clear reference to the biblical narration of Noah's Ark, seeds are collected to be saved from Man's destruction of the Earth. The book is a collective work that collects texts by different authors together with those of the curators of the pavilion. The work is focused mostly on the Greek landscape, and it is not merely a description but it is a narration made of thoughts and actions about the landscape itself. As in other texts, there is a close link between the theme of the research and the narrative form. The book is a

multi-directional journey throughout many voices across the geography of Greece. The many texts collected here reveal spatial displacements and territorial transformations exactly like the spores, the essence of life, are a multitude in continuous movement. The curator of the pavilion becomes the narrator of a shared story because it concerns everyone: like Homer, he inherits stories and brings them back into a collective form.

*Multidomes* instead is published at the same time with the homonymous exhibition organized at the Benaki Museum in Athens in 2012. The projects presented are built with hypothetical software that generates a housing system that grows, multiplies and adapts to the territory as spores. This system creates a porous, open and extroverted housing systems. The book is another example in which the content and the narrative structure fit together. *Multidomes* are indeed projects built as an *assemblage* of elementary units (the living cell) and among these elements there is nothing but space that is a collective and shared space. It is not a simple collection of texts and works, but it is a narration of the meaning of the multitude. The book opens with a conversation between the author, Elia Zenghelis, Alexandros Kioupkiolis and Yorgos Tzirtzilakis, and then develops into an alternation between texts and projects, in which the sequence actually represents two specific intentions: at the one hand it avoids hierarchies, while at the other hand it constructs a network of references between chapters. It does not seem risky to talk about a semi-lattice structure, which in mathematics indicates an isotropic structure of points without hierarchies, proposed in the architectural discourse by Christopher Alexander (1965) and later by Deleuze and Guattari (1975).

The two texts have a common narrative objective: to tell the story of singularities in parallel with the story of the multitude. Singularity is told with personal stories, the act of dwelling, the adaptation of the peasant to the virtual world through laptops, and linked to collective epic poems, such as the risk of ecological disaster, the evolution of the agrarian world, urbanization processes, and the alteration of the landscape. This aspect of Kotionis' research can be placed between two characteristics of contemporary Greece that represent an antithesis in Greek society. At one hand the epic narrative of the collectivity that pervades the work of the director Theo Anghelopoulos with the use of long sequences that embrace the landscape and the wholeness of human actions. At the other hand the crisis of the bourgeois family described by directors like Yiannis Economides and Yiorgos Lantimos, in which the whole story takes place within the domestic environment of the family apartment. Kotionis does not abandon the epic narration of Anghelopoulos, but he re-thinks it as an expression of a multitude in which the single event calls into question every predominant and immutable narration.

The overlapping of the narratives of Angelopoulos and Economides defines a specific geographic form of the text that links the individual and his wandering on the earth's surface to the panoramic images of the landscapes. In 1968 the brothers Charles and Ray Eames directed the film *Power of Tens*, in which scenes from everyday life - a couple picnicking on a lawn - is the meeting point between the all-encompassing view from the satellite and the exploration of internal organisms through the microscope. At each zoom out through the powerful lens of the NASA satellite the bodies are positioned within a vast scenario in which are completely absorbed. In the opposite direction, the microscope explores human cells, analyzing what man is made of. This rapid change of scale through the use of the machine

combines the interior with the outside, and the biological life of the individual to the Earth that is in constant evolution.

The text as an assemblage of fragments resembles a series of disassembled and reassembled frames that are able to superimpose the human gaze with the mechanical eye of the satellite. Kotionis abandons the zoom as a linear process and he shuffles and puts together the frames as residual images of the technological information society. In this way he merges the objectivity of the digital device to the subjectivity of the human in a new form of narration.

The architectural book for Kotionis is not an essay, as it does not pretend to establish codes, nor a presentation of his works. On the contrary, there is a coincidence between the narrative form and the contents as a project. The *assemblage*, used by Kotionis as a method of making art and architecture, is also applied to the narration. In the last case, the *assemblage* acquires a double value: the unfolding of the story through combining places, images, fantasies and characters, and the perpetual experimentation and research as the base for the design. The text is freed from the problem of subordination to architectural production and acquires its own autonomy. The text thus becomes a necessary tool for the design, and therefore indispensable.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Kotionis refers both to the touristic village, a concept investigated also with the projects *Amphibia* for the XIII Biennale of Architecture of Venice, and to the *camp* as a place of negation and control, with a reference to *Homo Sacer* by Giorgio Agamben.

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Lucia Miodini  
**The story of Mediterranean living.  
 Narration and project in Ponti's "ideario" of architecture**

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Abstract

The essay comes from a reflection on narrative structures of architectural project. It is dedicated to architecture domestic Mediterranean in the work of Gio Ponti. A case study in which the affinity between architectural design and design methodology emerges as an element characterizing not only the creative process, but also the relationship between architecture and narration forms. In the history of Ponti's architectural imaginary, in his "ideario" of architecture, the mise en page of Mediterranean living, from graphic interventions on drawing to photographic sequences, to textual commentary, highlights correspondences between drawing and literary imaginary. The narrative structure of living is individual in different phases of the project, from the ideation of the place to the graphic formalization, to the dialogue between the image of architecture and its textual commentary in the editorial communication. The narrative dimension is highlighted as a clarifying factor of the creative process of Mediterranean architecture, which is itself a form of narrativity.

Parole Chiave

Mediterranean architecture — Architectural drawing — Gio Ponti

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**Narration and cultures of the sketch**

The sketches of architecture are not only an important archival heritage to reconstruct the design process, but they constitute a precious material to identify, in the representation of the architectural works, different forms of 'narration'. Considering the material designs from this optics, the attention moves to the different iconologies of the sketches, to the methods and the techniques of graphic representation.

I will take in examination an exemplary episode: the project of the 'Mediterranean' living, imagined and created by Ponti in the second half of the thirties. These drawings express, in an integrated way, the different phases of the design process and communicate the ideation process<sup>1</sup>.

The identification of the preference for a certain and determined form of project's presentation, the study of the methods of figuration and the examination of the scriptures, are indispensable methodological premises to understand the different cultural models and the intellectual purpose of the author, and to finally understand, the complex system of relationships between the designer and the visual culture of his time.

The style of representation, the format, the graphic sign are testimonies of the author's intellectual intentions. «Through the interpretation of the techniques, the cuts, the use of light, it's possible to retrace the ideological and cultural attitude both of individual authors and schools of thought».<sup>2</sup>

Fabio Lanfranchi distinguishes between prose and poetics: the former canonical and conventional representation, while the poetic architectural representation would assume its own vocabulary, its own metric. The design used poetically would communicate the ideal aspects of the project, such as the emotional ones present in the moment of ideation. "Now, although



**Fig.1**  
 Gio Ponti. Untitled (Villa Marchesano a Bordighera), s.d. (1938). Prospectus towards the sea  
 Drawing for publication  
 mm.310x540 - china on glossy  
 Gio Ponti Archive, CSAC-Sezione Progetto.

the figurative moment of the representation defined as poetic, is framed, in all the effects, in the design “communicative” phase however, it finds its own references in the antecedent “ideational” phase.<sup>3</sup>

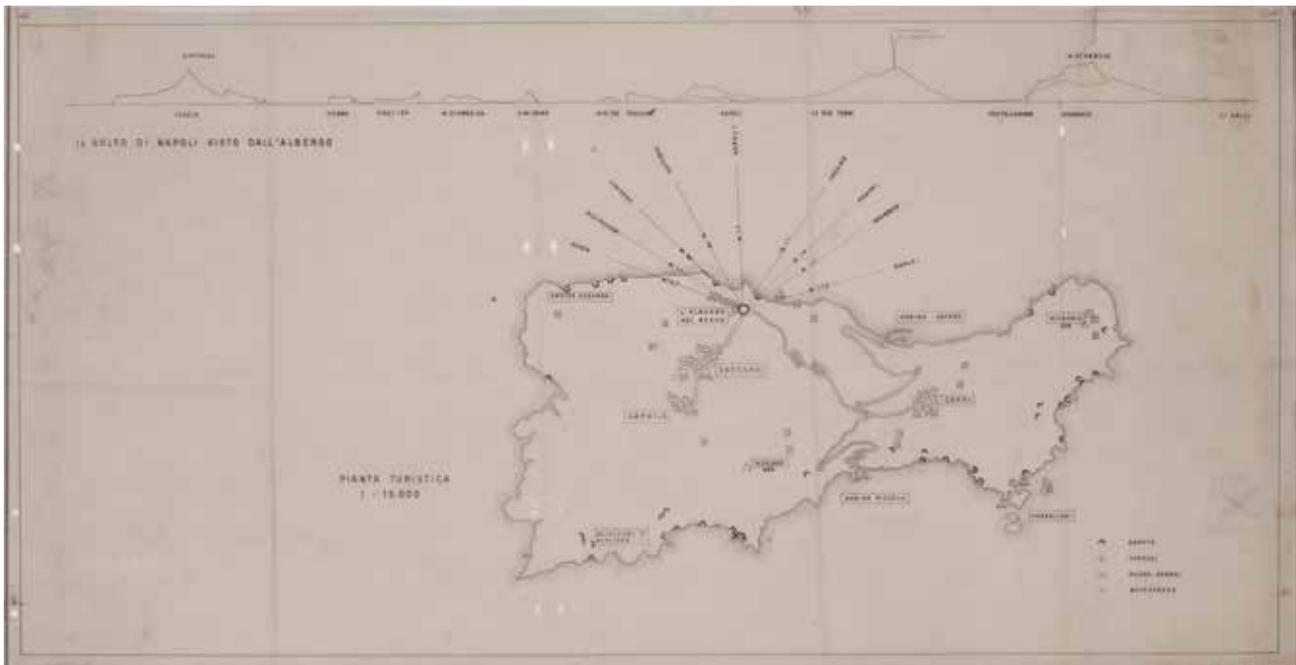
I believe, however, that the formal outcomes of this type of representation must be framed in a communicative context for dissemination purposes. I also believe that the field of application can not be limited to the design process, but should be extended to the communication of architecture aimed at hypothetical inhabitants and users, and, generally, to readers of sector magazines, but not only.

In Ponti’s case, it can even be said that the ideational and communicative phases largely coincide, especially since the editors of *Domus* and the architectural firm are a single place and a single source of ideas.

The Mediterranean domestic project as it emerges from the observation of the drawings preserved in the Gio Ponti Archive fund conserved at CSAC and the reading of the tables published in «*Domus*» is a case study and at the same time of verification, in which the structural affinity between the narration and the representation of architecture emerges as an element characterizing the creative process.

In Ponti’s design path, in his “ideario” of architecture, the mise en page of the Mediterranean project, from the graphic writing of the drawing to the photographic sequences, to the textual commentary, brings out unexpected correspondences between architectural text and literary imaginary. The narrative dimension has a clarifying function in the different design phases: from the ideation to the graphic formalization, to the dialogue between the image of the structure and its textual commentary in the editorial communication. Ponti has an excellent ability referring to different skills and fields, from photography to contemporary art, from literature to anthropology, so that drawing and photography, although in the diversity of the scriptures, transcribe the ritual and conviviality of the Mediterranean living, in a correspondence between methods and tools of representation. His approach, which we could define as metadisciplinary, born from a deep vision of the ways of being and living, of its theoretical premises and its rituals.

In the drawings for the Hotel in the woods on Capri’s island, studied in collaboration with Bernardo Rudofsky in 1937, and in the projects of seaside houses conceived by Ponti in the thirties and in the first years of the following decade, the essential connection between the creative process and



**Fig.2**

Gio Ponti. Hotel of San Michele on the island of Capri, (1938)  
Tourist plant. Drawing for publication. China on glossy - mm.530x1012  
Gio Ponti Archive, CSAC-Sezione Progetto.

story emerges.

The “Mediterranean” Ponti project is the expression of an architecture of the other modernity that highlights “a broader, less functionalistic and deterministic rationality, able to accommodate the elaboration of symbolic themes and to produce solid references for the collective imagination». (Crippa 2007, p.20).

### Imagining the Mediterranean

The order of the speech about Mediterranean architecture, is a form of narrativity<sup>4</sup>.

A linguistic and visual formulation whose genealogy has been carefully reconstructed in the recent critical debate. In the interventions of authors who discussed the different and often conflicting statements of the discourse, committed to deconstructing the elaboration and production of the ambiguous notion of Mediterranean, the theoretical contributions of Fernand Braudel (1949), Predrag Matvejevic, certainly weighed (1987) and David Abulafia (2003). The Mediterranean has been interpreted on two levels, an historical-empirical and a symbolic-initiatory one.<sup>5</sup>

Plans, however, are difficult to separate, since the use of mythology and oneiric discussions, combines in a single plot what is real and what is imaginary. In the last decade we have also witnessed an increase in studies and conferences that addressed many questions related to the cultural construction of the “myth”.

The suggestive and often cited definition of Fernand Braudel - «the Mediterranean is a thousand things together, not a landscape, but innumerable landscapes, not a sea, but a succession of seas, not a civilization but successive civilizations piled one over the another »- that still today, almost seventy years after its first publication, leads us to reflect on the geopolitics of this space, is taken up and updated by scholars convinced, as stated Walter Benjamin, «that history is the subject of a building whose place is not the homogeneous and empty time, but the one full of current events».<sup>6</sup> So, for example, in the introduction to the conference *Imagining the Mediterranean*, we read: «during the twentieth century, in the Mediterranean enclave, in places once mythopoetic and today tragically wet by a” basin

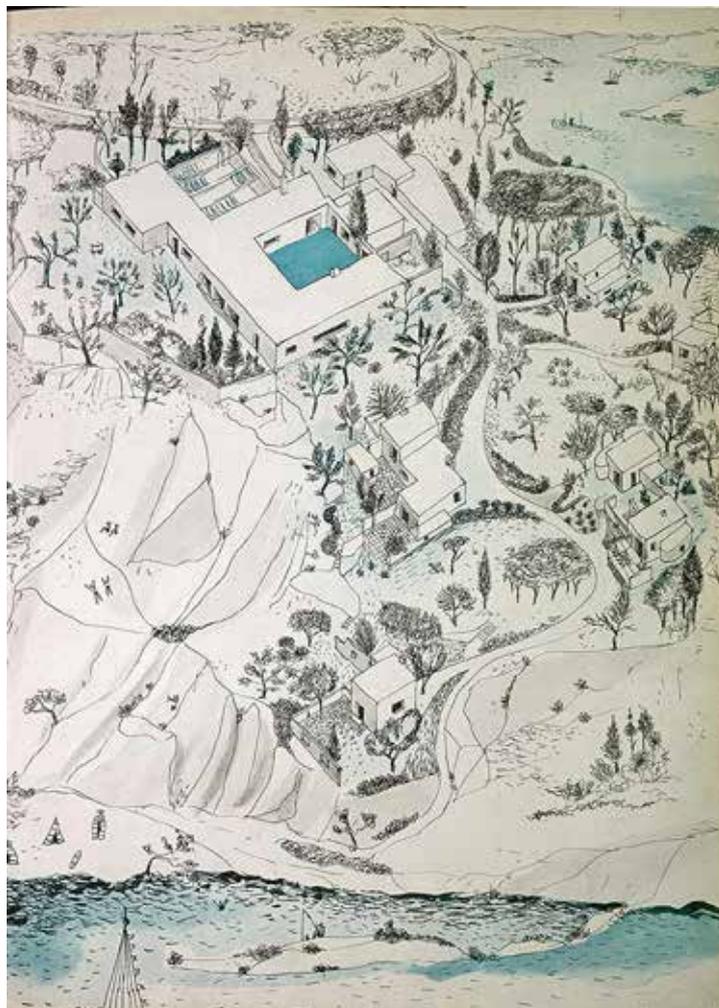
**Fig.3**

Gio Ponti. Room of the black wall in the hotel of San Michele at the island of Capri, (1938). Perspective view. Publicity design on glossy - mm.420x420.

Gio Ponti Archive, CSAC-Sezione Progetto.

**Fig.4**

Gio Ponti, Bernard Rudofsky Hotel San Michele in Capri "Stile". Style in the home and furnishings. n. August 8, 1941.





**Fig.7**

Gio Ponti, A small ideal house, "Domus", n.138, June 1939, p.41. Perspective view of the interior and the plant. "Small niches in the walls for the game of composing still lifes with curious objects", "the majolica floor offers the happiest resources of color: you would not love this "harlequin".

of death "have materialized on various occasions real experiential islands, not necessarily coinciding with their strictly geographical connotation».<sup>7</sup> Having cleared the field from semantic ambiguities, what does the conceptual term "the Mediterranean" really mean, which is used to characterize the phenomena of artistic representation? And, once recognized - with Fernand Braudel - the legitimacy of the assumption of the "Mediterranean civilization" as an object of historical analysis, making our own the question posed by Benedetto Gravagnuolo (2010), we wonder if it is possible to identify a Mediterranean culture of living?

A first consideration: the places have no meaning or value in themselves, taking on each time the contours delimited by a system of co-essential beliefs to the historical-cultural sphere of reference. Landscape is a space produced both by experience and by the ability to read the place as a system of signs.<sup>8</sup> It is a story, a form of writing, a visual catalog deposited in our imagination.

And, in this imaginary, Capri is an exemplary textual and visual construction. It is the place of a consoling Mediterranean "utopia", an idyllic landscape environment, where the architectural pre-existences interact with the visual arts and literary culture. And the lyrical interpretation of the native culture is associated with a renewed semantics coming both from the popular and the tradition.

In the Twenties and Thirties, the minor interest, spontaneous or vernacular, was the center of this intense debate and contributes to the cultural reforming of the Mediterranean "myth". The exponents of rationalism tend to recognize the parameters that lead the modern architectural language, the traditionalists aim to trace the forms to be inspired in the search for a new style based on the Italian constructive tradition.

For all the twenties, the myth of the construction of Capri - rising to its own category and erroneously separated from the context of the rural architecture in the more general area of the Neapolitan to which it belongs - assumes a central importance in the national architectural culture, with some echoes on the foreign press. On the one hand, the study of its spontaneous traditional construction, to which the attributes of sincere, rational, essential, emblematic of that cherished "Mediterraneanness", are passionate for many young architects, convinced to find the most ancient roots on the national soil of modernity (Mangone 2015).

Sector magazines play a fundamental role in the debate on the Mediterranean origins of modern architecture<sup>9</sup>. Gio Ponti in the pages of "Domus" wrote interventions on rural architecture and contributions to the debate on 'Mediterraneity'.<sup>10</sup> In order to give spaces to the quarrel between Luigi Figini and Carlo Enrico Rava<sup>11</sup>. The last one explains to the readers of the magazine that his intention is to identify "*Mediterranean architecture*" in contemporary architecture of every country, even in contemporary colonial architecture, considered as an aspect of the more general problem of modern architecture.

In judging the projects for the architectural arrangement of one of the main squares of Tripoli, Rava sentenced, in fact, in agreement with the examining jury, that the buildings must "reaffirm, in colony, the stylistic imprint of the imperial domination of Rome"<sup>12</sup>.

And there are traces of this domination "in our Mediterranean colonies" that Rava undertakes to trace, identifying even in Arab houses the legacy of the "most rational classical plant of the ancient Roman house".

On the southern shore of the Mediterranean, the Roman heritage lives again in the Mediterranean spirit of rationalist architecture; on the Italian coasts, the Mediterranean inspiration in rustic architecture, that of Capri, peculiarly, imbued with literary and pictorial quotations, permeates the architecture of the house near the sea. We can consider colonial architecture as the counterpart of the Mediterranean domestic project. They are apparently opposed narratives and discourses, but in reality complementary.

Federico Portanova, in an intervention published in 1934 on «Domus», reconnects the architecture of Capri to an ancient, Pelasgian and Hellenic tradition. And he warns the reader that those architectural forms, despite the styles of the past eras, «are always classical, if by classical we mean that the artistic completeness allows an era to reach the maximum balance of its expression and to be understood by all the others»<sup>13</sup>. In order to clarify better this parallelism, the author recurs to the analogy between spontaneous caprese architecture and the improvisation of a popular song "of which he has all the spontaneous freshness, the power of feeling, almost even the anonymous paternity, yet he obeys to such logical criteria that it makes, without at all proclaiming it, a rationality that is entirely in keeping with the needs of our times»<sup>14</sup>.

The photographs published, a Greek house on the island of Santorini, two rustic houses in the marina of Capri, two projects by Adolf Loos, are an effective visual synthesis of the 'Mediterranean' genealogy of the modern house. As Gravaguolo (1994, 2010) pointed out, Mediterraneanity in the field of design is repeatable, or at least it has always been proposed only through a transfiguration, from the eighteenth century rediscovery of *goût grec*, to travels to the south by Karl Friedrich Schinkel, to whom the first recognition of the ancient and authentic Mediterranean culture of construction, the studies on vernacular architecture by Josef Hoffmann and Adolf Loos (Sabatino 2010, Strappa 2004).

How much it has contributed to the rediscovery of the Mediterranean, the experience of the travel in the south of Italy of northern European painters and architects were the subject of his in-depth studies<sup>15</sup>. Also for the Austrian architect Bernard Rudofsky, key figure in the story of the Mediterranean pontian living, the Mediterranean area remains the main reference, especially as a result of the important experience of the stay in the '30s in Naples, Capri, Procida and Positano (Como 2017), and the meeting with Luigi Cosenza<sup>16</sup>.

### «Simple houses for days of the rest and vacation»

From the beginning “Domus” has been part of the debate on the Latin and Mediterranean origins of modern habitation. The pontiano project of the Italian house, which recovers elements of the Pompeian domus adapted to private construction, is both the cultural construction of a “myth” and the search for an ideal indigenous character of domestic architecture. In its definition of modern living, the Latin dwelling flows together, combining well with the elements of modern rationalism, the examples of the English country house and contemporary Austrian architecture (Miodini 2001, 2017). In the spontaneous construction of the Mediterranean basin, Ponti discovers more Italian and traditional forms, but also the correspondence to the style of a new way of living, updating the type of holiday home. The Pompeian house, published in “Domus” in 1934, is “the example of a house, which, next to a good operation and a not very expensive construction, also brings us closer to what our spirit wishes: it takes place at the Pompeian, around a courtyard open on one side, an extremely beautiful and intimate arrangement that must return to normal and which Italians must still love” (Ponti 1934, p.18). Ponti writes: “our country houses must respond to the characteristics of our time: the love of motion and the air, and the desire to escape from everyday worries, that is the thirst for poetic life: the demands of physical life, needs of spiritual life»

And, a few years later, he warns in an editorial that “the house is our essential, individual possession, family reign, the place of the most complete happiness, reading” Domus “does not only mean finding practical suggestions for the home, it also means adhering to Italian expression of a more civilized concept of life and giving greater strength to the national body in which the most select production of Italian art and ingenuity is represented. [...] you have noted the efforts to make our publication more accurate, documentary and inciting” (Ponti 1936, p.25).

