

51

'Play' and 'Assembly' in the teaching and in composition

Elvio Manganaro
Tommaso Brighenti

Play and Assembly
Just playing, but seriously

Gianluca Maestri
Francesco Zucconi
Antonella Sbrilli
Laura Scala
Cosimo Monteleone
Amra Salihbegovic
Elvio Manganaro
Tamar Zinguer

Notes on the semantics of play
Assemblage and anatopism according to Jean-Luc Godard
Seven notes on toy boxes, artists and art history
Malevič's *Victory Over the Sun*: the Dissolution of Reality
Frank Lloyd Wright and the play with geometric abstraction
Apologia for an Architecture of Play
"Montage, mon beau souci"
The Infancy of the *Sandbox*

Enrico Bordogna
Giuseppe Tupputi

Il ragazzo dello IUAV
The metropolitan architectures of Paulo Mendes da Rocha. Between spatial
conception and structural design

Giuseppe Verterame

Living the space through archetypes. Readings of the works of Kahn and Mies



**Magazine del Festival
dell'Architettura**

ricerche e progetti
sull'architettura e la città

research and projects on
architecture and the city

FAMagazine. Ricerche e progetti sull'architettura e la città

Editore: Festival Architettura Edizioni, Parma, Italia

ISSN: 2039-0491

Segreteria di redazione

c/o Università di Parma
Campus Scienze e Tecnologie
Via G. P. Usberti, 181/a
43124 - Parma (Italia)

Email: redazione@famagazine.it
www.famagazine.it

Editorial Team

Direzione

Enrico Prandi, (Direttore) Università di Parma

Lamberto Amistadi, (Vicedirettore) Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna

Redazione

Tommaso Brighenti, (Caporedattore) Politecnico di Milano, Italia

Ildebrando Clemente, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna, Italia

Gentucca Canella, Politecnico di Torino, Italia

Renato Capozzi, Università degli Studi di Napoli "Federico II", Italia

Carlo Gandolfi, Università di Parma, Italia

Maria João Matos, Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias, Portogallo

Elvio Manganaro, Politecnico di Milano, Italia

Mauro Marzo, Università IUAV di Venezia, Italia

Claudia Pirina, Università IUAV di Venezia, Italia

Giuseppina Scavuzzo, Università degli Studi di Trieste, Italia

Corrispondenti

Miriam Bodino, Politecnico di Torino, Italia

Marco Bovati, Politecnico di Milano, Italia

Francesco Costanzo, Università della Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Italia

Francesco Defilippis, Politecnico di Bari, Italia

Massimo Faiferri, Università degli Studi di Sassari, Italia

Esther Giani, Università IUAV di Venezia, Italia

Martina Landsberger, Politecnico di Milano, Italia

Marco Lecis, Università degli Studi di Cagliari, Italia

Luciana Macaluso, Università degli Studi di Palermo, Italia

Dina Nencini, Sapienza Università di Roma, Italia

Luca Reale, Sapienza Università di Roma, Italia

Ludovico Romagni, Università di Camerino, Italia

Ugo Rossi, Università IUAV di Venezia, Italia

Marina Tornatora, Università Mediterranea di Reggio Calabria, Italia

Luís Urbano, FAUP, Universidade do Porto, Portogallo

Federica Visconti, Università degli Studi di Napoli "Federico II", Italia



**Magazine del Festival
dell'Architettura**

ricerche e progetti
sull'architettura e la città

research and projects on
architecture and the city

Comitato di indirizzo scientifico

Eduard Bru

Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Barcelona, Spagna

Orazio Carpenzano

Sapienza Università di Roma, Italia

Alberto Ferlenga

Università IUAV di Venezia, Italia

Manuel Navarro Gausa

IAAC, Barcellona / Università degli Studi di Genova, Italia, Spagna

Gino Malacarne

Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna, Italia

Paolo Mellano

Politecnico di Torino, Italia

Carlo Quintelli

Università di Parma, Italia

Maurizio Sabini

Hammons School of Architecture, Drury University, Stati Uniti d'America

Alberto Ustarroz

Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de San Sebastian, Spagna

Ilaria Valente

Politecnico di Milano, Italia

FAMagazine. Ricerche e progetti sull'architettura e la città è la rivista on-line del [Festival dell'Architettura](#) a temporalità trimestrale.

È una rivista scientifica nelle aree del progetto di architettura (Macrosettori Anvur 08/C1 design e progettazione tecnologica dell'architettura, 08/D1 progettazione architettonica, 08/E1 disegno, 08/E2 restauro e storia dell'architettura, 08/F1 pianificazione e progettazione urbanistica e territoriale) che pubblica articoli critici conformi alle indicazioni presenti nelle [Linee guida per gli Autori degli articoli](#).

FAMagazine, in ottemperanza al [Regolamento per la classificazione delle riviste nelle aree non bibliometriche](#), rispondendo a tutti i criteri sulla [Classificabilità delle riviste telematiche](#), è stata ritenuta rivista scientifica dall'ANVUR, Agenzia Nazionale per la Valutazione dell'Università e della Ricerca Scientifica ([Classificazione delle Riviste](#)).

FAMagazine ha adottato un [Codice Etico](#) ispirato al codice etico delle pubblicazioni, [Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors](#) elaborato dal [COPE - Committee on Publication Ethics](#).

Ad ogni articolo è attribuito un codice DOI (Digital Object Identifier) che ne permette l'indicizzazione nelle principali banche dati italiane e straniere come [DOAJ](#) (Directory of Open Access Journal) [ROAD](#) (Directory of Open Access Scholarly Resources) Web of Science di Thomson Reuters con il nuovo indice [ESCI](#) (Emerging Sources Citation Index) e [URBADOC](#) di Archinet. Dal 2018, inoltre, FAMagazine è indicizzata da Scopus.

Al fine della pubblicazione i contributi inviati in redazione vengono valutati con un procedimento di double blind peer review e le valutazioni dei referee comunicate in forma anonima al proponente. A tale scopo FAMagazine ha istituito un apposito [Albo dei revisori](#) che operano secondo specifiche [Linee guida per i Revisori degli articoli](#).

Gli articoli vanno caricati per via telematica secondo la procedura descritta nella sezione [Proposte online](#).

La rivista pubblica i suoi contenuti ad accesso aperto, seguendo la cosiddetta gold road ossia rendendo disponibili gli articoli sia in versione html che in pdf.

Dalla nascita (settembre 2010) al numero 42 dell'ottobre-dicembre 2017 gli articoli di FAMagazine sono pubblicati sul sito [www.festivalarchitettura.it](#) ([Archivio Magazine](#)). Dal gennaio 2018 la rivista è pubblicata sulla piattaforma OJS (Open Journal System) all'indirizzo [www.famagazine.it](#)

Gli autori mantengono i diritti sulla loro opera e cedono alla rivista il diritto di prima pubblicazione dell'opera, con [Licenza Creative Commons - Attribuzione](#) che permette ad altri di condividere l'opera indicando la paternità intellettuale e la prima pubblicazione su questa rivista.

Gli autori possono depositare l'opera in un archivio istituzionale, pubblicarla in una monografia, nel loro sito web, ecc. a patto di indicare che la prima pubblicazione è avvenuta su questa rivista (vedi [Informativa sui diritti](#)).

Linee guida per gli autori

FAMagazine esce con 4 numeri l'anno e tutti gli articoli, ad eccezione di quelli commissionati dalla Direzione a studiosi di chiara fama, sono sottoposti a procedura peer review mediante il sistema del doppio cieco.

Due numeri all'anno, dei quattro previsti, sono costruiti mediante call for papers che vengono annunciate di norma in primavera e autunno.

Le call for papers prevedono per gli autori la possibilità di scegliere tra due tipologie di saggi:

- a) saggi brevi compresi tra le 12.000 e le 14.000 battute (spazi inclusi), che verranno sottoposti direttamente alla procedura di double blind peer review;
- b) saggi lunghi maggiori di 20.000 battute (spazi inclusi) la cui procedura di revisione si articola in due fasi. La prima fase prevede l'invio di un abstract di 5.000 battute (spazi inclusi) di cui la Direzione valuterà la pertinenza rispetto al tema della call. Successivamente, gli autori degli abstract selezionati invieranno il full paper che verrà sottoposto alla procedura di double blind peer review.

Ai fini della valutazione, i saggi devono essere inviati in Italiano o in Inglese e dovrà essere inviata la traduzione nella seconda lingua al termine della procedura della valutazione.

In ogni caso, per entrambe le tipologie di saggio, la valutazione da parte degli esperti è preceduta da una valutazione minima da parte della Direzione e della Redazione. Questa si limita semplicemente a verificare che il lavoro proposto possieda i requisiti minimi necessari per una pubblicazione come FAMagazine.

Ricordiamo altresì che, analogamente a come avviene per tutti i giornali scientifici internazionali, il parere degli esperti è fondamentale ma ha carattere solo consultivo e l'editore non assume, ovviamente, alcun obbligo formale ad accettarne le conclusioni.

Oltre ai saggi sottoposti a peer review FAMagazine accetta anche proposte di recensioni (Saggi scientifici, Cataloghi di mostre, Atti di convegni, proceedings, ecc., Monografie, Raccolte di progetti, Libri sulla didattica, Ricerche di Dottorato, ecc.). Le recensioni non sono sottoposte a peer review e sono selezionate direttamente dalla Direzione della rivista che si riserva di accettarle o meno e la possibilità di suggerire delle eventuali migliorie.

Si consiglia agli autori di recensioni di leggere il documento [Linee guida per la recensione di testi](#).

Per la sottomissione di una proposta è necessario attenersi rigorosamente alle [Norme redazionali](#) di FAMagazine e sottoporre la proposta editoriale tramite l'apposito Template scaricabile da [questa pagina](#).

La procedura per la submission di articoli è illustrata alla pagina [PROPOSTE](#)

ARTICLES SUMMARY TABLE

51 January-March 2020.

'Play' and 'Assembly' in the teaching and in composition

| n. | Id Code | date | Type essay | | Evaluation |
|----|---------|--------|------------|-----|------------|
| 1 | 300 | set-19 | Long | Yes | Peer (A) |
| 2 | 301 | set-19 | Long | Yes | Peer (A) |
| 3 | 296 | ago-19 | Long | Yes | Peer (A) |

NEXT ISSUE

52 April-June 2020.

Coronavirus, City, Architecture.

Prospects of the architectural and urban design

**Conference and publication by Carlo Quintelli, Marco Maretto,
Enrico Prandi, Carlo Gandolfi**

The aim of this call is to solicit critical and proactive reflection on the part of architectural culture, and in particular that of architectural and urban design, on the phenomena triggered by the coronavirus pandemic which, as we write this text, sees us still in an emergency phase but with our sights set on a future regarding which a varied set of possible scenarios and perspectives is already developing. A contribution which, moreover, would like to attempt to compensate for the marginality of our active knowledge compared to others that today are much more strongly called upon to provide answers, not only for the immediate future, in the fields of bio-medicines and pharmacology, new technologies, economics and social behaviour. The coronavirus problem, or rather a set of phenomena which are the effect but also the cause of that problem, to be tackled more and more in a global perspective without forgetting to also find adequate answers in the local dimension, certainly involves aspects related and strongly incidental to habitation logics and living in built-up areas as well as to those of a social, environmental and climatic nature. The contribution of architectural and urban forms will therefore be of no little importance in contributing to providing an effective response to the pandemic problem, seen not only from a viral perspective. Even more so, if we are able to propose new or rediscovered models, of both a futuristic and a historical nature, through a process of circumstantial criticism of the neo-liberal dynamic of understanding the city and its architecture and in general regarding the entire territory in a delicate balance between anthropization and nature. It thus becomes a matter of understanding, researching and



**Magazine del Festival
dell'Architettura**

ricerche e progetti
sull'architettura e la città

research and projects on
architecture and the city

elaborating habitation strategies, flow modes, urban layouts and forms, new types from the dwelling unit to collective spaces and structures, according to a multiscale logic able to encourage the systematic nature of the project as a prerequisite for its strategic effectiveness, both with respect to the upcoming emergency and to an overall improvement of urban life within a (sole) reformed "normality".

51

'Play' and 'Assembly' in the teaching and in composition

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|------------|
| Elvio Manganaro | Play and Assembly | 9 |
| Tommaso Brighenti | Just playing, but seriously | 12 |
| Gianluca Maestri | Notes on the semantics of play | 23 |
| Francesco Zucconi | Assemblage and anatopism according to Jean-Luc Godard | 33 |
| Antonella Sbrilli | Seven notes on toy boxes, artists and art history | 42 |
| Laura Scala | Malevič's <i>Victory Over the Sun</i> : the Dissolution of Reality | 49 |
| Cosimo Monteleone | Frank Lloyd Wright and the play with geometric abstraction | 58 |
| Amra Salihbegovic | Apologia for an Architecture of Play | 67 |
| Elvio Manganaro | "Montage, mon beau souci" | 76 |
| Tamar Zinguer | The Infancy of the <i>Sandbox</i> | 88 |
| Enrico Bordogna | Il ragazzo dello IUAV | 103 |
| Giuseppe Tupputi | The metropolitan architectures of Paulo Mendes da Rocha. Between spatial conception and structural design | 107 |
| Giuseppe Verterame | Living the space through archetypes. Readings of the works of Kahn and Mies | 111 |

Abstract

The following text is the abstract sent to the authors last July. It was intended to illustrate the reasons for the magazine issue. It seemed to the editors of some use to propose it at the opening also to the readers.

Keywords

Play — Pedagogy — Didactics — Assembly

The desire for play, or the “play-drive”, is halfway between sensitivity and intellect, said Schiller.

It is a primarily aesthetic space that joins matter and form.

Between matter and form there has always been the game-of-art, the game of architecture.

Children impetuously take apart and reassemble the games that adults give them. Thus, through play, we take possession of the outside world, but also its estrangement in the construction of a new world, where the pieces of yesterday are reconnected in new and unpredictable ways.

This is the transformative action which expresses itself through play.

Benjamin wrote of these things when speaking of toys.

Now there are different types of play. Physical, requiring skill, of chance, or representational.

Here play is of interest as a combinatorial process, as the capacity for assembly: taking a doll apart to reassemble it in a different way.

A little like a game of skill, a little like one of representation. Nor is chance irrelevant. In the sense of the randomness that fuels every kind of play, which precedes its structure in a set of shared rules.

Therefore, play and assembly share the same transformative tension.

Therefore, play and assembly are opposed to the real.

Taking apart reality to reassemble it in a different way. This is what cinema has always done.

In addition, play and assembly invite us to succeed with little: with the pieces left over, with the residue of the world of adults. With the architecture of yesterday or the day before yesterday. That which the spirit of time has left behind. Those whom we cannot leave, out of too much love.

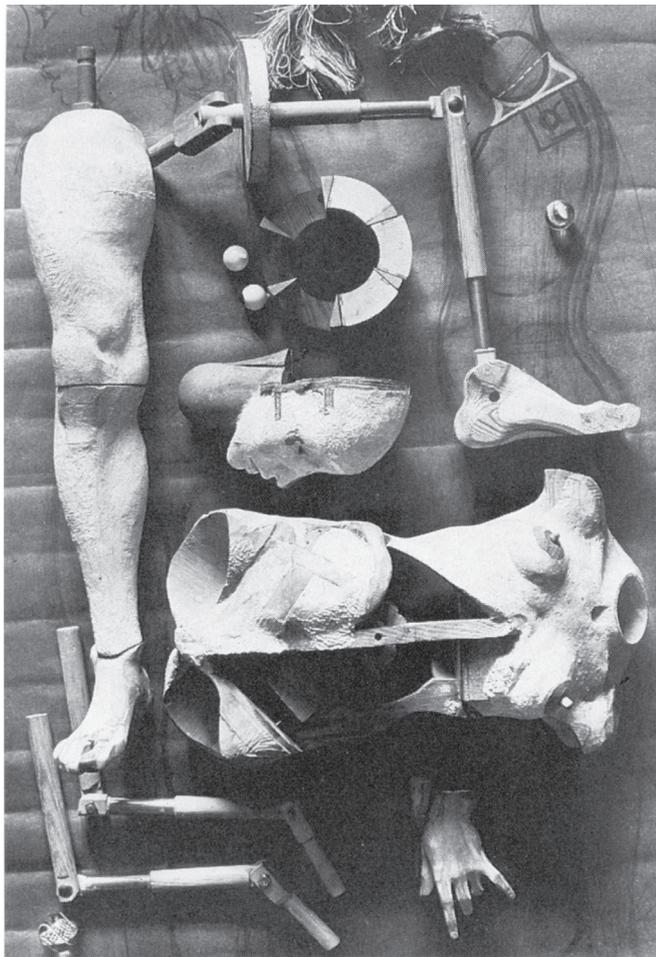


Fig. 2

Hans Bellmer, *Poupée: Variations sur le montage d'une mineure articulée*, from "Minotaure" 5, 1934.

Ultimately, this is a message of hope.

Shklovsky was not mistaken when he claimed that everything in life is the result of assembly.

If you want to understand what art is, start taking the doll apart.

It will be a story of errors, setbacks, and defeats. Attempts to reach the end of the maze of possibilities.

Only then will we have another doll.

Elvio Manganaro (Pavia, 1976), architect, in 2009 he obtained Ph.D. in Architectural Composition from the Politecnico di Milano, with a thesis about *Schools of Architecture*. Currently Researcher in Architectural and urban design at the Politecnico di Milano. Among the publications: *L'altra faccia della luna. Origini del neoliberty a Torino* (Melfi 2018); with A. Ronzino, *Corpo a corpo con un capo d'opera dell'architettura d'autore piemontese a mezzo dell'architettura d'autore piemontese / Hand-to-hand with a masterpiece of Piedmontese auteur architecture by means of Piedmontese auteur architecture* (Santarcangelo di Romagna 2018); *Warum Florenz? O delle ragioni dell'espressionismo di Michelucci, Ricci, Savioli e Dezzi Bardeschi* (Melfi 2016); *Scuole di architettura. Quattro saggi su Roma e Milano* (Milano 2015); *Funzione del concetto di tipologia edilizia in Italia* (Milano 2013).

Tommaso Brighenti
Just playing, but seriously

Abstract

Play and the game, the central themes of this issue of FAMagazine, bring together various fields of artistic knowledge to become a key to understanding their use in recomposing the multidimensional nature of knowledge and the world itself, able to oppose reality by presenting an alternative, while almost capable of assimilating certain aspects of the sacred. The game as a combinatorial process, as a capacity for assemblage like a montage, but also as an educational and pedagogical tool of knowledge and transformation of the world which ignores the conditions of reality since it spontaneously performs an abstraction.

The game, as such, has its own rules which determine what will happen inside the temporary world it delimits, rules which are absolutely mandatory and irrefutable but can be encoded and transmitted.

Keywords

Play — Assemblage — Composition — Rules

Friedrich Fröbel advised giving children a ball and a cube to spur their initial level of knowledge.

Experience came from manipulating objects, as unshakeable fundamentals. Spheres, cubes, triangles and cylinders were broken up into smaller bodies whose flat surfaces progressively attained autonomy by arranging themselves in combinations, juxtapositions, interweavings and spiral constructions with varying degrees of complexity «in the pedagogical intention to understand both the complexity and unity of the universe through the laws of the contrast and reconciliation of forms» (Semerani 2013, pp.111-112).

The objective of this particular game was knowledge of the compatibility between the various elements, and the learning took place through a sequence of steps involving the progressive delivery of boxes, each one containing an increasingly complex and advanced selection of forms and, given that each box delivered represented the achievement of a goal, it also constituted a prize, called a *gift*, which the teacher gave to the child. A gift because it was «an effect not yet of a market but of a free availability, inherent to both the nature of the world itself and to that of the human being, in short, the divine grace of being able to participate in the knowledge and transformation of the world» (Semerani 2013, pp.111-112).

Play is an activity inherent to human nature which has no outward end in itself and does not pursue a useful modification of the real world.

An activity which takes place in the real world, but also ignores its conditions since it spontaneously performs an abstraction¹.

It is not influenced by a specific rational goal but is an act in which sensibility and rationality coexist in the playful action, making humans free.

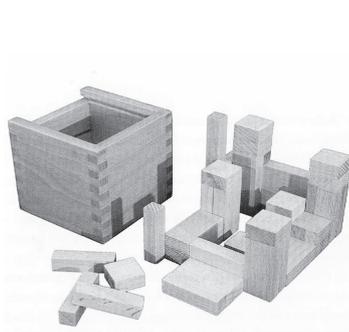
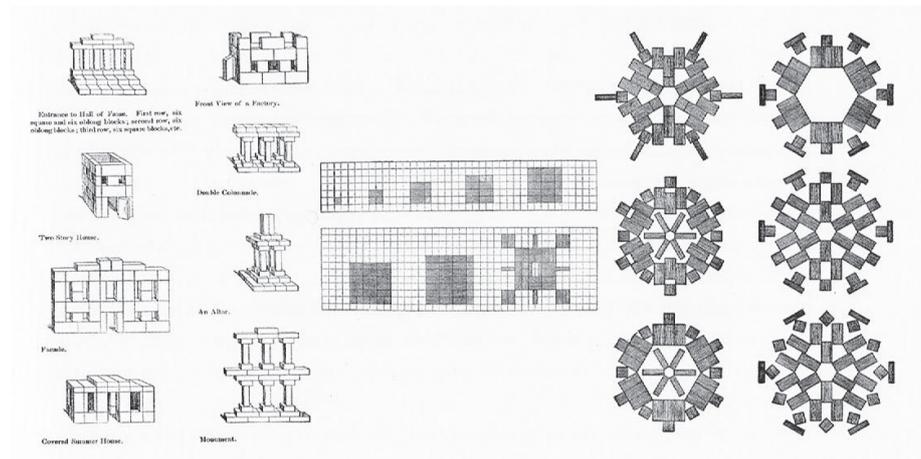


Fig. 1

Friedrich Fröbel: *Gift no. 6* and pedagogical table taken from Wiebè E., *Paradise of Childhood*.



In this harmony between form and matter, wrote Friedrich Schiller, we can realize beauty and human nature, so that «man is only completely a man when he plays»².

A game is therefore a simple form of art where «the contract on the aleatory (chance, luck or uncertain outcome) is only the formulation of an essential question on the relative perception of the moving; the pursuit of form is only a technical pursuit of time. The game is neither naïve nor funny». (Virilio 1992, p. 14)

A game is both form and structure.

Classing it as a “form” does not mean voiding it of its content:

«Conversely, the consistency of its structure and its internal objective imply a sense which is inherent to its form and is always alien to any practical aim. The game is produced from the very arbitrariness of the conditions which limit it and through which it reaches completion, by passing from one to the other; its essence lies entirely in the convention which regulates the game itself». (Benveniste 2018, p. 124).