The typological research of the holiday home has been approached in a systematic way by Ponti since the second half of the Twenties. From the country house, where it offers new housing solutions by mediating the study of Serlio and Palladio, conducted primarily on the treaties, with the interest for the Pompeian house and the Anglo-Saxon domestic architecture (Miodini 2001, p 54) to the proposals for houses at the sea of the second half of the Thirties, the history of a typology is outlined, the holiday home, theme, not by chance, of a competition announced on the occasion of the IV Triennale. The architectural typologies for the time of the loisir accompany both the evolution of tourism, from holiday to vacation, and the spatial transformations of places, defining the coordinates of the social distinction of modern tourism.

Tourism and holidays are at the base of a fundamental phenomena of nineteenth and twentieth century architecture and urban planning. As a primary and recurrent theme, the construction and consolidation of the im-

aginary places of tourism emerged, influenced by the enduring tradition of the Grand Tour and the odeporic literature (Mangone 2015).

The local tradition expressed in the rural architecture of Capri responds, we read in «Domus», «the needs of a life oriented towards the countryside, with simple houses, for the days of rest and vacation, natural cures or occupations of the land»<sup>17</sup>. In the same magazine, Maria Teresa Parpagliolo, dedicates an article to the garden of Casa Orlandi in Anacapri, writing «The origin of many of the most beautiful classic villas is due to the bourgeois habit of leaving the city in the summer months to retreat in the neighborhood more pleasant to enjoy a simple life full of rural occupations. Casa Orlandi in Anacapri has terraces overlooking the sea, pergolas for shade, the garden, around the house, with the rose garden, a citrus grove with vegetable garden, the orchard, a garden of flowers, vines and pergolas, and the olive grove that extends all around»<sup>18</sup>. The article is illustrated by photographs of the Orlandi house and scenes of ‘Capri’ life, to which the description of Capri which Fernand Gregorovius gives us in his *Ricordi storici e pittorici d’Italia* (1865) as well suited. To the German historian «all those little houses seem to be the seat of happiness, tranquility, solitary and hermit life», and on the island “«it is necessary to see these beautiful features [of the women of Capri], grouped together, or contemplate them when they descend from the mountain bringing on the head jugs of water of ancient forms»<sup>19</sup>.

If there is a continuity in the typological research, even if in the different formal solutions resulting from a complex process of critical interpretation, the iconography of architectural design and the form of presentation of the project are innovative. The first phase that gives shape to the Mediterranean evocation is the planimetric study of the existing plantations and of the best views on the landscape. The most illustrative method of graphic representation of Mediterranean architecture is the design of the plant “with topographical indication of the various ways of living suggested by the marine environment” (Irace 1988, page 142) and the intricate network of internal perspectives. An example of this is the plan of Villa Marchesano in Bordighera (1937-1938) published in «Domus», printing two overlaid transparencies projects of Ponti conserved at CSAC, the plant and a drawing with the only figures and visuals. In the poetic captions we read, for example: “who sits by the fire sees the sea beyond the window of the patio and the painted doors of the wardrobe”. The project expresses the indissoluble continuity of the environment between the external landscape and the interior of the house: a continuity obtained not only by opening numerous large windows in the sea fronts, but also with a series of devices that allow you to enjoy the view of the sea even from the innermost rooms of the building. A house that Ponti wanted to enter into the character of the landscape, and it is precisely the aspects of the landscape that, from this moment, assumed importance in architectural design.

In the case-rooms of the Hotel in Capri, whose first studies dated back to 1937, we find many references to the spontaneous Caprese building that seems to summarize, in the Thirties, the characteristics of the ideal home “of a perfect physical value, in a continuous exaltation of joy, living largely in the open air, closest to nature, enjoying the natural medicines of the air, the sun and the sea in a continuous physical exercise, to which the sea itself, the rock and the fields offer magnificent gym alternating contemplation with activity». The suggestions of the place are intertwined in these words, transmitted in the pictorial and literary repertoire, the cult of the

body and the rituals of healthy life in the open air, the result of the prodromes of modern biopolitics<sup>20</sup>.

The landscape, an integral part of the domestic environment, starts to become a cultural consumer good, an ideal place. The landscape is fabulation, metaphor of the dream: “in this key the landscape project is a device for simulating ideas and references outside the ordinary perception of space and time [...] the territory becomes landscape due to the visual experience that is an observer: it is this that recognizes the geographical entity of the territory as an aesthetic and cultural entity, therefore as a landscape »<sup>21</sup>. And in the 1930s, examples of ‘landscape’ architecture, the projects conceived by Bernard Rudofsky and Gio Ponti (Condello 2017, p.388).

### **Architecture in the landscape, landscape architecture**

The hotel in the woods, to quote Rudofsky, does not suggest a new way of building, but a new way of life. The spontaneous Caprese architecture would ‘feel’ the suggestions of the natural environment and would conform to the needs of those who must live there, to the needs of adapting at the conformation of the soil and natural possibilities. Capri is a field of architectural experimentation and its native architecture “gains an important place in the reflection first European and then Italian [and] its territory becomes an area and privileged place of experimentation of peculiar lines, and sometimes avant-garde, its specific conformation raises broad issues concerning the relationship between architecture and landscape “(Magone 2015, p.237).

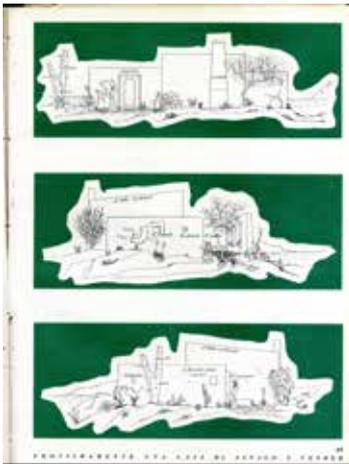
A precise and unavoidable starting point, in the rediscovery of the typical features of the landscape in defense of both the rural architecture of Capri and the landscape of the island, is the Conference on Landscape conceived and organized by Edwin Cerio (1875-1960) on 9-11 July 1922<sup>22</sup>.

Also Virgilio Marchi, who intervenes during the Convention representing Futurist architects, will dedicate a chapter to caprese primitivism in his *New Italy - New Architecture* (1931). Perhaps, more than the Convention are the architectures of Cerio, *La casa del Solitaria* in Marina Piccola (1920), in Rosaio a Caprile (1921), which could still be admired in the 1930, arousing the interest of the designers. «Cerio with the Rosaio, Ceas with his studies and later with his family village, Ponti and Rudofsky with their pioneering project of hotel bungalows, full of poetic ideas, are not satisfied with the merely architectural scale but try to make Mediterranean lesson is a micro-urbanistic system, devoid of those rigidities typical of functionalist urbanism» (Magone 2015, page 255).

The defense of spontaneous caprese architecture is also part of a broad sense of landscape, as well as, at the same time, the house of Capri is seen as an integral part of the garden.

*Rosaio*, which welcomes many European artists at the beginning of the Century, was born from the rock in the middle of the green forest. Cerio’s house appears to us as one of the possible models for the small houses in the San Michele wood designed by Ponti and Rudofsky that had to rise along the slopes of Monte Solaro. The “stracasa” of the Milanese Emilio Vismara, finished in 1929, was also visited by Le Corbusier with Rudofsky and Cosenza.

The very ancient constructions «are made for ‘that’ landscape for ‘that’ sea, nor could we imagine them elsewhere, formed with local material, whose shapes, whose color with the dominant candor only befits the olive, the cactus, the deep blue, the gray celestial, the scorched earth, the sunny



**Fig.8**  
Gio Ponti, A small ideal house, "Domus", n.138, June 1939, p.41. Façade.

horizon, nature, 'that' nature in short»<sup>23</sup>.

In the light of the accent placed on the relationship between architecture and landscape, we can better understand the representation of natural elements in the project design. The complete plant architecture, with its decorative character, the building, and the garden integrates the house into the landscape. Already in 1922, Cerio, in fact, highlights that "the garden and the house complete the work of nature, giving the landscape the peculiar imprint of the culture and taste of a people, the extent of its civilization, the expression of its character"<sup>24</sup>.

On the other hand, Ponti dedicates important columns to the garden and the landscape, making use of authoritative collaborators. To Maria Teresa Parpagliolo (1903-1974)<sup>25</sup>, architect-landscape designer, who signs articles on the design of the gardens, Ponti entrusted from 1930 to 1938 the heading "Giardino fiorito". Also in "Domus" since 1937 the contribution, albeit occasional, of Pietro Porcinai (1910-1986) begins. The landscape is an integral part of the project also for another collaborator of Ponti, Lina Bo Bardi (1914-1992) who, since 1939, with articles and illustrations contributed to the creation of «Domus» and later «Stile»<sup>26</sup>. We can state that Lina Bo Bardi, a progressive interpreter of the local tradition, represents "a dialectical and plural modernity that rejects rigid conceptual oppositions and considers the values of innovation and tradition not necessarily alternative between them" (Viola 2017, p. 357).

### The writings of the 'mediterranean' project

The interest in the landscape and the spontaneous architecture of the Mediterranean basin, strengthened by the interest, also anthropological, for the ways of living, are well represented in the drawings of the 'Mediterranean' projects, characterized by an evident narrative connotation. The ideal of life at the sea converges myths, imaginaries, iconographies, composite models and methods of representation.

In the planimetric studies of the beach house the *punctum* is the landscape.<sup>27</sup> In plants there is the indication «topographical of the various ways of living suggested by the marine environment».

When Ponti elaborates the composition of the spaces, a very important design theme, he always imagines the places to pass and those to stay, in a connected network of views inside the house and from the domestic environment towards the surrounding landscape. The continuity between inside and outside is orchestrated in a skilful play of perspectives.

Right from the ideational stage, Ponti designed the perception of the inseparable link between landscape and <sup>28</sup> built space. An aesthetic of the appearance that produces an articulation of the environments that the inhabitant has to cross slowly. The progressive "disappearance of the wall" is interpreted from time to time in a different way, and the external and internal relationship is substantiated by surfaces treated like vibrating sheets crossed by light (Crippa 2007, p.23).

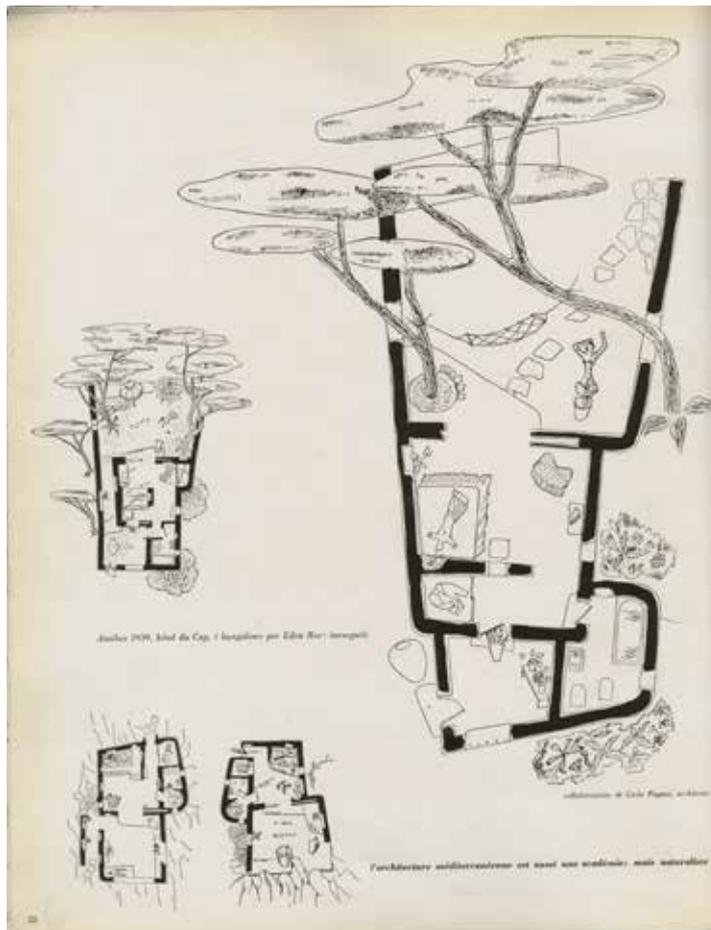
The act of seeing is an active gesture, which involves the use of memory. "Each vision is part of a performance framework that combines spatial, historical and artistic experience" (Violi 1991). Seeing 'architects' forms involves reading, memory and criticism, to observe and understand at the same time. In the Mediterranean landscape, the disparate coefficients of perception are linked to each other, collaborating in an inseparable relationship. If we remember that the Archaic Mediterranean is a territory of enclosures (Strappa 2004 pp. 19-21) we can better understand the shell

**Fig.9**

Gio Ponti. Untitled (hôtel du Cap, bungalows project for Eden Roc, Antibes), 1939. Perspective view and perspective view of the interior. mm.480x535 - heliographic copy with pencil, tempera and watercolor. Gio Ponti Archive, CSAC-Sezione Progetto.

**Fig.10**

Antibes 1939, hôtel du Cap, bungalows for Eden Roc  
Air of Italy. Expression of Gio Ponti, Daria Guarnati publisher, Milan 1954, p.28.



shape of many small houses in the woods articulated in enclosed open spaces.

An in-depth study deserves the different writing of drawings made or modified for publication. A choice that introduces reflections on the recipient of this story. The putting in page of the drawings transforms the design material into a structured iconotext, characterized by the interaction between the image and the didactic apparatus. The reader is induced to cooperate in the proper functioning of the text. The figures that Ponti inserts in architectural design are not concrete inhabitants, introduced as silhouettes to understand the dimensions of space, but allude to an imaginary life that takes shape.

The sketches and the drawings are part of a graphic and theoretical process that focuses on a range of possible readings. Among these, the drawings made for publication have a didactic, but also an informative function, of elements connoted into a narrative sense. In a perspective view, the representation of natural elements, the design of lush vegetation, frames and enters the architecture. The close relationship between architecture and nature identifies perspective views, as well as the system of glances in planimeters, which promote the interpenetration of landscape architectures.

The drawings of the project, unrealized, for Albergo San Michele in the woods on the island of Capri are, perhaps, the most convincing example of architecture-storytelling: the perspective view of the central building that “ventilates a natural agglomerate as it is in Martina piccola”. It tells about “village and marine” life forms, a complete and lyrical escape from the forms of city life. The picturesque village is accessed by a road between two walls crossed by a calash. The hotel’s lodgings “inspired by the most sensitive understanding of Mediterranean architecture and the life of Capri” are scattered in the woods. The guests thus enjoy an isolated life, each one has “his hermit, and feeld separate, happy, free and alone in the enchantment of incomparable nature [...] .People of the place serves the rooms-houses through the paths that have the function of corridors in the usual hotels ». In the elevations facing upstream we do not find female figures on the threshold to admire the landscape and the view on the gulf, but figures of women who bring on the head jugs of water or basket containing food, as the scenes of Capri life in the paintings of the painters of Resina school.

### **On the threshold**

«We architects - Ponti writes (1941) - want to architect and furnishish-ing to make a scene, the best possible, for *actions*, that is for the presence of the inhabitants». A modus operandi that takes shape in the Mediterranean domestic architecture. We have a first essay in the drawings of Villa Marchesano, a project in which the distribution choices and visual leaks coincide. The project of his ideal house by the sea comes from the research of internal and external views. The architect starts from the ideation of a skilful game of perspectives that benefits the continuity between inside and outside. And, in the planimetric studies, in the drawings of the plants “with topographic indication of the various ways of living suggested by the marine environment”, in the network of internal perspectives, its Mediterranean evocation is expressed. «Plants with the visuals of those who live there, suggest paths, framing views, [...] bright and chromatic densities, plant presences, atmospheric values, identifying the space constructed as a real narrative machine» (Mucelli 2017, page 158).

The ‘Mediterranean’ dwellings, which arise from the inspiration of the

place, draw a living space, where actions and behaviors are, from the preliminary phase, a necessary presence, internal to the idea of architecture itself. An exemplary case is the project of the Albergo di San Michele or in the woods on the island of Capri (1939): in the room-houses scattered on the slopes of Mount Solaro, the sequence of interior spaces finds its natural counterpoint in the vastness of the landscape of the gulf on which the view opens without ever ‘closing the prospects’, as is evident in the demonstration plan of Capri and the Gulf of Naples, which indicates the views towards the main coast resorts and the distance in miles. Mucelli (2017) examines the room of the black wall, with the intent of creating a scale model from Ponti’s original drawings, and carefully considers the indication of the two visuals that suggest privileged views: the vertex of the first coincides with the position of the bed and turns to the patio through the large door that leads to the outside, and to the opening that frames Vesuvius. The summit of the second cone is located outside the same door and crosses the wall of the patio through the small opening that frames the glimpse of Capo Miseno and Posillipo. This second perspective is further emphasized “by the presence of a female figure, in a vestal dress, which, in a far from casual, appears at the corner of the door, both in the design of the section on the patio and in the perspective view” (Mucelli 2017, p.159). The architectures “are designed with the invention of a painter to create a vague scenario for the human presence and a ready show for the eye” (Ponti 1939). Ponti always draws figures facing the threshold in the seaside houses. The very idea of threshold implies a passage, a communication between two places. The inside and the outside can be represented only in relation to what puts them in communication. The threshold alludes to “that passage that can not fail to happen, to that crossing that allows access to a new and unexpected horizon” (Tarditi 2012, p.18). It is the symbolic place of the exchange and of the relationship between ‘internality’ and ‘externality’<sup>29</sup>; a space of meeting and exchange, where an event can happen, a representation is expressed, or constructs a narration. It is here, in fact, on the threshold of the house that the women depicted by Ponti give body to his design idea. They are mediating figures who, like the intermediate spaces, have the power to become symbols of exchanges and meetings.<sup>30</sup> For women, the door is an invitation, an entrance to the house: “The door is hospitality and the house is a dream. Architecture for them [women] is not a crystal, it’s a shell. The house in the soul, that is, in the female judgment does not belong only to the possible achievements of architecture, to that which is of the Architect, but belongs to something more intimate, even impossible; to a complex of desires and abandonments and beauties that you think will never be satisfied. A dream” (Ponti 1957, p.143). The threshold (window or door) is the framing that allows a “story” to be given. It makes architecture a scene. The door that gives access, in the design of the hotel in Capri, to the rooms in the woods, is the condition for there to be something to tell or describe. Without framing, notes Monica Sassatelli, there would be neither *Stimmung* nor landscape because there would be no individualisation of a part that becomes totality; nevertheless the totality thus obtained is precisely cut out, not arbitrarily created. Through this boundary delimitation - which is already a modern tear - some parts are identified (individualized) and separated from the rest (Sassatelli 2006). In the plants published in «Domus», Ponti represents the gaze, albeit implicitly. The images, in turn, attract our eyes, stimulated by the desire to relive the perceptual experience referred to by the figures drawn. «An image

of the gaze is therefore characterized by the very fact that our own gaze becomes an image [...] The expectation of finding our gaze in an image is conditioned by cultural assumptions that have determined in the course of history our exchange with mirrors and windows “(Belting 2008, pp. 6-7). The window, but also the door, is an architectural and symbolic threshold that arises between the world and the gaze. In narrative painting, gazes played both a communicative and emotional role, making the viewer participate in meaning. Even in architectural design it is possible to recognize a plot of glances: as shown by plants in the indication of the visuals that reveals the communicative and narrative function of the gaze.

Often the visual cones show the vertex in correspondence with female figures lying on beds or benches, on the other hand, Rudofsky observes (1938, p.8) “the relaxed position in our concept is a mythological position. Therefore every woman should consider that this is the most advantageous position -all the Venuses, the Dani and the Olimpie made their portraits in a relaxed position. “

The game of looks is calculated and spectacular even in the interior views: in the design of a small ideal house, published in «Domus», as in the Room of the Hotel's Black Wall in the woods, the bathroom is an empty and well-lit room. center of the floor there is a lowering, a basin, which contains water. “The human figure in a costume in the rain of a shower or emerging from the cup of a basin - like from the pool of a stream - or that is behind the waters is sportingly and aesthetically beautiful to see” (Ponti 1939, p.44).

Ponti extends the idea of an architecture-show at the end of the Thirties. “The architecture inside is made to follow it: it must be a continuation of shows: better if it has more views, and from below and from above” (Ponti 1941). When one enters a house designed by Ponti “perspectives remain alive in the mind”. An exemplification is the project for Casa Mazzocchi at Via Claudiano in Milan (1938-1939), unrealized, designed “with a good game for the visuals that moves the architecture”: an internal window opens from the upper gallery of the hall, «Nice thing to see from below (especially if animated by figures) and a beautiful point of view to look from above». A spatial composition that brings to the fore «the conception of a Peripatetic Architecture [...] made up of a sequence, of windows to look out, of stairs [where figures rise or fall]» (Miodini 2001, p 193)<sup>31</sup>. In the drawings published in «Stile», ‘true’ figures that climb the stairs merge with the frescoed figures along the walls of the staircase. Connections emerge between the composition of the spaces and the pictorial composition. You can compare this solution with the sculptures of Arturo Martini and the works of Massimo Campigli, the sculptor and the painter, among all, the most admired by Ponti. And for Campigli I think of works such as *L'Emporio* (1929) or *Villa Belvedere* (1930). Also in the *Vita degli angeli* plate (1935) of the Manifattura Richard Ginori di Doccia depicts women climbing stairs or facing the balcony.

In the early Forties, he poetically affirms: “always imagine the architect for a window, a person at the windowsill, for a door a figure that surpasses it” (Ponti 1941a). And, in environments, governed by lights, colors, and materials, images are always the designer the places to go and those to stay. The probative force of the design project gives the illusion to the reader and the reader of “Domus” to be or have been in first person witness of those views, of that landscape, of being or having been the inhabitant of that “dreamed” house.

The drawings of the plants allude to an aesthetic exercise of the gaze, pro-



**Fig.11**  
 "Stile". Stile in the home and furnishings. N.23, November 1942. Cover.

jecting on the space and on the structure designed a primary domain of the gaze, linked to the body. An essential dimension, the body dimension, since images are created in the body, even if they are made visible in the media. The body is symbolized in the female figures drawn in the sections, mostly facing the threshold.

In reality, spatiality and vision are, at least, to a certain extent independent: space is not built only and exclusively in visual perception. Moreover, from the point of view of semiotic analysis, the choice of linking space and vision has the side effect of almost necessarily circumscribing the spatial dimension to the sole discursive level, linking the space to the articulation of the gaze and its various perspective inscriptions in the text. As far as space and its perception are concerned, it is not determined solely, or primarily, by sight, but by that "invisible and widespread" sixth sense, which goes by the name of proprioception, which is the perception of our bodily being, of being and dwelling in space. A real extension of the body space the house is almost everywhere invested with a very complex symbolism in which several models are merged (Violi 1991).

### The layout of the 'mediterranean' project

Architecture is fed by stories through images, its knowledge and understanding are, in fact, conditioned by the graphic and photographic representation. An iconography, therefore, in which the visual part is the prevailing form in putting the project in the page. The photographic story, the photo-text published in the magazines, is an «artifact in which visual signs are mixed to produce a rhetoric that depends on the coexistence of words and images»<sup>32</sup>. The relationship between image and text proves to be of particular interest in the study of narrative structures. The phototext, we remember with Cometa, plays a fundamental role in the articulation of memory and oblivion (Cometa 2011, p.70). And the act of seeing is an active gesture, which involves the use of memory (Strappa 2014, p.19).

The dialectic between photographs and text seems all the more productive when it calls into question the cognitive and interpretative activity of the spectator's gaze. The text and the captions play a non-subsidary role in the creative process, telling the reader aspects of life that one imagines can take place in the designed houses. The identification of a narrative structure in the architectural project is present both in the conception process, based on literary procedures (the phase of conception of the place or object that precedes its graphic formalization, defining a program, not only functional, on which joint the project), as in the use of writing in all phases of project development, with particular attention to the relationship between image and written text.

The photographic sequence defines the path suggested to the reader, establishing connections and hierarchies between the spaces and the looks staged in the images. The photographic story is structured as a path, as it is a cinematographic sequence. Undoubtedly, the experience of architecture is linked to body awareness and our movement in space, nevertheless in putting the iconic-textual sequence on the page, the reader is presented with a path constructed like a story. The 'virtual' movements in the home are structured according to narrative programs co-articulated with the space<sup>33</sup>. Ponti, a fundamental figure in the history of design communication - still largely to be reconstructed - based on identification processes, wants to involve the reader, revitalizing the narration of the place, already connoted in the literary sense. Every place, site, or building brings with it a story,

a story that Ponti recalls, integrating it with new contents. The recipients of the seaside houses and the guests of the Hotel in Capri are, in fact, the readers and readers of “Domus”, inhabitants of the ideal Mediterranean home. It is worth remembering that the editorial office and the architectural studio have complementary roles in the politics of architecture promoted by Ponti.

The convergence between the previsualization of the work and its visualization is the result of a close collaboration between designer and photographer. Photography is a tool able to capture the characteristics of the landscape, the specificity of the places. For many authors photography is an indispensable linguistic intervention in the drafting of the project. An instrument of choice for critical reading of architecture, the city, the landscape. The interpretative-critical potentials of the photographic medium are soon grasped by Ponti, well in advance of the contemporary debate. He understands the specificities of photographic writing and establishes the artistic autonomy of photography

In fact, Ponti writes that photography “gives us a further” view “, an abstract, mediated, composed view, a view that we” see “; an independent, autonomous view, which multiplies, isolates the thing or the moment seen, which fragments them and at the same time [...] fixes them the independence of the photographic view itself has revealed to us again an unprecedented aspect of things. brought a whole new understanding, a whole new sense of them and of interpreting their images “(Ponti 1932, pp. 285-287). The architect is a *metteur en scène* and the photographer, who in the 1930s is Studio Porta, scrupulously follows the designer’s instructions: the insertion of the image in the text, the interdependence between caption and photography, the interruption of textual apparatus, but also the photographic choices, from photo-genic writing to montage. The text-image interrelations are the result of a complex strategy, entrusted to the reading habits introduced and disseminated, since the 1920s, by the magazine. «Domus» already in the first installments proposes to the readers the project of a house. «Is the reading of a plan drawing normal and easy? - asks Ponti - We architects always think so, and we are amazed by the difficulty that some people find in reading a plant and in representing, from it, the appearance of the environments. This presentation of projects will be part of our readers as an introduction to the reading of architectural design, which is essential for those who love the house and wants, through the rapid perception of these drawings, to detect and recognize the characteristics and qualities of a distribution of rooms to be used to their advantage “(Ponti 1928, p.26).

Architectural photography, which has been constructed sequentially since the 1930s, is gaining ever greater weight in the narrative of the project. The reader is thus transported within the designed space without however having the possibility to really participate in the scene represented. Nonetheless, Ponti promotes the image of the inhabited architecture as an essential element of the process of creation and communication of architecture.

### **Architecture and storytelling**

In the Mediterranean project is the life of the inhabitants to become a measure of space. The figures, designed by Ponti, perform, nonetheless and first of all, a narrative function. Especially since one of the fundamental functions of narrativity is the semiotization of experience (Ferraro 2015). At the same time they stage the gaze, since the optic of the narrated

landscape is that of observing (Bagnoli 2003).

I conclude by reflecting on the parallelism between narrativity and architecture addressed by Paul Ricoeur (2016), which significantly affects the writing choices implemented by Ponti in 'Mediterranean' projects.

Living, Ricoeur asserts, is the place where narrative and architectural values are exchanged for each other. The construction processes contain the act of staying, of stopping and fixing, just as the paths and stops are an integral part of the act of living, made of rhythms and stops. It follows that the relationship between interior and exterior, symbolized by a threshold, expresses the crossing of the boundaries between an inside and an outside, and the interaction of shadow and light, day and night.

The accent on the system of gestures and rituals appears evident in the drawings of the Hotel in the woods on the island of Capri and in the tables of the seaside projects published in "Domus"; the presentation of the project takes place through a sequence of places where something happens, where something arrives. In the temporal and narrative dimension of the architectural project the functions of living are continually invented and transformed, as can be seen in the sequence of movements invested in the mobility of the gaze that runs through the structure.

Intertextuality in architecture is the environmental context in which the new building is inserted. And if it is true that every architect decides which choice to implement the relationship between tradition and innovation, it can also be said that the new configurative act designs new ways of living that fit into the tangle of past histories of life. The revaluation of the act of inhabitation rests, in fact, with those who live and live the architectural project. But just as significant, in the age of the technical reproducibility of the architectural work, is the role played by the reader. His continuous learning of the juxtaposition of life stories undoubtedly accompanies the desire to enter a story. The Mediterranean project, announced in the journal, inaugurates the capture of its spectator: the object of desire is a new way of living, it is the start of identification and the projection process in architectural design.

Ponti offers to the reader some ideas for the beach house: they are simple ideas that can be easily developed, writes the architect, according to the needs and environmental circumstances; houses to be built among the olive trees, or between some cypresses, or under the maritime pines or on the rocks.

They are houses that can make you, at a low price, a good mason of the place, very simple [...] all are houses that *fan the natural landscape* [...] Dream, or readers, small houses happy as these, and build them. In the ground you have chosen, you will also intervene to trace the walls. The wall of the patio you will trace that imprisons a pine or an olive tree: you will put in the place where the dining table will go, or a sofa or the bed and from there you will have to open a window or a door framing an enchanting landscape (Ponti 1941, p.23).

It is, so to speak, a catalog of bespoke houses, a prêt-à-porter production for the loisir architecture. The small houses by the sea, easily realized by local craftsmen, are not opposed with all the villas designed by renowned architects: the magazine aims, in fact, to show to its public a new way of living, to encourage "that re-education to the nature that customs, travel and sport exert on the new generations".

Addressing the readers, the subscribers, and the friends of «Domus», Ponti

(1936, p.25) notes that this is not a magazine «to make a home for fashion or luxury», but it is « mirroring how much it serves as taste, as utility, as convenience for YOUR [...] Read DOMUS does not only mean searching for practical suggestions for the home, it also means adhering to the Italian expression of a more civilized concept of life ».

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The critical debate on architectural design now has many contributions. On the cultures of design in Gio Ponti's projects and a summary of the themes of the debate, see MIODINI 2001. In the 1960s, semiology was applied to architectural design by Giovanni Klaus Koenig and Renato De Fusco, supporters of the linguistic nature of architecture. Let's remember R. De Fusco, *Architettura come mass medium. Note per una semiologia architettonica*, Dedalo Bari 1967, and of G. K. Koenig, *Architettura e comunicazione*, Florentine Publishing Library, Florence 1970.

<sup>2</sup> See Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, *La realtà dell'immagine, disegni di architettura del Ventesimo secolo*, Community Editions, Stuttgart 1982.

<sup>3</sup> See Fabio Lanfranchi, *Linguaggio di-segni. Considerazioni sulla comunicazione grafica d'architettura*, Aracne Roma 2008. The author affirms the instrumental value of the design in the transmission process from the design idea to the realization of the architectural work. In the period of post-structuralism Lanfranchi affirms, without the mechanics and terminological rigidity of those years, that drawing is a language that shapes design thought in every phase. See also G. Testa and A. De Dancis, *Rappresentazione e architettura, linguaggio per il rilievo ed il progetto*, Gangemi Editore, Rome 2003; R. De Rubertis, *Il disegno dell'architettura*, La Nuova Italia Scientifica, Rome 1994; M. Cresci, *L'immagine mediata dell'architettura*, in *Icarus*, n. 8, Gangemi 1996.

<sup>4</sup> I refer of course to Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*, Gallimard Paris 1970; trad. it, *L'ordine del discorso*, Einaudi, Torino 1972

<sup>5</sup> See Fernand Braudel, *Civiltà e imperi del Mediterraneo nell'età di Federico II* (1949), Torino, Einaudi 1953; Predrag Matvejevic, *Breviario Mediterraneo* (1987), Milano, Hefti 1995; David Abulafia, *Il grande mare. Storia del Mediterraneo* (2003), Milano, Mondadori 2013.

<sup>6</sup> See Walter Benjamin, *Tesi di filosofia della storia*, in Id, *Angelus Novus. Saggi e frammenti*, Torino Einaudi 1962.

<sup>7</sup> I refer to the International Convention, *Imagining the Mediterranean. Architecture and the arts*, by Andrea Maglio, Fabio Mangone, Antonio Pizza, held in Naples on 16-17 January 2017.

<sup>8</sup> I refer to the theoretical contribution of Michel de Certeau (1925-1986), *L'invention del quotidiano* (1974), Rome, Lavoro 2001, which highlighted the narrativity inherent to the form of historiographic writing and the size of fiction that is proper to it, affirming that even space itself is a story. See also M. de Certeau, *The writing of history, edited by Silvano Facioni*, Jaca Book Milano 2006 (headline: *L'Écriture de l'histoire*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris 1975).

<sup>9</sup> Suffice it to mention the position of Enrico Peressuti, *Mediterranean Architecture*, in "Quadrante", n. 21, January 1935, which sees in the rationalist architectures of the Alps echoes of the typical Mediterranean houses, Italian heritage. For the signatories of the architecture program, the Italian rationalist tendency is the affirmation of "classicism" and "mediterraneity" in the spirit and not in the forms of folklore. The intervention by Giuseppe Pagano, which investigates rural architecture as a collective, anonymous phenomenon: G. Pagano, *Case rurali*, in «Casabella», n. 86, February 1935, pp.8-15; Id., *Architettura rurale italiana*, «Casabella», 96, December 1935, pp.16-23; Id., *Documenti di architettura rurale*, in «Casabella», 35, November 1935, pp.18-25. On the Quadrante group's position, see the chapter *L'idea di Mediterraneanità negli scritti di Carlo Enrico Rava e del Gruppo di Quadrante*, in F. Brunetti, *Architects and Fascism*, Alinea Firenze 1993, pp.203-2016.

<sup>10</sup> The magazine hosts among the first articles on the minor architecture of the Mediterranean basin, G. Michelucci, *Fonti of modern Italian architecture*, in "Domus", n.56, 1932, pp.460-461.

<sup>11</sup> See Carlo Enrico Rava, Mirror of rational architecture. VI Conclusion, in “Domus”, n.47, November 1931, pp.34-40. Luigi Figini’s letter was published a few months later: Mediterranean controversy, in “Domus”, n.49, January 1932, p.66.

<sup>12</sup> See Carlo Enrico Rava, *Di un’architettura coloniale moderna, Parte Prima*, in «Domus», n.41, maggio 1931, p.39-43, 89.

<sup>13</sup> See F. Portanova, *Ragguaglio sull’architettura rustica a Capri*, in «Domus», 74, febbraio 1934, pp.58-60, p.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p.59.

<sup>15</sup> See each other Benedetto Gravagnuolo (1994); Alfredo Buccaro (2007); Fabio Mangone (2003). Paola Carla Verde (1999) It focuses on the image of Eastern Capri established in the second half of the nineteenth century, even Mangone (2015) points out that even in its period of greatest fortune, the imagery of Capri in the East does not eclipse the more durable one of classic Capri, the island from which Tiberius commanded the Roman Empire, received in the vestiges of Villa Jovis.

<sup>16</sup> In recent years numerous contributions have been made to the figure of Bernard Rudofsky, in particular the speeches by Andrea Bocco Guarneri (2003, 2010, 2011) and Ugo Rossi. (2016, 2017). In addition to the bibliography on Luigi Cosenza, among others, Luigi Cosenza today 1905-2005, edited by A. Buccaro, G. Mainini, Napoli Clean 2012; see also N. Braghieri, *Mito and spell of architecture without architects*, in M. Bruzzone, L. Serpagli, edited by, *The anonymous roots of contemporary living*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2012.

<sup>17</sup> F.Portanova, *Ragguaglio sull’architettura rustica a Capri* cit, p.58

<sup>18</sup> Maria Teresa Parpagliolo, *Dei casini di campagna, casa Orlandi, Anacapri*, in «Domus», 73, gennaio 1934, pp.54-55.

<sup>19</sup> See *Ricordi storici e pittorici d’Italia*, per Ferdinando Gregorovius, translation from German of Augusto di Cossilla, 2 voll., Milano, F. Manini 1877. We remember with atrizia Battilani, *Vacanze di pochi, vacanze di tutti. L’evoluzione del turismo europeo*, Bologna Il Mulino 2001 that in Capri in 1840 there were 400 visitors, but already in 1855 the island, included in the Murray guide or travelers in Southern Italy, became a destination for the winter stay of English aristocrats. In 1905 there were 30,000 largely German presences.

<sup>20</sup> See R. Campa, *Il culto del corpo. Una prospettiva genealogica e biopolitica*, in *Rivista di scienze sociali*, n.15, Erotica. *Sguardi obliqui di copri dilatati*, a cura di Claudia Scano, 30 aprile 2016.

<sup>21</sup> See A. Metta, *Paesaggi d’autore: il Novecento in 120 progetti*, Alinea editrice, Firenze 2008.

<sup>22</sup> See the figure of Edwin Cerio Gaetana Cantone, *Un caso di “altra” modernità: Edwin Cerio scrittore e architetto a Capri*, in *L’architettura dell’“altra” modernità*, Proceedings of the XXVI Congress of History of Architecture, Roma, 11-13 aprile 2007, edited by Marina Docchi, Maria Grazia Turco, Gangemi Editore Roma, pp.512-523; Andrea Nastri, *Edwin Cerio e la casa caprese*, Clean Edizioni, Napoli 2008. The Il Rosaio house is rated in G. Capponi, *Architettura e accademia a Capri. Il “Rosaio” di Edwin Cerio*, in «Architettura e arti decorative», dicembre 1929. Among the writings of the same E. Cerio, *L’architettura minima nella contrada delle sirene*, in «Architettura», n. 4, 1922, pp.156-176. On Confess of Capri see F. Mangone, *Il convegno di Capri. Architettura e paesaggio nel primo dopoguerra*, in Adorno S., edited by, *Professionisti città territorio. Percorsi di ricerca tra storia dell’urbanistica e città*, Roma, Gangemi, pp.171-178.

<sup>23</sup> A. Giacconi in *Casa d’Amalfi*, in «Natura», 1939, pp.28-31.

<sup>24</sup> E. Cerio, *Il giardino e la pergola nel paesaggio di Capri*, Alfieri & Lacroix, Roma 1922.

<sup>25</sup> The attention of Italian critics to the figure of Maria Teresa Parpagliolo is scarce, with some mention in Luigi Latini, *Lo sguardo “moderno” sul paesaggio toscano. Porcinai e la cultura progettuale del XX secolo*, in *Paesaggi. Didattica, ricerche e progetti*, edited by Guido Ferrara, Gulio Gino Rizzo, Mariella Zoppi, Firenze University Press 2007 which underlines the contribution of Parpagliolo and Porcinai to La campagna di Domus per il verde, among the numerous interventions by Parpagliolo on the pages of “Domus” see *I principi ordinatori del giardino italiano*, in «Domus», 37, 1931, pp.68-71. The attention reserved to Parpagliolo in the Anglo-Saxon field, in particular, is different, Sonja Dümplemann, *The landscape architect Maria Teresa Parpagliolo Shephard in Britain: her international career 1946-1974*, in Stud-

ies in the History of Garden & Designed Landscapes, 30, 1, 2010, 94-113; Sonja Dümplemann, *Maria Teresa Parpagliolo Shephard (1903-1974): Her Development as a Landscape Architect between Tradition and Modernism*, in Garden History, vol.30, n.1 (Spring 2002), pp. 49-73; *Women, modernity, and landscape architecture*, edited by Sonja Dümplemann, and John Beardsley, Routledge London and New York 2015.

<sup>26</sup> There are numerous contributions by Italian scholars on the work of Pietro Porcinai, among others see Milena Matteini, *Pietro Porcinai. Architetto del giardino e del paesaggio*, Mondadori Electa, Milano 1991; Luigi Latini, Mariapia Cunico (a cura di), *Pietro Porcinai. Il progetto del paesaggio nel XX secolo*, Marsilio, Venezia 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Figure on the whole that marginal, Lina Bo Bardi has been recently re-evaluated, among the contributions Laura Miotto e Savini Nicolini, *Lina Bo Bardi (1914-1992)*, in G. Bassanini e R. Gotti (a cura di), *Le architettatrici*, in «Parametro», n.57, maggio-giugno 2005, pp.48-51; Alessandra Criconia (a cura di), *Lina Bo Bardi. Un'architettura tra Italia e Brasile*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2017, in particolare ivi i saggi di Anna Giovanelli, *Abitare la casa dell'uomo. Paesaggi domestici e Alessandra Muntoni, Il Mediterraneo e l'Atlantico. Dalla casa sul mare alla Casa di Vidro*.

<sup>28</sup> I apply the barthesian notion of punctum, a detail present in an apparently but decisive photograph at first glance, to architectural design. See R. Barthes, *La camera chiara. Note sulla fotografia (1980)*, Einaudi, Torino 1980.

<sup>29</sup> Threshold as area speaks Walter Benjamin in the incomplete *Passagen-Werk* trad. it., *Parigi, capitale del XIX secolo*, Torino, Einaudi 1986; e I "Passages" di Parigi, Torino, Einaudi 2002), taken from Georges Teyssot, *Soglie e pieghe. Sull'intérieur e l'interiorità* in «Casabella», 681, settembre 2000, pp.26-35. Interesting suggestions in Bassanelli 2015, for a reading of living as a threshold see Aceti 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Teyssot takes up the concept of determining a place through a process of legitimation that takes place with the definition of a limit, indicated by Michel De Certeau in *L'invention du quotidien*, cit.. See G. Teyssot, *Le cose perturbanti e nomadiche*, in Area, n.79, 2005, pp. 8-13; Bassanelli 2015. Compare the interesting reading of M. Bassanelli, *Interno/esterno: lo spazio soglia come nuovo luogo della domesticità*, in BDC,vo.15, n.2,pp. 315-326.

<sup>31</sup> Gio Ponti speaks of Peripatetic architecture in *L'architettura è un cristallo*, Edit Editore italiano, Milano 1945, p.68.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Wagner (editor), *Icons-Texts-Iconotexts. Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality*, De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 1996.

<sup>33</sup> Refer to Hammad M., "Dei percorsi: tra manifestazioni non verbali e metalinguaggio semiotico". In: Gianfranco Marrone e Isabella Pezzini (a cura di), *Linguaggi della città. Senso e metropoli II: modelli e proposte d'analisi*, Meltemi, Roma, pp.97-130.

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Marco Moro

**Through the looking-glass.****The narrative applied to the counter-story of territorial planning**

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**Abstract**

What is the difference between the Broadacre City model and popular drone views simulations used to promote future sustainable cities? Between an interior space designed by Tessenow and a look through 3D glasses? Perhaps not so much, all they tell the same story: the *wonderland*. The essay aims to investigate the ideo-logical contribution of story-telling to architectural and territorial design projects, rather than its techno-logical. If it is true that media evolve and adapt their narrative, but the story they use to tell is always the same of the *wonderland*, questions arise from a different point of view. Which design project deserves a story with a narrative contribution? Only the project in which all the contradictions are positively solved as in the *wonderland*, or is there room for counter-stories too?

**Keywords**

territorial planning — settlement forms — counterstory — agrarian urbanism — wonderland

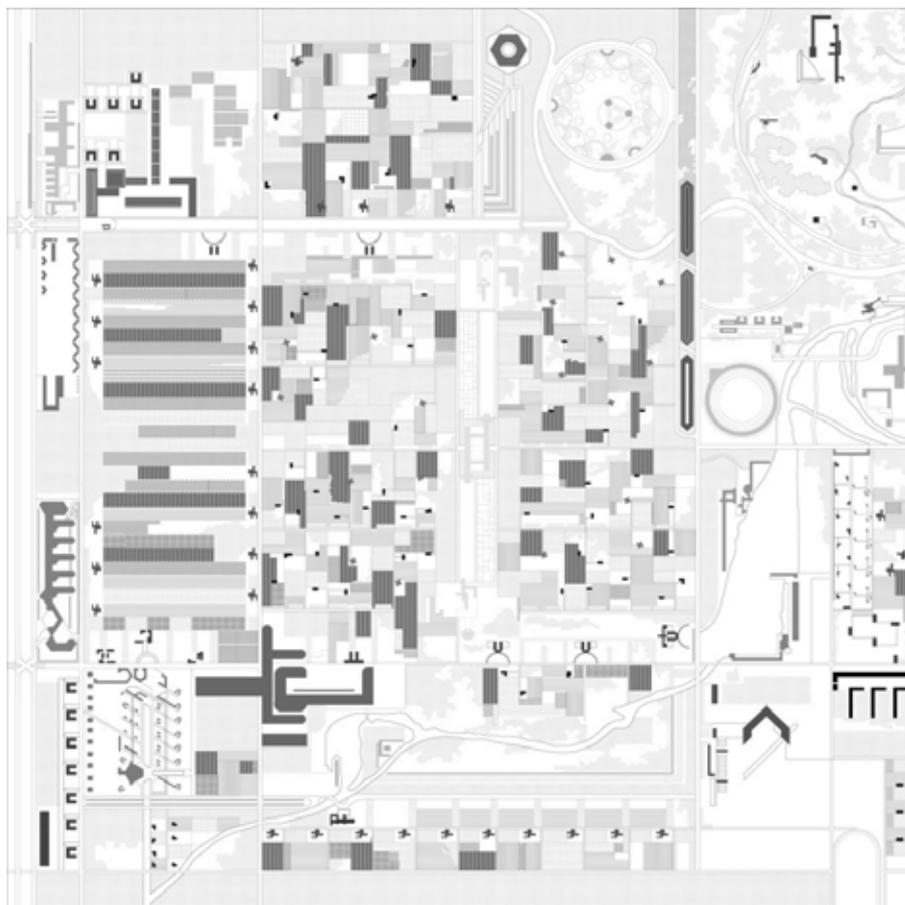
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Communication is a primary act, therefore cannot but be assumed as an invariant of our relationships. Above all, communication forms intended as stories with persuasive purpose has been consolidated in the collective perception. Vance Packard's inquiries conducted in the 50s concerning inducement stories elaborated within American sectors of production and consumption, and revealing the extraordinary ability of these stories to pass from one disciplinary field to another, seem distant and totally inoffensive.<sup>1</sup> Nowadays, Packard would realize that our reality has not changed too much: unless an increasing awareness of his inquiry's content, persuasive communication not only keeps going to influence any disciplinary field, but has developed into an instrument for everyday use. Especially, thanks to the excited experimentation addressed to the *media*.