A game requires an understanding of its parts and a continuous drive to make it work. It works on human thought «by breaking it up through the practice of creativity itself»³ and it accompanies and complements life in general: «it adorns life, amplifies it and is to that extent a necessity» (Huizinga 1973, p. 12) and, while remaining outside the process of immediate satisfaction of needs and desires, «it interpolates itself as a temporary activity satisfying in itself and ending there» (Huizinga 1973, p.12).

The game, as such, has its own rules which determine what will happen inside the temporary world it delimits, rules which are absolutely mandatory and irrefutable but can be encoded and transmitted.

Paul Valéry once commented that there is no room for scepticism where the rules of a game are concerned.

For all these reasons it is clear that between the game and architecture there is much more than a mere affinity, and that the knowledge and transformation of the world, cited by Semerani speaking of Fröbel's *gifts – Fröbelgaben*, are the basis of every architectural thought and must above all be the goal of every attempt at transmission by our discipline.

For this reason, in agreement with Elvio Manganaro, it was decided to deliberately extend this issue of FAMagazine to embrace other disciplines, demonstrating that between philosophy, art, theatre, cinema, and architecture there is an inseparable bond, and that the guiding thread, play or the game, may well be the point in common. A key to understanding useful to «rebuild the multidimensional nature of knowledge and the world itself»⁴.

Then there is a second aspect which is of greater interest to us as architects. The game as a combinatorial process, as a capacity for assemblage: «Taking a doll apart to reassemble it in a different way», hence a montage. Therefore, the game and assemblage share the same transformative tension.

The game and assemblage oppose reality by presenting an alternative, while almost being capable of assimilating certain aspects of the sacred⁵. In a world in which reality has been falsified and alienated by a swarm of media, and digital or other types of technology, in a period when we are experiencing the conclusion of a historical cycle and the beginning of an uncertain one, «teetering on a ridge» (Benedetti 2011, p. 4), we might well ask ourselves today: what reality are we talking about?

Our crippled way of thinking leads to «crippled actions», thanks to being one-dimensional knowledge and actions that have not yet been contextualized, writes Maestri in the first essay of this issue. The compartmentalization of knowledge in doctrines unrelated to one another has dismembered the fabric of reality, causing it to lose its overall direction, and in this desertion of humanism what have increasingly prevailed are specializations which restrict and circumscribe the overall experience, the personal capacity to judge as well as *Bildung* itself.

A reality taken to pieces needs to be put back together in a different way. This is what cinema has always done, but also the visual arts, theatre, music and especially architecture and every other compositional process in the artistic field.

Therefore play leads us to inventive construction and discovering – something equally important, pedagogically speaking – invention.

Invention is the essence of every creative gesture; technical knowledge is merely a means and is of secondary importance. «Instruction in professional techniques inhibits inventiveness», wrote Josef Albers (1972, p. 166) and he added that this way of learning things resulted in ways that were longer, more roundabout, and sometimes erroneous; however no beginning is straightforward: «Walking begins with crawling and speaking with baby talk. And mistakes that are recognised promote progress. Consciously roundabout ways and controlled mistakes sharpen criticism, teach by experience, and promote the desire to do things better and more accurately». (Albers 1972, p. 166) It is only necessary to provide the tools.

There are various schools of architecture, to cite some examples, which have trained generations of architects by conducting meticulous research which, like *monads*, have independently developed the best research without endorsing what was happening outside them. Schools which have made a voluntary withdrawal from reality, in many cases by taking their distance from a society, often too concentrated on their practical actions in the short term to be able to self-assess. In these cases, what has prevailed has been research on the deepest aspects of the architecture rather than fashions, trends, and particular market interests.

At these schools, the teaching of architecture has become something akin to a *game* not determined by external influences, able to exclude reality as a form of self-defence against the surrounding world.

When, in the early 1950s, a group of young architects and artists were summoned to Austin, Texas by an ambitious director of the school of architecture who wanted to recreate the whole curriculum, Colin Rowe, Bern-

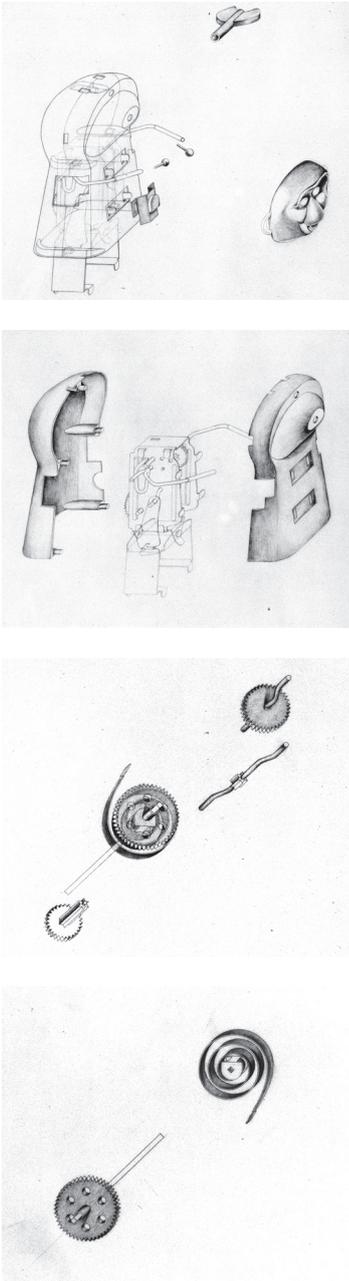


Fig. 2

Joan Serrapica, *Musical Instrument: Wind-up mechanical monkey*, 1979-80, Cooper Union. Courtesy of The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture Archive.

hard Hoesli, John Hejduk, Robert Slutzky and many others, renamed the *Texas Rangers*, found themselves having to develop, in a short time, a new programme for this school.

This programme was intended to allow the student to develop his or her capability of choice through the education by the exercising of judgement. All of them were convinced that this was a priority for a student of architecture not only «to assimilate a catalogue of knowledge and skills, but to acquire the actual ability to fully understand and perform a critical evaluation» (Van den Bergh 2012, p. 69).

And while in those years the masters of architecture were tormented by remodelling the great schools, producing with their pupils technically perfect works of architecture, a young John Hejduk along with the painter Robert Slutzky, within an interior design course at the Department of Home Economics of Austin, created the famous exercise called the *Nine Square Grid Problem*⁶.

A skilful play on the infinite manipulation of a finite space in order to understand the nature and spatial quality of architecture. But as Wim Van den Bergh wrote (2012, pp. 69-70), «...understanding, however, is the only thing that a teacher cannot teach because it is something that the student must acquire alone. As a teacher the only thing you can do is to construct the ‘game’. The ‘game’ is the means through which students if they decide to ‘play the game’ seriously and with enthusiasm – i.e., if they let themselves become consciously engaged and openly accept to expose themselves in an effort to achieve the objective of the game – can actually come to understand»⁷.

The game became the project and the game to be played was the design process.

A game based on the idea of programming the teaching around faith in paradigmatic creation and on the pedagogical use of problems/abstract models which, albeit far from any practical implementation or function, did develop a high sense of consistency, a framework for the creativity and passion capable of permeating simple elements with the maximum allusive wealth.

This fact was the origin from which Hejduk, a few years after this experience in Texas, returned to, restructuring the entire education programme of the Cooper Union in New York by devising new exercises and focusing more on the visual aspects of architecture than on other more pragmatic and technical approaches.

This School evolved an idea of architecture which was based on the principle that there is no architecture without knowledge and that it is essential to steer the operation of design, the «game to be played» towards rules, in order to play and learn the value of the space and form of architecture. Between the 1970s and the early '90s, at the Architectural Association of London the goal was creative freedom.

One of its young teachers, Bernard Tschumi, stated that learning the «pleasure of play», the ludic dimension of architecture, was the essence of research. His teaching was inspired by a superimposition on a reality which philosophy, sociology, and disurbanism were unable to interpret and showed it to be fragmented, downgraded, artificial, consumerist, and violent⁸.

In another context, in Latin America to be precise, the school of Valparaíso in Chile was instead built on sand.

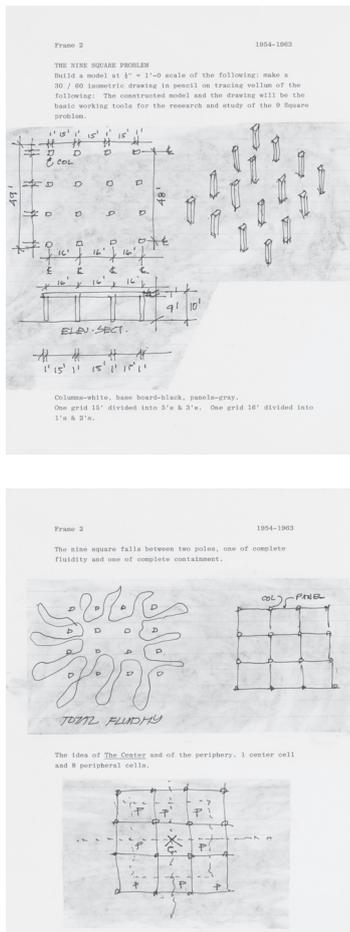


Fig. 3-4
John Hejduk, *The Nine Square Grid Problem*, 1954-1963.
John Hejduk Fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture CCA, Montréal.

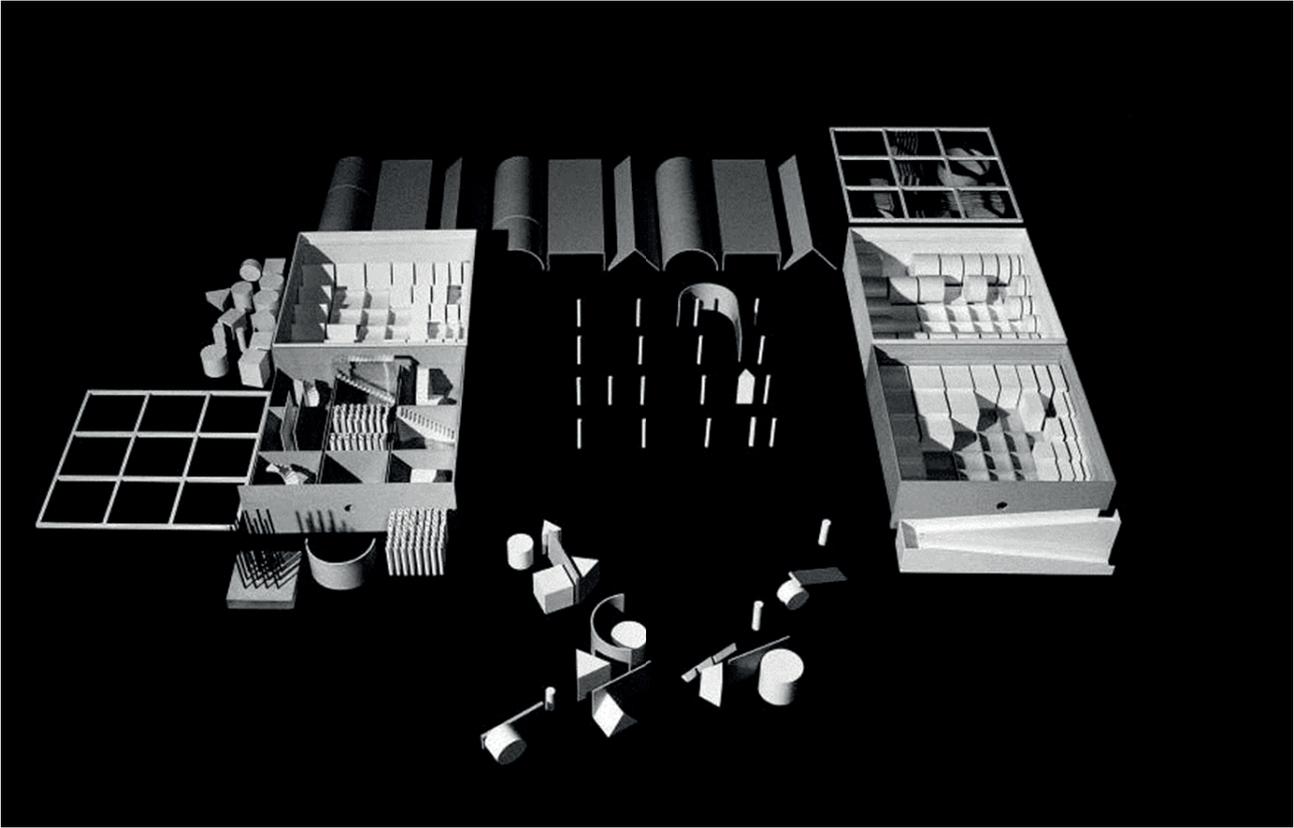


Fig. 5

Lorna McNeur, photo of the model of the *Nine Square Grid Problem*, project developed during the course of the first year *Architectonics*, 1976-1977.

Teachers: Roger Canon, Sean Sculley, Chester Wisniewski, Robert Slutzky, Susana Torre. Courtesy of The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture Archive.

The sand of large dunes overlooking the Pacific Ocean, in the Open City of Ritoque to the north of Valparaíso.

At this school out of the friendship between a poet Godofredo Iommi and an architect Alberto Cruz, was born architecture built on sand which meant an architecture that in just a short time would undergo alterations.

These works of architecture are transitory, but this is of no interest to the teachers of the School who built these works together with their students. They do not fear this fleeting destiny of their achievements, because those who play know that playing begins and ends but the player is always eager to start over.

As they themselves repeated, the sand means «returning to not knowing» and their architecture becomes a changeable but tangible trace of a search in continuous evolution.

Works of architecture self-built in this strip of land, then occupied daily by the teachers and students not only as accommodation, but as spaces for living and working where the building of the architecture then becomes the playing of a game whose rules are set by the teachers with their students.

The ways in which the poetic acts take place, the self-built architecture through the *Trabajo en Ronda* used at the Open City and during the *Traversie*, the group games invented and practised within the *Culture of the Body* course, are all activities which share the requirements of play⁹.

Returning to this issue and its structure, as mentioned previously, our intention has been to involve several scholars from different disciplines.

This issue of FAMagazine is therefore built on a path which, from a broader vision that attempts to frame its subject through a reflection on play and its semantics, passes from the cinema to visual art, from visual art to the theatre and then architecture and its experimentation in design and the



Fig. 6-7
Tournament of the *Body Culture*
Course: *Edros y Oides*, *Playa de Ritoque*,
Quintero, 1979. José Vial Historical Archive,
PUCV, Valparaíso.



Fig. 8
Poetic act of opening the lands
of the Open City, 1970.
José Vial Historical Archive,
PUCV, Valparaíso.

educational field to conclude with what Agamben has defined «the original experience», i.e. childhood.

In the first contribution, Gianluca Maestri sets out to reflect on the theme of play through recognition of its “semantics” reconstructing the story of a path which extends around the thinking of some of the main thinkers of the twentieth century such as Huizinga, Caillois, and Goffman.

«These authors have grasped in the theme of play, although with different perspectives, a symbolic space and a common practice necessary for the life of culture», Maestri writes and adds, «in fact, within our play takes place/occurs the encounter and negotiation between the different points of view, necessarily heterogeneous and conflicting, as well as their unceasing/constant/incassant re-inclusion in a shared horizon of meaning, capable of transcending them».

Within this «semantic horizon», Maestri helps us delineate the definition of play through a recognizable objective quality by providing the reader with the tools to better understand the complexity of the theme in the following essays.

The second article, by Francesco Zucconi, is dedicated to the cinema and in particular to assemblage.

«Taking reality apart to reassemble it in a different way», a well-established game within the research of many leading film-makers.

Speaking of assemblage, Zucconi turns to the concepts of *anachronism* and *anatomism*, to which due theoretical prominence does not seem to have been given, and does so through the work of one of the most important directors of the late 20th century, Jean-Luc Godard, who was capable of opening up the geographical atlas on several occasions, «forcing us to conceive the practice of assemblage as an unceasing juxtaposition of different places».

In his article, Zucconi sets out to rethink cinema as a large assemblage laboratory, where the spatial component of the image as well as its geographical and political ones are represented.

From cinema we pass to the visual arts, with an essay by Antonella Sbrilli, divided in turn, as the title says, into *Seven notes on toy boxes, artists and stories of art*.

Sbrilli builds an “itinerary” which, from Giotto and Savinio arrives at LEGO, from Duchamp and Cornell concludes with Warburg back and

forth within the 20th century with «glimpses of the present and the occasional deviation or detour».

A selection of examples, all more or less intricately linked to the theme of the toybox, with its contents – «also immaterial or metaphorical» – of items to erect and re-assemble.

Art and the game, the game and play are fuelled through a repertoire of works to be dismantled and reassembled, «sequences of spaces and places to be crossed, a palimpsest of times and levels to climb».

Then follows an essay by Laura Scala, entitled *Malevich's Victory over the Sun: the dissolution of reality*.

Here, theatre, art, music and architecture are combined in the production designs for *Victory over the Sun* which represents one of the best expressions of “total art”, combining the spatiality of multi-dimensional Cubist-Futurist theatre, the experimental music of Matyushin, and the transreason language of Kruchyonykh.

From the rich array of pictures published, such as Malevich's scenery sketches, and informed compositional analyses of the innermost structure of these works made by the author through reconstructions, emerges a new idea of space which transcends human reason – symbolized by the sun, to expand into a dream world made up of fairy tales from the Russian folklore tradition.

A vague place where art is born, to be drawn on only «through another type of knowledge: a space-time break widely open towards a new world».

Malevich, Kruchyonykh and Matyushin sought, as underlined by the author in the words of Kruchyonykh, «new ways of understanding the world, going beyond the real world, the senses and reason, to reach another reality» considering new forms of expression which transcend the limits of art, passing from poetry to music, to scenic action and then to theatre.

A reinterpretation, through the action of *de-analytical construction* and a *summarized re-building* of artistic material in which this revolution takes shape, drawing on the compositional techniques of painting, in particular of a Cubist kind. Disassembly, assembly and *collage*, based on the Cubist *sdvig*, a practice which generates the displacement of pictorial planes and «passages of compositional techniques and unexpected dimensional-figurative relationships».

From the production designs of Malevich we arrive at architecture, Cosimo Monteleone tackles the geometric-symbolic connections between the method related to play in the romantic pedagogical philosophy of Friedrich Fröbel and architecture, and how this educational system constituted a particularly significant moment in the formative process of Frank Lloyd Wright.

The investigation carried out by Monteleone looks into the learning procedures of the American architect and the possible repercussions in his works by means of an analysis aimed not so much at the formal similarities recognizable in his projects, already investigated by many scholars and historians of architecture, but rather at the traces of those rules of play which influenced Wright's composing.

An education which «pertains to the substance as well as the essence of the work». (Semerani 2013, p. 112)

These rules find real confirmation in the laws which Fröbel, borrowing

from the theories on mineralogy of Christian Samuel Weiss, transformed into the rules to be observed during a game: the *Law of Unity*, the *Law of Contrast*, the *Law of development* and the *Law of Connection*.

Compatibility between the parts, manual construction, simple elements (squares, circles, triangles) become an expression of stability and firmness, dynamism, and asceticism.

The formal suggestions of Fröbel's pedagogical method gained through experience also enriched Wright's architectural conception with a further fundamental nuance, one which wanted a meaning assigned to each form. «Symbolism, as expression of the romantic vision of the German educator».

Also Amra Salihbegovic speaks of play and architecture and does so by dealing with the work of a contemporary designer, Pezo von Ellrichshausen, showing how his various design solutions demonstrate the potential opportunities which an architectural project can offer by means of continuous research into infinite spatial structures. Play, the author maintains, belongs to the very nature of the design process «in terms of abstraction of geometrical possibilities while imbuing architectural work with specific spatial qualities».

«Richness and ambiguity of architectural design are inherent in the freedom of individual design attitudes, where the essence of the imaginative realm is depicted by a creative design process that proceeds through a variety of levels but evolves from a playful intention».

From the work of an architect, to educational experiments through the report which Elvio Manganaro describes in his article, showing how games and assemblage have acted specifically in a course which he himself designed.

Manganaro does not talk about games and assemblage in speculative terms but describes two specific exercises presented to the students within his Architectural Design Workshop.

The exercises' field of application is the city of Venice, a 'theatrical scene' and as such artificial and precarious, but precisely for this reason able to accommodate trials of a "textual" type, since «reality remains outside the exercise».

The essay is not just a simple account of these educational experiences. Manganaro numbers a series of paragraphs which give substance to his essay by constructing a path which again contends with different disciplines and the work of several authors dealt with in previous writings.

Hence, names like Godard return, also paid homage to in the title of the contribution, but also painters like Malevich, Klee, and El Lissitzky or art historians, thinkers and philosophers – writers like Galvano, Levi Strauss, Benjamin, and Rodari.

This issue concludes with an essay by Tamar Zinguer, which focuses on experimentation with play in childhood.

In her essay Zinguer describes how Fröbel conceived play inside his famous *Kindergarten* – the children's gardens, addressing, in particular, through a meticulous reconstruction, the birth and development of the *sandbox* as a spatial and material tool.

The experience of play, through which a child's creativity and expressive capabilities are awakened by acquiring the role of a tool capable of "watering" the «natural fertility of the soil» of their mind, lets children grow rooted in the life of the universe «just as a plant is rooted in the ground

with its head facing upwards towards the light».

Play in childhood predisposes children to receive knowledge and teaches them to believe in a code of conduct which is far from the desires and immediate instincts of the “I”.

The childhood of humankind as the place of original experience, because «the true place of experience cannot lie either in the word nor in the language, but in the space between them»¹⁰.

Notes

¹ See Benveniste E. (1947) – “Le jeu comme structure”. *Deucalion*, 2, 1947, pp. 159-167. [It. transl. in Idem (2018) - “Il gioco come struttura”. *Aut Aut*, 337 (January-March), pp. 123-132].

² See Schiller F. (2002) – *Lettere sull’educazione estetica dell’uomo. Callia o della bellezza*, Armando Editore, Rome, p.48

³ Citation from an essay by Gianluca Maestri entitled: *Notes on the semantics of play*, published in this issue of FAMagazine.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ On the sacredness of the game, see: Agamben G. (2001), “Il paese dei balocchi. Riflessioni sulla storia del gioco”. in Idem, *Infanzia e storia. Distruzione dell’esperienza e origine della storia*. Einaudi, Turin, pp. 67-92.

⁶ See Caragonne A. (1995) – *The Texas Rangers. Notes from an Architectural Underground*. MIT Press, Cambridge MA.

⁷ See Van den Bergh W. (2012) - “John Hejduk’s Teaching by Osmosis”. in: Gallo A. (ed.), *The clinic of dissection of art*. Marsilio, Vicenza.

⁸ See Tschumi B. (1996) – *Architecture and Disjunction*. MIT Press, Cambridge MA.

⁹ See Alfieri M. (2000) – “La geometria e il gioco”. in: Idem, *La Ciudad Abierta*, Editrice Librerie Dedalo, Rome, pp. 82-95.