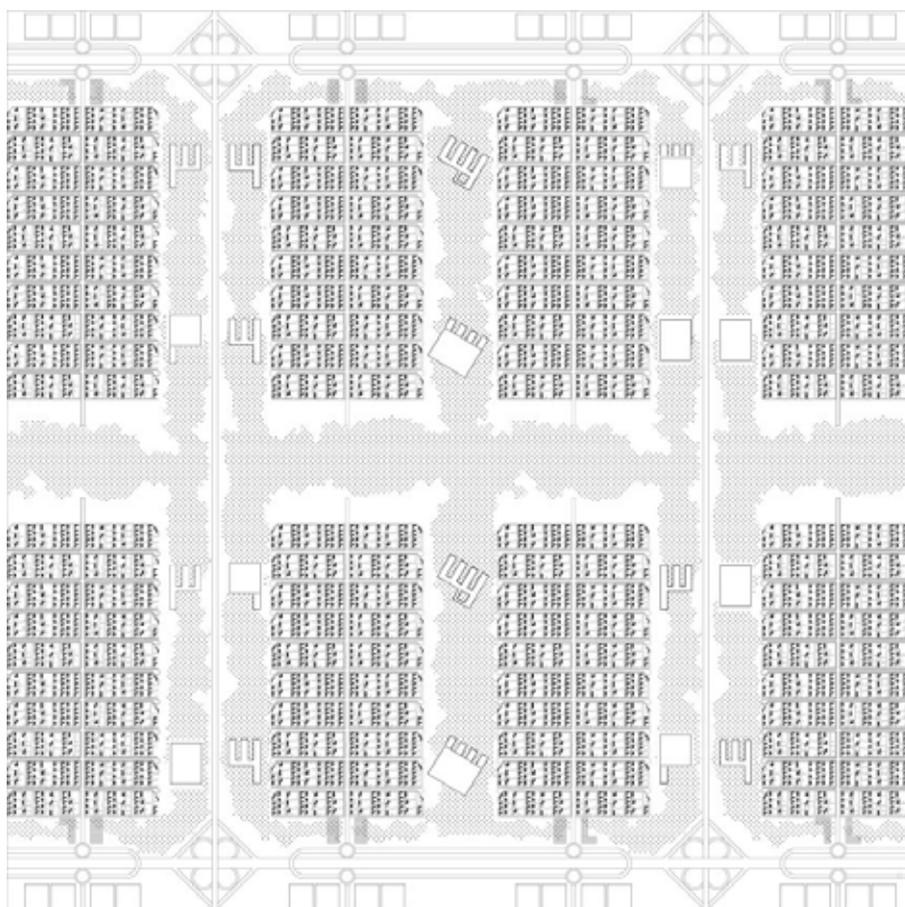
There is certainly no point in denying the appeal related to some investigations focused on the means of communications, even more in the field of architecture and urban planning: how these means have evolved to best serve a design project story? In which way the contribution of a more or less advanced technology could influence this part of story-telling? To what extent the means of representation should adhere to reality? The above are just some of the issues raised by the current debate on the relationship between narrative and design. Let us take the example of representation that reproduce figurative elements using a painting-style without losing any technological support: the beginning of the so-called Post-Digital era. At least, this is the name of the movement to which one of the experts on digitally intelligent architecture has confessed to belong today, unveiling his new technique: «They are not really watercolors...Photoshop. I am post-digital now». The one who listens to the compromising confession

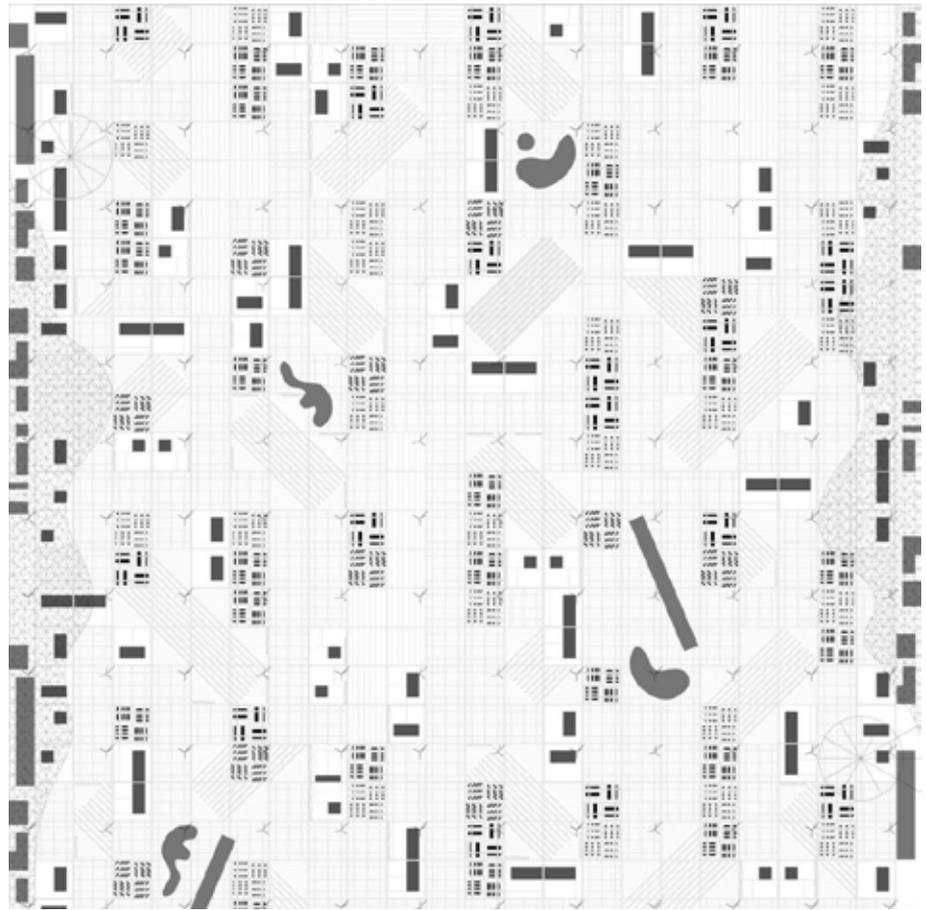
**Fig. 1**

Selective drawing made by the author of Broadacre City settlement model by Wright.

**Fig. 2**

Selective drawing made by the author of The New Regional Pattern settlement model by Hilberseimer.



**Fig. 3**

Selective drawing made by the author of The Strijp Philips settlement model by Branzi.

is Mario Carpo, architectural historian and well-known specialist on the same research field, who decided to tell the episode that evidently struck him in a recent article entitled *Post-Digital “Quitters”: Why the Shift Toward Collage Is Worrying*.<sup>2</sup> Carpo’s argument focuses precisely on the way architecture is told, denouncing the risk of “quitters” that seem to abandon technology in favor of apparently low-tech representation forms. Apparently, because the thesis argued in this article deal with the strong difference between a design project story told in the ‘70s and those proposed today using the same representation: while the aversion of Postmodernism was explained – paraphrasing Carpo’s words – on the basis of a modern technology that «as a whole had just failed, spectacularly, and there was no technological alternative in sight», there is no reason that explains an aversion to the extraordinary technological advancement we have witnessed in recent times. In fact, just from the admission on the use of graphics and image-editing software to create post-digital collages, not only it is argued that there is no aversion to technology, but rather the exploitation of technological support to reproduce a precise narrative contribution made of «watercolor, collage and sfumato». Beyond the more or less worrying outcome that such *quitters* could cause according to Carpo’s point of view, the interest falls on a more general issue.

What is the difference between the *Broadacre City* model and the drone views simulations used to promote future sustainable cities? Between an interior space designed by Tessenow and a look through 3D glasses? Perhaps not so much, all they tell the same story: the *wonderland*. The essay aims to investigate the ideo-logical contribution of story-telling to architectural and territorial design projects, rather than its techno-logical. If it is true that media evolve and adapt their narrative, but the story they use

**Fig. 4**

Vertical Home, setting by Andrea Branzi at Giornate Internazionali dell'Arredo, Verona 1997.

to tell is always the same of the *wonderland*, questions arise from a different point of view. Which design project deserves a story with a narrative contribution? Only the project in which all the contradictions are positively solved as in the *wonderland*, or is there room for counter-stories too? Maybe there is, at least in some cases from the past. The city as project has been sustained by remarkable narrative contributions, even if it was not promoting a vision without any contradiction.

The essay questions the ideological contribution of story-telling applied to territorial planning, identifying analogies between different cases which use to tell the *wonderland* story, then moving towards the others in which a strong narrative component has been dedicated to its counter-story. The former are more easily associated with the paradigm of colonization, powered by the assumptions coming from the narrative that in any case appears inseparable from other instruments of persuasion like the settlement model and architectural devices; the latter try to interpret the crisis in the process of colonization, but surprisingly we do not witness the renunciation of the narrative component, but rather its strengthening.

Territories affected by an intense process of modernization, usually understood as a progress in terms of production, often use to establish a new general order: a productive community regulated on the basis of high moral values to which corresponds a set of rules that organize physical, geographical and urban characters of those same territories. It is common to use the term *settle* to describe this process; it is even more common that a remarkable narrative component is often associated with this process. The work of Wright and Hilberseimer between the 30s and 50s is deeply focused on the idea of settling the American countryside through the introduction of a new order: the *Broadacre City* model and the large-scale diagrams published in Hilberseimer's *New Regional Pattern* were anything but harmless instruments, indispensable for describing all the elements that articulated their territorial settlements, especially communicating the idea that in a single glance one could seize the resolution of any contradiction - just the second meaning of the verb *to settle* in English. The act of settling expresses a desire for stability, up to domestic space orientation translated into the architectural device of *Usonian House* by Wright and Hilberseimer's *Settlement Unit*. Much more recent, the mirrored showcases in which Branzi exhibits the model of *Agronica* and other architectural devices like *Casa Madre*, show that the act of settling continues to support the positive and proactive idea of the *wonderland*, realized through a powerful experimentation on the spatial and architectural elements – a

multistorey and suspended inhabitable wall - that aim to establish the new general order and simultaneously govern the scale of the domestic space. However, the third aspect that completes the analogy between these three cases is about the use of narrative, an essential instrument and inseparable from the previous ones for the creation of a settlement model. *The Disappearing City* (1932) and *The Living City* (1951) are the books in which Wright describes all the arguments on the urgent need to abandon the urban model, toxic and compromised in its moral values as well as a place of economic decline, counterposing the story of a rural and decentralized settlement which may subsequently be extended to the entire American continent. Combined with the well-known iconographic apparatus, the narrative contribution becomes fundamental in defining the lifestyle of Broadacre City community, largely based on self-sufficient economy. According to Wright's prediction, just in this way America could know its redemption and live its *wonderland*. Hilberseimer's assumptions are quite similar, and his dedication to structure a narrative about his settlement model, provides an equally successful result: *The New Regional Pattern* tells of a free world, independent of city's conditioning thanks to total integration between agricultural and industrial production systems. Although Hilberseimer minimizes the formal experimentation on his buildings, especially compared to the atlas of variations proposed by Wright, he was extremely confident in the narrative positive effects. The written manifesto by Branzi, describing his settlement strategies applied to contemporary rural territories, is entitled *New Athen's Charter* and gathers *modest suggestions* for an interpretation of the current life-and-work conditions, nowadays much less rooted in space. Although *Agronica* and other models proposed by Branzi are not really referable to ideal cities, the narrative contribution appears pronounced and persuasive, illustrating the living-working equipment which is going to replace the traditional domestic environment.<sup>3</sup>



**Fig. 5**  
Life Conditioning, wrote by Cedric Price and first published in *Architectural Design* October 1966 describing Potteries Thinkbelt project.

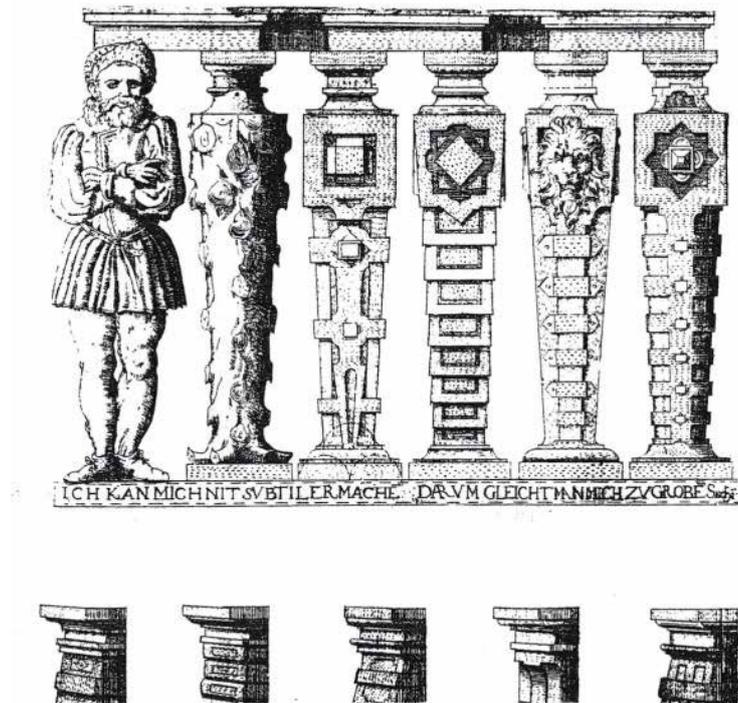
While it is true that the idea of introducing a new order means shaping the territory through the use of a precise apparatus of spatial configurations, the reverse process of *un-settling* – here referred to spatial connotations – it is often understood as a complex geopolitical process that rarely has been investigated in its spatial and architectural implications. On the contrary, if it were understood as a process in which the general order has been undermined by real conditions – shortage of productive resources in the case of company towns, obsolescence of transport infrastructures, population aging – appears plausible to investigate a *decolonization* process from the same perspective that usually animates the *wonderland* scenario: scrutinising transformations at the scale of the general plan to find out forms that can interpret the characters of this reverse process; analyzing adaptation attitude shown by settlement components; proving whether it is the architectural device initially designed as a settlement prototype to adapt, or if new ones are generated.<sup>4</sup>

The question remains about the role played by the narrative in these cases. Does it survive as one of the three inseparable instruments that use to inform the positive idea of the *wonderland*? Or nobody tells the counter-story?

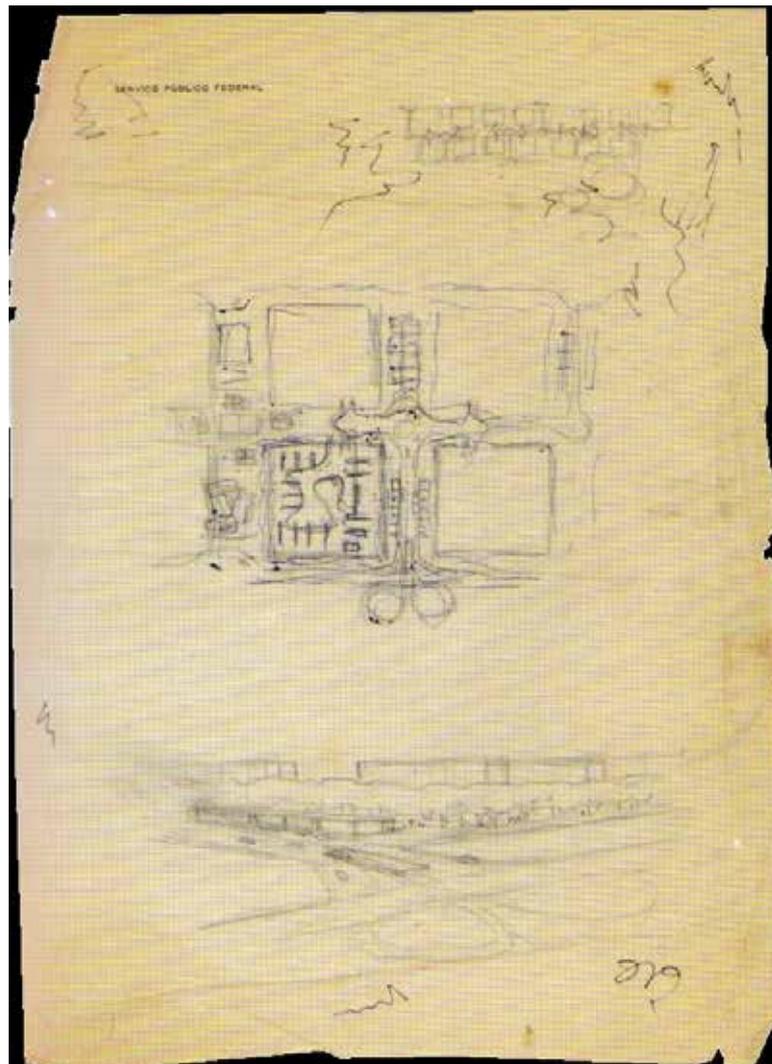
As anticipated, some projects far from promoting an ideal scenario have chosen not to give up the narrative contribution. Indeed, in some cases, the story-telling was intentionally inspired by an opposite situation than ideal. Among this 60s and 70s projects that have radically engaged the crisis of

**Fig. 6**

The metamorphosis of the column by Gabriel Krammer, in "Architecture as Theme" by O.M. Ungers.

**Fig. 7**

Sketch of the "superquadra" by Lucio Costa, in AD March 2011 "Brasilia's Superquadra: Prototypical Design and the Project of the City" by Martino Tattara.



settlement theory, the *Potteries Thinkbelt* by Price and Berlin *Archipelago* by Ungers keep playing a paradigmatic role. The first describes the pottery factory and its productive infrastructure adaptation in the North Staffordshire, turned into a regional university campus for 20,000 students. This unbuilt project shows a narrative contribution in the form of Price's critique about advanced education issue: the ambition towards a ruling class tamed inside medieval cloister-shaped campuses, represents total detachment from the social reality of that time. Flexibility would become the instrument through which interpret reality, and the pages of *Architectural Design* (October 1966) would host Price's narrative contribution. Around ten years later, Ungers will lead three Summer Schools at Cornell University focusing on the possibility of making autonomous some of the city's architectural components.<sup>5</sup> The analysis produced on architectural devices like *blocks*, *villas* and *gardens*, will merge in its general vision that provide the imminent depopulation of Berlin due to the post-war condition. Thinking of reconstruction on the heels of the widespread ideal in Europe, was considered even more utopian than imagining a configuration of autonomous islands like parts of the city surrounded by the forest: a *green archipelago*, told in the form of a manifesto with an extraordinary narrative charge. The third case that reflects on the narrative perspective applied to the counter-story, is perhaps even more striking. In 1957 Lucio Costa won the competition for the Plano Piloto of Brasilia presenting few sketches including the design of *superquadra* prototype, and a written description which assumed a different objective than that of representing the ideal city of Brasilia: developing a conceptual apparatus in order to conceive and build new spatial forms, characterizing the relationship between public and private, proposing an adaptable device in respect of changing conditions such as topography, respecting the general principles of maximum height and distinction between pedestrian and vehicular paths.<sup>6</sup> The city was built by adapting the *superquadra* prototype in dozens of variations. The result was a competition won with a written discourse, and a built project following those principles in this case: the narrative at the service of reality without the persuasive will to promote a *wonderland* scenario solved in its entirety.

Unless some examples of the recent past, reflections should be focused on the ideo-logical contribution of narrative within contemporary proposals. Are the counter-stories told even today? And which stories are the narrative *media* applied to, whose evolution or involution still have been animatedly debated?

It seems that the narrative is still an instrument more reserved to the first story, telling an ideal model of a contemporary *wonderland*. As Lewis Carroll did seven years after the publication of his bestseller, we should have the courage to apply the narrative to a counter-story: *through the looking glass* makes us understand the importance of narrative contribution as a critical instrument rather than a persuader. Less obvious, and therefore extraordinarily important, in those cases where there is no *wonderland* to tell, but a situation dictated by real contradictions and limits. Reassuring also Packard on the fact that after him, the role of the narrative has not had the sole persuasive purpose, but that of a fundamental instrument for the interpretation of our reality.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In Vance Packard, *The hidden persuaders*, David McKay Company, INC, New York, 1957, the American sociologist investigates the aggressive propaganda in which the good citizen was identified as the good consumer under the development of the advertising industry that proceeded with hidden methods.
- <sup>2</sup> Mario Carpo, *Post-Digital “Quitters”: Why the Shift Toward Collage Is Worrying*, in *Metropolis Magazine*, March 2018.
- <sup>2</sup> In addition to the *New Athen's Charter* presented by Branzi at the 2010 Venice Biennale, most of his arguments are exposed in Andrea Branzi, *Modernità debole e diffusa. Il mondo del progetto all'inizio del XXI secolo*, Skira, Milano, 2006.
- <sup>4</sup> For an in-depth study on the topic of decolonization and its architectural and spatial implications, see Alessandro Petti, *Arcipelaghi e enclave. Architettura dell'ordinamento spaziale contemporaneo*, Paravia Bruno Mondadori Editori, Milano, 2007 with preface by Bernardo Secchi.
- <sup>5</sup> Ungers proposed three consecutive Summer Schools at Cornell University respectively entitled “The Urban Block” (1976); “The Urban Villa” (1977); “The Urban garden” (1978) that will converge in the idea of the *Cities within the city* in post-war Berlin and the idea of *Green Archipelago*.
- <sup>6</sup> Lucio Costa, *La Memória descritiva del Plano piloto di Brasilia, 1957* is commented in the article by Martino Tattara, *Brasilia's Superquadra: Prototypical Design and the Project of the City*, in AD “Typological Urbanism: Projective Cities”, Wiley, March 2011.