¹⁰ See Agamben G. (2001), *Infanzia e storia. Distruzione dell’esperienza e origine della storia*. Einaudi, Turin.

References

- AA. VV. (2008) – “Indagini sul gioco”. *Aut aut*, 337 (gennaio-marzo).
- AGAMBEN G. (2001), *Infanzia e storia. Distruzione dell'esperienza e origine della storia*. Einaudi, Torino.
- ALBERS J. (1972) – “L'insegnamento creativo”. In: Wingler H.M., *Bauhaus*, (trad. It. Sosio L.). Feltrinelli, Milano, pp. 166-168.
- BENEDETTI C. (2011) – *Disumane lettere. Indagine sulla cultura della nostra epoca*. Laterza, Roma-Bari.
- BRIGHENTI T. (2018) – *Pedagogie architettoniche. Scuole, didattica, progetto*. Accademia University Press, Torino.
- CARAGONNE A. (1995) – *The Texas Rangers. Notes from an architectural underground*. Mit Press, Cambridge MA.
- HUIZINGA J. (1973) – *Homo ludens*. Einaudi, Torino.
- MANGANARO E. (2018) – “Un gioco serissimo”. *Ananke*, 84 (maggio), p. 87.
- SCHILLER F. (2002) – *Lettere sull'educazione estetica dell'uomo. Callia o della bellezza*, Armando Editore, Roma, p. 48.
- SEMERANI L. (2013) – “Il dono delle forme”. In Id, *Incontri e Lezioni. Attrazione e contrasto tra le forme*. Clean, Napoli.
- TSCHUMI B. (1996) – *Architecture and Disjunction*. The Mit Press, Cambridge Ma.
- VAN DER BERGH W. (2012) – “John Hejduk's Teaching by Osmosis”. In: Gallo A. (a cura di), *The clinic of dissection of art*. Marsilio, Vicenza.
- VIRILIO P. (1989) – *Esthétique de la disparation*. Edition Galilée, Parigi. [trad. it. Id. (1992) – *Estetica della sparizione*, Montagno G. (a cura di). Liguori, Napoli.
- ZINGUER T. (2015) – *Architecture in Play. Intimations of Modernism in Architectural toys*. University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville VA.

Tommaso Brighenti (Parma 1985), architect, graduated from Scuola di Architettura Civile del Politecnico di Milano. In 2015, he took a PhD in Architectural Composition. He is currently developing teaching methods at the Politecnico di Milano where he teaches architectural design. He has collaborated with several Italian universities, in particular, the Politecnico di Torino and the Università di Parma, giving lessons and participating in design experiments. He is editor-in-chief of the online journal FAMagazine devoted to research and projects concerning architecture and the city. He has published a book entitled *Pedagogie architettoniche. Scuole, didattica, progetto* for the series *AAC – Arti | Architettura | Città – studi, temi, ricerche* (Accademia University Press, Turin, 2018).

Gianluca Maestri
Notes on the semantics of play

Abstract

This article aims to take a new look at the theme of play through the recognition of the semantics which are proper to it. The path we have identified develops around the suggestions of Huizinga, Caillois and Goffman's thoughts. These authors have grasped in the theme of play, although with different perspectives, a symbolic space and a common practice necessary for the life of culture. In fact, within our play takes place/occurs the encounter and negotiation between the different points of view, necessarily heterogeneous and conflicting, as well as their unceasing/constant/incessant re-inclusion in a shared horizon of meaning, capable of transcending them. For this reason, not only a simple affinity between play and teaching is given, but a dense relationship capable of directing our actions in the world and the ways in which we try to represent it.

Keywords

Play — Semantics — Representations — Shared Horizons — Meaning

Semantics and minimal signification around play

Schiller stated that man is only fully a human being when he plays (2002). This fascinating proposition suggests at least two things to those who want to address play. The first, and certainly the most evident, lies in the ontological *quid* of “success” – playing is the only act in which an individual can be fully successful. The second is that play is an activity which is intimately intrinsic to culture. Therefore, on that basis, we inevitably fluctuate in a complementary sense between the sensible and the rational. Consequently, we must recall the activity and the practice of play. This is because play, being made out of rules and objects (but not exclusively), as it shows itself in its pragmatic lines and its normative aspect, involves the person's intentions, his acts and the collective representations that mediate his own relationship with play and with the relationships included within it.

I would now like to recall a distinction made by many authors who wrote about play: the semantic horizon and the practical horizon. If the first helps us to identify the definition of recreational situations and recreational objects through objective and recognisable qualities, the second includes the description of the characteristics of recreational behaviour and the creation of the related recreational situations. Broadly speaking, it is an allocation susceptible to exemplification such as a comparison between passive properties and active properties relating to play.

In Italian, the word *gioco* indicates a leisure, exercise, training activity, or again a regulated competition. However, this activity also represents many other “excesses”, starting from the idea of space which could be called into question for mechanical, linguistic, visual etc. reasons. This space of action assumes a fundamental hermeneutic importance which is easily as-



Fig. 1
 Katsushika Hokusai, *Leçons de dessin par la décomposition géométrique*.
 Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie, 4-OD-154.



Fig. 2
Hieronymus Bosch, *The Conjuror*, 1502, oil on wood.

cribable to the difficulties that could arise when searching for a unique meaning of *gioco*, to the fact that the concept itself is used to represent an interpretive space which is not reducible or objective.

The English language offers instead an interesting dichotomy constituted by the terms *game* and *play*. The nodal point of the first word is the description of a physical or mental competition carried out by participants opposing each other through rules. Peculiar qualities of (recreational) objects or contexts are described, qualities which we could define as passive, tied to the objectivity of the game. The second word calls into consideration actions, recreational acts and active qualities related to the subjectivity of those who play. Bateson refers to this distinction by making a diachronic connection between the two meanings: in fact, once *play* is organised and regulated, and a sanction is assigned in case of victory or defeat, it becomes a *game* (Bateson, 1996). Certainly, there are two very different readings of this dualism. However, these two terms, although capable of considering the distinction between active and passive properties, don't seem to unambiguously solve the problem around the nature of play. On the one hand, we have playing in an organised and disciplined way; on the other, we have playing linked to fun, attributable to children playing while the world is unravelling. In summary: on one hand we have the object "game", the structure, the context, while, on the other, the act of playing, the creation of a ludic context.

Culture, practice and activities. Reality comes into play

French structuralist studies tried to address play with a prospective approach which is deeply different from mathematical discipline. In the period immediately after the Second World War, Benveniste described play as «any regulated activity which is an end in itself and [which] does not aim at any practical modification of reality» (Benveniste, 2008, 123). In comparison with mathematical theories of that time, the use of strategy in social relationships is therefore hypothesised and a greater emphasis is

placed on rules and the “inefficient” influence of play in reality¹. Today, Benveniste’s comparison of play to a structure, together with the declaration that play itself determines the nature of its players (and not vice versa), represent positions which are hard (please note: not impossible) to support. Beyond the current considerations, the positions taken by Benveniste indirectly cover the theoretical discourses around play. Consider the difference between *ludus* and *jocus*, words that recall exercise (preparation and training) and *non-serious* discourse, and how the second progressively ousted the first in common use when referring to play. Or again, consider the idea that play is distinct from reality but that, at the same time, it is capable of imagining an alternative to it, acquiring some aspects of sacredness. From these intuitions we obtain semantic couples which will necessarily be recoded while imagining an ideal education wanting to deal with itself “through” play: exercise/non exercise; seriousness/non-seriousness; real value/simulated value; sacralisation/desacralisation.

In this direction, I would like first to ponder on some theories belonging to Huizinga and Caillois, as they offer a primarily morphological analysis of play. Afterwards, following Goffman’s perspective, I will consider the concepts of “disguise” and “encounter” present in ludic interactions.

Ludens

Huizinga is the first scholar of the twentieth century to dedicate himself with depth of analysis to the understanding of play. His work certainly shows an excessively aestheticised interdisciplinary emphasis. However, criticism notwithstanding², the heuristic efficacy of Huizinga’s illuminating intuition remains: culture and play are overlapping and comparable ideas. This means if it’s not possible to offer one or more boundaries to the concept of play, in it we can find and recognise conceptual plots and problematic nodes which are susceptible to being tested in different disciplinary fields. Concentrating on the analysis of play as a process (and not as a structure) appears to the present author to be an effective choice.

In Huizinga’s work (1973) the distinction between *game* and *play*, despite implicitly running through the entirety of the text, remains unanswered. It’s hard to understand which definition Huizinga prefers in his defining research, even if he seems to be closer to the idea of *play*. This only emphasises the dualism between the formal analysis of the play object and the observation of the ludic practices and acts concentrating on the involved subjects. According to Caillois, Huizinga performed «a research on the fecundity of the ludic spirit which presides over certain kinds of games: regulated competition games» (Caillois, 2000, 19). Therefore, the inherent contradiction in limiting the analysis to regulated and structured games analysing them as ludic acts (*play*), ignoring their inherent characteristics (*affordance*), is evident. Hence, Huizinga realises the need to use other instruments, related to the analysis of the ludic act, to more widely consider the different existing ludic configurations, but he ends up limiting himself to the traditional ones.

The point where he recognises the possibility for play to be serious, even tragic, is interesting. Play and seriousness are not opposed as two mutually exclusive options, but as dialectical poles which exclude each other, and «the metagame is the ‘serious’ moment which rejects the game object within the games to be redeveloped...» (Eco, 1973, XXV-XXVI.). Huizinga’s work is still extremely important for its description of a lucidity which is parallel to human existence, and not a simple cause or effect of cultural

changes: «It was not my object to define the place of play among all the other manifestations of culture, but rather to ascertain how far culture itself bears the character of play. [It was a question of integrating] the concept of *play* into that of *culture*» (Huizinga, 1973, XXXII.). The ludic activity configures itself transversely to reality, to a culture that can by itself be play (with all the risks this entails)³.

Homo Ludens also contains a definition of play on which should be carefully pondered since it describes a series of qualities that characterise ludic practice. Play is a free act, a potentially serious activity capable of captivating the player completely (cf. *ibidem*, 17). It is an order that creates order through regulation and as such it is an act performed within defined spatio-temporal limits. Possessing these characteristics, it presents itself as an alternative to real and ordinary life with its own purposes, a generator of social relationships which imply the use of masks and disguises. These characteristics evidently possess different benefits and essences.

Surely, claiming that play is a potentially serious and involving activity is not something unheard of nowadays. However, Huizinga was out of step with the common sense of the time that considered play as an irremediably trivial activity. Today, the evaluation of the semantic opposition serious/not serious regarding play appears to be clear in its value and the attention seems to shift toward other semantisations. Instead, it's useful to hold together the characteristics of play which emerge as crucial issues worth pondering over: its spatio-temporal limit, its regulation, its alternative situation to real life related to masks and disguises, and its simulation. These characteristics appear to partially contradict each other. To that effect, we understand that simulation and freedom of action refer to the intention of the player, to his actions (*active properties*), while separation and regulation represent the contextual existence conditions of the ludic situation itself (*passive properties*).

Moving in this direction, *Homo Ludens* brings us four crucial problems to consider, belonging to two different orders. Two refer to the inherent nature of the ludic situation, to its objectivity: regulation and the well-defined separation from real life; the other two to the act of play and to the related creation of the ludic situation itself: freedom and the simulation of “real” life.

Men playing

In his book *Man, play and games*, Caillois clearly observes the presence of ludic activity in the entire human social and cultural evolution:

«One can find a mark, an influence of the principle of play, or at least a concurrence with its particular intentions. It's possible to interpret the progress of civilization to the extent that it consists in the passage from a chaotic universe to a regulated universe which rests on a coherent and harmonious system of rights and duties, or of privileges and responsibilities» (Caillois, 2000, 11).

Play becomes the embodiment of human evolution. Games and toys represent fundamental cultural residues which are easily understandable and interpretable. In their evolution, it is possible to identify societal and cultural changes which have already happened or are currently happening. Caillois specifies his concept of “residue” describing ludic activities with a political and religious meaning tied to specific eras. These activities, when deprived of their related meanings, end up as simple structures, “pure” games. This way, play becomes not only an activity that transcends cultures, but also a

recognisable “residue” of the preceding culture (*Ibidem*, 76-77).

This is in evident contrast with Huizinga, who states that play is a concept intrinsic to culture and not a consequence of it. If Huizinga considered the current ludic spirit in continuity with culture, according to Caillois the change in social function, which happens when an activity is deprived of its original meanings, is essential. In fact, the key point in the definition of a “civilised” ludic activity is the presence of a regulation⁴. Caillois hypothesised an historical evolution that would have led humanity from experiencing free ludic forms, tied to the definition of *play*, to the inclination toward regulated and structured forms, tied to the definition of *game*: “Rules are inseparable from play as soon as the latter becomes institutionalized. From this moment on they become part of its nature and they transform it into an instrument of fecund and decisive culture” (*Ibidem*, 46). This value judgement comes from the distinction between *Ludus* and *Paidia* present in the entirety of the text. That is, a distinction between two opposite play methods comparable to the already mentioned lexical difference in the English language: *Paidia* is fantasy and improvisation, “as if” (primary improvisational and carefreeness powers), while *Ludus* is “for real”, a regulated attempt to overcome obstacles (the completion and the education of the *Paida* disciplined and enriched by *Ludus*) (cf. *ibidem*, 55). Caillois’ other fundamental theoretical effort is the creation of a model dividing games in: *Argon* (competition), games of competition, challenges with a claim of responsibility for one’s own actions; *Alea* (chance), gambling and games of luck related to the abandonment of an individual to destiny; *Mimicry* (mask), games of identification, simulacra, with one rule for each role; the actor must charm the audience and the audience must believe the portrayal; *Ilinx* (vertigo), games of vertigo and pure enjoyment. The cultural evolution from *Paidia* to *Ludus* also applies to these new categories such as the passage from an era characterised by *Mimicry* and *Ilinx*, games of representation and vertigo, to the contemporary era, characterised by *Argon* and *Alea*, competition and chance games (cf. *ibidem*, 46-60).

Caillois then clarifies the concept of *Paidia*, at first glance at odds with regulated play. In reality, free and imaginary play answers to rules of a different nature. However, these remain strict and precise. At this instance one considers the ludic activity intended as a representation or a simulation, but Caillois does not follow this path, remaining sceptical about the opportunity to consider a play without borders, determinedly affirming its corrupting power:

«If play consists in providing formal, ideal, limited, and escapist satisfaction for these powerful drives, what happens when every convention is rejected? When the universe of play is no longer tightly closed? When it is contaminated by the real world in which every act has inescapable consequences? Corresponding to each of the basic categories there is a specific perversion which results from the absence of both restraint and protection» (*Ibidem*, 62).

Here lies an important node: the collapse of barriers is something “negative” and play must be kept separated from real life in order to avoid dangerous consequences for the individual (repudiation, superstition, alienation, vice, etc.). Rules create and maintain these barriers as necessary instruments to protect the “civility” of a ludic activity and, at the same time, as devices to turn it into an exercise for real life:

«Games discipline instincts and institutionalise them. For the time that they afford formal and limited satisfaction, they educate, enrich, and immunise the mind against their virulence. At the same time, they are made fit to contribute usefully to the enrichment and the establishment of various patterns of culture» (*Ibidem*, 73).

Nevertheless, Caillois maintains the idea of associating his four macro-categories of play to both marginal ludic form and their related degenerations, and to institutionalised and socially integrated ludic forms. Therefore, the idea of a ludic activity capable of coming out of its own contexts invading real life comes into play, even if the belief that a barrier must delimit it to avoid its degeneration still remains.

Face to face, in disguise

In the first section of *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction* (2003), Goffman describes the dynamics of face to face interactions and of “focused gatherings” through the analysis of the concept of fun. The (theoretical) point is indeed the idea of play.

The concept of “gatherings”, of being together, is meticulously described, because it implies, for those who participate, a single visual and cognitive focus of attention; a mutual and preferential openness to verbal communication; a reinforcement of the reciprocal relevance of actions; an eye-to-eye ecological huddle that maximises each participant’s opportunity to perceive the other participants’ monitoring of him (*Ibidem*, 31-33). This (communicative) condition is compared to the “ludic situation”, primarily for the presence of a regulatory set restricting the “correct” experience of the situation and for the definition of a “barrier” separating the communicative-ludic situation from reality. Therefore, play is still considered the union of two qualities: regulation and separation from reality.

Goffman develops these two aspects by describing certain kinds of rules. A first order of rules, defined as “of irrelevance”, act as a selection related to external stimuli: this way, the participants avoid distractions caused by an overabundant influx of thoughts unrelated to the ludic action (*Ibidem*, 33). This means that the shape of the objects, or of the contexts used in the game, is not important in relation to its rules: as we know, the shape of the pawns on a chessboard is of no importance compared to the range of moves each pawn can perform according to the rules of chess. This filter highlights the dis-junction of play given as a separate situation, which is able to autonomously feed a self-sufficient and coherent world, notwithstanding the stimuli originating from reality. A second class of rules helps us to understand how this barrier is comparable to a porous membrane, recovering some of the characteristics of the wider world inside the ludic situation. In fact, “transformation” rules guide the behavioural qualities of the participants, which are taken into consideration during play (*Ibidem*, 43). Therefore, the structure of the “magic circle”⁵ faces the participation and the subjectivity of the player in this case as well. In addition, the porosity of the membrane separating play from reality considers the psychological nature of the player’s involvement, defined as “spontaneous” and “non-objective”. This involvement would be lost if we limited ourselves to a formal study of the context or of the ludic object. When this “spontaneity” is coherently contained within the game world as defined by transformation rules, the player is comfortable, or else he/she could find himself/herself in a situation of dysphoric tension that could lead to the rejection of the game itself. Controlling this tension is essential to the

conservation of the barrier and, therefore, of the ludic situation. In fact, more or less integrated incidents could occur, difficult and “overflowing” situations which influence the game, inducing the participants to «openly alter the rules, redefining the situation around the plight of the offender, but treating him now *not as a participant but as a mere focus of attention* - in fact, as an involuntary performer» (*Ibidem*, 71).

Therefore, the ludic situation conforms and configures itself to the nature of the interaction membrane: when the wider world crosses the borders of an encounter and is elaborated inside the interactional activity, something greater than a simple reorganisation or a simple transformation of models happens. What happens is something of a psycho-biological, organic nature. A potentially determinative part of the wider world «is easily ignored; some is repressed and some is suppressed self-consciously at the price of felt distraction» (*Ibidem*, 76). In addition, certain components of the external environment are able to expand or contract the events that belong to the encounter, while others are able to make it durable or to destroy it.

Reflecting on these components, it is possible to provide a definition of the two substantive principles of play: uncertainty of outcome and simulation in the form of a sanctioned exhibition of real-world qualities. In addition, continuing the study of the second aspect, games can be considered as a means of instilling or integrating a great variety of external, socially significant facts to encounters. Through what Goffman defines as “disguise”, play represents a simulation instrument, an area where we are able to “safely” try and experiment new social factors and communicative dynamics, with very limited consequences on real life: it is “a way of revealing as much of it as can be tolerated in an encounter. We fence our encounters in with gates; the very means by which we hold off a part of reality can be the means by which we can bear introducing it” (*Ibidem*, 87). Other than de-potentiating the possibilities of reality, disguise in a ludic context allows us to understand that what holds people inside a game answers to a need to face complexities, to measure ourselves against fatigue and risk, to challenge what is already planned. The situation of play is extraordinary also because it is constantly surrounded by external reality: if the normal situation is that of a variety of roles, of a multiple and synchronous reference to different *frames*, to meta-communicative messages which indicate how to read reality and how to navigate it, the technologically advanced society seems to progressively disturb the natural rhythms in consonance with the interior laws of behaviour. This means that reality and technology undermine the clarity of roles that the individual can assume in the ludic situation. Goffman himself (implicitly) confirms this when he describes the simulative ability that makes the ludic situation an exercise of real instincts, reduced and symbolically effective at the same time.

Escape routes, or coming back to play

We can see how it is possible to identify qualities and proprieties inherent to play that go through, although with undeniable differences, the different subjects that we addressed: regulation, separation from reality through a porous membrane, the idea of simulation or a setting where it’s possible to safely (as compared to real consequences) test and experiment, the instinctive need to prove oneself and the presence of uncertain outcomes. Considering these as a whole, play emerges as a field in which it is possible to

experiment potentially “negative” roles without facing their consequences, to deal with the uncertain outcomes of our projects, of our design (*signum*), of the com-position, even by instinct, of our own personality.

Therefore, there’s more than an affinity between play and didactics. In this *locus* a person finds clues, signals capable to let him/her face (with limitations) a macrocosm that provides meaning and significance to his/her own life, capable of orienting (and legitimise) his/her own symbolic and material behaviour. Play re-enchants, ritualises, while at the same time reveals a non-apparent decisional power. In this regard, the teacher has the responsibility to understand how to play and how to make others play. Doing this, he/she should carefully consider something directly related to our times and with the digital or physical material *used* to play.

Technical and technological innovations are shaping teaching and traditional disciplinary methods, and have always been accompanied by lively public debate regarding the more or less harmful consequences that they could bring to humanity. In one of his last published studies, Morin, in an essay on our planet’s current situation and on the paths we can pursue to end its crises and to promote a new future for humanity, states that the human planetary crises are cognitive crises: «Our system of knowledge, as encoded in our minds, conducts us to important ignorances» (Morin 2012, 133). In fact, the fragmentation and compartmentalisation of knowledge in separate disciplines and doctrines has broken the overall fabric of reality, making us lose its overall meaning. So, «our compartmentalised way of knowledge could produce global ignorance» (*Ibidem*, 134). This way, our mutilated way of thought leads to “mutilated actions”, because those are unidimensional and decontextualised knowledges and actions.

Taking this into consideration, play could also become a key in recomposing a pluridimensionality of knowledge and of the world itself. Play oscillates, it requires mobility and understanding of “roles”, but it mostly requires a constant incentive to act, to intervene in reality through simulations or reductions in which the player is involved. The play space is a space of reality which mobilises what is familiar, common or part of common sense, where some of the rigidities of reality can be questioned. Play intervenes in the habitual thought breaking it through the practice of creativity itself.

Please note again: the fact is that any product of human activity – be it an instrument or a machine, or a scientific or creative work, or a ludic combination of forms that express the willingness to reproduce and understand the world, namely to embody ideal realities that are part of life – inevitably retroacts *on* and *with* mankind itself and its own life. Arts, literature, painting, music, architecture etc. have always developed the potential of mankind to reproduce worlds. This is not so much because they are free from the necessity of realisation, (such as the artificial reproduction of machinery, robots, etc.) but because we think they are more adequate to give sense and meaning to mankind’s aspiration to create and design possible worlds, based or not on reality. Men do not interact only with each other or only with artefacts according to rules and values which characterise their social life, but they interact with each other also thanks to the artefacts which they produce to this end and which consequently have a repercussion on how they stay together. In general, the observation that mankind uses artefacts as means or instruments designed to social activities is obvious and shared. It is harder to recognise that these instruments impose, by interacting with men, some behaviours and customs.