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Alioscia Mozzato  
**The Image of the City and the Rhetoric of the Oxymoron.  
 Le Corbusier and the Apartment of Charles de Beistegui**

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Abstract

The architectural narration of the apartment designed by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret for the Count Charles de Bestegui on Avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris, which specifies an image of the city through the rhetoric of the oxymoron and some considerations by Le Corbusier on the French philosopher's George Bataille thought, lead to wider and more up-to-date reflections concerning the epistemological status of Art. On the one hand, the Artist, a tragic hero whose life is spent as a sacrifice given to humanity in search of those means of expression that allow us to describe the ineffable, on the other the Art, the only tool of knowledgeable to tell concepts, thoughts and ideas when, beyond the limits of rationality, myth is superimposed on reality.

Keywords

Le Corbusier — Beistegui — Bataille

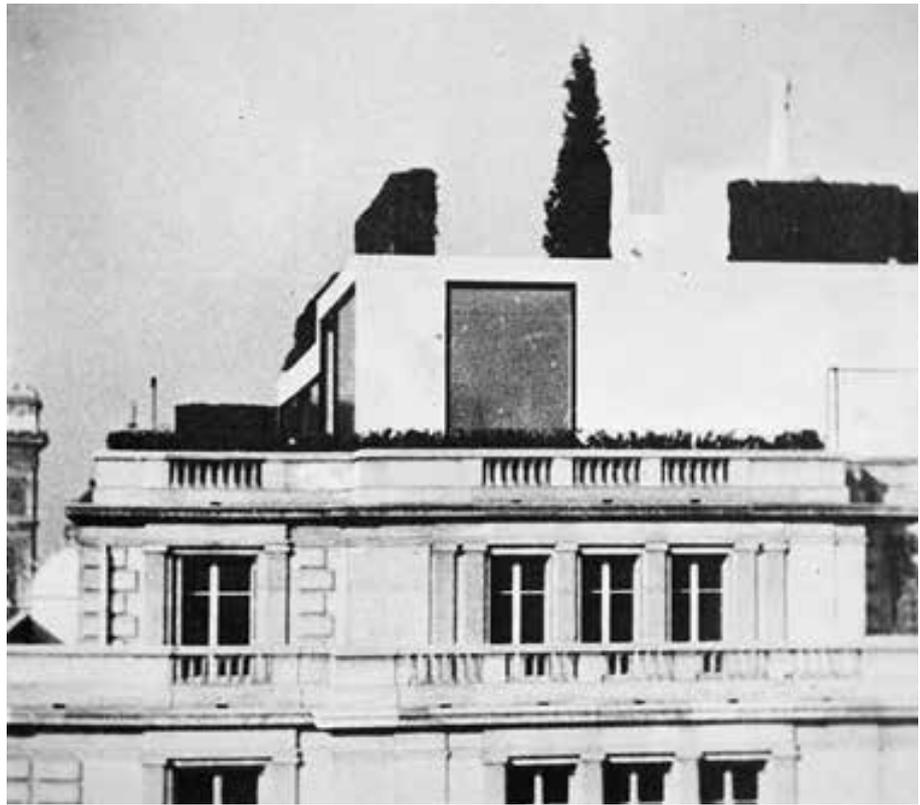
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In 1932 the magazine *Architecte* published the article by Le Corbusier *Appartement avec terrasse, avenue des Champs-Élysées, à Paris* (1932)<sup>1</sup> (Le Corbusier 1932) describing the project of the apartment built on the sixth and last floor of the *hôtel particulier* in avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris between 1929 and 1932 for the eccentric Count Charles de Beistegui<sup>2</sup>.

It is the period of the *années folles* in the French capital and alongside an operating bourgeoisie that has now acquired a central role in the economic and productive system of the new industrialized civilization, a decadent aristocracy seeks its own role and its own social legitimacy through masquerades and social events readily registered and spread on the New York magazine *Vogue*<sup>3</sup>.

Charles de Beistegui was born in Paris in 1895 from a rich family of Mexican origins<sup>4</sup>. An eccentric multimillionaire and professional interior designer - he called himself a surrealist<sup>5</sup> with an extravagant and excessive neoclassical eclecticism - Charles inherited a grand estate after his father's death in 1925 and immersed himself completely in the mundane events of the Parisian *haute bohème*.

In 1929, he asked architects Gabriel Guevrekian, André Lurçat and Le Corbusier with Pierre Jeanneret<sup>6</sup> a project for a penthouse on the top floor of the family's *hôtel particulier* at 136 Avenue des Champs-Élysées. The aim is to have an apartment that, according to Beistegui, «is not intended to be inhabited, but to serve as a frame for big parties<sup>7</sup>». A *decor de fête* then, a *machine à amuser*<sup>8</sup> where to host the events and evenings of the *Café Society* of those years in Paris and thus be able to legitimize and institutionalize their social position alongside families and figures with a well-established reputation as the Noailles, Faucigny-Lucinge, Pecci-Blunt, and

**Fig. 1**

Le Corbusier, Beistegui Apartment - Façade on avenue des Champs-Élysées (from Laurent Salomon e Jean-Pierre Ammeler, *Appartement Charles de Beistegui 1929-1931*. 136, avenue des Champs-Élysées, Paris 1979).

Beaumont.

The description of the apartment, published by the magazine *Architecte* (Le Corbusier 1932), makes explicit, through the construction of the text, the narrative theme that is declined in the work.

Le Corbusier calls it «an act of devotion to Paris» (Le Corbusier 1932, p.100), a *promenade architectural* that «constitutes an architectural landscape, both internal and external, created on different plans established at four successive levels» (Le Corbusier 1932, page 100). Specific *prospéctives émouvantes* (Le Corbusier 1932, p.100), precise views on architecture and urban facts frame the «sacred places of Paris» (Reichlin 2013, p.295): «*The Arc de Triomphe, the Tour Eiffel, the Sacré-Coeur* and finally the green mass that extends from the *Champs-Élysées* through the *Tuileries* to *Notre-Dame*» (Le Corbusier 1932, p.100).

The first terrace «is a green space with stone slabs, enclosed by boxwood and yew walls [...] a pressure on an electric button and the green palisade is slowly eclipsed» (Le Corbusier 1932, p.100). Also, the second *eplanade* is surrounded by green hedge walls, while in the last terrace, on the top of the building, high white walls define the limits of a grass floor and enclose a portion of the sky that becomes the ceiling of a real *open-air room*.

Elements that belong to the conventional vocabulary of an outer space take the form of those referable to an interior space, specifying a strong ambiguity on the level of the character between exterior and interior. This intention becomes even more explicit in the last terrace because of the presence of a fireplace that, as Le Corbusier writes, «is used to turn on the fire during the cool evenings» and, he explains later, «the owner of the place, following the evident influence of a *mode ravissante*, he added himself a Spanish fireplace box in Louis XV style» (Le Corbusier 1932, p.101).

“The outside is always an inside” (Le Corbusier 1923, p.154) we read in *Vers une architecture* (1923) and in the drawings made during the conference *Architecture en tout, urbanisme en tout* (Le Corbusier 1930) in Bue-

nos Aires in 1929. Although we are here facing reflections concerning the relationship of «immanent rivalry» (Le Corbusier 1930, p.78) between architecture and landscape, which translates into a positive conflict between *culture* and *nature* only for those who, Le Corbusier writes, «are able to see it and extract a fruitful benefit» (Le Corbusier 1930, p.78), the syntactic and semantic ambiguity between the form of outer and internal space is not a completely foreign thought for Le Corbusier's architectural research. Just to mention some of the best-known examples, we can think about the wall with square holes towards the lake in the Petit Maison garden (1923-24) in Vevey, or the same wall with the same hole used on the roof of the Villa Stein in Garches (1926), the solarium in the walkable part of the roof of Villa Savoye (1928-31) and the masterful doubling of the liturgical outdoor space towards the green space in Ronchamp (1955).

Le Corbusier writes:

«Let us explain: from this belvedere, Paris is visible on all its horizons: both in the most admirable places and in the dark desert of the roofs and the chimneys. The choice was to suppress that panoramic view and to create another architectural center of stones, gardens, and sky, completely isolated from the turbulence of the panorama» (Le Corbusier 1932, p.100). The selection of specific historical pre-existences of the city of Paris is an operation that Le Corbusier had already done on paper at the Buenos Aires conferences (1929) and in the collage entitled the *Esprit de Paris* exhibited at the *Pavillon des Temps Modernes* (1937); in the Beistegui apartment the «sacred places» of the city are framed and isolated through the form of the architectural space, so that the semantic intentionality connected to the meaning of the *Esprit de Paris* is expressed through the use of specific syntactic devices of the narrative sequence of the *promenade architectural*. By isolating and decontextualizing the monuments from every day - represented by the dark desert of the roofs and the chimneys of the city of Paris - the historical pre-existences express their own value of permanence and immutability that transposes them within a synchronic dimension of historical time. History, perceived as a danger in the inexorable and unstoppable will of change and progress implicit in modernity, can thus be saved from destruction through an operation of isolation and suspension that produces an inexorable but necessary interruption of its *continuity*. The *tabula rasa* is the only operation historically possible because if on the one hand, it allows a necessary social regeneration of an eschatological character<sup>9</sup>, on the other hand, it gives the historical pre-existence a *chance* of salvation when it becomes a testimony of a past that no longer exists. *Dialectical comparison* thus becomes the only possible relationship between historical memory and Modernity.

Le Corbusier writes:

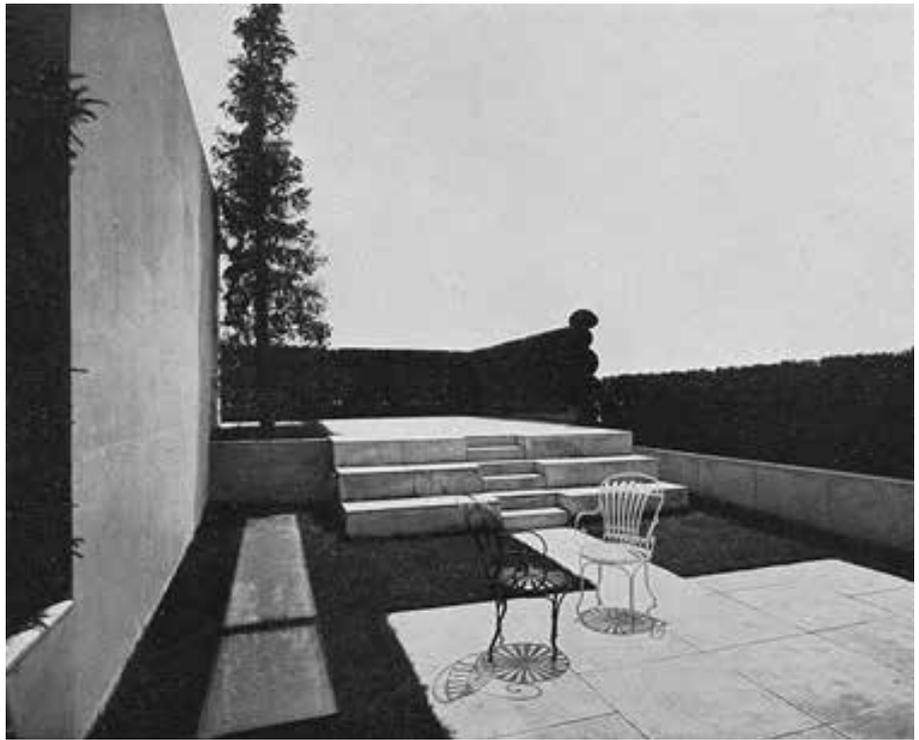
«The historical past, universal heritage, is respected. I will say more, it is saved. A continuation of the current state of crisis would lead to a rapid suppression of this past.

[...] *The Plan Voisin*, occupies with the buildings only 5% of the surface of the ground, safeguards the remains of the past and places them in a harmonious framework: in the middle of the green. But yes, things like that die one day, and these parks at the *Monceau* are many cemeteries held with extreme care. Here one comes to be an erudite person, to dream and to breathe: the past is no longer something that threatens life, it has found its accommodation» (Le Corbusier 1924, pp. 277-278).

Tafuri, referring in particular to these words, highlights how «the anti-

**Fig. 2**

Le Corbusier, Beistegui Apartment - external terraces on the 2nd and 3rd floor (from Le Corbusier, *Appartement avec terrasse, avenue des Champs-Élysées, à Paris, (1932), Paris 1932.*



**Fig. 3**

Le Corbusier, Beistegui Apartment - external terrace on the 3rd floor (from Le Corbusier, *Appartement avec terrasse, avenue des Champs-Élysées, à Paris, (1932), Paris 1932.*



historicism of the modern movement has deep roots in history» (Tafuri 1986, p.89), because, he says, «on the one hand it dissolves the traditional function of *continuity* of historical events», in favor of a *dialectical relationship*, «on the other hand, it recovers the values of memory on radically new foundations» (Tafuri 1986, page 93).

Claude Lévi-Strauss states that «*mythical* thought *expresses* itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited» (Lévi-Strauss 2015, p. 31) In the *promenade* of the outer gardens of the Beistegui apartment the historical pre-existences assume the narrative value of «constitutive units of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense» (Lévi-Strauss 2015, p. 33): the language of myth<sup>10</sup>. For Lévi-Strauss, «mythical thought appears to be an intellectual form of *bricolage*» (Lévi-Strauss 2015, p. 35) that uses «the remains and debris of heterogeneous events (Lévi-Strauss 2015, p. 35) only as regards the content, so far as the form is concerned, there is an analogy between them. The analogy consists in the incorporation in their form itself of a certain amount of content, which is roughly the same for all» (Lévi-Strauss 2015, p. 47).

Framing, selecting, suspending and transposing the story within a context other than that of its origins is an operation that builds an *image of the city*, not as an objective fact, but as a pure concept. Its meaning: the *Esprit de Paris* is an idea whose contents are transmitted through a language of the «mythical thought», an expressive form that, according to Lévi-Strauss, «lies halfway between *precepts* and *concepts*» (Lévi-Strauss 2015, p. 47). The narrative sequence of the external gardens that generates the process of metaphorical and mythological conceptualization of the city is interrupted when the contingent reality of the urban is perceived through a sequence of images, captured by a periscope, projected onto a *camera obscura* table and observed in the total darkness and complete isolation of a small pavilion located in the second-last of the four external terraces<sup>11</sup>. The «sacred places» of Paris transformed through the architectural space into supra-historical entities, expressions of pure universal concepts, are brought back, through the consistency of the image, to the immanent dimension of their existence.

When in Buenos Aires Le Corbusier formulated the following questions: «What is Paris? What is its beauty? What is the Spirit of Paris?» (Le Corbusier 1930, p.154). When questioning issues related to *content* and *form* at the same time, he seems to suggest that to formulate an answer we need a coincidence between the immanent properties of things and the ideas or principles that transcend things, in other words a synthesis between what «the object is as it is and its appearance affected by the particular perspective» (Lévi-Strauss 2015, p. 39).

Baudelaire writes:

The beauty is made of an eternal, immutable element the quantity of which is excessively difficult to determine, and of a relative and circumstantial element which will be in turn or at once, the era, the fashion, morality or passion. Without this second element...the, the first element would be indigestible (Baudelaire 1992-2004, p 278).

When the *Spirit of Paris* coincides with the *Beauty of Paris* its meaning can only be expressed through a convergence of antithetical terms: universal and individual, relative and absolute, image and idea, reality and myth. In the Beistegui apartment, to achieve this «presence of opposites» (Eco



**Fig. 4**

Le Corbusier, Beistegui Apartment - the room with periscope (from Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre complète 1929-1934*, Paris 1947).

1997, p. 20) *the image of the city* is constructed through a narration that uses the rhetoric of the oxymoron, that is, able to overlap the contents of a metaphysical and transcendent dimension of the city with the properties of its empirical and immanent reality.

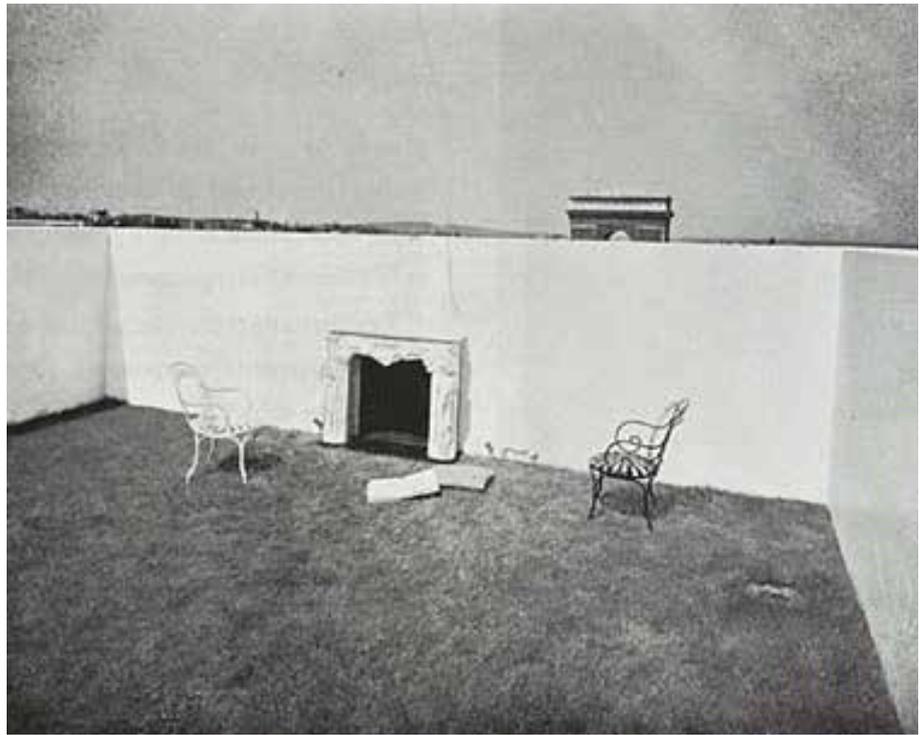
The linguistic code, because of some formal limits, must contradict itself to express deeper ideas and thoughts. The oxymoron, used by the mystics and poets to cross the boundaries of the logically representable - about this the gnostics spoke of a dark light; the alchemists of a black sun (Jorge Luis Borges) - allows to delineate and communicate the contents of an image of the city that are inexpressible through the language of logic because their consistency is that of ideas and concepts.

In the avenue des Champs-Élysées apartment, the oxymoron seems to represent for Le Corbusier that instrument which, as Jean Cocteau claims, is used by artists who «feel the sweet sadness of those who know that the human alphabet offers a reduced number of combinations» (Cocteau 1920-25, p.325).

The scientific literature has tried to include Beistegui's apartment - and some moments of Le Corbusier's plastic research - into the thought and investigations of Surrealism<sup>12</sup> even if, although there is certainly some interest in that kind of reflections<sup>13</sup>, the position of Corbusier is very clear if we refer to what he wrote in his essay *L'espace indicible* (1936):

«I am a cubist and I am not surrealist, wanting to oppose the feeling of construction, looking forward, to a consideration of the dead, of the dying, of remembering» (Le Corbusier 1936, p.14).

Considering this reasoning, we may focus on some notes that Le Corbusier took in the margins of the book *The Accursed Share (La part maudite)*, Bataille 2015) written by the French philosopher George Bataille in 1949<sup>14</sup>. The book and the essay *The Notion of «Dépense»* (Bataille 2015), published a few years earlier in *La Critique sociale*, illustrate the principles of a general economy that undermines the economic conventions of capitalist matrix related to the exclusive production and accumulation of goods and, proposing a system that affirms the centrality of «profitless consump-



**Fig. 5**

Le Corbusier, Beistegui Apartment - external terrace on the 4th and last floor (from Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre complète* 1929-1934, Paris 1947).

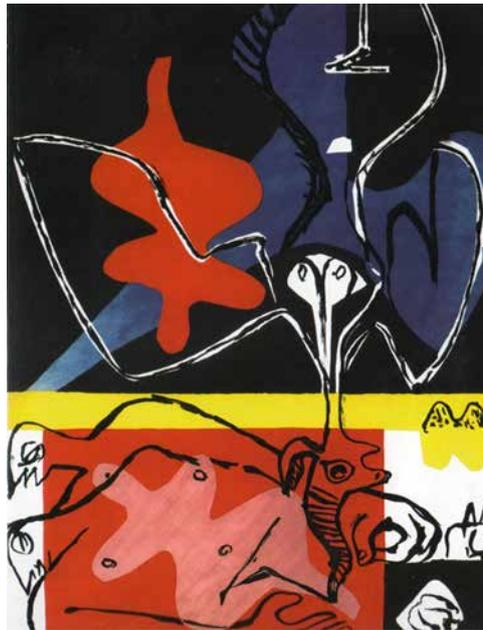
tion», re-evaluates the meaning of some commercial practices of the Indian tribes of North America - previously described by Marcel Mauss in his essay *Essai sur le don, form et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques* (Mauss 1923-24) - connected to the institution of the *potlatch*, that is to the exchange through the gift.

At the base of what could be defined as the eschatological dimension of the heterodox economic principles formulated by Bataille there is the will to emancipate the existence of man from the poverty of profit through the practice of the *gift* that, assuming the same role and value of *sacrifice*, becomes the instrument through which, Bataille writes, «restore to the sacred world that which servile use has degraded, rendered profane». (Bataille 2015, p. 104).

To sacrifice, from the Latin *sacrificare* is made up of *sacrum* «sacred rite» and *ficare*, from the theme of *facere* «making», that is *making sacred*. In giving without any counterpart, man disrupts the relationship of servility that the utilitarian approach generates between the reality of things and its activity in the world so as to be reunited with the *divine* dimension of existence. Through the *gift*, Bataille writes, «the animal or plant that man uses is restored to the truth of the intimate world; he receives a sacred communication from it, which restores him in turn to interior freedom» (Bataille 2015, p. 106).

On page 92 of the book *La part maudite* (Bataille 2015), in the chapter *Theory of the potlatch, the paradox of the «gift» reduced to the «acquisition» of a «power»*, Le Corbusier notes:

«The 5 volumes of the Corbu Complete Works offer, propose and impose Corbu's ideas through enthusiastic adherence. On one side Corbu is tried by rascals, on the other, he is the king. The disinterested practice of painting is a tireless sacrifice, a gift of time, of patience, of love, without any counterpart in money (with the exception of modern traders). It is a sowing to the wind for strangers, one day before or after death, they will thank us. It is too late for the many difficulties experienced. But what does it matter; what matters is the key to happiness» (Duboy 1987, p.67).