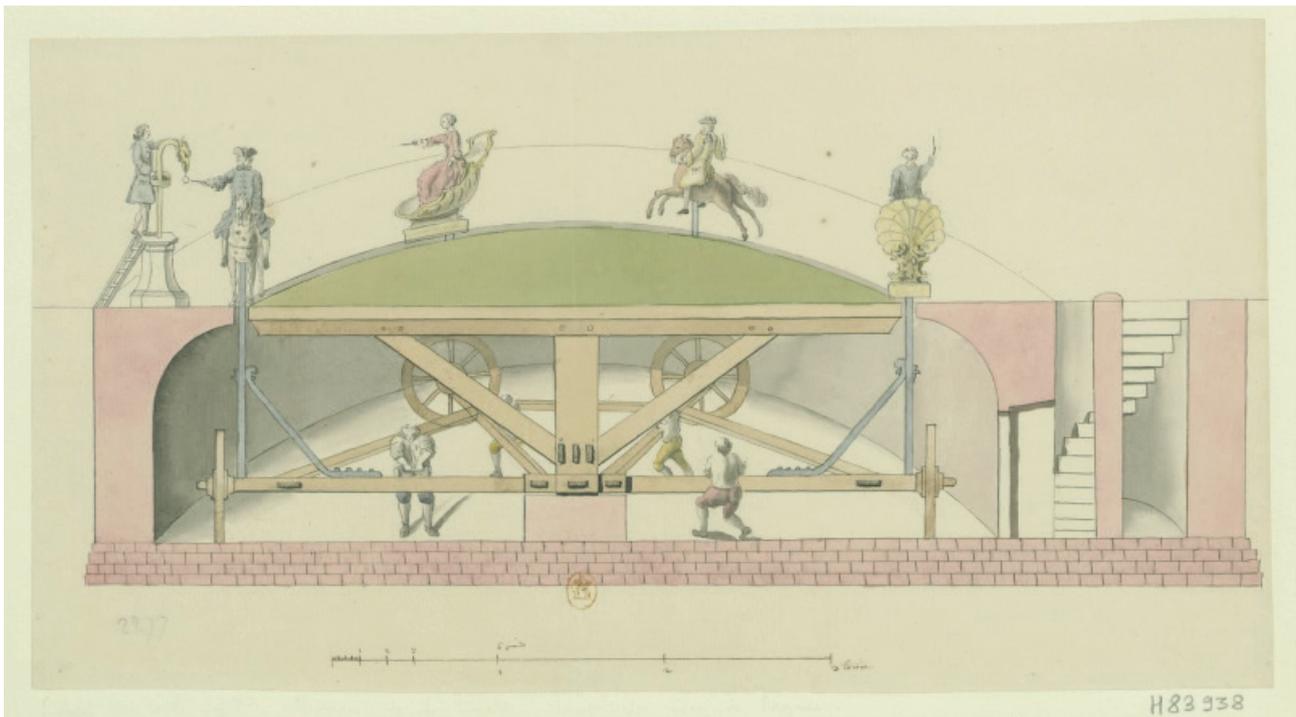


Fig. 3
Paris, *Château de la Muette*:
coupe de la plateforme du jeu
de bague, dessin, 1719.

We shouldn't believe that, on one hand, there are technical objects and, on the other, the individuals who use them and employ them as more or less adequate instruments to accomplish individual goals in a more or less facilitated and productive way, since they are produced by men for this purpose. Individuals and technical products have always formed a single relational reality. This single reality constitutes the life "environment" where individuals live and where it is possible for them to form relationships and to build anything that qualifies their social trade. Including their games.

Notes

¹ We are unable to linger on the mathematical theories of play, therefore please refer to, for example, Von Neumann and Morgenstein (1944).

² We consider in particular what Eco (the structuralist) wrote in his preface to the book.

³ The issue of the inherent risk in play and its application in relation to culture cannot be addressed here.

⁴ A shared point between Caillois and Huizinga and many other authors.

⁵ *Magic Circle* is one of the terms used in game studies to define the dynamics which form the basis of the game. In brief, "magic circle" indicates the existence of a border between a game and the world beyond the game itself. Inside this space, the players submit by choice to rules in order to allow the game to function. In this sense, the game is a magic space where the rules and the manners of daily life are suspended. Nowadays, the idea of Magic Circle encounters many critics or even radical misunderstandings.

References

- BATESON G. (1996) – *Questo è un gioco*. Raffaello Cortina, Milano.
- BENVENISTE E. (2008) – “Il gioco come struttura”. *Aut aut*, 337 (gennaio-marzo).
- CAILLOIS R. (2000) – *I giochi e gli uomini*. Bompiani, Milano.
- GOFFMAN E. (2003) – *Espressione e identità. Gioco, ruoli, teatralità*. Il Mulino, Bologna.
- HUIZINGA J. (1973) – *Homo Ludens*. Einaudi, Torino.
- MORIN E. (2012) – *La via. Un'avvenire per l'umanità*. Raffaello Cortina, Milano.
- SCHILLER F. (2002) – *Lettere sull'educazione estetica dell'uomo. Callia o della bellezza*. Armando, Roma.
- VON NEUMANN J., MORGENSTERN O. (1944) – *The theory of games and economic behavior*. PUP, Princeton (NJ).

Gianluca Maestri, PhD in Sociology and Social Research, is a research fellow in Sociology of cultural processes at the Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Sociali dell'Università di Bologna. He deals with issues related to the culturalist paradigm with particular attention to the representations of the social imagination and the cultural codes with which they are transmitted.

Francesco Zucconi
Assemblage and anapopism according to Jean-Luc Godard

Abstract

Frequently described as a reflection on the traumatic history of the 20th century, the cinema of Jean-Luc Godard has managed to call attention several times to the geographical atlas, forcing us to conceive the practice of assemblage as an unceasing juxtaposition of different places. This article sets out to rethink his cinema as a large assemblage laboratory, where the spatial component of the image as well as the geographical and political ones are called into question. In speaking of assemblage, we turn to the concepts of “anachronism” and “anapopism”, the latter seemingly never granted due theoretical prominence.

Keywords

Cinematic Editing — Anachronism — Anapopism

Layouts of a thought in images

In the autumn of 2019, the 89-year-old Franco-Swiss director Jean-Luc Godard was invited to present his latest film, *The Image Book* (2019), in the form of a multi-media visit at the premises of the Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers, on the outskirts of Paris¹. The idea to design an exhibition from a film might appear to be the umpteenth reflection on the relationship between the forms of the cinematic experience and that of the museum: a new episode of that “*querelle des dispositifs*” (Bellour 2012) which has so enlivened the theoretical and critical debate of recent years. However, those who know Godard also know that the only controversies which count are those launched by his films, by his stance; ingenious and difficult to totally marry into in equal measure. So it was that the transformation of *The Image Book* into an exhibition project mostly inspired reflections on the influence of Godard’s work on contemporary theatre, on the possibility of putting on show the creative laboratory of an artist and therefore on the idea of looking into his working method. The latter themes were explicitly included in the exhibition “*Jean-Luc Godard: Le Studio d’Orphée*”, which opened in December 2019 at the Fondazione Prada in Milan².

In an explicit quote from Philippe Quesne, director of the Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers,

«L’idée n’est pas de surenchérir en inventant des décors, mais de restituer le trouble qu’il y a à parcourir une arborescence. Ce bâtiment n’est ni un musée ni une crypte. C’est un lieu de travail, très fantomatique, on peut s’attendre à voir surgir d’autres images et des acteurs invisibles. Mais il n’y a pas le côté mortifère d’un lieu d’archive»³.

The idea of spatializing his film work, rethinking it as a path that opens

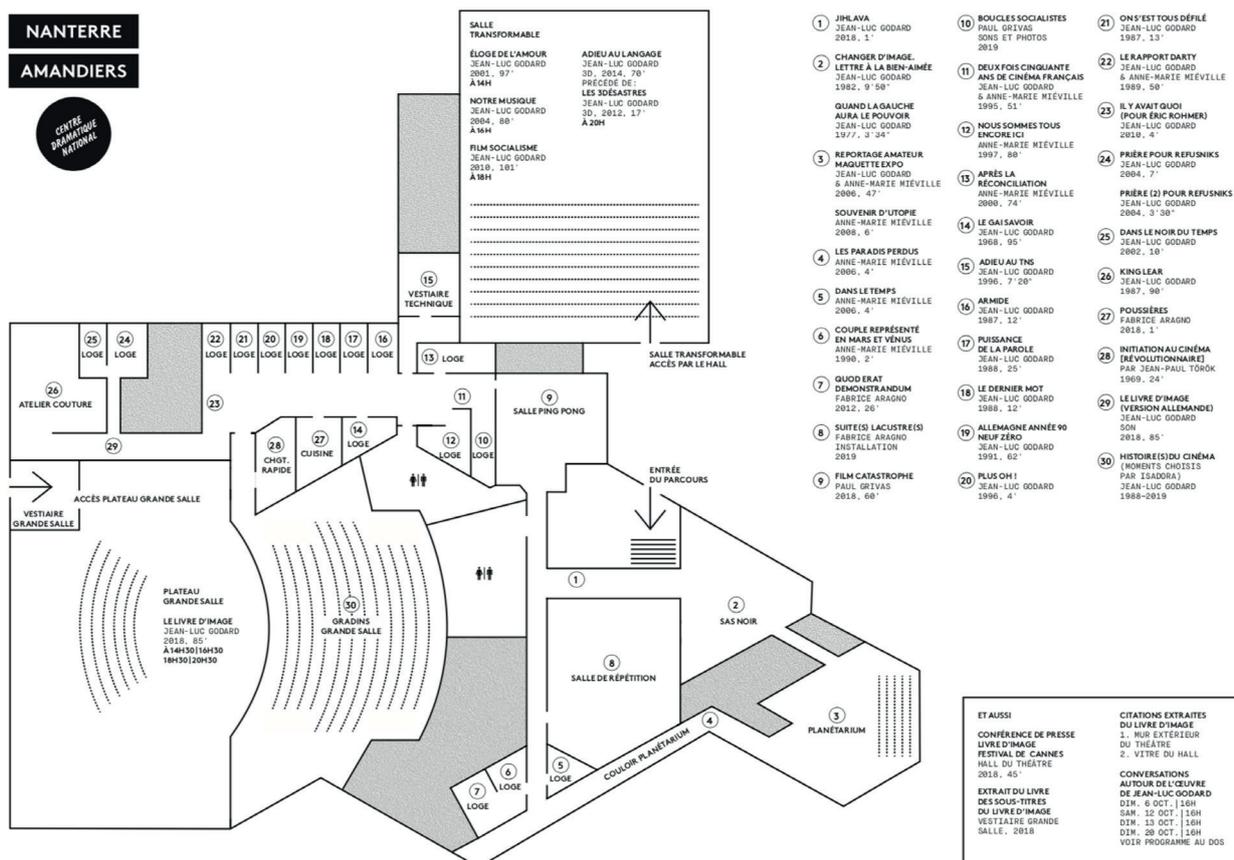


Fig. 1
Layout of the “Parcours Livre d’image”. Source: <https://nanterre-amandiers.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/plan-parcours-livredimage.pdf>.

up and comes into contact with other works, therefore seems an invitation to observe the “*système de pendant*” according to which one film is juxtaposed with another, projected immediately afterwards or in an adjacent room: the extraordinary short film *Jihlava* (2018) found alongside *Quand la gauche aura le pouvoir* (1977), with *Notre musique* (2004) in the same room as *Film socialisme* (2010) and *Adieu au langage* (2014). By observing the layout of this exhibition (Fig. 1), we can see that Godard’s filmography resembles the surface of a map, as full of gaps as of overlapping regions with a palimpsest that produce effects of material density. Already described and investigated as a reflection on the history of the 20th century⁴, the art of Godard manages to call attention to the geographical atlas, forcing us to conceive the practice of assemblage as a ceaseless juxtaposition of different places⁵.

Out of the plan of the exhibition dedicated to *The Image Book* came the idea of considering his cinema as a great “geo-aesthetic” laboratory⁶; a laboratory of assemblage, where both the spatial component of the image as well as the geographical and political ones are called into question, interweaving the very notion of anachronism with its less fortunate companion: that of ‘anatotism’, the latter seemingly never granted due prominence.

Here and elsewhere

The division into periods – the “Karina” years, the “Mao” years, the “video” years, etc. – presents an image of Godard’s work which is much more dated than the individual movies are. Yet, as Serge Daney noted (2001, p. 372), *Ici et ailleurs* (1976) is a «Film charnière. Cinq ans de réflexion pour Godard, qui commence le film au Moyen-Orient avec Gorin et le finit à Grenoble avec Miéville. Nous sommes au milieu de la décennie: le cinéma



Fig. 2

Still from the film “Ici et ailleurs” (1976) by Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville.

militant ne remportera plus de victoires».

As is well-known, *Ici et ailleurs* was born as a piece of propaganda, commissioned by Yasser Arafat in 1969 from Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, members of the Dziga Vertov Group, and aimed at showing the forms of life and struggle in Palestinian refugee camps. But the political situation soon deteriorated: King Hussain of Jordan ordered a series of massacres, fearing that the Palestinians would attempt to overthrow his monarchy⁷. So what was to be done with the images of the struggle of the late '60s now that many of the men and women filmed had been killed? How was the film, originally titled *Jusqu'à la victoire*, to be completed in a political scenario that had changed so dramatically?

With the waning of the Dziga Vertov Group, Godard came into contact with Elias Sanbar and also met Anne-Marie Miéville, with whom he developed the idea of transforming the *propaganda film* into a *film of assemblage*: seeing each image as purely mediatic and not as if it were a candid representation of the Palestinian cause. Inviting the viewer to do the same: to become aware of the compositional frames that give form to public debate and visual culture alike. The images of Arafat's militants therefore alternate with others of daily life in France, or the soundtrack is used to dissolve from one to the other situation. The *here* of which the title speaks is the France of 1975, while the *elsewhere* is Palestine in 1970. To attempt an impossible mediation between the two places we find a TV set switched on before the eyes of a French family (Fig. 2).

In this way, with this film, Godard anticipated certain issues of post-colonial thought, focusing on the problem of the endoscopic position as a geographical and political issue⁸. Where is the one who is observing and speaking with respect to what is being talked about? And does the latter then have the opportunity to exchange words and gaze, or is he/she merely spoken about by others?

Like an “American Indian”

Dictionaries have difficulties when dealing with the concept of anapism. They identify it with an “error of place” or with an inability to adapt to the uses and customs of the group of which it is part, as when we say that someone is a «stranger in his/her homeland».

Talking about *anatopic assemblage* in the cinema of Godard does not refer to its rebellious character, nor does it point to the alleged errors of setting. Instead, starting from at least *Ici et ailleurs*, Godard seems to have conceived his filmic practice as a juxtaposition and overlaying of images that relate to different places in order to bring out both the distance that separates them and the elements that unite them. Against the shortcuts of militancy and “empathetic” identification, it is necessary to appreciate the scraps, the *and* present in the title, so as to develop new criteria when it comes to juxtaposition, new forms to politicize both the images and the assemblage⁹.

This is surely the case of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98), where the images of fictional cinema from previous years and following WWII are treated as if they themselves were symptoms of the advent of Nazism¹⁰. We can think of the images of the laborious combing of the territory during the hunt in *The Rules of the Game* (1939) by Jean Renoir and of the unanticipated reverse shot: a short extract from Kenji Mizoguchi’s *The Lovers Crucified* (1954). Clearly, these images are nothing more than euphemisms with respect to the horror of the killing fields, nonetheless, through this approach, Godard invites viewers to observe the structure, the diagram of the extermination, as something that concerns them intimately; the relationship of the metaphor between History with a capital ‘H’ and all other commonplace histories alludes to the totalitarian exception in the daily routine of civilian life (Fig. 3).

Certainly the most debated, most discussed of Godard’s assemblages is that involving the Nazi concentration camp and the Palestinian refugee camp, suggested in *Ici et ailleurs* and reprised several years later in *Notre musique* and *Film socialisme*. A bold juxtaposition, even more questionable given the provocative reiterations by the director in numerous public statements. Furthermore, this assemblage was the starting point for Georges Didi-Huberman’s lengthy criticism (2015, pp. 86-119) of Godard’s attitude to this political issue, after affording himself – a few years later and using much more controlled argumentative methods¹¹ – the possibility of a juxtaposition of concentration camps and European refugee camps of the new millennium.

However, Godard’s work was not limited to associating various places and events with Nazi camps. In *Episode 3A* of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* – made in the ’90s and reprised with variations in the first part of *The Image Book* – he assembled a series of media images relating to the massacre of Bosnian populations by the militia of Slobodan Milošević together with a reading of the intense article *Pour la Serbie*, written by Victor Hugo in 1876 in defence of some Serbian towns destroyed by the Turkish Empire¹². From *Hélas pour moi* (1993) to *Je vous salue Sarajevo* (1993), from *For Ever Mozart* (1996) *Notre musique*, up to *Le Pont des soupirs* (2014) this was a theme which Godard returned to constantly: the relationship between Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and Catholics in the heart of Europe.

And it is conceivably in Bosnia, at the foot of Mostar Bridge, destroyed by Croatian militias during the Balkan conflict, that we need to remain in order to reflect on the «assemblages of the world» created by Godard. It is the second part of *Notre musique* when a group of Native Americans suddenly appears posing under this bridge – then undergoing reconstruction at the behest of UNESCO – like a postcard (Fig. 4).

Godard’s reflection is firstly on the stereotype with which Western culture has fixed in a proud image those peoples it has systematically annihilated¹³. But it is also a way of saying that after the conflicts of the ’90s, the multi-

Fig. 3

Still from the film "Histoire(s) du cinéma" (1988-1998) by Jean-Luc Godard.



Fig. 4

Still from the film "Notre musique" (2004) by Jean-Luc Godard.



ethnic melting pot of cities such as Mostar or Sarajevo was profoundly downsized if not totally destroyed and the little that remains has become a “reserve” for tourists. The shot of Mostar Bridge with the Native Americans is ultimately an invitation to consider the underlying bonds between the different forms of colonial and post-colonial violence, between the conditions of all those who have suffered privation and deportation. It is the “American Indian”, as the figure of the deported and dispossessed – even in name, the result of a famous error attributed to Christopher Columbus – that constitutes a potential geographical and political paradigm.

Heuristics of anatopism

Within French culture, the notion of anatopism has seen explicit conceptualization in the work of the writer Michel Tournier and, in particular, in his book on the photography of Edouard Boubat:

«L’anatopisme serait donc l’équivalent pour l’espace de ce qu’est l’anachronisme pour le temps. Anachronisme: violations de la chronologie. Exemple: les canons que Shakespeare fait intervenir dans sa pièce Jules César. Anatopisme: violation de la géographie (ou de la topologie) Exemple: la crèche de Noël situé par un peintre hollandais ou allemand dans sa propre ville. [...] Pour un photographe comme Édouard Boubat, qui ne touche jamais à rien ni à personne, et photographie les choses et les gens comme il les trouve, l’anatopisme a le sens d’un signe, d’une offrande spontanée que lui fait personnellement le hasard»¹⁴.

Tournier’s definition has the merit of associating anachronism and anatopism. However, in his conception, the latter tends to coincide with something “spontaneous” or is the result of a modernization in the staging. Nothing similar seems to happen in Godard’s cinema, which is not so much about modernizing or antiquing nor, for that matter, respecting or infringing a geographic reference. Instead, Godard tends to take up a position within a threshold space, trying to observe and understand what makes specific times and places stand out with respect to themselves and with respect to their historical and geographical field of reference (the city of Batak during the Serbian-Turkish conflict of the 19th century, the Barcelona of the Civil War and the ’60s refugee camps in Amman, Mostar and Sarajevo in the last decade of the 20th century...).

Over the course of the 20th century, in the same years that the director was experimenting with his assemblages, semiotics had developed the concept of “isotopy” borrowed from physics/chemistry and transferred to semantic and syntactic analyses. In particular, using this concept we can observe the persistence of a theme or a series of figures, or a given topological, eidetic and colour category through different works or in different parts of the same work¹⁵. So it is that in the visual arts, the term isotopy lends itself to identifying the persistence of certain spatial, temporal and actorial configurations, such as redundant phenomena of the plastic components characterizing different images and visual objects¹⁶. However, on a closer look, this same term can lend itself to analysing the ways of establishing possible juxtapositions of two or more events, of two or more locations, through representations of them, leading us to recognize the profound configurations that substantiate the assemblage of different images, rather than restricting ourselves to superficial iconic analogies¹⁷.

Beyond the respective and opposing etymological roots, the notion of isotopy (from the Greek roots *ἴσος* and *τόπος*, “equal place”) and that of anatopism (from *ἀνά*, against, plus *τόπος*, place) work together, thereby substantiating

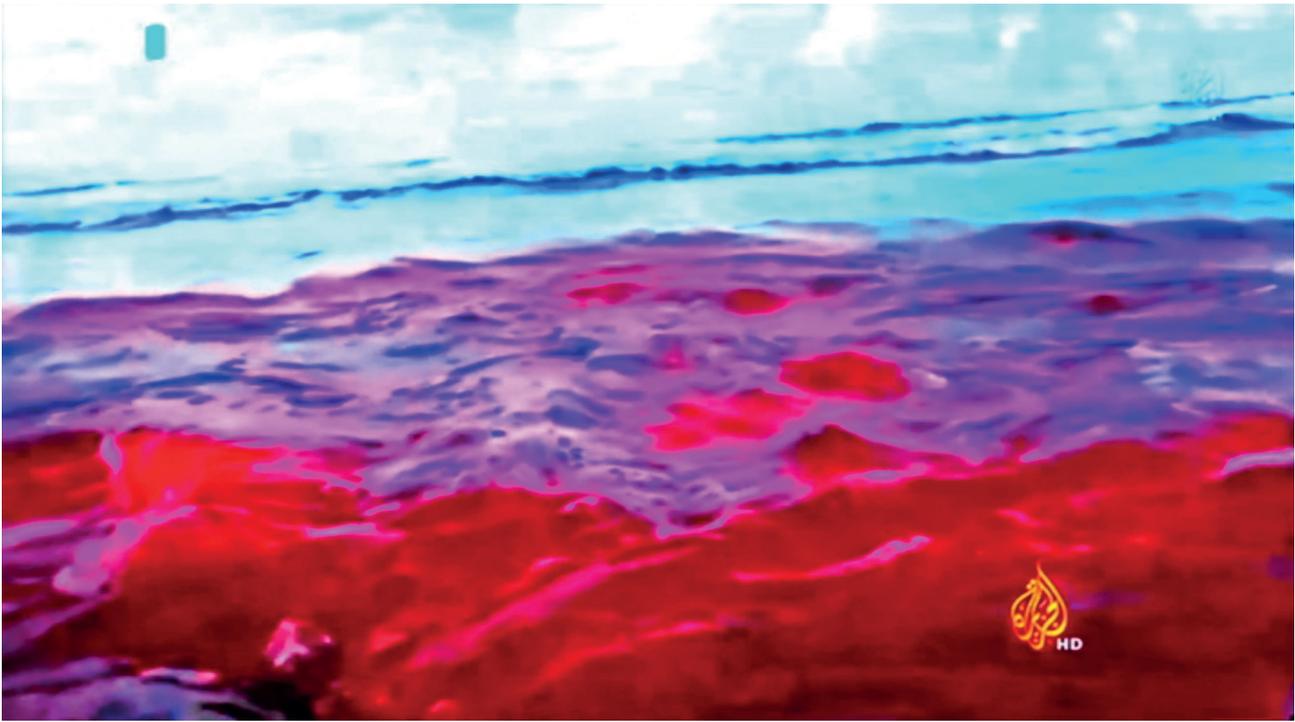


Fig. 5
Still from the film “Le livre d’image” (2018) by Jean-Luc Godard.

the possibilities of combinations or substitutions of images that are not necessarily linked by predefined typological relationships. Precisely in virtue of the figurative and plastic configurations that characterize them, two or more images relating to different events, at different times and in different places, can be juxtaposed if not overlapped. Drawing the due conclusions from this consideration, it is possible to note that the very notion of “anachronism” – widely investigated and used in the theoretical debate of recent years – rests in reality on that of anachronism and on the isotopic relationships which make it possible to juxtapose different images; on the very fact that, beyond the reference to a particular place, each image in itself constitutes a system of relationships between different elements while the persistence of such a system allows exercises of assemblage and permutation.