**Fig. 6**  
Le Corbusier, Fusion (da Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, Parigi 1955).

Later in the chapter *Sacrifice or Consumption* Le Corbusier underlines the following passage:

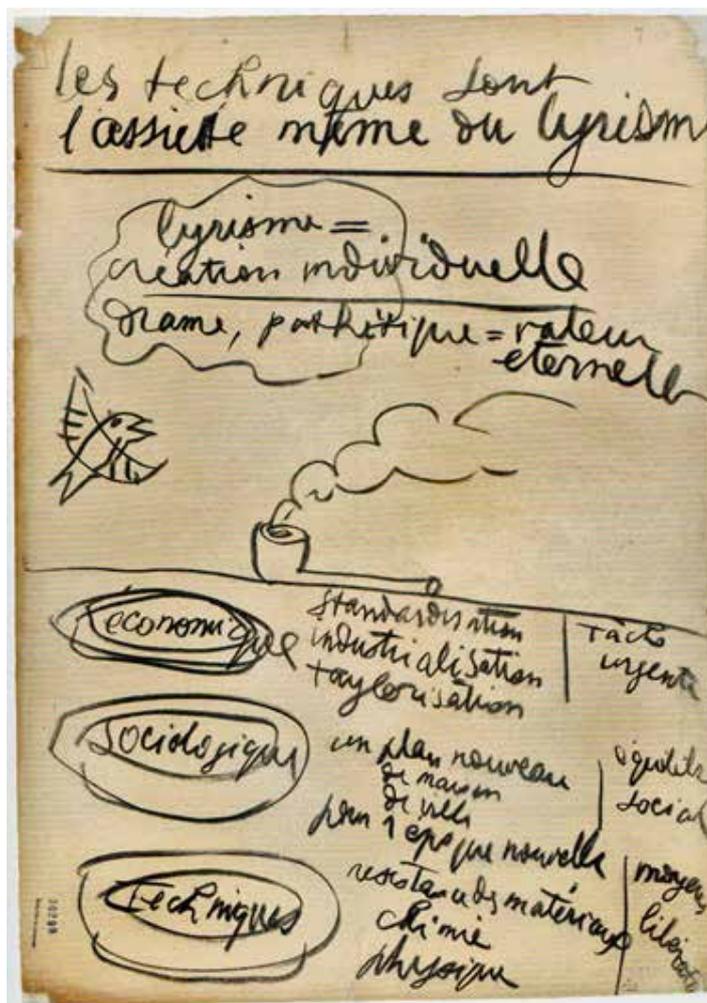
«This useless consumption is what suits me, once my concern for the morrow is removed. And if I thus consume immoderately, I reveal to my fellow beings that which I am intimate: Consumption is the way in which separate beings communicate. *Everything shows through, everything is open and infinite* [italics of the writer] between those who consume intensely. But nothing counts then; violence is released and it breaks forth without limits, as the heat increases» (Bataille 2015, pp. 106-107).

On the sidelines, Le Corbusier notes the word «fusion».

The term *fusion* refers unequivocally to the «alchemical fusion» described in the lithograph of the fourth chapter of the *Poème de l'angle droit* (1955) and, more generally, to a whole series of studies that have brought the last Le Corbusier's poetics to the symbolic dimension of the sacred<sup>15</sup>.

The hermetic concept of not easy interpretation<sup>16</sup>, the «alchemical fusion» literally indicates the union and conciliation of opposites, water-moon and fire-sun, masculine *animus* and feminine *anima*, the vertical and the horizontal of the right angle. It also represents a stage in the process of purification (martyrdom) performed by the alchemist on vile metals, to free the pure element, thus becoming a metaphor of the spiritual liberation of consciousness, a crucial moment, after which, for the lonely people that will take the risk, the true knowledge of themselves (Scavuzzo 2006) and of those places of their own interiority where, for alchemists, the *divine* resides.

Intersecting what Bataille writes about the exemplary virtue of the *potlatch* as «the possibility for man to grasp what eludes him, to combine the limitless movements of the universe with the limit that belongs to him» (Bataille 2015, p.111) and the concept of *espace indicible* (1936) - «the fourth dimension [...] the moment of unlimited evasion provoked by an exceptionally right consonance of the plastic means» (Le Corbusier 1936, p.10), «of incontestable, but indefinable nature» (Le Corbusier 1936, p.17) - we glimpse the sense of a possible *heroic dimension* of the *gift*, where the «alchemical fusion» becomes «fusion with the sacred» through a creative act that, explicating itself as a *sacrifice* given to the humanity, *makes sacred* what is raw material allowing the experience and knowledge of the



**Fig. 7**

Le Corbusier, *Techniques are themselves the foundation of Lyricism* (from Le Corbusier, *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme*, Paris 1930).

*divine* and the *ineffable*<sup>17</sup>.

Deeply different from Baudelaire's *flâneur*<sup>18</sup>, who wanders around the city contemplating its modernity, and from Benjamin's «magician-painter» (2013) that, still anchored to the principles of *mimesis*, retains a natural distance to the modern *second nature*, Tafuri (1986) inscribes the figure of Le Corbusier in the category of the «surgeon-operator» (Benjamin 2013) who, constructively introducing himself into reality, actively works in society with the objective of responding to poetic needs through aesthetic principles that lead, on the one hand, to absolute identification between industrial work and artistic work (Tafuri 1986, p.65), and on the other to an unconditional enslavement of the Art to the constructive action of the world (Tafuri 1986, p.64).

Le Corbusier's statement: «techniques are the very foundation of lyricism» (Le Corbusier 1930, p.37) expresses the will to confer a spiritual and poetic character to functions and techniques that are very empirical by their nature, inductively delineating a need for coincidence between the instances of the *material* and those of the *spiritual* that makes the convergence of *usefulness* and *poetic* possible in the work of art.

The *heroic* character of life in modernity recounted by Walter Benjamin<sup>19</sup> - and proposed again by Philip Duboy (1987) - if placed near the reflections of Bataille refers to a further possible critical interpretation of the role of the artist in society. The *sacrifice* that the artist makes in giving himself and unconditionally giving his action to the world becomes the instrument through which the understanding of the *unspeakable* is made possible. A

search therefore of those expressive means that, through a mediation between the instances of the real and the ideal, are able to charge with a different sense energy and, overcoming the boundaries of logic, describe something for which a word has never been created.

Some exponents of the Russian intelligentsia, repeating certain theoretical positions of German idealism - of Schelling in particular - gave art the ability to understand and describe the *truth* or *spirit of the world*<sup>20</sup> and gave the artist the duty to pursue this research and its disclosure. The *idea of truth* and the *beauty of things* - terms that for the romantics of Russia at the end of '800 coincided - are not given immediately, they are not the evidence itself, they are instead the product of a mental work that unmasks things from appearances built around them by traditions, commonplaces, deceptive and mystifying ideologies that interprets them (Reichlin 2013, p.296). Framing carefully a cluster of artifacts that must be selected, made intelligible and ordered in what Reichlin (2013) describes Le Corbusier's «analogue Paris», is an operation that specifies an image of the city as a synthesis between the universal requests of idea and myth and those ones of the phenomenon and of reality. Thus preserving the consistency of the mental construct, the *image of the city* lies between its *idea* and its *form*, ontologically revealing its essence, Beauty, and Spirit. Meanings that, referring to a reality beyond the phenomenon of which, however, is used as a support to ensure its existence, can be expressed only through a conceptual convergence of opposite terms proper to the rhetoric of the oxymoron.

From the analysis of the narrative structure of the apartment of Charles de Beistegui and the notes by Le Corbusier on the thought of Georges Bataille, we can read issues that lead to wider considerations on the ever-present question of the epistemological status of Art and the role of the Artist in society. On the one hand, the Artist who, through the creative and expressive act overcomes the limits of an exclusive reflection on usefulness and, boldly advancing through the meanders of the *ineffable* and the *sacred*, becomes a *tragic hero* whose life is spent as a sacrifice given to humanity; on the other, an Art conceived as an instrument of knowledgeable to investigate and describe concepts, thoughts, and ideas when, having crossed the limits of rationality, language requires that the *meaning* replaces *signification*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> One finds an Italian translation of the text written by Le Corbusier in the essay by Paolo Melis, *Il 'cadavere squisito' di Le Corbusier: Pierre Jeanneret e Charles Bestegui* (Melis 1977).

<sup>2</sup> One finds a bibliography on this topic in the essays by Alexander Watt, *Fantasy on the Roofs of Paris* (Watt 1936); Ross Anderson, *All of Paris, Darkly: Le Corbusier's Beistegui Apartment* (Anderson 2015); Win van den Berg, *Beistegui avant Le Corbusier: genèse du penthouse des Champs-Élysées* (Berg van den 2015); Beatriz Colomina, *The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism* (Colomina 1988); Juan José Lahuerta, 'Surrealist poetics' in the work of Le Corbusier? (Lahuerta 2007); Jean Lucan, *Corbusier: une encyclopédie* (Lucan 1987); Le Corbusier, *Appartement avec terrasse, avenue des Champs-Élysées, à Paris* (Le Corbusier 1932); Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre complète 1929-1934* (Le Corbusier 1947); Sylvain Malfroy, *Der Aussenraum ist immer ein Innenraum* (Malfroy 1994); Paolo Melis, *Il 'cadavere squisito' di Le Corbusier: Pierre Jeanneret e Charles Bestegui* (Melis 1977); Bruno Reichlin, *La "Parigi Analoga" di Le Corbusier. L'Attico per Charles de Bestegui, 1929-1932* (Reichlin 2013); Pierre Saddy, *Le Corbusier Chez Les Riches, L'appartement De Beistegui* (Saddy 1979); Pierre Saddy, *Le Corbusier e l'Arlecchino* (Saddy 1980);

Laurent Salomon e Jean-Pierre Ammeler, *Appartement Charles de Beistegui 1929-1931. 136, avenue des Champs-Élysées, Paris* (Salomon e Ammeler 1979) Manfredo Tafuri, *Machine et mémoire. La città nell'opera di Le Corbusier* (Tafuri 1984); Anthony Vilder, *Paris: Beistegui Apartment, Or Horizons Deferred* (Vilder 2013).

<sup>3</sup> For an in-depth analysis of this particular type of social context of the 1920s, see the essays by Pierre Saddy, *Le Corbusier e l'Arlecchino* (Saddy 1980) and by Win van den Berg, *Beistegui avant Le Corbusier: genèse du penthouse des Champs -Élysées* (Berg van den 2015).

<sup>4</sup> One finds a biographical report on Charles de Beistegui in the essay by Win van den Berg, *Beistegui avant Le Corbusier: genèse du penthouse des Champs -Élysées* (Berg van den 2015).

<sup>5</sup> About the furnishing of the apartment in avenue des Champs-Élysées Charles de Beistegui declares: «My work is surrealist. On this fake fireplace a pendulum clock and small candlesticks. This mirror reflects the sun... The objects that one usually sees under a certain light, give new effects under a new light». Quotation from the essay by Pierre Saddy, *Le Corbusier e l'Arlecchino* (Saddy 1980, p.27) where one finds a brief and eloquent description of some of his works.

<sup>6</sup> For the description of the three projects see the essay by Win van den Berg, *Beistegui avant Le Corbusier: genèse du penthouse des Champs-Élysées* (Berg van den 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Excerpt from an interview given by Charles Beistegui to Roger Baschet in 1936, reported in the essay by Win van den Berg, *Beistegui avant Le Corbusier: genèse du penthouse des Champs-Élysées* (Berg van den 2015).

<sup>8</sup> A happy parallel with «machine à habiter» suggested by Win van den Berg in his essay *Beistegui avant Le Corbusier: genèse du penthouse des Champs-Élysées* (Berg van den 2015).

<sup>9</sup> I refer in particular to the thoughts described in the text by Colin Rowe, *L'architettura delle buone intenzioni* (Rowe 2005, p. 84).

<sup>10</sup> About the argumentations discussed in this essay we believe that the most appropriate definition of myth is the one formulated by Gillo Dorfles which states: «[...] these expressive forms derive their origin from an analogical and translated realization of events, images, situations, of which sometimes they are an unconscious recording and sometimes the metaphorical transcription, but always immersed within a halo of rational indeterminacy that is precisely what allows to differentiate them from perfectly rationalized and conceptualized forms, which are those transmissible through the normal linguistic expressions (of the word or of the figuration). (Dorfles 1965, p.51).

<sup>11</sup> In his essay, Ross Anderson (2015) puts the darkroom with periscope in contact with some reflections on the concept of *Unheimliche* formulated by Sigmund Freud in *Das Unheimliche* (Freud 1955, pp. 217-56). In Italian, the German word *Unheimliche* can be translated into a disorientation specified by the meeting of the two oxymoronic terms: frightening and familiar. Anderson outlines an affinity between the character of strong ambiguity inherent in the very meaning of *Unheimliche* and the space of the darkroom. Freud writes: «*Unheimliche* [...] on the one hand denotes that which is familiar and congenial on the other that which is concealed and kept hidden [...] therefore *Unheimliche* is a word whose meaning develops in the direction of ambivalence, up to coincide with its opposite *unheimlich*. (Freud 1955, pp. 222-223).

<sup>12</sup> See the article by Alexander Gorlin, *The Gost in the Machine: Surrealism in the Work of Le Corbusier* (Gorlin 1982) and part of the essay by Danièle Pauly, *Il segreto della forma* (Pauly 1987). For further critical work on this topic, see the bibliography in the book by Stanislaus von Moss, *Le Corbusier une synthèse* (Moss von 2013). One finds a confutation of the positions supporting hypothesis of similarity between Le Corbusier's poetics and Surrealism poetic as regards the relationship between architecture and city in the essay by Juan José Lahuerta, '*Surrealist poetics*' in the work of Le Corbusier? (Lahuerta J. J., 2007).

<sup>13</sup> See the texts by André Breton in Le Corbusier's personal library (Collegi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya 2005).

<sup>14</sup> These notes were published for the first time in the contribution of Philippe Duboy (1987) to the *Encyclopédie* by Jaques Lucan (1987): *Bataille (Georges): Le Corbusier, héros moderne*. On the relationship between the thought of Bataille and Le Corbusier, see the essay by Nadir Lahiji, «... *The gift of time*» *Le Corbusier reading Bataille* (Lahiji N. 2005).

<sup>15</sup> For a critical esoteric reading of the work of the last Le Corbusier, see the essays by Giuseppina Scavuzzo, *Iconostasi: la forma e i segni. Dalla costruzione simbolica alla composizione architettonica in alcune opere di Le Corbusier* (Scavuzzo 2006); Richard Allen Moore, *Le Corbusier: Myth and Meta Architectue. The Late Period (1947-1965)* (Moore 1977). For a work on the *Poème de l'angle droit* which refers only in part to theosophy and alchemy, see the essay by Juan Calatrava, *Le Corbusier e Le Poème de l'Angle Droit: un poema abitabile una casa poetica* (Calatrava 2007).

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed study on alchemy especially as regards the repercussions of psychoanalysis, see Carl Gustave Jung, *Psicologia e alchimia* (Jung 1995).

<sup>17</sup> Thoughts on the concept of *ineffable* can be found in the early writings by Le Corbusier as can be deduced from some considerations formulated in the chapter *Esprit de vérité* in *L'art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (Le Corbusier 1925, pp. 167-184). During a visit at the Tourette, invited by the monks to talk about his work, he says: «They [the places] determine what I call the *espace indicible*, which does not depend on the dimensions, but on the quality of perfection. This concerns the domain of the ineffable» (Le Corbusier 1987, p.36).

<sup>18</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the figure of the *flâneur*, see the essay by Charles Baudelaire, *L'artista, uomo di mondo, uomo delle folle e fanciullo*, in *Il pittore della vita moderna* (Baudelaire 1992-2004, pp. 282-287).

<sup>19</sup> In re-reading Baudelaire's reflections on modernity, Walter Benjamin writes: «*Les héros* is the true subject of modernity, which means that in order to live modernity there is a need for a heroic nature» (Benjamin 1979, 108).

<sup>20</sup> For a more in-depth look, see the text by Isaiah Berlin, *Il riccio e la volpe* (Berlin 1986).

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Kostas Tsiambaos  
**Architecture, narration and the art of living**

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Abstract

This paper draws from the idea of philosophy as a “life art” - as discussed by philosopher Alexander Nehamas in his book *The Art of Living* - in order to highlight a hidden connection between architecture, as a creative practice, and the narration of the self. Can the criteria for a great architecture be reduced to standards and values that are deemed ‘universal’? Or should concepts such as “originality”, “authenticity”, and “uniqueness” be regarded context-dependent and determined retrospectively, only relevant within the narration of a unique personal creative course? Through a short, imaginary story - which is based on actual historical events - I will argue that the value and impact of every architectural creation cannot always be inherently defined but are usually directly related to what is called “the care of the self”.

Keywords

Art of living — Self — Narration

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**Introduction**

This paper draws from the idea of philosophy as a “life art” - as discussed by philosopher Alexander Nehamas in his book *The Art of Living*<sup>1</sup> - in order to highlight a hidden connection between architecture, as a creative practice, and the narration of the creation of the self. The life art approach to philosophy has a long history; initiated in “ἐαυτοῦ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι” (the care of the self) encountered in the early Platonic texts, it was then transformed into the pursuit for the perfect “blend of life and theory” in Aristotle, and was later promoted by modern thinkers such as Montaigne, Nietzsche and Foucault as the cultivation of an “aesthetic dimension of life”. Friedrich Nietzsche in particular, one of Le Corbusier’s intellectual heroes, only considered artistic creation in its dynamic as a story of self-creation and not as an expression of a transcendent representation.

Through a short, imaginary story I will argue that the value and impact of every architectural creation cannot always be inherently defined since no ‘recipe’ for great architecture exists for someone to follow, precisely because every exemplary architectural creation is always constructed on the scaffolding of a personal biography. Likewise, if every influential architectural work is based on the architect’s biography, then the creative potential of architecture cannot but be intertwined with the question of a narrative of the self. In other words, architecture’s value, impact and command are related to the creation of the architect as a person as much as, if not more than, architectural creation itself. The following fantastic narration, which is however based on actual persons and events, is offered as such an example.

**Fig. 1-2**

Illustrations by Kostas Tsiambaos.

### Jeannerex

Our story begins somewhere around 1890, at the office of the famous Professor of BeauX-Arts Georges. One day, Georges receives an anonymous letter (Fig. 1). He opens it and reads horribly: “Eclecticism is doomed to die by the hand of a young boy who will someday create a new kind of architecture.” Immediately, and without a second thought, he decides to take action. He orders one of his best students, Auguste, to find the boy and make him ‘disappear’ (Fig. 2). Auguste actually finds the young boy but hesitating to hurt him, he guides him to a remote cliff on the Jura Mountains. He ties and abandons the boy there, hoping for someone to find and save him (Fig. 3). Fortunately Charles, a local artist, finds the boy in the middle of nowhere and decides to grow him up like his own son. “I will teach him all I know”, he thinks. “I will make him a painter, a decorator, or an architect.” (Fig. 4). After a while he even gives him a name. “I will call him Jeannerex!”

As Jeannerex grows up, he is increasingly interested in architecture. At some point, however, he realizes that all that he had read in the books of architecture was not the only truth. That is why, full of curiosity, he decides to travel to Delphi in order to find out what real architecture is (Fig. 5). Arriving in Delphi, he is looking for an oracle. But the oracle he receives does not answer his question (Fig. 6). It instead tells him that he is meant to attack the architecture of the past and create his own architecture. Rather disappointed Jeannerex decides to leave his unanswered queries aside and travel further away...

Approaching the city of Athens while on the boat, he sees a hill from afar (Fig. 7). Something odd is over there. He knows it, he had seen it before in the books, but from here it looks unfamiliar, uncanny. He has to walk up there.

Without wasting time, he decides to reach the Acropolis. The view of the rock up close is rather disturbing, if not shocking. The Parthenon is white and shiny, its marbles look bright and frozen. Jeannerex stands against the temple, unable to move forward, fixed by the spectacle. “So this is reality... this is the only truth!” He thinks. He has to do something... he has to react before it is too late. He will either fight or crash!

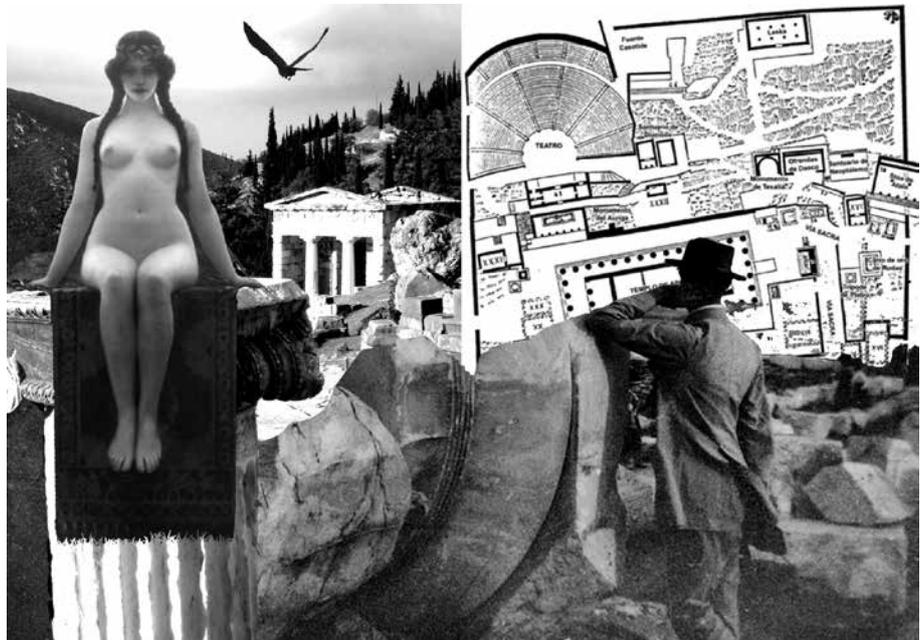
The battle is tough and without a clear winner (Fig. 8). Jeannerex defends himself but he gets hurt, loosing his left eye. The Parthenon is powerful but its identity is now revealed. Its image is altered, its story is rewritten (Fig. 9).