It may be no coincidence if the first of the five episodes that make up *The Image Book* is dedicated to the concept of the “remake” and to war as something that relentlessly reproduces itself in space and time. As always, Godard is not afraid to deal with both the most trivial and the most violent images of the present. So it is that one of the most shocking sequences in *The Image Book* consists in alternating assemblages of executions/drownings in the episode from Roberto Rossellini’s *Paisà* (1946) filmed in Porto Tolle, with images of ISIS propaganda (Fig. 5). The detail of the water rippling from the falling of the bodies in the former finds a partial correspondence in the rough seas of the latter, where the accentuation of the colours forces the image beyond the merely referential, attempting to elicit the underlying diagrammatic component: the paradigm of the sinking as the thing that kills and hides¹⁸. Immediately afterwards, with just enough time to recognize it, we see the extraordinary sequence filmed by Rossellini, in that same film, inside the Vasari Corridor: a place of high culture connecting the two banks of the city of Florence under Nazi occupation suddenly loaded with the political function of resistance. Almost as if wanting to expound his method of assemblage, Godard therefore inserts a sign with the inscription “RIM(AK)ES” a pun which refers at the same time to the idea of creation and to that of a figurative and plastic rhyme [*rima* in Ital-

ian] between two or more images.

As Didi-Huberman (2007, p. 24) maintained, this is the «heuristic power of anachronism», treating the latter as a tool for art history, and it is thus that Godard's work can be interpreted as a heuristic of anachronism. Instead of producing a compressing to distinguish between *here* and *elsewhere*, rather than giving rise to an absolute distancing between what is near and what is far, it is about conceiving assemblage in a dynamic way, as an «art of displacement»¹⁹.

Undoubtedly, many of Godard's juxtapositions remain cryptic if not difficult to tolerate. However, even in the face of provocation, it should be recalled that assemblage is precisely that which *does not* establish equivalences, instead inviting us to understand *in what way* and *how* distinct and distant events may be related and especially to assess what the *conditions for possibility* are that it has again been possible to put back together, elsewhere. It was Godard himself, in a long interview published on the occasion of the exhibition at the Théâtre des Amandiers, who returned to the anachronistic and anachronic character of assemblage, further complicating the terms of the issue: «J'ai même fait un'équation, très simpliste, comme Euclide avait fait ses cinq axiomes: $x+3=1$. Pour obtenir un, il faut supprimer deux. Ce n'est pas vraiment un'équation. Quand je l'ai montrée à Badiou, il ne savait pas trop quoi en faire»²⁰.

If “Godard's theorem” remains unresolved, then we need to keep watching his films. At times, juxtaposing one image with another is like producing a multiplication of two places or two times, producing an incredible, provocative result. At other times, the exercise is instead to introduce – by putting on the table, on the editing bench – a series of elements with a subtractive goal, to push the gaze even further, towards a third dimension, another space whose deepest structure can be recognized but whose historical and geographical coordinates are as yet unclear.

Notes

¹ <https://nanterre-amandiers.com/en/evenement/nanterre-amandiers-ouvre-le-livre-dimage-jean-luc-godard-2019/>

² <http://www.fondazioneprada.org/project/jean-luc-godard-le-studio-dorphee/>

³ Lepastier 2019, p. 34.

⁴ See, at least, Cervini, Scarlato, Venzi, 2010.

⁵ On the relationship between history and geography in Godard, see Aumont 1999, pp. 160-162.

⁶ On geo-philosophical thinking, see Deleuze and Guattari, 2002, pp. 77-107.

⁷ For a reconstruction of the steps to realize the film and the controversy that followed its release, see De Baecque, 2010.

⁸ As a point of reference, see Said, 2008.

⁹ On the “between” as a key concept of Godard's method, see Deleuze 1989, p. 201.

¹⁰ As a theoretical reference, see Krakauer 2007.

¹¹ See Didi-Huberman Giannari, 2017, p. 50.

¹² For an analysis of this sequence, see Zucconi 2018, pp. 28-43.

¹³ See the classic by Todorov, 2014.

¹⁴ Tournier 1981, unnumbered pages.

¹⁵ Greimas, Courtés 2007, p. 171.

¹⁶ For a fresh look at the concept of isotopy in the field of semiotics and art theory, such as the idea of a “geography of images”, see Calabrese, 1985.

¹⁷ On the idea that film editing can work on the “profound figurativeness” of images, see Mengoni 2009, pp. 187-231.

¹⁸ On the colour manipulation in *The Image Book*, see Béghin 2019, pp. 23-24.

¹⁹ On the idea of “assemblage” and “displacement” as methods, see Zucconi 2018.

²⁰ See Delorme, Lepastier, 2019, p. 9.

References

- AUMONT, J. (1999) – *Amnésies. Fiction du cinéma d'après Jean-Luc Godard*. POL, Paris.
- BÉGHIN, A. (2019) – “L’image viendra”. *Cahiers du cinéma*, 759.
- BELLOUR, R. (2012) – *La querelle des dispositifs. Cinéma - installations, expositions: Cinéma - installations, expositions*. POL, Paris.
- CALABRESE, O. (1985) – *La macchina della pittura. Pratiche teoriche della rappresentazione figurativa fra Rinascimento e Barocco*. Laterza, Roma-Bari.
- CERVINI, A., SCARLATO, A., VENZI, L. (2010) – *Splendore e miseria del cinema. Sulle “Histoire(s) du cinéma” di Jean-Luc Godard*. Pellegrini, Cosenza.
- DANEY, S. (2001) – *La maison cinéma et le monde. 1. Le Temps des Cahiers 1962-1981*. POL, Paris 2001.
- DE BAECQUE, A. (2010) – *Godard. Biographie*. Grasset, Paris.
- DELEUZE, G. (1989) – *L’immagine-tempo. Cinema 2*. Ubulibri, Milano.
- DELEUZE, G., GUATTARI, F. (2002) – *Che cos’è la filosofia?*. tr. it., Einaudi, Torino.
- DELORME, S., LEPASTIER, J. (2019) – “Ardent espoir. Entretien avec Jean-Luc Godard”. *Cahiers du cinéma*, 759.
- DIDI-HUBERMAN, G. (2007) – *Storia dell’arte e anacronismo delle immagini*. Bollati Boringhieri, Torino.
- DIDI-HUBERMAN, G. (2015) – *Passés cités par JLG. L’œil de l’histoire, 5*. Minuit, Paris.
- DIDI-HUBERMAN, G., GIANNARI, N. (2017) – *Passer, quoi qu’il en coûte*. Minuit, Paris.
- GREIMAS, A., COURTÉS, J. (2007) – *Dizionario ragionato della teoria del linguaggio*. Bruno Mondadori, Milano.
- KRACAUER, S. (2007) – *Da Caligari a Hitler. Una storia psicologica del cinema tedesco*. L. QUARESIMA (a cura di), Lindau, Torino.
- LEPASTIER, J. (2019) – “Genèse. Entretien avec Philippe Quesne, directeur et programmateur du Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers”. *Cahiers du cinéma*, 759.
- MENGONI, A. (2009) – ““Accumulare prove”. Trauma e lavoro memoriale in “Muriel” di Alain Resnais”. In: Id. (a cura di), *Racconti della memoria e dell’oblio*, Protagon, Siena.
- SAID, E. (2008) – *Orientalismo. L’immagine europea dell’Oriente*. Feltrinelli, Milano.
- TODOROV, T. (2014) – *La conquista dell’america. Il problema dell’“altro”*. Einaudi, Torino.
- TOURNIER, M. (1981) – *Vues de dos*, Gallimard. Paris.
- ZUCCONI, F. (2018) – “«Accostare cose che non sembrano disposte a essere accostate». Politica e montaggio secondo Jean-Luc Godard”. *il Verri*, 68.
- ZUCCONI, F. (2018) – *Displacing Caravaggio: Art, Media, and Humanitarian Visual Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, Chan.

Francesco Zucconi is researcher at the Department of Design Culture at the IUAV University of Venice, he took his PhD in studies on visual representation. History, Theory and Production of Art and Images, at the Italian Institute of Human Sciences, Scuola Normale Superiore. Formerly a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the Centre d’Histoire et de Théorie des Arts of the EHESS in Paris and a Lauro de Bosis Fellow at Harvard. His publications include: *La sopravvivenza delle immagini nel cinema. Archivio, montaggio, intermedialità* (Mimesis 2013); *Sensibilità e potere. Il cinema di Pablo Larraín* (with M. Coviello, Pellegrini 2017); *Displacing Caravaggio: Art, Media, and Humanitarian Visual Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018).

Antonella Sbrilli
Seven notes on toy boxes, artists and art history

Abstract

Giotto and construction sets; LEGO: “Play well” and build; What artists played at when they were little; The doll’s house with a Duchamp; Joseph Cornell’s boxes; Boîtes and “*mise-en-boîte*”; The history of art-in-a-box: these are the titles of the seven incursions into the relationships between art, games, toys and assemblage presented in this article. Savinio’s observation that Giotto’s scenes in the Scrovegni Chapel follow the instructions of the “*Piccolo Architetto*” (a children’s construction set) is tied to recent research on the relationship between construction sets and art education, while around the conceptual theme of the portable box containing archaeological finds and miniatures are condensed important experiences of 20th-century art, from Duchamp and Cornell to the *Boîtes* exhibition. Art plays with games and games are fuelled by art and art history which – through current phenomena like gamification – offer themselves as a repertoire of works to be dismantled and reassembled, sequences of spaces and places to be crossed, a palimpsest of times and levels to climb.

Keywords

Games — Toys — Art

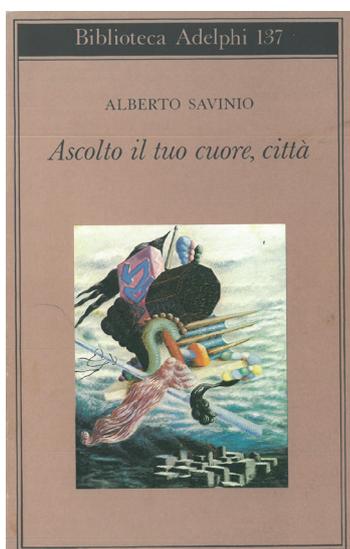


Fig. 1
 Cover of the book by Alberto Savinio, *Ascolto il tuo cuore, città*, Adelphi, Milan, 1984.

The vast domain of the relationship between art and games is increasingly populated by research, interpretations, and connections: a rereading in a ludic key of the artistic phenomena of recent centuries, with investigative thrusts: the activity of artists who created daring innovative toys (Bellasi P., Fiz A., Sparagni T. 2002; Sources D., Bacci di Capaci F. 2017); the influence of the games artists played as children on the subsequent development of their styles (Bordes J. 2012, 2016); analysis of changes in modern design sparked by a reconsideration of childhood (Kinchin J., O’Connor A. 2012); the presence of playable devices in linguistic, performance and interactive research, and finally the application of practices derived from games to involve the general public in art (Viola F., Idone Cassone V. 2017; Bottai S. 2018).

The presence of games – consistent, widespread, interrelated to cognitive, pedagogical, and sociological aspects – shows up extensively in current artistic creation, in exhibition and communication choices, in a reconsideration of art history itself.

A selection of examples, all more or less closely linked to the theme of the toybox, with its contents – also immaterial or metaphorical – of items to erect and assemble, is presented in this article, which moves back and forth within the 20th century, with glimpses of the present and the occasional deviation or detour.

Giotto and construction sets

The first step is to be found in a book by Alberto Savinio, published during WWII, *Ascolto il tuo cuore, città* [“Listen to your heart, city”] (Savinio A. [1944] 1984). The author, the younger brother of Giorgio de Chirico, had

changed his name from De Chirico to Savinio, an alias which would quickly lend itself to becoming – through anagrams of the seven basic letters – Nivasio and Visanio, the respective names of the protagonist and the father in the story told in his 1941 book *Infanzia di Nivasio Dolcemare*. Savinio's childhood, with its armoury of colourful shapes – balls, sticks, wheels, construction elements, of scientific and fantastic illustrations, spatial and narrative memories, had already appeared in some of his paintings during the '20s – assembled in precarious equilibria, and this is how they reappeared among the pages of *Ascolto il tuo cuore, città*. The author tells of a slow ex-cursive approach to the city of Milan, during which he stopped off in Padua and visited the Scrovegni Chapel. As soon as he crossed the threshold – he wrote – «time suddenly ran in reverse, and I went back to being a child in my playroom. Games to the right, games to the left. [...] Giotto's painting is the mother of toys». (*Ascolto il tuo cuore, città* [1944] 1984), pp. 62 et seq.). Giotto and toys: with Savinio's ear and his knack with words he may well have made out the name of the great Tuscan painter in the Italian word *giocattoli* [toys], with the artist being for some years at the centre of an intense “primitive” rereading while also becoming the trademark «dedicated to colour and creative expression» of the pencil and pastel company FILA, founded in Florence in 1920.

In his book, Savinio discerns among Giotto's forthright colours those of the skittles, balls, and dice of his own childhood pastimes, and keenly underlined – referring to a popular boxed construction set – that his composition «follows the instructions of the *Piccolo Architetto* [Little Architect]»: in this portable dimension, each piece seems eager to be assembled and disassembled like a spare part. «Giotto's landscapes need to be broken down every evening, when playtime is over, and stowed away in their boxes. Inside one box the temples, houses, loggias, towers and spiral belfries. In another, the reclining sheep and the cauliflower-like saplings».

LEGO: “Play well” and build

With a leap of centuries from Giotto and one of decades from Savinio, it is worth mentioning in passing an initiative of the LEGO Group, the famous manufacturer of little bricks, whose name came from a contraction of the Danish words “*leg godt*” (“play well”), lending itself in the Latin languages to an assonance with verbs that indicate assembly and connection. In 2005, the Danish company launched its LEGO Certified Professional programme (LCP), an initiative that involves artists of different nationalities who focus on the creative potential and derivations of its construction system based on a combination of coloured shapes and packaged in boxes just like Savinio's favourite *Piccolo Architetto*. In some ways resembling “an artists' residency” (Borelli R. 2019), the LEGO Certified Professional arouses the interest of an audience in the toy and its modular components that includes adults. An interest which, even before the LCP programme and quite independently from it, saw the involvement of artists such as Zbigniew Libera from Poland, Ai Wei Wei from China or Jan Vormann from Germany, who inserted Lego bricks into buildings to repair gaps in masonry throughout cities from Amsterdam to Orvieto and Venice.

What artists played at when they were little

The next step take us to a line of research begun by the Spanish sculptor, architect and collector Juan Bordes concerning the link between the games that avant-garde artists played when they were little and the development



Fig. 2

Cover of the book by Daniela Fonti, Filippo Bacci di Capaci (edited by), *La trottola e il robot. Tra Balla, Casorati e Capogrossi*, Exhibition catalog, PALP Palazzo Pretorio, Pontedera, 11 November 2017 – 22 April 2018, Bandecchi & Vivaldi, Pontedera 2017.

of their creativity. In a series of articles and exhibitions with eloquent titles – *La infancia de las vanguardias*, *Juguetes de La Vanguardia*, and *Juguetes de construcción. Escuela de la Arquitectura Moderna* – the renewal of educational models developed in the 19th century – in which learning through games plays a fundamental part – is synced to the early 20th century’s profound transformation of artistic languages (Bordes J., 2012; Bordes J. 2016). The toys, albums, models, and especially the boxed construction sets, together with the enlightened methods of educators such as Pestalozzi, Fröbel (and later Maria Montessori) dialogued at a distance with the playful, floating, re-combinable shapes of the artists (Klee, Mondrian, Picasso, etc.). In this scenario, the bricks from construction sets are seen as the foundation of the future design approaches of architects like Frank Lloyd Wright, Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier. In short, the author is suggesting, backed up by visual and syntactic evidence, that the games these artists played as children left traces in their creative development, thereby adding a second strand linking the evolution of pedagogy, the industrial production of toys and their popularization, artistic training and art education (Tavella C. 2020).

For the theme of this issue dedicated to games and assemblage in the teaching of architecture, this corpus of research seems particularly relevant, leading as it did to exhibitions and further investigations in Spain. In outlining the road, Juan Bordes – whose collection of construction sets runs into the hundreds – recalls the principles of Vitruvius, namely, *solidity*, *utility*, and *beauty*, which build, in his analysis, a network of references wherein boxed construction sets – increasingly popular over the course of the last two centuries among children of all social classes – became the first, founding, «school of modern architecture», which was to go on to influence the form of new 20th-century construction toys.

Doll’s house with a Duchamp

The subsequent foray is to the Museum of the City of New York, which keeps a doll’s house with a unique history and an unexpected presence. A toy born with educational sooner than ludic intentions, doll’s houses – as Martina Antonelli wrote (2018) – acquired a recreational meaning «only after the industrial revolution and the birth of industries specializing in the production of toys». The specimen preserved in New York was furnished over the course of more than two decades by Carrie Stettheimer (1869-1944), one of the daughters of a well-to-do family who arrived in New York from Europe in the 19th century, and through whose lively open salon passed many intellectuals and artists: one of Carrie’s sisters, Florine, herself a painter and poet, was much admired by the critic Carl Van Vechten and Marcel Duchamp. And it was none other than Marcel Duchamp, to be precise, a miniature reproduction of one of his works, who appeared in Stettheimer’s doll’s house.

As Martina Antonelli unerringly reconstructed (2018), one of the rooms at the back of the house is a “gallery”, an area whose furnishing was completed after Carrie’s death by another sister, Ettie, who hung miniatures of coeval artworks in it – just like a picture gallery. Among these works stands out the *Nude Descending a Staircase*, donated by Duchamp to Carrie in 1918 shortly before the artist left New York for Argentina, with a dedication “*en bon souvenir*”. Observing the rooms with their tiny pieces of furniture through the panes of glass which have replaced the original walls in the museum display, our thoughts easily turn to other works by

Duchamp, including his *Boîte-en-valise*, a portable container with miniatures of his own works, made in several versions between the second half of the 1930s and the early 1940s.

Joseph Cornell's Boxes

Marcel Duchamp – as Carla Subrizi noted (2008) – was working on his box/suitcase while Walter Benjamin was in the throes of publishing *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* (1936), both works underlining the characteristics of reproduction: the change in scale, the assemblage, travelling, circulation and dissemination.

During the undertaking of creating various versions of the *Boîte-en-valise* in New York, Duchamp sought the advice and collaboration of Joseph Cornell (1903-1972), an American artist of Dutch origin who shared the Frenchman's passion for *objets trouvés*, glass, miniatures, optical devices, and constructions inside boxes.

While living in a house on Utopia Parkway in the Flushing district of New York, Cornell chose as a means of expression the assembling of objects inside wooden boxes closed off by glass (Solomon D. 1997; Roscoe Hartigan L. 2007). Clay pipes, clock springs, feathers, compasses, dice, construction bricks, Victorian toys – assembled and composed along with cuttings from atlases, road maps, star charts – to create worlds that are coherent, magnetic and questioning, rooted in analogy and relationships. Childhood plays a key role in this process, as a source to draw on, as a dimension to be re-evoked, and as an audience to address (Ashton D. [1974] 2002).

Cornell was the creator of collages (also on film) and, in addition to the works he produced, his creativity is corroborated by his collection of dossiers on romantic ballerinas, opera singers, poets and film stars; in the 30,000 pages of his diaries, he reveals notes, traces of dreams and reveries, but also the daily practice of crossing the city in search of chance encounters that could trigger enlightenment and epiphany.

Organized in expanding files, the materials collected (writings, newspaper cuttings, photographs), gradually build networks of connections that sync up in unpredictable ways, where the boxes represent “the definitive and no longer expandable distillate” of a ceaseless and potentially endless activity that alludes to the “mechanism” and experience of connective thought (Castelli P, Sbrilli A. 2009).

One of the most popular series of boxes built by Cornell is entitled *Medici Slot Machine*. Reproductions of Tuscan Renaissance masterpieces, printed in different formats, including ID cards, are arranged inside the typical outline of a slot-machine together with toys and geographical maps: the young scions of the Renaissance dynasties travel into the future, while the machines take on the semblance of treasure chests where the player's luck and the goddess of fortune cross paths (Simic C. 1992). Another title used by Cornell for his brainchildren includes the words ‘Prince’ and ‘Princess’ in a temporal short-circuit between Machiavelli and Saint-Exupéry. *Medici Princess*, for example, contains an image of Bia de' Medici, as portrayed by Bronzino. In the box composed by Cornell for this natural daughter of Cosimo I stands out, next to the girl's hand, a red wooden ball, which echoes the balls of the Medici family coat of arms, but which is also, yet again, a toy enclosed inside its box.