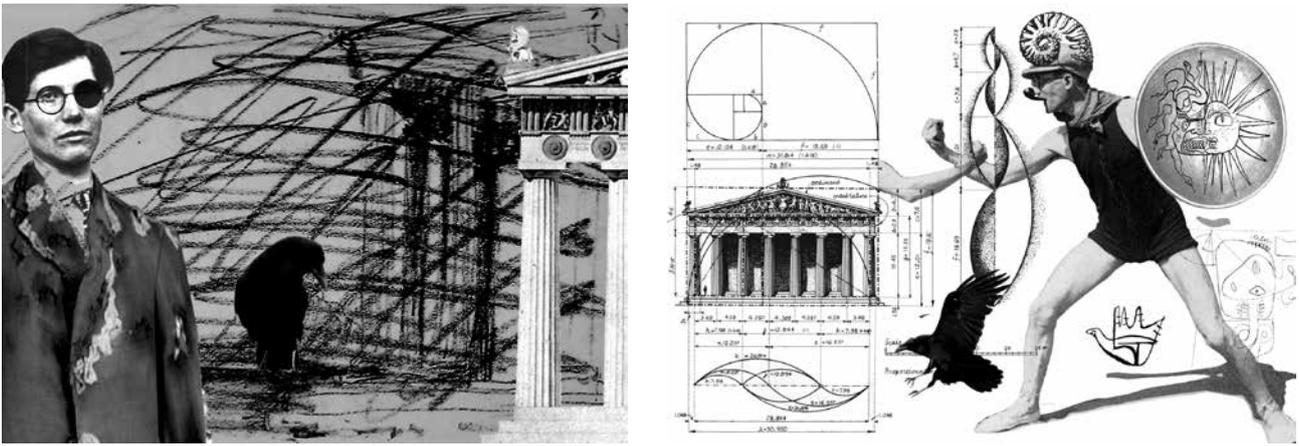
Hurt and exhausted, Jeannerex decides to leave Delphi and return home. On his way back, however, he meets the Sphinx, which stops the passers-

**Fig. 3-4**  
Illustrations by Kostas Tsiambaos.



**Fig. 5-6-7**  
Illustrations by Kostas Tsiambaos.





**Fig. 8-9**  
Illustrations by Kostas Tsiambaos.

by and puts them in a puzzle (Fig. 10): “Before its birth it is inside us. After its birth we are inside it. What is it?” Jeannerex stands silent, thinking for a while and then he answers: “It is architecture! Before being built it is within us, as an idea, but when built, we can enter it, inhabit it.” The Sphinx replies: “Yes, that’s the correct answer.”

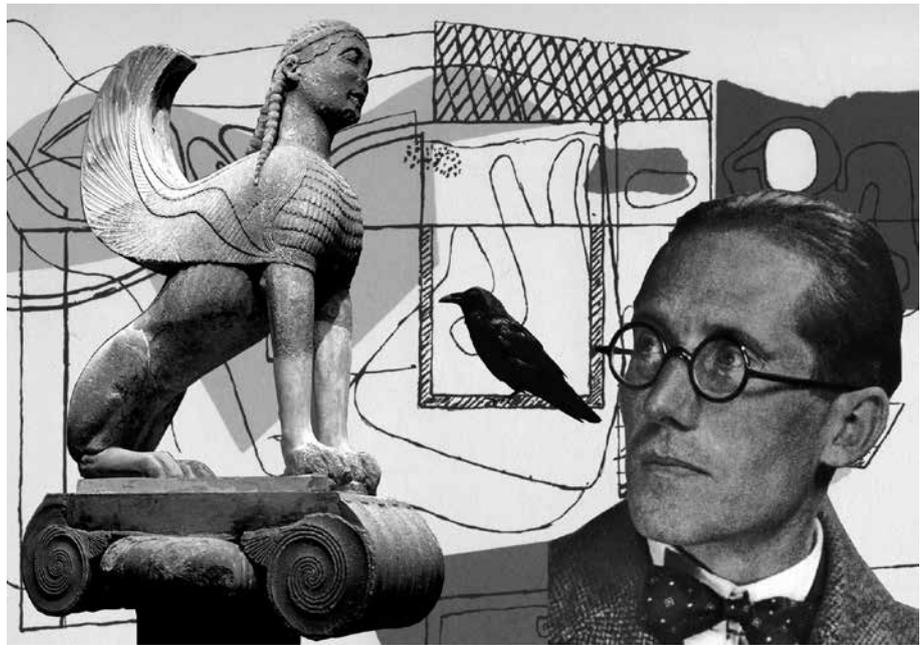
Arriving in Paris, Jeannerex is certain that he wants to become an architect (Fig. 11). On his desk, his gaze pulls a small book. On its cover he reads: “Who knew the famous riddles and was a man most masterful.” He looks out the window. Behind the glass, he imagines a new name for himself... As time passes, he begins to talk, write, draw, construct something that has not appeared ever before. It is a new architecture. The architecture of Jeannerex or, after his new name, the architecture of El Corbusier! (Fig. 12).

That was my little fantastic story, in which, however, one could recognize, in a fragmented and random order, some real facts, persons and events from Le Corbusier’s life. One could recognize, for example, Auguste Perret, at whose office the young Jeanneret worked for 14 months in 1908-1909, and Charles l’Éplattenier, Jeanneret’s first teacher at the Ecole d’Art of La Chaux-de-Fonds from 1900 to 1904. One could also recognize the places where the architect toured and traveled; from the mountains of Jura, where his was unwillingly hiking together with his father, Georges, to Delphi, the Athenian Acropolis and, of course, Paris the modern city that marked the start of a new life and the creation of a new name (the name Le Corbusier) by the young Jeanneret himself.<sup>2</sup>

As equally real is the rupture with the academic eclecticism of the Beaux-Arts, which was symbolically introduced at the beginning of our story. The ‘struggle’ against the Parthenon can be also recognized as a central theme of Le Corbusier’s creative life as this has been described in a dramatic way by the architect himself as well as by most historians-researchers of his early life, ideas and works. Finally, Le Corbusier’s partial blindness from the left eye was another fact although this was not something that took place on the Athenian Acropolis in 1911 but an event that took place in 1918, the night when the architect was completing his painting titled *La Cheminée*; a purist painting on which Jeanneret abstractly illustrated the Parthenon, as he himself had written.<sup>3</sup>

All of the above, real or fantastic ingredients were reconstructed on the scaffolding of a very well known ancient myth, *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, which seemed to fit. And it is true that it did not take much effort to link the biography of Le Corbusier with the myth of Oedipus. But I will discuss more on this connection a bit later.

**Fig.10-11**  
Illustrations by Kostas Tsiambaos.



### The person before the architect

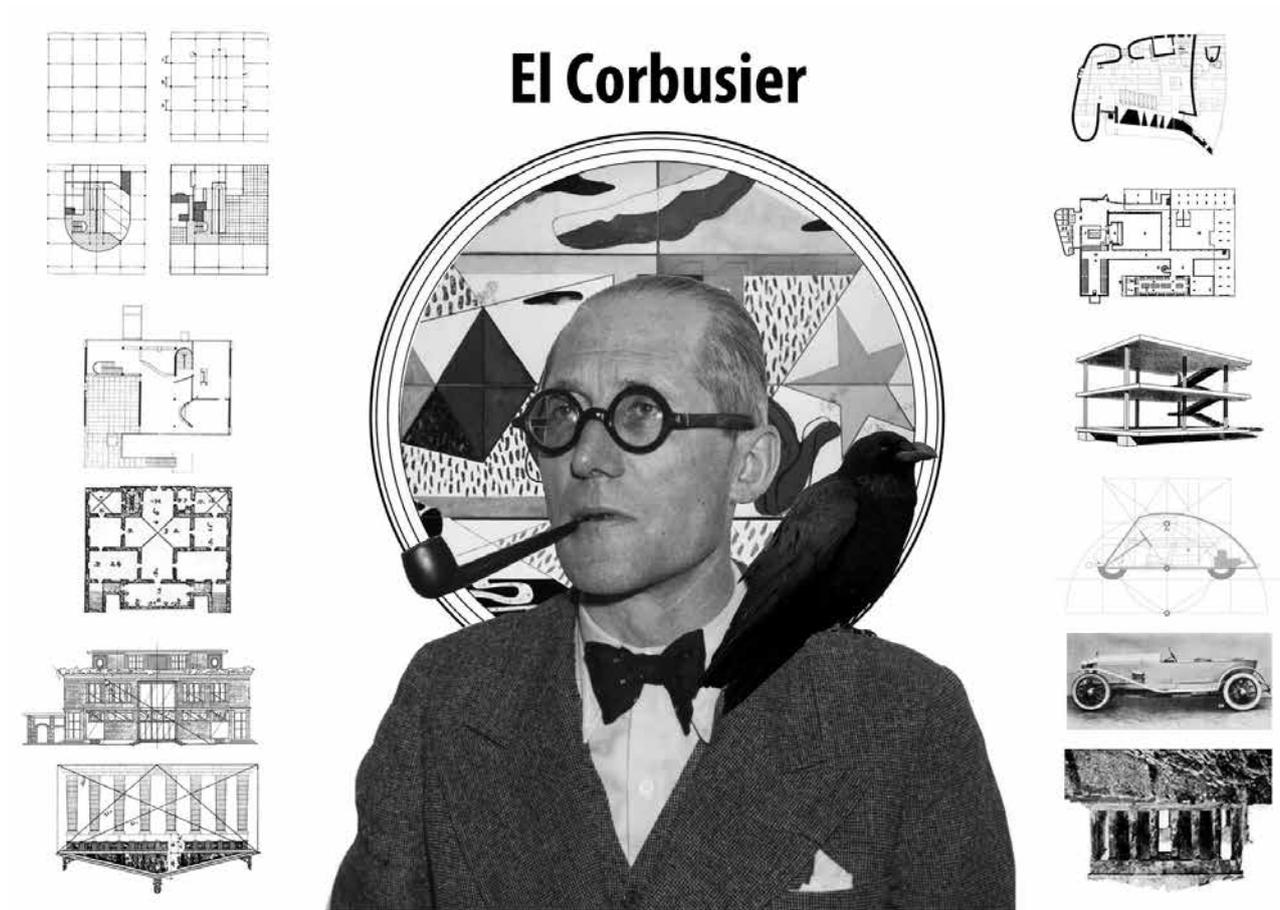
We are discussing emblematic architects, such as Le Corbusier, through their work, a seminal project, a work of reference that has the power to enrich over time and in multiple ways the work of other architects or students of architecture. This influence of important architectural works can be immediate and obvious - to a degree of a direct copy of the form itself - or indirect as a more general reference to conceptual ideas, design practices or construction techniques. This indirect influence is considered the only legitimate, since the formal reproduction of an architectural work seems to be totally meaningless. Indeed, it is not difficult to agree that if, supposedly, a contemporary architect could accurately reconstruct, again today, ten of the most important works of the 20th century he would not be a great architect even if all of the pure architectural qualities (geometry, composition, layout, scale, construction, materials, details) were exactly the same. This may sound obvious but it is at the same time a paradox since it tells us that: a. The criteria of great architecture *cannot be only* architectural and b. A great architect *is not just* one who makes great architecture. Let's just keep this paradox in mind for the time being.<sup>4</sup>

We are also talking about the work of an architect through his biography. Such a person is Le Corbusier about whom it seems that we know everything: where and how he grew up, who were his family and how good or bad were the relationships with his father, his mother and his brother, who were his teachers, where did he work and who did he worked with, where did he travel and what exactly he did during his journeys, what did he write or think, what did he paint or sketch, what letters did he send and to whom, which were his relationships with women and of what kind, how did he spend his summers, what did he like to eat, how did he like to sleep, what did he love and what did he hate.<sup>5</sup>

This special interest, by architects, on the biography of another architect is also explained by something else: by an established - although not always obvious - belief that the narration of a creative person's biography can tell us something important about his work. There is somewhere, under the surface, a mentality that relates the uniqueness of the work to the uniqueness of the person; a certain logic according to which the architectural work would not have been as important if the life of the architect was not as interesting. And this logic becomes more provocative and challenging the moment we realize that many important architects, including Le Corbusier, did not attend a School of Architecture, did not even have the degree of an Architect, but emerged as great architects only through an impressive and unique course of self-creation; a course that included diverse influences, readings, apprenticeships, travels, friendships etc. etc. As Le Corbusier himself had once said: "I am self-taught in everything, even in sports".<sup>6</sup>

This epic aura surrounding the project of self-creation is a shared characteristic among the 'heroes' of modern architecture. Beyond common values, priorities and concepts, every important architectural work is recognized as unique precisely because the path followed by its creator could only be his own and no one else's. Here we are no longer talking about the project-as-a-model but about the biography-as-a-model. The thing is that if repeating the first one (the work) seems unlikely, resembling the second (the person) is impossible. Biographies, by definition, *cannot* be repeated. How can one become as great as his heroes then?

Philosopher Alexander Nehamas discusses how the idea of philosophy



**Fig. 12**  
Illustrations by Kostas Tsiambaos.

as an art of life (what is called “the philosophical life”) lasts over the work of great modern and contemporary thinkers such as Montaigne, Nietzsche and Foucault.<sup>7</sup> This idea started with the “care of the self” (ἐαυτοῦ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι)<sup>8</sup>, which we encounter in the early Platonic texts as a knowledge of the soul,<sup>9</sup> and then into the ideal mix of life and theory in Aristotle as a reflective desire,<sup>10</sup> until the great thinkers of modernity. The difference is that the latter are gradually downgrading the regulatory or incentive framework of “living well” (εὖ ζῆν) keeping the debate about self-care as an art that neither follows an exact method nor obeys strict rules.

In this perspective it is accepted that a virtuous human life cannot be defined in advance since there is not a common, optimal life-standard for all. Thus, even if ancient societies could agree on common ethical frameworks and typical patterns of life - and to a certain extent impose them - in modernity, on the contrary, people are describing and following an *aesthetic* dimension of life based on a narration of their biography as the analogy of an artistic creation.<sup>11</sup> And in art, even if there are some standard or universal models and values, the criteria for what is beautiful, successful, good, new, correct, unique, important etc. etc. are becoming much more free, unstable and open.

Furthermore Nehamas, using the example of platonic Socrates, implies that things were open from the very start and never clearly defined.<sup>12</sup> He also emphasizes that just as in art, success is directly related to self-care since originality, authenticity, uniqueness etc. are concepts that are related *only* within the framework of a strictly personal course. That is why, when we talk about art, the theoretical ‘recipe’ does not pre-exist but it is always determined afterwards.

In order to relate the above to our case, we would say that the concern for an architect’s biography is justified to the extent that it can describe, *in retrospect*, some kind of theory. While the criteria of great architecture are not written somewhere in order for someone to read and follow, narrating the life of an important person comes to justify the unquestionable value and success of his extraordinary work.

What is interesting in Le Corbusier’s case is that the man himself stated this link between his life and his work from the very start. The ways in which he dramatized events in his life, told his experiences, recorded documents, published opinions, justified his choices, rewrote his story etc. all these defined a re-construction of his own life, a “technology of the self”, to quote Michel Foucault.<sup>13</sup> That’s why many historians and theorists have written about how, in Le Corbusier’s case, this parallel construction of his life and his work was entirely conscious and targeted.

As a matter of fact, the famous architect never did he hide his ‘secret’ from the young architects who would like to follow a similar path. In his well-known booklet titled *Entretien* one reads:

One day, some young students from the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris asked me to open a studio. I declined their request. “Well then, give us some words of advice” [...] Some years have passed. With great insistence, some students of the Beaux-Arts once again appealed to me to start a Corbusier workshop. “Thank you, dear young friends, but I must say no. What should I teach? A philosophy of life?”<sup>14</sup>

The “philosophy of life”. That was the only lesson in architecture that Le Corbusier could teach. But could he really teach this lesson? And what exactly were to teach? Can the philosophy of life be taught? Le Corbusier

was rather doubtful and left the question floating unanswered. However, he insisted. He criticized any kind of teaching that was supposed to guide architectural creation but had still not managed to approach its essential core. And it had not accomplished it because it had not realized what was the original creation that preceded every other creation:

Teaching in this country has hardly inspired you to devote yourselves to the creative struggle or to the constant battle with yourselves.<sup>15</sup>

This is how we get back to the self-care, the construction of the self, the Corbusian “philosophy of life” that was identified as a “constant battle”, as a “creative struggle” with oneself. It is in this struggle, that young architects should focus before they - and in order to - become creative architects. In addition, Le Corbusier had defined early enough architecture as a “pure creation of the mind”, setting the mind as the foundation of architecture that desires to become Art.<sup>16</sup> But what did that mean and why was this accessible only to those who had succeeded in winning the battle with themselves?

Nehamas would tell us not to look for something more tangible because, anyway, when we talk about the art of living and the care of the self, there is no recipe. And he would also remind us that a person like Socrates could be a reference, even if neither he nor anyone else could describe the pattern of (his) good life. Who would expect, anyway, that someone like Socrates who had started his career from architecture (his actual profession was a stonemason)<sup>17</sup> would end up being a great philosopher?

### **Wie man wird, was man ist<sup>18</sup>**

It is well known that the myth of *Oedipus* existed long before Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles, already since the Homeric Era. And, of course, it continued its course in history, through various readings, interpretations and variations: the Oedipus by Aristotle, Ovid, Seneca, Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, Cocteau, Pasolini, Ricoeur and many, many others. In my narration, which I presented at the beginning, one meets again all the basic motifs of the myth to the extent that an indirect identification with Le Corbusier’s biography seems easy.

Another variation of the myth, Corbusian this time, is legitimate at the moment we isolate the common reference to self-care, to the delphic “know thyself”, and we read the myth as the analogous of a “promenade architecturale”,<sup>19</sup> as an evolutionary journey of self-knowledge.<sup>20</sup> Having this in mind, as well as the reconstruction of Oedipus myth by Sigmund Freud,<sup>21</sup> we may argue that in the case of Jeannerex the conflict with the father had its analogue to the conflict with the established architectural history while the desire to union with the mother was transformed - following the psychoanalytical process of sublimation - in a new (modern) architecture both as an artistic activity as well as an intellectual search. As for his blindness, this had happened already during a real, psychic, battle against the Parthenon, the reverent ‘father’ of western architecture. And, as in Sophocles, here too, the ignorance of truth can be complete even if the eyes are open, while the knowledge can be terrifying even if the eyes do not see.<sup>22</sup>

According to one of Le Corbusier’s intellectual heroes, Friedrich Nietzsche, the model of the creative person was clearly the artistic genius.<sup>23</sup> The artists were really creative personalities, the most important ones<sup>24</sup> or, conversely, only truly great personalities could become great artists.<sup>25</sup> Jeannerex’s narration becomes thus instructive while at the same time it remains inaccessible; instructive because it offers an example to imitate

but inaccessible because the example it offers (the narration of the person's life) is an example impossible for someone to copy.

At the same time narration is used as a means to transcend the objective foundations and limits of architectural creation in order to further establish a social distinction; a distinction (in Bourdieuan terms) between the architects and the Architect. Recent films about the life and work of important figures such as Louis Kahn, Rem Koolhaas and Bjarke Ingels are nothing but contemporary efforts to narrate a unique biography and at the same time rhetorical constructions used in the framework of a persuasion strategy.<sup>26</sup> Although there is always a certain tendency to present their architects-protagonists as normal persons with typical human inclinations, fixations, or passions, these narrative documentaries cannot but communicate the message of their architect's uniqueness. In fact, the more 'normal' these architect-professionals seem the more distanced, as architects-models, become since it is impossible for someone to explain how or why someone who is 'just-one-of-us' can, at the same time, stand out as someone unusual, famous and exceptional.<sup>27</sup>

This is, in short, the moral of all these narratives: the person actually matters more than the project. Architecture's value, impact and command are related to the creation of the architect as a person as much as - if not more than - architectural creation itself. That is why the creative project is always built on the scaffolding of an exemplary life; exemplary not in a moral sense but in the aesthetic sense of the care for the self. But what does this exactly mean, this is something that each and every one of us will have to find out on his own.

Investigating the uses of narration in relation to the architect's personal biography allows for a critical stance towards architecture's foundation, identity and context. This is the only way for us to solve the paradoxical enigma: if you want to become like me do not try to imitate me.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Nehamas, Alexander. *The Art of Living, Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> The change of the name is indicative as the first step towards the construction of a (new) self. For an interpretative approach to the micro-history of Le Corbusier's *Voyage d' Orient* see: Tsiambaos, Kostas. "Après l'écrasement: d'Eleusis à Delphes" in *L'invention d'un architecte. Le voyage en Orient de Le Corbusier*, Paris: Fondation Le Corbusier-Éditions de la Villette, 2013, pp. 340-351.

<sup>3</sup> I am referring to the painting titled *La Cheminée*. See: Iuliano, Marco. "Montage d'Orient" in *L'invention d'un architecte*, op.cit. pp. 414-423.

<sup>4</sup> On the question of authenticity in works of art see: Goodman, Nelson. *Languages of Art, an Approach to a Theory of Symbols*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968, pp. 99-123.

<sup>5</sup> See: Baker, Geoffrey H.. *Le Corbusier, the Creative Search: The Formative Years of Charles-Edouard Jeanneret*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, London: E & F N Spon, 1996, Brooks, H. Allen. *Le Corbusier's Formative Years, Charles-Edouard Jeanneret at La Chaux-de-Fonds*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997, von Moos, S. and Rüegg, Arthur (eds.). *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002, and Richards, Simon. *Le Corbusier and the Concept of Self*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Le Corbusier. *Entretien avec les étudiants des écoles d'architecture*. Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1943.

<sup>7</sup> Nehamas, op.cit.

<sup>8</sup> Φέρε δὴ, τί ἐστὶν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι - μὴ πολλάκις λάθωμεν οὐχ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ἐπιμελούμενοι, οἰόμενοι δέ - καὶ πότε ἄρα αὐτὸ ποιεῖ ἄνθρωπος; Ἄρ' ὅταν τῶν αὐτοῦ

ἐπιμελῆται, τότε καὶ αὐτοῦ; Plato. *Alcibiades A'*, 128a.

<sup>9</sup> Ψυχὴν ἄρα ἡμᾶς κελεύει γνωρίσαι ὁ ἐπιτάττων γυνὼνα ἑαυτὸν. Plato. *Alcibiades A'*, 130e.

<sup>10</sup> For Aristotle living-well is related to a reflective gaze on life, a constant asking about its meaning. See: Hughes, Gerard J.. *The Routledge Guidebook to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. London: Routledge, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> "On the Philosophical Life, An Interview with Alexander Nehamas". *The Harvard Review of Philosophy*, vol. VIII, 2000, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> Martin, L. H., Gutman, H. and P. H. Hutton (eds.). *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

<sup>14</sup> In Le Corbusier's *Entretien*. I am using the 1961 English translation by Pierre Chase as published in *Le Corbusier Talks with Students, from the schools of architecture*. New York: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> For Aristotle whether someone is a good architect is determined by the kind of houses he builds. But the point of the good life just is the living of it. In Gerard, *op.cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>17</sup> Socrates followed the profession of his father, Sofroniskos, according to Porphyry but also according to Diogenes Laertios. Pausanias even conveyed to us that in Propylaea there was a marble relief, which Socrates had said to have been made. "You are a sculptor, Socrates, and have made statues of our governors faultless in beauty" (quoted in Plato's *Republic*, Book 7).

<sup>18</sup> From Friedrich Nietzsche's last book titled *Ecce Homo, Wie man wird, was man ist*.

<sup>19</sup> As in Le Corbusier's promenade architecturale.

<sup>20</sup> See: Segal, Charles. *Oedipus Tyrannus: Tragic Heroism and the Limits of Knowledge*. New York: Twayne Publishers (Macmillan), 1993 and Dawe, R. D.. *Sophocles. Oedipus Rex*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> The phrase: ὃς τὰ κλεῖν' αἰνίγματ' ἤδει καὶ κράτιστος ἦν ἀνὴρ (Who knew the famous riddles and was a man most masterful) from Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* was written in Sigmund Freud's ex libris according to Ernest Jones. The design of this ex libris stamp, depicting Oedipus against the Sphinx, was designed for Freud by the Viennese Bertold Löffler in 1901. See: Pichler, Gerd. "Bertold Löffler's Bookplate for Sigmund Freud". *Psychoanalysis and History*, vol. 12, issue 1, January 2010, pp. 7-14.

<sup>22</sup> Le Corbusier's phrase "Des yeux qui ne voient pas" describes a similar, Oedipean mechanism: eyes wide open can be also blind when they cannot 'see' (understand) the 'real' architecture.

<sup>23</sup> One of young Jeanneret's favorite books was an edition of *Ansi parlait Zarathoustra* (Thus Spoke Zarathustra) translated by Henri Albert. See: Brooks, *op.cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>24</sup> Leiter, Brian. *Nietzsche and Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, chapter 9.

<sup>25</sup> This admiration for artists and all those elements who can express through their art can be found, similarly, in Freud.

<sup>26</sup> I am thinking of Nathaniel Kahn's *My Architect* (2003), Tomas Koolhaas's *Rem* (2016), and Kaspar Astrup Schröder's *Big Time* (2017). The fact that some of these films were directed by the sons of the famous architects sets an undoubtedly Oedipean (albeit unresolved?) framework.

<sup>27</sup> Such a postmodern narration usually avoids a critical view on the evolution and promotion of the protagonist as a internationally recognized professional. At the same time the typical representations of a 'hero' or a 'genius' cannot but keep emerging. It is characteristic that in the recent film *Big Time*, the narration of Bjarke Ingels's life and work follows such a typical heroic-Oedipean structure: a. the first years (his family / Bjarke as a child) b. the challenge - threat (going to the US / threatening headaches) c. the victory (success at the US / overcoming the health problem) d. the woman - marriage (he finally finds his significant other / he will make his own family).

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Paolo Strina  
**The linear city and its architecture**

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Author: *Enrico Prandi*  
 Title: *L'architettura della città lineare*  
 Text language: *italian*  
 Publisher: *FrancoAngeli, Milan*  
 Characteristics: *dimension 23x15.5 cm, 431 pages, paperback, b/w*  
 ISBN: *978-88-917-5003-7*  
 Year: *2016*

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“Nothing, my dear Watson, is so fantastic as reality!”<sup>1</sup>

Can utopia become reality?

This appears to be the guiding question of Enrico Prandi in his “atlas” entitled “The architecture of the linear city”, published by Franco Angeli. A sort of “apology of the line”.

The “utopian” text - in the sense of eu-topos, the place of happiness - aims at the apex of the state of the art on applied research to a phenomenal topic, still confined to the realm of utopia, launched since the end of the 800 and perhaps never really ended. Starting from the results achieved by George R. Collins, still considered today the “largest (and almost unique) historical of linear planning”, the author assumes as a field of investigation, a vast series of examples that animated an architectural imaginary projected towards new social and urban paradigms. The very rich miscellany of linear city projects presented in the book is described and cataloged according to new interpretative-analytical categories. The methodological approach to the theme, by the author, is rooted in the tradition of studies on architecture and the city, of which “The architecture of the city” by Aldo Rossi is manifest. Linear cities, intended as sets of minimal elements that configure continuous-growth settlements, are investigated by Enrico Prandi in an almost anatomical way, with continuous leaps of scale that allow the real understanding of these complex organisms in constant dialectic between architecture, city and territory.

At the base of these experiments, there was an ethical, moral and practical dream.

Rationalize the use of the territory, welcoming the advent of the prophesied “city of networks”, through the experimentation of new urban modular models based on the road as “backbone”. This is the synthesized thought of Soria y Mata, a republican with philosophical skills, the inventor of the linear city typology inhabited by “linear citizens”. According to Prandi, linear cities represent the last bastion of sustainable urban planning, because it is still based on the anthropocentric concept of “ideal city”, which pursues an order that is even more mental than spatial.

The index, accompanied by a synoptic table very useful for the reader to frame the theoretical palimpsest of the book, transforms the above-mentio-

ned interpretative categories identified by the author into chapters.

The structure of the publication can be metaphorically understood as a space-time journey between the evolutionary thresholds of the urban model in question. We start from the origins triggered by a vision confined between utopia and ideal cities, and we arrive at the demonstration of the almost physiological advent of the contemporary “natural linear cities”, real polycentric territorial systems innervated by the infrastructure (Città Emilia, Roadtown ER, FO-CE, Adriati-città, NOMARE, Hyper Adriatica, Future GRA). Extreme ratio, are two contemporary examples of linear city projects, demonstrating the fact that research on the theme of linearism has never really ended: the North-West Director of Milan, by Guido Canella (1993) and VE\_MA of Franco Purini (2006).

The Ciudad Lineal by Arturo Soria y Mata (1882) and the Cité Linéaire Belge by Gonzalez del Castillo (1919) referable to the Kandinsky triptych “dot, line, surface”, represent the prototypes of the linear city, developed then in the world in the coming years. The two geo-political rivals America and the Soviet Union had considerable importance. The first, territory of large abandoned spaces, protagonists of Blake’s “God’s own junkyard”, is the canvas of Wright’s organic formations (Broadacre City), of the sociological findings of Richard Neutra, translated into his “running city” (Rush City) ) and of the first experiments of Ville Radieuse by Le Corbusier of 1933 with its “three human settlements” in the systemic logic of a “great urban assembly line”. From the linear city we passed to the experiments of the “linear metropolis” of Reginald Malcomson. Hence, the project by Michael Graves and Peter Eisenmann of the Jersey Corridor which anticipates the concept of “Bigness, or the problem of large size” (R. Koolhaas) and which sets out the principle of “cluster point”. The Soviet Union, always anti-capitalist, puts man at the center of linearist experimentations. Le Corbusier himself was a great supporter of the USSR as fertile context for an urban revolution. The models of socialist linear cities, from the projects for Miljutin and Leonidov’s Magnitogorsk, to the Green City of Ginzburg and Barsc, are the emblem of a community vision of urban settlement on a human scale, in part analogous to the principles of the “city humanized” by Lluís Sert.

Europe also played a fundamental role in the development of the linear urban model; the region became the application area of linear cities in constant tension between small and large scale as expressed by Ludwig Hilberseimer. His vertical city, whose atmosphere that transpires from the drawings is worthy of a scene of Inception so that the same author compares it to a necropolis, goes in the sense of regionalization. A key passage in the book is the analysis of linearity in the expansion plans of the built city, starting from Plan Obus with the concept of “fifth façade” and of Plan Voison, both of Le Corbusier. The Great London Plan, signed by the collective MARS (Modern Architectural Research Group), promoters of modern architecture through the dissemination of matter, assumes the typical linearity of the socialist approach as a directrix of the urban expansion of the city of London set on “contact theory”. This vision, abandoned because it was considered too radical, was initially supported by the Architectural Review magazine.

The realm of utopia comes to interface with the built city.

The analysis of the historical episodes of interaction of the linear city project with the constructed matter of the consolidated city, is a fundamental step of the book towards the answer to the initial guide question.

The twentieth century is assumed by the author as a season of great urban transformations. The practice of building substitution and the reconstruction of significant parts of the city starts. Linearity is forcefully imposed as a refounding matrix through the insertion of real prostheses in the existing, and no longer just conjunctions between full and full. Derived articulated patterns composed of interconnected architectural elements according to lines of force, within urban fabrics. Examples of this remodeling of the built are the project for Market Street East by L. Kahn and Unter Der Linden by Van Eesteren for Berlin. In both cases, the design choices are dictated by the predominant advent of the machine as the main means of transport. The parking lot was therefore seen as a potential destructive element of the urban order. Kahn, for Philadelphia, inflicts the theme of parking to pursue the exact opposite with his linear regenerative strategy. The Philadelphia reimagined by Kahn is, therefore, a city able to defend itself from the car, in analogy with the medieval fortified cities for reasons of a completely different kind, through intermodal exchange points called “docks”.

The author, in the practice of inserting linear devices (prosthetics) in the existing building, analyzes in parallel to the professional experiments, the academic ones. The Urban Renewal, a movement born from laboratory realities within the four American university landmarks (Princeton University, Cornell University, Columbia University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology), immediately confronted the issue of Harlem-Manhattan regeneration. The area was divided into four project areas with a wide linear extension and each of them was entrusted to one of the university working groups. The outcomes led by group leaders, including Peter Eisenmann, Michael Graves and Colin Row, are evidently mindful of the linear city models of Chambless (Road Town) and Le Corbusier (Algiers and Rio). Another example of a linear prosthesis inside the building was the LOMEX (Lower Manhattan EXpress) by Paul Rudolph. This is a linear city that transports all the infrastructure of the peninsula of Manhattan to the hypogeum level, bringing out from the country floor, highly monumental pyramid elements, assembled in order to create an urban corridor and containing the various typical functions of its own functional mixité of the great experimental “vectors” of the period. The idea behind LOMEX flows into that utopian territory, defined by the author “Manhattismo”, then denounced by “Delirius New York” by R. Koolhaas.

The linear city then became the type adopted in the experiments of the so-called “Ecocittà”.

Projects born as an alternative to the chaos of contemporary cities from which some of the designers themselves escaped. Paolo Soleri above all, found refuge in the context of his training as an architect, the Arizona desert. Right here, in Arcosanti, a self-built city of foundation with the help of a changing community set up specifically on site, he carried forward the ideas of his Mesa City and Lean Linear Arcology.

Less radical in the choices of life but not in the ideas of the city, were Marcello D’Olivo with his Eco-Town and Luigi Pellegrin with its “habitats” made up of vectors composed of neo-lines and neo-mounds.

According to the writer, the maximum level of utopia dealt with in the book is that of “megastructures”. 1964 was the “mega-year” of megastructures’ maximum production of megastructures (E. Prandi). Kenzo Tange, Alan Boutwell and Mike Mitchell, Yona Friedman, Superstudio, Archigram, Archizoom, OMA; all struggling with the collage technique to create new fantastic cities suspended and superimposed on the old, almost

denying them.

A dense book, straddling historiography, architectural and urban composition, which answers the initial question, despite the demonstration of the advent of contemporary natural linear cities, thus: “Perhaps the most interesting aspect (of linearist experience) is constituted by the “not feasible”, that is from those visionary prefigurations that, anticipating the future, stimulate the cultural debate. The value of these proposals resides on the scientific-figurative level rather than on the technical-practical one. [What Giorgio Grassi writes about the Tange Plan for Tokyo can generally be applied to multiple proliferated solutions (...). The study of Tange has value (...) as research, where the concrete result is necessarily partial, where the synthesis is valid as a deepening of the topics contained (...); if it is usable or not I do not think it has (...) importance.]” (G. Grassi, 1961).

### Notes

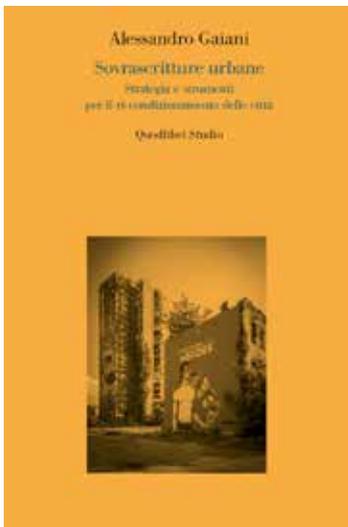
<sup>1</sup> Title extracted from the beginning of the Peter Assmann lecture, in occasion of the “Paradisi immaginari” exhibition in the Polytechnic of Milan, headquarter of Mantua. Assmann introduced the lecture by an extract of Sharlock Holmes adventures: “Nothing, my dear Watson, is so fantastic as reality!”.

Francesco Pasquale  
**The grammar of urban over-writing**

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Author: Alessandro Gaiani  
 Title: *Sovrascritture urbane.*  
 Subtitle: *Strategia e strumenti per il ri-condizionamento delle città*  
 Series: *Città e paesaggio. Saggi*  
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The conciseness of this essay by Alessandro Gaiani should not trick the reader about its extent. Contrary to a trend of highly specialised skills and knowledge, the author gives an holistic vision for understanding and operating in contemporary urban realm. The ability of summarize complex dynamics in effective syntesis lays in the research of the essential elements of the anthropic processes and starts from the title “Urban Over-writing” as premonition of new semantic paradigm both for theory and practice, due to global strategies together with a variety of tools for local applications.

The precondition is the awareness of the historical change we are going through, with the implosion of most of the social, financial and technological systems that ruled the 20th Century. The need of a redefinition of the role of design is described as urgent, but not to be based only on new tools and technologies – like digital above all. It should be defined instead according with the local heritage, as material and cultural legacy given by the context. On this mean the author offers a solid argumentation with his perspective on the evolution of the design from modern to now, going through the main publications and exhibitions of the last century. That paints the realistic framework where to operate for a contemporary design.

As the starting point is identified in the failure of a linear model tending to an infinite growth, the next step figures a circular system where the resources are balaced between natural and anthropic demand, against a blind consumerism, but yet open to provide a sustainable development of society. This approach reminds the theories that William McDonough express in *From Cradle to Cradle*, even in that diagram where the symbol of “plus infinite” re-shapes in a double closed circular system.

The design can operate in many ways for this purpose: first of all by being a transparent process, open to multiple issues, instead of a protocol for authorised personnel only, following a bottom-up principle to legitimate urban transformations. Then is inevitable to operate on the existing fabric, starting from the urban brownfields, in order to preserve the amount of permeable soil of the planet. Over-writing on the existing heritage with new architectures will create an original palimpsest, where to have a diachronic reading of the evolution of the city. From this point of view, Italy would represent a perfect training field for experimentation due to its history and complexity. The methodology on the micro-scale is based on continuous

hybridations, which define mutations both in functional and – consequently – formal meanings of the places.

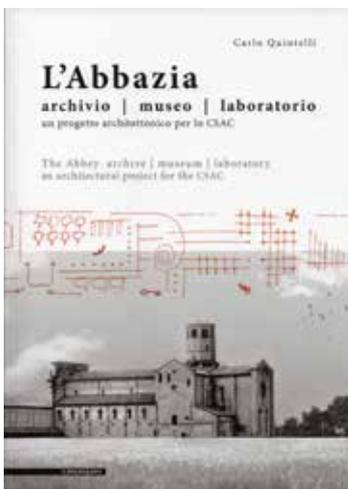
The greater value recognized to the process with which a place is conceived, considering the shape as the result instead of the generator, challenges the designers to research new poetics, in order to avoid that “new realism will be translated in new functionalism”, as Franco Purini states in the foreword of the book. The constant reference to the discipline of language works again in understanding the way shown by Alessandro Gaiani, which has groundworks in the education of the designers in reading the context, so to write – or better over-write – their own text with an innovative, but yet not arbitrary grammar.

Lamberto Amistadi  
**The possible community: a project for the CSAC of Parma**

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Author: *Carlo Quintelli*  
 Title: *The Abbey, Archive | Museum | Workshop, an architectural project for the CSAC*  
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Carlo Quintelli makes things clear right from the title *The Abbey, Archive | Museum | Workshop* and the citation of Tolstoy that catches the eye under a fine photograph of the Abbey of Valsereina: “People understand the meaning of art only when they cease to consider that the aim of that activity is beauty.” And, in fact, this releases the museological and display project for the CSAC Study Centre and Communication Archive of the University of Parma from any overly facile and reassuring aesthetic and contemplative temptation. In reality, the more than 200 pages of this volume, throughout which the tale of the architectural project for the archive-museum-workshop unravels – from the genealogy of the abbey type to the definition of a complex functional programme – point elsewhere and higher up: to try and understand the role of art in society, the role of architecture for art, i.e. the possibility of preparing a sophisticated space-functional device that can put the visitor in the condition to assume an active and informed role in respect of the artworks. And, generally speaking, is it possible through a marriage of art and architecture to contribute to some extent to reactivating individual awareness, its rational and emotional component, and, by and large, to return the individual to the role of an informed and responsible citizen?

Quintelli is well aware of the difficulty of this problem and in the volume there is no lack of references to the contemporary “human condition” in the accounts of sociologists and anthropologists, in a tight clasp between existential solitude and the illusions of simulacra. It is no coincidence that he speaks of “r-existential leaning”, which “tends to return under a certain logical, selective, and reflexive control, the kaleidoscopic inflation of the aesthetic offer and the syndromes that accompany it (...)”<sup>1</sup>. But perhaps the point consists precisely in this: to build a counter-narration in which a pretext – sometimes one has the feeling, reading the book, that the CSAC project is nothing but a pretext – becomes an occasion to hope, like Gramsci (i.e. under the responsibility of doing), in the possibility of reproducing those seeds of rationality and amazement that nurture the most authentic experiences of life. From this point of view, the architectural project for the CSAC represents the construction or invention of a happy experience, in which the abbey lends its body to the exposition-production of a material whose semantic-figurative density seems able to re-activa-

te the critical capacity of its visitors, “involving them in a mechanism of understanding and thus of participation within a spatiality rich in spatial stimuli, symbols, and imagery, along a path that is not unique but well determined in its being formalized and decipherable”<sup>2</sup> while re-producing the spiritual riches of the ancient Cistercian community. Because, by developing the terms of the discourse further – it is the book that demands this, its structure presented as a thematic concatenation for subsequent insights – the vexation on which to base our counter-narrative consists in a reaction to Bataille’s acquiescence on the impossibility of bringing life to any community whatsoever or at least to a community that survives itself and does not end with conscious annulment in death. For an instant, Bataille saw the possibility of a “community of readers”, whose members share a text that “exposes itself” (sacrifices itself) to reading and interpretation. Franco Basaglia<sup>3</sup> – from whom we borrowed the title of this review – relates his “possible community” to a “therapeutic community” that replaces an agglomerate of invalids, a community based on interpersonal comparison and communication. These references are not so foreign to our discourse if we consider the heterogeneity with which the ancient Cistercian community welcomed and hosted both scholars dedicated to interpreting texts and pilgrims in need of spiritual and corporal comfort, and just how many contemporary anthropologists and artists (I cannot help thinking of John Hejduk) have matched the theme of education with that of care. Or even – to respond to the concerns on the grip of the relationship between the city and democracy expressed in the last book by Carlo Olmo<sup>4</sup> – if the citation of Munford that Quintelli mentions is true, namely, the fact that to some extent the monastic communities also cared for the cities, acting as an incubator to identify and renew ideal objectives<sup>5</sup>. Because the community Quintelli is thinking of, as a university professor and lecturer, is one devoted to the study and exegesis of the works of art preserved at the CSAC, but also to make workshop activities “come alive”, to obtain “unexpected new meanings with respect to the works, the authors, and the historical contexts.”<sup>6</sup>, ultimately, one cannot escape the romantic imperative of the “education of man” – to quote Fröbel and the humanistic-phenomenological dimension of German Idealism. And Quintelli lets this be understood quite clearly, appealing to the idea of a “university community”, a sort of “humanistic technopole” on the example of the Bauhaus and in the end invoking Arnheim in defining an expressly pedagogical perspective: “To try to answer this question the project adopts the point of view of Rudolf Arnheim when, in his treatise with its eloquent title visual thinking, he says that “Once it is recognized that productive thinking in any area of cognition is perceptual thinking, the central function of art in general education will become evident.”<sup>7</sup>

Like the project for the CSAC, also Quintelli’s volume “works” or “enters-into-action” – to recall some “Poleselli-style” references of the book – at different levels, elaborating the discourse through successive insights grafted onto the main structure of the text, in a continuous game of correspondences between the project and the book: the chapter entitled “The spatial-functional device of the archive - museum - workshop” is thought of as the screenplay of a film, according to which a long sequence of planes articulate the narrative device from the arrival at the Abbey Museum (1) to its projection in the sweeping plain of the surrounding countryside (Museum 9), passing through the Sculpture Court (Museum 2), hallways, diaphragms, joints, cloisters, “the great workshop of the Church” (Mu-

seum 8), A game of targets and crossings that are repeated at different scales, between the chapels and the church as between the Abbey and the landscape; the structure of the text resembles a little those devices of medieval mnemonics that suggested establishing a correspondence between a real work of architecture and the book whose content you wished to remember. In our case, within the general discourse, what open up, like lateral chapels, are some long thematic excursions (the Cistercian community, the abbey type, the contemporary art museum), which articulate the story through sub-plots that assume the density of monographic research; between the nature of the community life and that of the archive-museum-workshop a game of mirrors and allusions is established, where the meanings chase one another analogically according to three key concepts: searching, producing, the community (see the chapter “Reproducibility of the abbatial project”).

And finally, in the game of recursion which we have mentioned, the book tells of a project conceived as a story, i.e. serving to recount the works exhibited, each in turn the bearer of a particular story. Because ultimately Quintelli is right when, “Bataille-style”, he says that, “the first object to exhibit [*donate or sacrifice*]<sup>8</sup> is in fact the CSAC itself, the story of an idea and a process from the origins to the present day throughout its historical evolution.”<sup>9</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> C. Quintelli, *Abbey archive | Museum | Workshop, an architectural project for the CSAC*, Il Poligrafo, Padua, 2018, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., P. 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Franco Basaglia: la comunità possibile*. Acts of the 1st International Conference on Mental Health (Trieste, 20-24 September 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. C. Olmo, *Città e democrazia, per una critica delle parole e delle cose*, Donzelli editore, Rome 2018.

<sup>5</sup> See C. Quintelli, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., P. 51.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., P. 124.

<sup>8</sup> Parenthesis added by the author of the review.

<sup>9</sup> C. Quintelli, op. cit., p. 168.