Boîtes and “mise-en-boîte”

This range of artworks by Cornell and Duchamp, together with some simi-

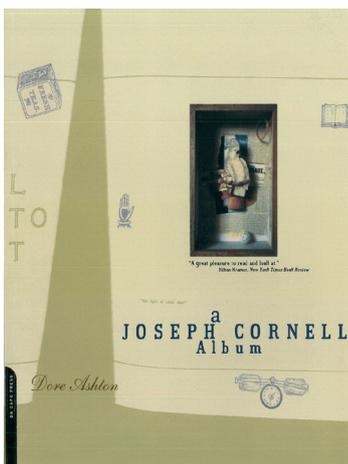


Fig. 3
Cover of the book by Dore Ashton, *A Joseph Cornell Album*, Da Capo Press, Cambridge MA, 2002.

lar ones by Schwitters, Giacometti, and Dalí, were recalled – as precursors and influencers of a trend towards the use of the box in the art of the '60s and '70s – in an exhibition entitled *Boîtes*, curated by Susanne Pagé and Françoise Chatel, which premiered at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in December 1976 and was subsequently transferred in February 1977 to the Maison de la Culture in Rennes (Pagé S., Chatel F. 1976). This exhibition, with the profusion of works selected for it, underlined the importance of the box format and the practice of “*mise-en-boîte*” in the language of those years, which was able to combine a conceptual framework with quotidian objects; the intellectual operation of choice and constructive bricolage.

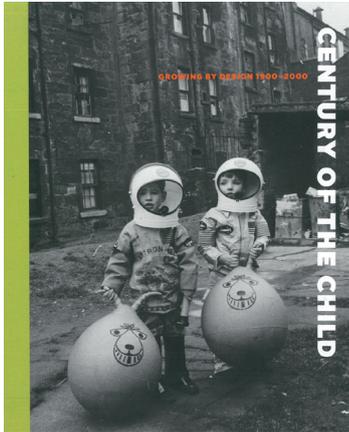


Fig. 4

Cover of the catalog of the exhibition held at Moma in New York from 29 July to 5 November 2012 by Juliet Kinchin, Aidan O'Connor, *Century of the Child. Growing by Design 1900-2000*, Exhibition catalog, Moma, New York, 2012.

The history of art-in-a-box

In the meantime, art and art history were making their début in boxed board games that included trials of skill and memory, such as *Trivial Pursuit*, investigations into the more or less invented theft of works from museums, and role-playing games (Dossena G. 1984, De Luca E. 2011). There was no lack of play sets from museums and galleries on their collections in the wake of a phenomenon – ‘gamification’ – that tries to adapt the procedures of games (including video games) to the legacy of the works kept. Below are just three recent examples of games on art history plus an analogy that comes from the past.

In 2015, the Beyeler Foundation in Basel published *Speed Art*. Issued by the publisher Carlit and the brainchild of Christian Fiore and Knut Happel, this game is based on the ability to observe, recognize and classify in six categories the works of the collection which are reproduced on cards. In line with the philosophy of ‘edutainment’, the box contains examples of choices that may be correct, incorrect, or disputable, and a mini-catalogue with information on some of the artists, reflections on iconography and composition, and curiosities which inspire the player to learn more about the artists and works cited.

In that same year, 2015, came *The Gallerist*, a game of strategy and planning against a financial background, designed by the Portuguese writer Vital Lacerda and focusing on the art market. The players slip into the shoes of competing art galleries which need to discover, promote and establish on the international scene their own artists through complex and intricate manoeuvres.

Guess the Artist. The Art Quiz Game is a boxed set that was released in 2017 by Laurence King Publishing. Authored by Robert Shore, the game consists of 60 cards, each of which has three drawings (visual clues) that allude to an artist, covering a period of time from the Renaissance to our own days. The drawings have nothing to do with the style of the artists to be guessed: they are clever abstract icons created by Craig Redman and Karl Maier, two designers who use a flat colourful style with strong black outlines. By proceeding to decipher the clues, the players amass precious information that can be used to understand the individual cards and the scenario as a whole.

Finally, an analogy that brings us – with another conceptual leap in time – to the work of the art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929), author of *Mnemosyne*, a figurative atlas (*Bilderatlas*) consisting of a series of panels made up of photo montages which bring together reproductions of different works: “vestiges that are mainly from the Renaissance (artworks, pages of manuscripts, playing cards, etc.), but also archaeological finds from the

ancient east, Greece and Rome; and further evidence from 20th-century culture (newspaper clippings, advertising labels, stamps)” (Engramma – Mnemosyne Atlas online). Among the various existing editions of this project which remained unfinished due to the author’s death, is one “in a box”: this is the catalogue of exhibitions dedicated to the *Mnemosyne Atlas* (German edition: Dölling und Galitz Verlag, 1994). The panels, reproduced on loose sheets, «handy and productively ‘disorderable’», can be extracted from the container one by one, in different sequences and relationships. In some way, they add the dimension of a gaming table to the work desk of whoever is studying, transforming studies into a constructive and combinatorial session of interpretations and meanings Sbrilli (A. 2017)

A significant presence and an immense theme in the current panorama (Ortoleva 2012 Raessens; 2012; Bartezzaghi 2016), the game also affects the artistic legacy, thanks to its vast catalogue of objects and characters, a labyrinthine sequence of spaces and places, a palimpsest of times and levels to fathom and climb, to disassemble and reassemble.

References

ANTONELLI M. (2018) – *Gli usi creativi della casa di bambola*. Master thesis in contemporary art history, Sapienza University of Rome.

artusi.it – a blog by Maria Stella Bottai and Antonella Sbrilli on games and the innovative teaching of art history.

ASHTON D. [1974] (2002) – *A Joseph Cornell Album*. Da Capo Press, Cambridge MA.

BARTEZZAGHI S. (2016) – *La ludoteca di Babele*. Utet, Milan.

BELLASI P., FIZ A., SPARAGNI T. (2002) – *L’arte del gioco: da Klee a Boetti*. Catalogue of the exhibition in Aosta at the Regional Archaeological Museum, 20 December 2002 - 13 May 2003), Mazzotta, Milan 2002.

BORDES J. (2007) – *La infancia de las vanguardias: sus profesores desde Rousseau a la Bauhaus*. Ediciones Cátedra, Madrid.

PÉREZ C., LEBRERO STALS J. (2010) – *Toys of the Avant-Garde*. Málaga: Museo Picasso 4 October 2010 - 30 January 2011, Fundación Museo Picasso, Málaga.

BORDES J. (2012) – *Historia de los juguetes de construcción. Escuela de la Arquitectura Moderna*. Ediciones Cátedra, Madrid.

BORDES J. (2016) – *Juguetes de construcción. Escuela de la Arquitectura Moderna*. Catalogue of the exhibition at Círculo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, 18 February - 15 May 2016. [online] <<https://www.circulobellasartes.com/libros/juguetes-construccion-escuela-arquitectura-moderna-2/>>

BORELLI R. (2019) – *I Lego Certified Professional: gli artisti “quasi” residenti della LEGO*. Thesis on contemporary art history, Sapienza University of Rome

BOTTAI S. (2018) – “Videogiochi d’artista e videogiochi per l’apprendimento”. In *Economia della cultura*, 3 (Year XXVIII).

CASTELLI P., SBRILLI A. (2009) – “Esplorazioni, estensioni, costellazioni. Aspetti della memoria in Joseph Cornell”. *La Rivista di Engramma*, [e-journal] 70, February/March.

DE LUCA E. (2011) – *Dizionario dei giochi da tavolo*. Libellula Edizioni, Tricase.

Didatticarte – <didatticarte.it> the blog of the architect Emanuela Pulvirenti .

DOSSENA G. (1984) – *Giochi da tavolo*. Mondadori, Milan

Engramma - Mnemosyne Atlas on line [2000, 2004] 2012 e ss. [online] <http://www.engramma.it/eOS/core/frontend/eos_atlas_index.php>.

FONTI D., BACCI DI CAPACI F. (2017) (eds.) – *La trottola e il robot. Tra Balla, Casorati e Capogrossi*. Catalogue of the exhibition at PALP Palazzo Pretorio, Pontedera, 11 November 2017 – 22 April 2018, Bandecchi & Vivaldi, Pontedera 2017.

KINCHIN J, O’CONNOR A. (2012) – *Century of the Child. Growing by Design 1900-2000*. Catalogue of the exhibition at the MOMA, New York, 29 July - 5 November 2012.

Micromondi 2017 [online] <<https://micromondi.tumblr.com>>.

ORTOLEVA P. (2012) – *Homo ludicus. The ubiquity of play and its roles in present society*, The Italian Journal of Game Studies, [e-journal] 1.

PAGÉ S., CHATEL F. (1976) – catalogue of the exhibition Boîtes, Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 16 December 1976 - 30 January 1977; later at ARC/2, Maison de la Culture de Rennes, 3 February - 2 March 1977, Paris

RAESSENS J. (2012) – *Homo Ludens 2.0. The Ludic Turn in Media Theory*. Universiteit Utrecht.

ROSCOE HARTIGAN L. (2007) – catalogue of the exhibition Navigating the Imagination, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington 17 November 2006-19 February 2007; Peabody Essex Museum, Salem 28 April 2007-19 August 2007; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco 6 October 2007-6 January 2008

SAVINIO A. [1944] (1984) – *Ascolto il tuo cuore, città*. Bompiani, Milan 1944; Adelphi, Milan 1984.

SBRILLI A. (2017) – “La parola all’immagine. Facciamo il nostro gioco”. In Engramma, [e-journal] 150 (october).

SIMIC C. (1992) – *Dime-Store Alchemy. The Art of Joseph Cornell*. It. Transl. A. CATTANEO (2005), *Il cacciatore di immagini*, Adelphi, Milan.

SOLOMON D. (1997) – *Utopia Parkway. The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell*. MFA Publications, Boston.

SUBRIZI C. (2008) – *Introduzione a Duchamp*. Edizioni Laterza, Rome-Bari.

TAVELLA C. (2020) – *Tra arte e pedagogia: la formazione degli artisti al gioco da Froebel al contemporaneo*. Master’s thesis on education and methods to teach art history, Sapienza University of Rome.

VIOLA F., IDONE CASSONE V. (2017) – *L’arte del coinvolgimento*. Hoepli, Milan.

Antonella Sbrilli, Associate Professor of History of Contemporary Art at the Sapienza Università di Roma. Among the recent publications and exhibitions on the theme of the game: exhibition catalog *Ah che rebus! Cinque secoli di enigmi fra arte e gioco in Italia*, Rome, Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica 2010-2011, co-curated with Ada De Pirro, Mazzotta, Milan 2010; *Nelle tasche del quotidiano. Giocatori di prestigio alle prese con oggetti, immagini, parole*, in the catalog of the exhibition *Dal nulla al sogno. Dada e Surrealismo dalla Collezione del Museo Boijmans Van Beuningen*, Ferrero Foundation, Alba, Silvana Editoriale, 2019; *Stare al gioco. Intermezzi ludici e replicabili tra parola e immagine*, with Marco Dotti, Alfabeta edizioni, DeriveApprodi, Milan 2019.

Laura Scala

Malevič's *Victory Over the Sun*: the Dissolution of Reality

Abstract

The scenography of *Victory Over the Sun* by Malevič (St. Petersburg, 1913) represents one of the best expressions of "total art", combining allusions to the multi-dimensional *Cubo-Futurist* theatre with the experimental music of Matjušin, and the *transmental* language of Kručěnych. The new idea of space in Malevič's drawings goes beyond ordinary human reason – symbolized by the Sun – and spreads to the world of dreams, fairy tales, rituals, and folk traditions. The theatre performance leads the spectators through a journey to a new world without the Sun, and so without order, directions, proportions and rules, where the most incredible objects float and dance together in space, as the free words of a *transrational* Kručěnych's composition.

Keywords

Montage — Design — *Avant-garde* theatre — Collage

With the *Black Square's Suprematist* icon, painted in the summer of 1915, Malevič brings us to a new world beyond reason. This *transmental* journey, undertaken by the artist with the poet Kručěnych and the painter-violinist Matjušin, is expressed in the *zaum'* play *The Victory Over the Sun*, staged for the first time in St. Petersburg, in December 1913¹. The protagonists of this first *Cubo-Futurist* show, the last step towards *Suprematism* (Marzaduri, Rizzi and Battafarano 1991), are *Supermen* who fight and kill the Sun, and reach the new world of the *Tenth Lands*. The *Heliomachy*, that is the victory over cosmic forces and the conquest of the stars, is the work's *leitmotif*: a symbol of revolt against any imposition of the past. The space that Malevič aims at representing in the six sketches of *Victory Over the Sun* (Fig. 1) is hard to draw on paper, since it goes beyond reason. It looks as though the artist is striving to capture a timeless place, which is made of the same substance as dreams and memories, and makes use of ancient and new languages taken from magic rites, Russian folklore, circus and cinema. This place, depicted in two dimensions, is so surreal, *a-logical* and boundless, that it would require a translation into a three-dimensional space in order to be understood. Therefore, starting from Malevič's drawings, we tried to create three-dimensional models of them.

Victory Over the Sun stems from the collaboration of Malevič, Kručěnych and Matjušin, who met at the first congress of the *Russian Bards of the Future*, in Uusikirkko, Finland, in the summer of 1913. The congress *manifesto*, published in the newspapers of St. Petersburg and Moscow, proclaims *The New Theatre "Budetljanin"*² and its aim:

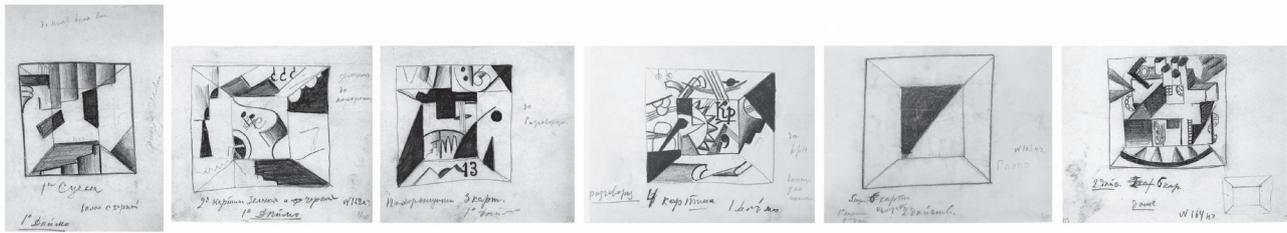


Fig. 1

Kazimir Malevič, *Pobeda Na Solncem/ Victory Over the Sun*, six sketches, pencil on paper St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music Art, 1913.

«the right to annihilate the outdated way of thinking of the laws of causality, of common sense, of symmetrical logic, and to give a personal and creative version of the real world of new men; to attack the artistic weakness, the Russian theatre, and to radically transform it. The Art Theatre, Korševskij, Aleksandrinskij, Bol’šoj and Malyj are all outdated».

(Matjušin, Kručěnych and Malevič, 1913, in Petrova e Di Pietrantonio 2015, p. 185 and following.)

Malevič, Kručěnych and Matjušin jointly sought new ways of understanding the world, going beyond the real world, the senses and reason, to reach another reality (Kručěnych 1913), experimenting new forms of art, literature and music. These three artists completely revolutionized the way of doing theatre through the *analytical de-construction* and the *synthetic re-construction* of the artistic substance. The Cubist pictorial compositional techniques go beyond the limits of art, moving from poetry to music and stage action. While the *Budetljane* painters dissected objects and parts of the body and sewed them together again with new meanings, the *zaum*’ writers cut the syntactic-semantic connections of texts and split the words into minimal pieces – syllables or letters – enhancing them in their inner phonic values, and then recomposing them in unimaginable combinations of the so called *transmental* language.

In *Victory Over the Sun*, Kručěnych put together not only individual fragments of action and scraps of dialogue, but also meaningless phonemes. These operations of disassembly, assembly and *collage* came from the Cubist *sdvig*. The *sdvig* practice involves the displacement of pictorial levels, abrupt transitions of compositional techniques and unexpected and apparently incompatible dimensional-figural relations and it is translated into Kručěnych’s *zaum*’ language as unmotivated fractures of verbal segments and random combinations of letters, syllables and units of meaning. The same feeling of *nonsense* had to be produced by illogical sound-connections from Matjušin’s music and by the graceless movements of the “actors-figurines” on the scene, designed by Malevič. Words and music follow the flow of painting, leaving the burdens of the past and freeing the creative act from unnecessary weights. Logic has always hindered new movements of the subconscious and, in order to free it from prejudices, the current of *a-logisim* has been promoted (Malevič, 1919). In his letter to Matjušin, June 1916, Malevič encourages his friend to free the letter from the line, and to give it the opportunity to move freely. These groups of letters will hover in space and will give us the opportunity to move further and further away from earth³.

Malevič sketched six three-dimensional scenic boxes (Fig. 1), which allude to a pyramid trunk – whose main base faces the spectators – or to a cube, seen in central perspective. All his sketches refer to the square and are drawn on a square. Moreover, the observer is ideally “closed” inside a

cube that is composed of five squares in depth and the sixth square is hypothetically placed behind the spectators. The backdrop is a construction of rooms, inside a room, a multiplication of mirrors, a kaleidoscope of worlds that open wide towards the eyes of the spectator: each face is a projection on the new world (Michelangeli 2000).

In all the six sketches, many dark shapes are contained in white spaces, in a *climax* that leads to the victory over the Sun and the arrival in the *Tenth Lands*: the static figure of the square contains the dynamic of the story. The objects – more or less filled with black colour – of incongruous dimensions, proportions, and semantic fields, torn from their own reality, invade the stage-box and confuse the spectator. The clash of these objects gives life to the new world beyond reason, some of them such as the hat, the spoon and the stairs, are figurative archetypes, that are also present in other Malevič's works (for example: *Englishman in Moscow*, Stedelijk Museum di Amsterdam, 1914). (Fig. 2)

Malevič acts as a director of a dream or of a child's memory and puts together the chimneys, the stairs, the sickle, the wheel of the factory world, with the violins, the musical notes, the organ pipes, the trumpet, which allude to Matjušin's cacophony. A classic capital, numbers, letters, circles, black triangles, planetary systems and the first *Suprematist* elements are bundled up inside the six white squares, as free *a-logic* words in a Kručėnyh text; finally, images that materialize or dissolve in the white space. In these sketches, the space, or emptiness or «white», declares itself through the objects that it contains, which are the full «black» shapes. These elements, topologically placed towards the observer, float dancing *within* and *beyond* the three-dimensional boundaries, traced by Malevič, recalling the «*literal and phenomenal transparency*» of Rowe and Sluzky (Rowe and Sluzky 1963, 45-54). The observer is brought into a universe where he has the simultaneous perception of different levels, figures, times and worlds. The white background expands among the objects and goes beyond the limits of reason. The white, that is the absolute and the perfection to which we aspire, is in contrast with the black, that is the concreteness of those everyday objects that break into the *Cubo-Futurist* scene, until the *Black Square* in the *Fifth Scene* takes over, destroying the white and the traditional Enlightenment values of reason. «At the end of Scene V, the dark square descends into the square of the stage, first it's like a curtain that lowers on the diagonal, then an eyelid that closes.» (Semerani 2012, 28, personal translation). Malevič seems to understand the whole universe, he is aware that the opposites interpenetrate each other until they finally find themselves into another order.



Fig. 2
Kazimir Malevič, *Englishman in Moscow*, painting, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1914.

We reach the *Tenth Lands* through the six Scenes designed by Malevič. The new *Cubo-Futurist* space is perceived through an investigation by figural isolations, identifying full and empty spaces, through the reconstruction of three-dimensional models that reproduce the stage-box, our field of action. In each sketch, which is built as a cube seen in perspective, we can analyse the shape, the size and the topology of the dark elements inside the square, which direct the gaze of the observer, between compressions and extensions of perceptions, according to laws of attraction and repulsion between the shapes. The sketches' compositional analysis through the model thus becomes a tool to explore the elements and the relationships that exist between them within the field of action. This reconstruction takes the signs and the expressive forms to the extreme and translates them into

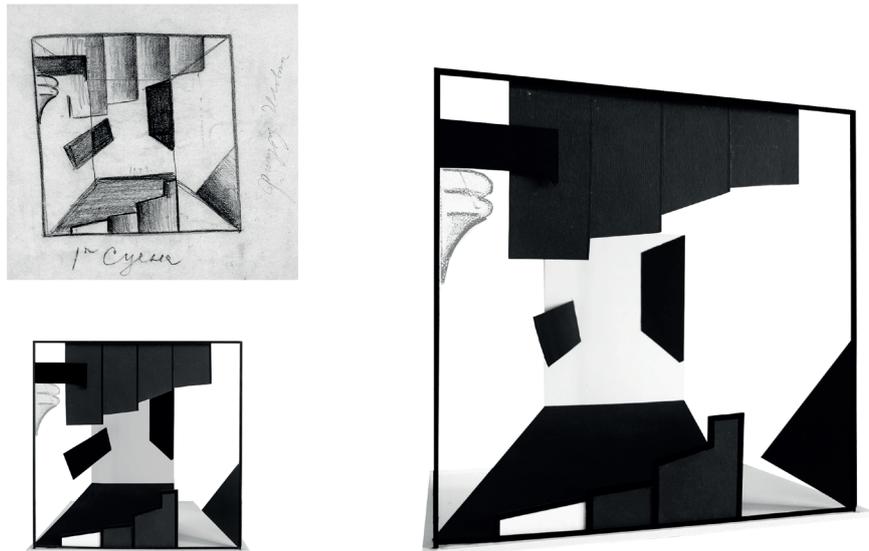


Fig. 3

Kazimir Malevič *Pobeda Nad Solncem/ Victory Over the Sun, First Scene, Act One*, sketch, pencil on paper, St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music Art, 1913.

Laura Scala, three-dimensional reconstruction of the set, 2017.

spatial terms: how could these sets have been built three-dimensionally in the small Luna Park Theatre in St. Petersburg⁴⁷?

In the *First Scene* of the *First Act* (Fig. 3) two *Futuristic Strongmen* tear the curtain and the victory over the Sun is described in a fragmentary way. The dynamic of the stage-action is enforced by the two black objects, stuck inside the cube, like two splinters, compositionally counterbalanced by a black triangle in the lower right corner, and by a black rectangle in the upper left corner. On the top left side, a classical column refers to the past to defeat. The wings are represented by four black curtains and a sort of three-level scaffolding is drawn on the floor.

In the *Second Scene* (First Act, Fig. 4) white and black objects remind us of a struggle: on the left of the background there is a half a white wheel turning; next to two notes and a bass clef, there is a wrapped dark blanket, anticipating the victory of black over white; on the floor, another three-level scaffolding is drawn like a stair; from the ceiling, next to the three hanging hooks, a black figure with seven sides looms like a dark bird, while, on the lateral faces, the scene is framed on the left by two curtains and on the right by a black curtain that looks like a bat.

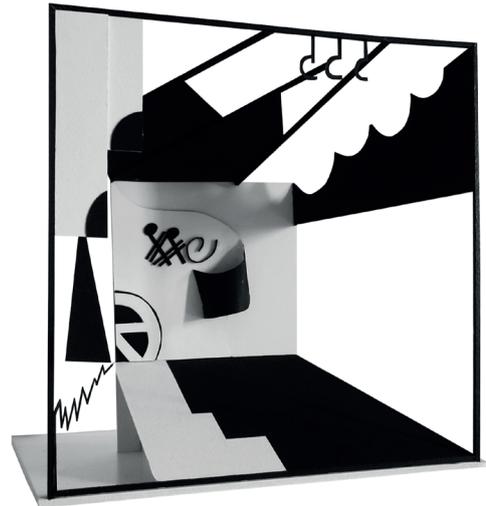
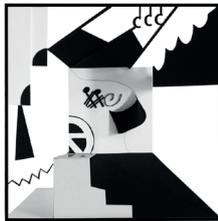
In the *Third Scene* (First Act, Fig. 5) the *Gravediggers* sing for the Sun's death; the sketch is a bundle of black and white points, lines and surfaces on different levels, which prefigure a new world. Six black figures dominate the set: in the background, a segment of a black circle stretches towards another small black circle, invading the right face; a bulky dark cross falls from the ceiling, hinting at the death of the Sun; on the lateral faces there is a black trapeze on the left, and two black triangles on the right, one of which is hanging (from the right corner above). On the floor, a black quaver seems to move next to the number 13. Two white curtains drop from the ceiling.

In the *Fourth Scene* (First Act, Fig. 6) "Those who bring the Sun prisoner" reach the *Tenth Lands* and sing his death. In the background, on the left side, there is a large Sun in the middle, two underlined letters *Kp* and a black comma; on the left there is an airplane, facing the Sun. Triangles, quadrangular figures and a black planet animate the space: a sort of closed fist, like a cannon facing the Sun, rises from a black quadrilateral, at the bottom left side; a black triangle is hanging from the upper right corner and

Fig. 4

Kazimir Malevič, *Pobeda Nad Solncem/ Victory Over the Sun, Second Scene, Act One*, sketch, pencil on paper, St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music Art, 1913.

Laura Scala, three-dimensional reconstruction of the set, 2017.

**Fig. 5**

Kazimir Malevič, *Pobeda Nad Solncem/ Victory Over the Sun, Third Scene, Act One*, sketch, pencil on paper, St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music Art, 1913.

Laura Scala, three-dimensional reconstruction of the set, 2017.

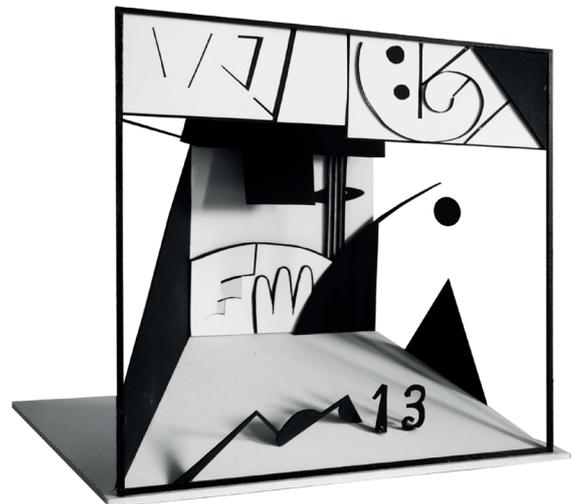
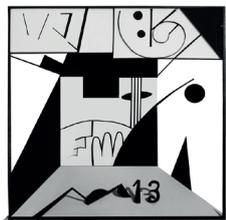




Fig. 6

Kazimir Malevič, *Pobeda Nad Solncem/ Victory Over the Sun, Fourth Scene, Act One*, sketch, pencil on paper, St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music Art, 1913.

Laura Scala, three-dimensional reconstruction of the set, 2017.

another quadrilateral is placed in the upper left edge of the backdrop (this is probably an airplane's wing); on the ceiling, a planet oscillates between oblique lines, curves, drapes and hooks with wings. The eye of the observer stumbles over a curved depression on the floor; through the lateral walls, the viewer glimpses planetary systems as gashes in new worlds and dimensions.

The *Fifth Scene* of the *Second Act* (Fig. 7) anticipates the famous *Black Square* of 1915: there is a square in the background, cut into two triangles, where the overlying one is black, representing a partial and then total eclipse of the Sun, the victory over light and reason. The *News* characters explain to the *Cowards* that they have shot the past and the *Disclaimer* rejoices in the present. The *Black Square*, empty of objects and full of sensations, opens a window towards the whole universe; there is no reason to doubt that the *Suprematist Black Square* has its origin in this painting, since this unique image includes all the meanings.

Finally, we reach the *Tenth Lands* (Fig. 8). The *Sixth Scene*'s cubic stage-box is contradicted by a perspective and axonometric drawing at the same time, which represents, through a *collage* of fragments, a large *Cubo-Futurist building-house-city*: five cylindrical chimneys or organ pipes stand out from the roof; a clock is glimpsed from a window; a spiral staircase and a ladder allow us to reach unknown destinations. This *city-dresser*, embedded in the set, goes beyond earthly logic and cannot be placed in known time and space. In the *world upside-down* (a *topos* of *Russian Futurism*) of the *Tenth Lands*, the man is freed from any physical and psychological burden: laws, social conventions, hierarchies are abolished; spatial and temporal coordinates are disrupted; logical-causal connections and grammatical rules are no longer applied. Time goes back, the cause precedes the effect, there are no more proportions and directions, everything is the opposite of everything else; common sense, logic and reason show their limits in this upside-down reality. The *Sixth Scene* is, among all, the most difficult to understand in spatial terms, since there are a lot of incongruences; the *city-dresser* is designed as a body, around which the artist's eye moves through time and space: Malevič constantly changes the point of view, he juxtaposes partial views, sections, and distorted perspectives, disorientating the viewer. The *Tenth Lands* remind us of an intangible world, space

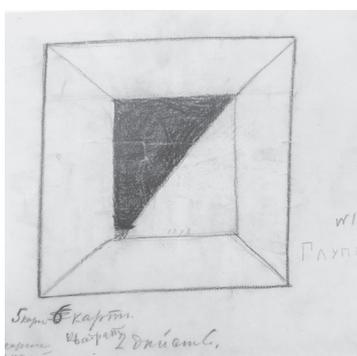


Fig. 7

Kazimir Malevič, *Pobeda Nad Solncem/ Victory Over the Sun, First Scene, Act Two*, sketch, pencil on paper, St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music Art, 1913.

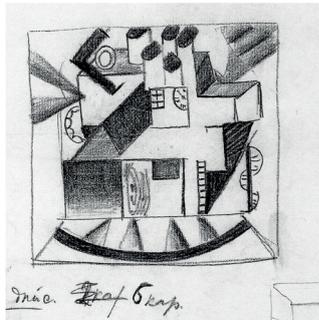


Fig. 8

Kazimir Malevič, *Pobeda Nad Solncem/ Victory Over the Sun, Sixth Scene, Act Two*, sketch, pencil on paper, St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music Art, 1913.

Laura Scala, three-dimensional reconstruction of the set, 2017.

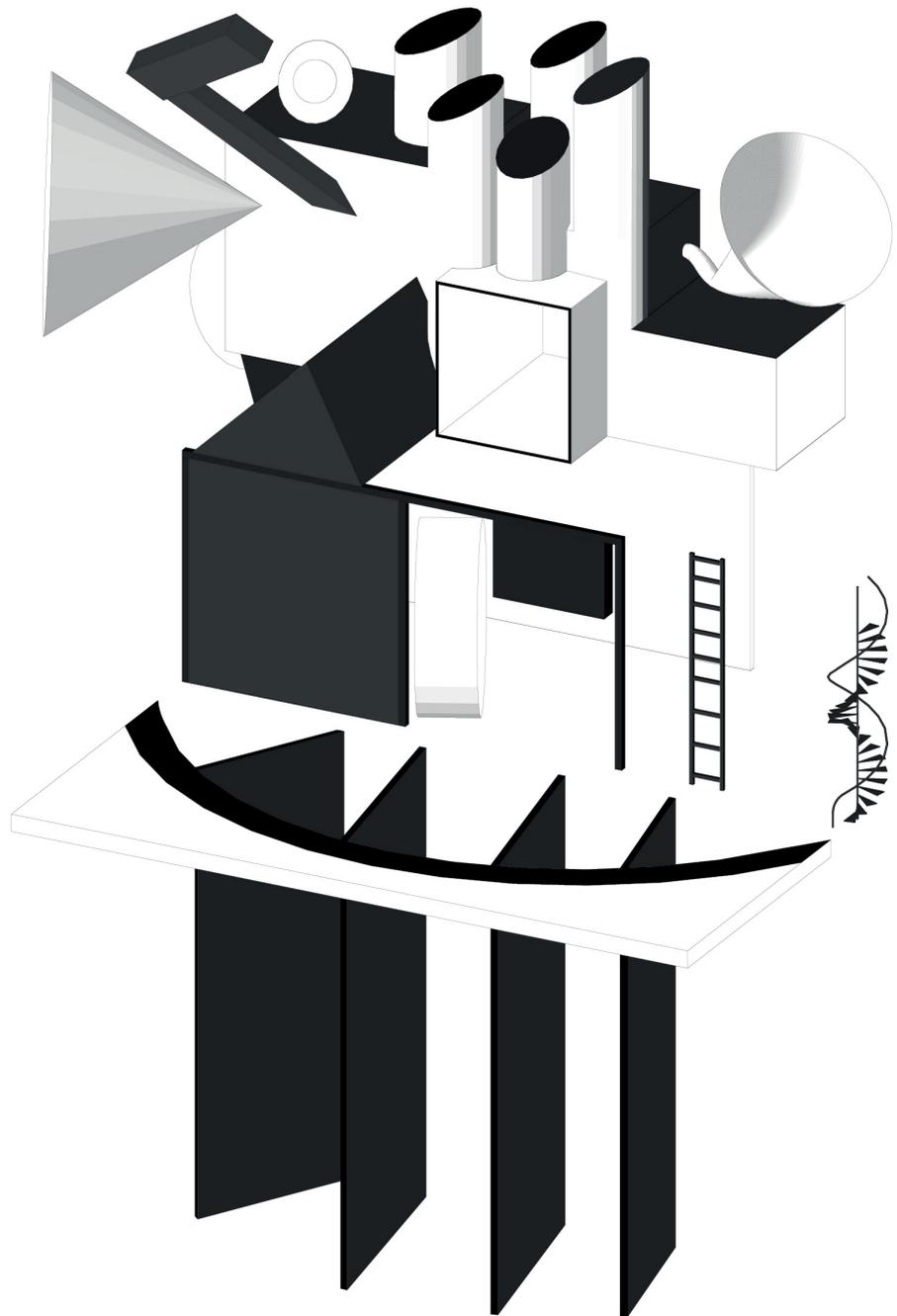




Fig. 9
Kazimir Malevič, *Instrumental Lump o Musical Instruments*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1913.

and time, that cannot be trapped by the two-dimensional sketch. In the work *Instrumental Lump* by Malevič (Fig. 9) it is possible to find the same elements and compositional laws that we see in the *Sixth Scene*. The construction is made up of actions of dismemberment, perforation, the addition and subtraction of bodies, the decomposition and re-composition of pieces.

Cubo-Futurism and *Suprematism* subverted the use of words, sounds, colours and signs, and revolutionized the ordinary idea of space. The *Cubist* visual distortion and the alienation of the object, through the technique of *sdvig*, *collage*, disassembly and re-assembly, bring our attention back to the object itself, its characteristic shapes and materials, regardless of its functions. This attention to the object as such, both in the art and theatre, is analogous to the inner value of the word and the sound as such in Russian *Cubo-Futurist* literature: phrases that are to compose new languages, fragments that are to create new worlds to which you could aspire. Language is the meaning frozen in the word, just as the energy is frozen in the shapes. Malevič's *upside-down world* is a space in which we can get lost as in *Alice in Wonderland*, where the irrational breaks into everyday life and where the industrial world of technology, speed and machines merges with the dreamlike, circus, unpredictable universe of childhood and myths, to lead us to that limbo, «an indefinite place where art is born» (Semerani, e-mail of 2017, personal translation), perceivable only through another type of knowledge: a space-time break widely open towards a new world.

Notes

¹ After the first performance on December 3, 1913 at the small Luna Park Theatre on Oficérskaja Street in St. Petersburg, another performance took place on December 5 of the same year. The show, divided into two *Acts* of four and two *Scenes*, was introduced by the prologue by Chlebnikov. Today it only remains Malevič's set designs and stage costumes, Kručěnych's *libretto* written in *zaum'*, and only twenty-three bars of Matjušin's experimental music.

² *Budetljanin* (plural *Budetljane*) is a neologism that Chlebnikov invented in order to use it instead of "futurists". *Budetljane* means "the men of the future" or "the men that will be", from the Russian verb "*budet*" (he/she will be).

³ Letters and notes about the friendship between Malevič and Matjušin are translated in MALEVIČ K. (2000) – *Suprematismo*. edited by DI MILIA G., Abscondita, Milano.

⁴ At the end, – for lack of organization and money – the original sketches by Malevič become the sets themselves, placed on the backdrop of the scene. Every three-dimensional intention of Malevič's sketches is only achieved through the use of stage lighting design. [LIVŠIĆ B. K. (1933) – *Polutoraglazyj strelec*. Leningrad.].

References

- BOWLT J. E. (1976) – *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934*. Viking Press, New York, 116-135.
- DE MICHELI M. (1959) – *Le avanguardie artistiche del Novecento*. Feltrinelli, Milano.
- DOUGLAS C. (1980) – *Swans of other worlds, K. Malevich and the origins of Abstraction in Russia*. UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor.
- DI MILIA G. (2000) a cura di – *Kazimir Malevic, Suprematismo*. Abscondita, Milano.
- KRUČĚNYCH A. E. (1913) – *Pobeda Nad Solncem*. Petrograd.
- Trad. it. M. BÖHMING (2003) a cura di – *La Vittoria sul Sole*. La mongolfiera, Cosenza.
- KRUČĚNYCH A. E. (1913) – *Novye puti slova*. In CHLEBNIKOV V., KRUČĚNYCH A. E., GURO E. – *Troe, Žuravl'*, Sankt-Peterburg.
- LIVŠIC B. K. (1933) – *Polutoraglazyj strelec*, Leningrad.
- Trad. it. KRAISKI G. (1968) a cura di – *L'Arciere dall'occhio e mezzo. Autobiografia del futurismo russo*. Laterza, Bari.
- MILNER J. (1996) – *Kazimir Malevich and the Art of Geometry*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- MALEVIČ K. (1919) – *O novych sistemach v iskusstve*. Unovis, Vitebsk.
- MALEVIČ K. (1976) – *Pis'ma k M. V. Matjušin*. In E. F. Kovtun, *Ežegodnik ot dela rukopisi Puškinskogo doma na 1974 god*. Leningrad.
- MATJUŠIN, KRUČĚNYCH A. E. e K. MALEVIČ (1913) – *Pervyj vserossijskij s'ed bajačej buduščego (poetov-fururistov), Zasedanija 18 i 19 ijulia 1913 goda v Usikirko (Finljandija) [Il primo congresso panrusso dei poeti futuristi, 18 e 19 luglio 1913 a Uusikirko (Finlandia)]*. *Za 7 dnei*, 28, (122), pp. 605-606.
- MARZADURI M., RIZZI D. e BATTAFARANO I. M., (1991) – *Scritti sul futurismo russo*. Peter Lang, New York, Bern.
- MICHELANGELI C. (2000) – “Il vuoto e il suo respiro”. In BASNER E., CASALI C., CORRADINI M., CORTENOVA G., GUADAGNINI W., MICHELANGELI L., VILINBACHOVA T., PETROVA E. – *Kazimir Malevič e le sacre icone russe. Avanguardia e tradizioni*. Electa, Milano.
- PETROVA E. e DI PIETRANTONIO G. (2015) a cura di – *Malevič*. Giunti Arte Mostre Musei, Milano.
- PETROVA E., KARASIK I. e N., BASNER E. V., (2000) – *In Malevič's circle: confederates-students-followers in Russian 1920s-1950s*. Palace Editions, Moscow.
- ROWE C. e SLUZKY R. (1963) – “Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal”. *Perspecta*, vol. 8, 45-54.
- SEMERANI L. (2012) – “Il Circolo Malevič – La scuola UNOVIS 1919-1922. Il dipartimento di Ricerca Formale e Teorica del Museo di Cultura Artistica di San Pietroburgo, 1923-1926”. In GALLO A., a cura di – *The clinic of dissection of art*. Marsilio, Venezia, 12-31.

Laura Scala (Treviso, 1986) is a Phd architect based in Venice. She achieved the title of Doctor of Philosophy in Architectural Composition at Luav University of Venice with praise and dignity of publication in 2017. Her work was shown at the *Close Reading* exhibition by L. Degli Espositi at the Tulpemanie Gallery in Milan in April 2017. During her academic formation, she participated in an internship with the Venetian Studio Semerani e Tamaro Architetti Associati and in 2012 she graduated with honors at the Faculty of Architecture of Venice. She has worked as teaching assistant of Professor A. Gallo at luav's courses and laboratories since 2014, and at W.A.Ve – luav summer Architecture Workshops – since 2016. Starting from 2014 she is curating Design and Architecture exhibitions, most of which are related to luav University of Venice. She is author and co-author of W.A.Ve's critical texts and of published projects together with Professor A. Gallo.

Cosimo Monteleone
Frank Lloyd Wright and the play with geometric abstraction

Abstract

Friedrich Fröbel is known in history as the creator of the *Kindergarten*, a pedagogical institution established in Germany in 1837 that spread all over the world in fifty years. This educational method was a significant moment in Frank Lloyd Wright's training and the following essay investigates the learning mode of the American architect and its possible repercussion in his works. The analysis does not focus on the formal similarities that can be found in his design, because these aspects were already investigated by many scholars, but it is based on the traces that the rules of the play have left in the compositional method of the Maestro.

Keywords

Frank Lloyd Wright — Kindergarten — Fröbel

There are many opinions on the weight to be attributed to the influence that play and study exert on the creation of our personality, but all the pedagogues agree in considering both fundamental for a healthy psychophysical growth of the self. In particular, the so-called “construction” games encourage the reinterpretation of reality by introducing the child to what experts define deferred imitation (Trisciuzzi 1984), that is, the ability to reproduce behaviors even in the absence of a model. If game and study play such an important role in the formation of the ego, how much of what we learn during the training period is poured into the behavior and actions of an adult? If this question is addressed in deepening a great personality like that of Frank Lloyd Wright, the exploration becomes insidious, first because the cultural roots of the American architect are more than one and, second, because there are already a lot of studies about it (Kaufmann 1981). So, what is the purpose of insisting on these topics if critics have already probed the relationship between the educational method of Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel and the architectural production of the *Prairie* period? This essay proposes an overtaking of formal and symbolic analogies between the drawings of the Kindergarten manual and his plans or volumes of buildings, which, however, I do not want to deny, but I want to highlight how in Wright the game has become a tool for composition.

To understand how profound was the *Kindergarten* influence in Frank Lloyd Wright's training, it is better, before studying in deep the philosophy of the method, to specify briefly, but precisely, which part of the pedagogical institution the American architect attended thanks to the help of his mother Anna Lloyd Jones. This short path of historical and

biographical reconstruction starts from a privileged source, the words of the architect that can be read in *An Autobiography* (Wright 1998)¹. Anna learned about Fröbel's method in 1876, during the Philadelphia Centenary Exhibition and bought the *gifts* through which her two children, Frank and Mary Jane, aged 9 and 7 respectively, playing, should have started a new learning path.

We note some aspects: the first is that Wright was introduced to the method when he was older than usual; the second is that he never participated in a real *Kindergarten* in a strict sense of the word. Indeed, Anna adapted Fröbel's method to the family economic condition, giving up professional educational educators and focusing exclusively on the activities that could be carried out inside a room. In the original intentions of the pedagogue, the *Kindergarten* was addressed to children between 3 and 5 years old, they should be gathered in classes of about 25-30 and should spent time outside playing and farming (Owen 1906).

But Wright had a lonely childhood, attending an incomplete *Kindergarten*, and if the experience of sharing time and confronting with other children was never regained, on the other hand, he had a privileged contact with nature, completing in part, as a self-taught, his first training received during his personal *Kindergarten*. Indeed, his mother, worried about the solipsism of her son, who preferred to read and fantasize rather than going outside and playing with other children, sent him, still a teenager, to his uncle James, so that he could introduce Wright to the hard life of farming. The direct contact with the lush meadows and the thick forests of Spring Green (Wisconsin) revealed in all their adamant clarity the relationships between what was learned at the game table and the rules of nature.

There is no doubt that the maternal teaching, mythologized by the American architect, marks a particularly significant moment in Wright's training, as evidenced by the design process of a life, from which it is evident that he absorbed above all two aspects of the pedagogical method: geometry, derived from the formalistic logic of Heinrich Pestalozzi (teacher and reference point of Fröbel); and symbolism, as expression of the romantic vision of the German educator (Fröbel 1993)². These are the two aspects of Wright's works that have been more studied by critics. As an example of the consequences related to the use of geometric shapes linked to the Fröbelian method, let's consider the famous stained-glass windows of the *Prairie* period; they are abstract representations of nature obtained through an appropriate distribution of regular and irregular coloured surfaces. The *Unity Temple* in Oak Park of 1906, instead, refers in its volumetric forms to the assembly of the maple blocks. The formal suggestions of the pedagogical method enriched Wright's architectural conception also with a further fundamental nuance, that wanted each shape linked to a meaning. According to Fröbel, a direct connection between forms and symbol was spontaneously established in the mind of the child, so the square could become expression of stability and firmness, the circle of dynamism and the triangle of asceticism. This type of influence, mostly didactically induced with direct experience and experiments carried out on objects, has left a profound mark on many of the Maestro's buildings, which always stand out for their considerable symbolic charge, associated with form. An emblematic example of this attitude can be traced back again to the *Unity Temple*; the building con-

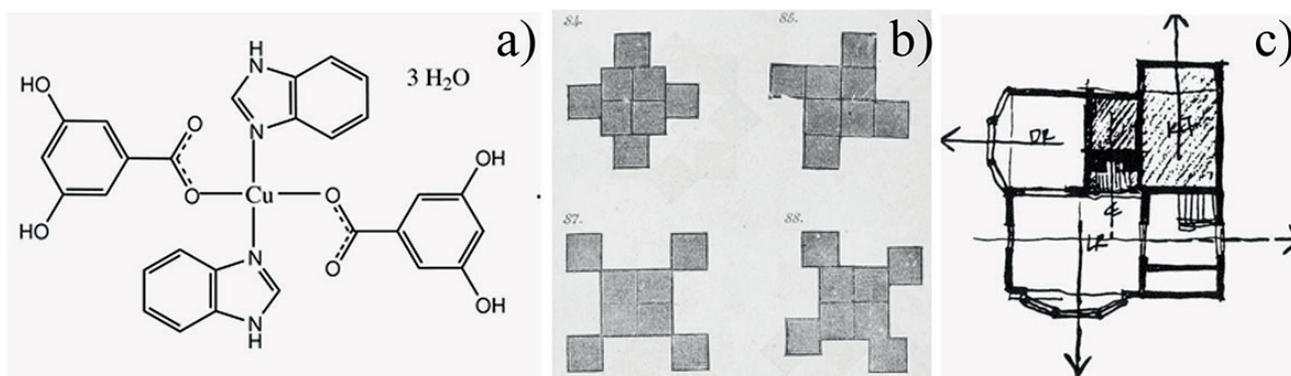


Fig. 1

a) copper crystal; b) windmill configurations; c) F. L. Wright, Home and Studio, Chicago, Oak Park (1889).

stitutes a case of evident connection between architecture and concept, since the aggregation of the volumes encloses a pure cubic inner space, that alludes to moral solidity, a theme very important in the Unitarian religion, which preached a life in harmony with nature and, at the same time, an intimate relationship with the divinity. The cube, the most stable polyhedron among the Platonic solids, perfectly embodied these aspirations.

A brief analysis of the cultural roots on which Fröbel founded his *Kindergarten*, makes us able to overcome the geometric-symbolic connections between pedagogical method and architecture, focusing our attention on how the play rules influenced Wrightian composition. Before becoming a successful educator, Fröbel accumulated a lot of knowledge in different fields: he was an employed at the Office of Forests, a topographer, a cartographer, a private secretary, an accountant, a tutor and a crystallographer (Fröbel 1889). In particular, the latter work, attended in Berlin between 1811 and 1812 as assistant of professor Christian Samuel Weiss at the Mineralogy Museum of the city, suggested to him a scientific base for a solid theoretical structure, suitable to support his innovative pedagogic method. Fröbel was looking for simple natural laws to apply to all types of growth, including the human one (Spielman Rubin 2002). For this reason, he turned to crystallography trying to isolate the germs of transformation, growth and energy from the rock fragments. Formal memories, similar to the Weissian graphic model to show the development of a crystal, can be found in Fröbel's windmill figures, obtained starting from the constitution of a central nucleus, around which the other elements have to be arranged. An echo of the way to arrange the maple blocks at the *Kindergarten* table can be found in the centrifugal and dynamic organization of the plans of the *Prairie* houses. In this sense, the Oak Park *Home and Studio* is the first and most emblematic example; the windmill planimetric arrangement of the rooms is very similar to that suggested by the German pedagogue in distributing the maple blocks starting from a central core (the fireplace for Wright), around which the outermost rooms of the house must be rotated and translated always in the same direction; this rotation closely resembles the ways of growth of inanimate matter and, in particular, of crystals (Fig. 1). There is another important aspect, also if it is a hypothesis, which could constitute a further link between Fröbel's method and the American architect's design. During the years spent in Oak Park, Wright was also involved in the education of his children, giving them lessons at the *Kindergarten* table. So, the American architect passed from the role of student to that of teacher, with the aim of deepening that this task entails and the possibility to see not only the figures of the text but, above all, to read the theory that the

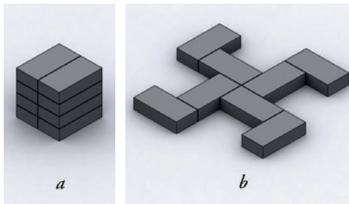


Fig. 2
Forth gift (maple blocks); Law of Unity.

German pedagogue associated them. Maybe this event constituted a summary, a real moment of synthesis, in support of the new organic architecture. According to Weiss, the growth of crystals respected precise laws, that Fröbel borrowed to transform them into the rules to use during the game: the Law of Unity, the Law of Contrast, the Law of Development and the Law of Connection (Hughes 1911).

The Law of Unity can be applied to all entities, each of them has to be considered simultaneously as a whole in itself, and as a fragment of a larger portion, which in turn becomes part of a last unity. For Fröbel the Law of Unity constitutes a fundamental background that must be taught from the beginning in the attention to pay when the games are presented to the child. The boxes containing the maple blocks were, indeed, turned upside down on the table, making the top cover slip to present its content to the children in the form of a solid unity, also if made of single elements. During the play the elements could be moved to obtain different configurations, but at the end of the game the child had to put the single components back into the box by reconstituting the original unity (Fig. 2).

For Wright the Law of Unity is a pivot to all his architecture, often described as an organic entity expressed in the details that integrate with the project, as well as the final design relates to the orography of the place. An example of this unitary approach can be seen in the second project for *Herbert Jacobs House*: the house was built near Madison (WI) and, therefore, it is exposed to the cold of the north weather. The architect develops a specific scheme called *Solar House*, interring the northern side of the building to protect it better from the cold: the plan, the shape of the garden and many other details, are based on the circle, referring to the solar disk and, while the connection to the earth is guaranteed by an excavation in the local sandstone, the resulting material was used to create the bricks of the walls (Fig. 3). The Law of Contrasts (also called the Law of Opposites) can be considered a direct consequence of the Law of Unity; it embraces all possible differences, from the most similar to the opposite extremes, it is characterized by a co-presence of polarity which manifest a common property. Fröbel concludes in *The Education of Man* that between the different degrees of contrasts there is always a point of mediation where the opposites reach a balance and calm down, exalting each other (Fröbel 1889). In the *Kindergarten* the Law of Contrasts happened every time the eye was deceived in the interpretation of the figures, because the alternation of full and empty areas. This was the way to show the reconciliation of opposites: the students had to distribute the geometric figures following a specific order on the game table so that, once arranged, a modular drawing was created in the foreground and background (Fig. 4). Traces of the Law of Contrasts in Wright's work can be found in the wind-pump, known as *Romeo and Juliet* (Fig. 5). The planimetric composition of this small building is generated by the interpenetration between an octagon (*Juliet*) and a rhombus (*Romeo*). Referring to the activities carried out around the *Kindergarten* table, the first figure can be obtained arranging eight equilateral triangles with a vertex and two sides in common, while the second can be considered as a consequence of the first, obtained by overturning a single triangle around its free side; indeed, in the equilibrium of the interpenetrated figures, created by the matter and

Fig. 3
F. L. Wright, H. Jacobs House,
Middleton, WI (1943).

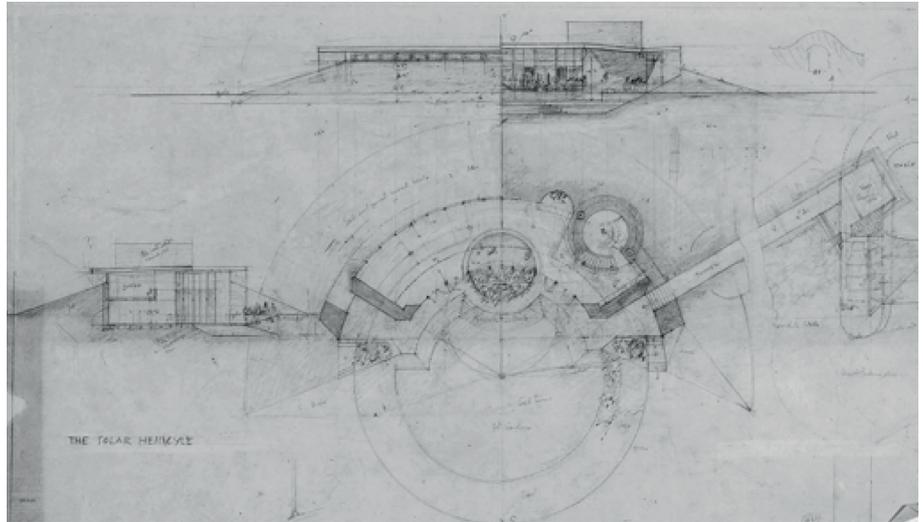
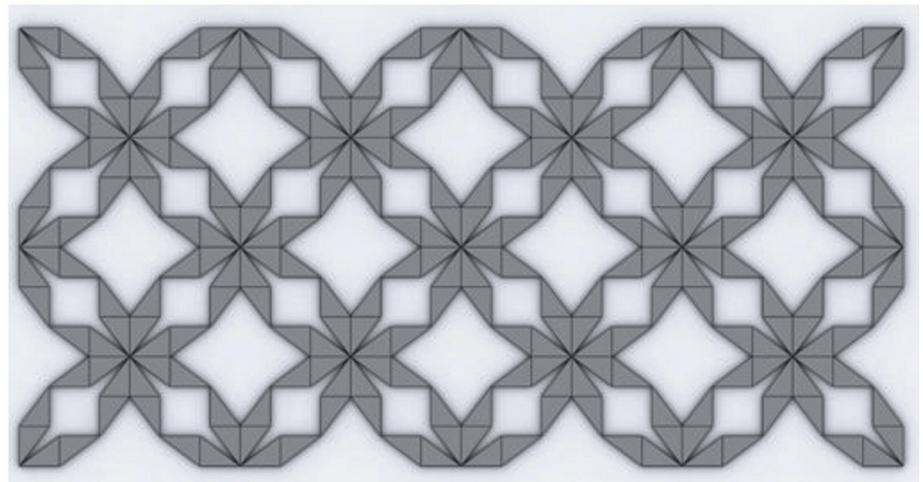


Fig. 4
Seventh gift (families of triangles); Law of Contrasts.



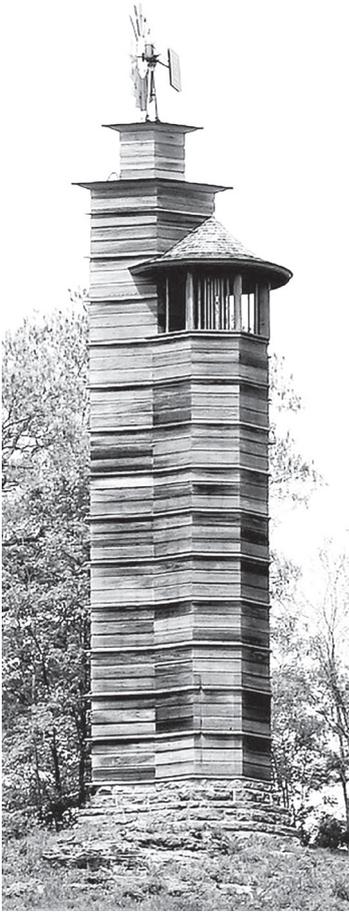


Fig. 5
F. L. Wright, *Romeo and Juliet*,
Spring Green, Wi (1896).

the physical empty space, participate together in close collaboration in generating the final composition (Fig. 6).

The third rule identified by Fröbel is called the Law of Development, which involves all possible changes of forms, no matter how infinitesimal they may be. For the pedagogue there is an indispensable condition, according to which each subsequent step of development does not exclude its precedent, ennobling it, transforming and increasing it. From this, it derives an important awareness to be acquired during the play: each new object, given to the child, must be connected to the previous one in order to complete and integrate it, encouraging to proceed with order from the simplest to the most complex activities. In Wright's architecture, it often happens that the geometric figures are declined in successive variations as counterpoints; so, the triangles alternate with the squares, and these in turn with hexagons, octagons, dodecagons until the number of sides dissolves in the continuous arc of a circumference. To clarify this aspect it is better, also in this case, to consider the houses of the *Prairie* period. For *McAfee House* Wright juxtaposed, in two separate and ideally connected sequences, the rectangular roof that covers the octagonal library and an octagonal roof that closes the rectangular dining room (Fig. 7) (Mc Carter 2005).

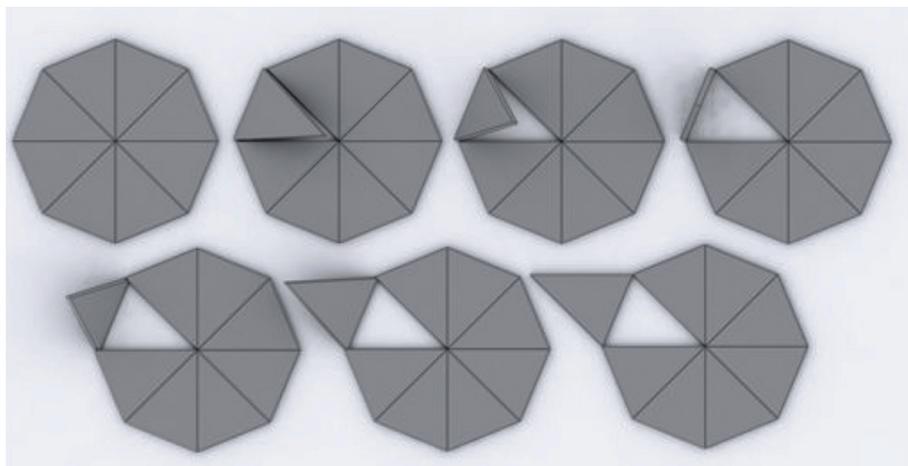
The last rule found by Fröbel is the Law of Connections and it is useful to reconnect all the other three laws for a correct outcome of the training activities. The *Kindergarten* educational project highlights this assumption by dividing the learning program into two game phases, they are separated but interconnected. While the *gifts* (maple blocks, sticks, seeds and geometric cardboard figures) provide the material to transform the impressions coming from the world into personal considerations, moving from the real objects to abstract entities; *occupations* generate an opposite mechanism, leading from inner ideas to the free expressions, starting from the abstract entities to arrive at real objects. The educational method, in practice, invited children with *gifts* to a first process of analysis by rationalizing the real world by means of solids, surfaces, lines and points; while a second process of synthesis, the *occupations*, connected the points to the lines, the lines to the planes, the planes to the solid. In Wright's work reminiscences of the Law of Connection can be found in the appropriate 'folding' of lines and surfaces that envelop the space, as in the case of the living room of *Taliesin West* (Fig. 8) (Pfeiffer 1992). This environment is characterized by a roof that has different inclinations emphasizing the expansion process of the space. The interior is delimited by a thin white cloth, similar to a diaphanous surface, stretched over a system of wooden beams, folded in a C, in a configuration that could easily be traced back to the ludic experience performed by connecting lines and surfaces.

The whole Fröbelian educational structure revolves around these four laws that had to be strictly applied in the act of composing figures and solids, embodying the typically American aspiration to bring every aspect of man back in close contact with nature. The *Kindergarten* answered perfectly to Wright's need to found a national architectural identity able to free himself from European cultural dependence:

«He [Fröbel, ed.] insisted on Nature, with the capital "N", as the basis for any fruitful study, which would allow the child to learn from Nature, to draw from Nature the effect he saw; until, with the bases of those effects, he is introduced to elementary

Fig. 6

Rhombus-octagon intersection, attributable to the plan of Romeo and Juliet.

**Fig. 7**

Law of Development. Plans, elevations and axonometric views of the library (sx) and of the living room (dx).

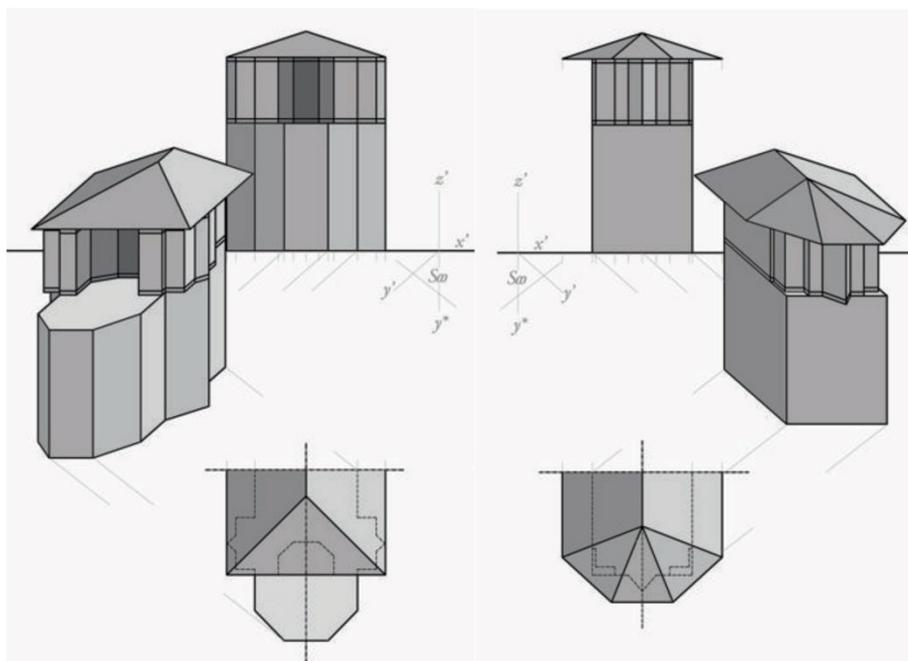


Fig. 8

Low of Connections. F. L. Wright,
Taliesin West, Scottsdale, AZ
(1937).



geometry to understand its causes. Isn't this wisdom? This is all organic, isn't it? Friedrich Fröbel is organic in the soul, in the character of his thought and his work. And I am one of the beneficiaries, through my mother, of that training process known as *Kindergarten*» (Pfeiffer 1987).

Notes

¹ Original edition: Wright F. L. (1932) – *An Autobiography*, Longmans Green, New York.

² Original edition: Fröbel F. W. A. (1826) - *Die Menschenerziehung*, Verlag der allgemeinen deutschen Erziehungsanstalt, Keilhau.

References

- BAGLIONE C. (2008) – *Casabella 1928-2008*. Electa, Milano.
- FRÖEBEL F. W. A (1889) – *Autobiography of Friedrich Froebel*. C. W. Bardeen, Syracuse.
- FRÖEBEL F. W. A (1993) – *L'educazione dell'uomo*. FLORES D'ARCAIS G. (a cura di), La Nuova Italia, Venezia.
- HUGHES J. L. (1911) – *Fröbel's Educational Laws*. D. Appleton, New York.
- KAUFMANN E. (1981) – “Form Become Feeling, a New View of Fröbel and Wright”. *Journal of Architectural Historians*, vol. 40, 2 (maggio) pp. 4-20.
- MC CARTER R. (2005) – *On and By Frank Lloyd Wright. A primer of Architectural Principles*. Phaidon, New York.
- OWEN G. (1906) – “A Study of the Original Kindergartens”. *The Elementary School Teacher*, vol. 7, 4 (dicembre), pp. 201-213.
- PFEIFFER B. B. (1987) – *Frank Lloyd Wright: His Living Voice*. California State University Press, Fresno.
- PFEIFFER B. B. (1992) – *Collected Writings of Frank Lloyd Wright*. Rizzoli, New York.
- SPIELMAN RUBIN J. (2002) – *Intimate Triangle: Architecture of Crystals, Frank Lloyd Wright and the Froebel Kindergarten*. Polycrystal Book Service, Alabama.
- TRISCIUZZI L. (1984) – *Psicologia, Educazione, Apprendimento: Manuale di Psicopedagogia*. Giunti, Firenze.
- WRIGHT F. L. (1932) – *Una Autobiografia*. Trad. It. ODDERA B., Jaka Book, Como.

Cosimo Monteleone is Associate Professor of Descriptive Geometry and Architectural Representation at the Padua University. In 2003 he obtained his degree in Architecture at the University IUAV of Venice, where he also earned his Ph.D. in 2010 in “Architectural Composition curriculum in Survey and Representation of Architecture and Landscape” with a study on the Guggenheim Museum by Frank Lloyd Wright. His focuses on architectural, urban and landscape survey; 3D modeling of architecture and city; augmented and virtual reality; gnomonic; science and technique applied to art and architecture; history of representation with particular skills related to Renaissance perspective. Among his publications is *Frank Lloyd Wright. Geometria e Astrazione nel Guggenheim Museum* (Rome: Aracne 2013).

Amra Salihbegovic Apologia for an Architecture of Play

Abstract

Richness and ambiguity of architectural design are inherent in the freedom of individual design attitudes, where the essence of the imaginative realm is depicted by a creative design process that proceeds through a variety of levels but evolves from a playful intention. While the notion of play resembles the driving force in the infinite search for the appropriate answer to a certain problem, the different design solutions do showcase the manifold of possibilities an architectural design can offer. The notion of play is integrated into the architectural design in terms of abstraction of geometrical possibilities while imbuing architectural work with specific spatial qualities. Particularly, as in the contemporary work of Pezo von Ellrichshausen devoted to the continuous search for infinite spatial structures.

Keywords

Design Process — Logic of Design — Play — Assembly

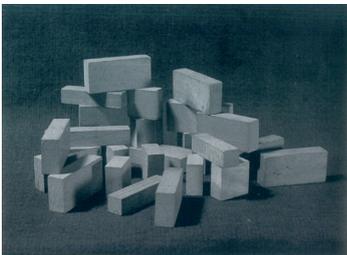


Fig. 1

Friedrich Froebel - Gift no. IV, c. 1890: "Pure forms", *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*.

Towards a playful architecture

From utopian architectural solutions to contemporary practices of current trends, the core of the design process evolves from a creative exploration of juxtaposing or eliminating diverse solutions brought back and forth. A design approach where the notion of play and assembly refer to the compositional capacity in architectural design and its representational significance. This nature of the design process was underlined in the following statement: «The whole force and rule of design, consists in a right and exact adapting and joining together the lines and angles which compose and form the face of the building» (Leon Battista Alberti as cited in Johnson, 1994, p. 414).

The reality and visionary solution might coincide in the manner that they offer to question our environment by imposing a critical reflection on a specific problem. Therefore, we can consider that an arbitrary play in architectural design can have a significant impact in moving the borderline of the current knowledge in practical, but as well as in the theoretical field. On the contrary, it can have a negative impact as the tools used and the methods applied with a certain degree can abolish the inherent qualities of architectural work. This thin line in-between of two alternatives should be balanced and mastered by the creativity of the architect and regulated by the specific preconditions. Where the differentiation of the trajectories of the building tasks, from inception to the final solution is underpinned by a constant search for redefinition. Its only constant medium is bond in many cases specifically by a coherent concept as the core of a design solution and determinant of the articulation of spatial structure. Whereas play and assembly define an explorative tool able to introduce an opposing view

towards a certain task, and a tool for critical inquiry relying on topological relations.

In his book *The Child's Conception of Space*, Jean Piaget (1956) explored the concept of space in terms of child psychology, determining that the child's conception of space relies on the topological relations prior to the development of projective or Euclidian relations. Precisely Piaget defined these elementary topological relationships as spatial proximity and separation, order and enclosure. Additionally, Johan Huizinga (1949) in his book *Homo Ludens*, acknowledged the concept of play as an essential cultural phenomenon. He elaborated on the significance of this phenomenon and its manifold nature.

In his book *Intentions*, Norberg-Schulz (1968) asserted the underlying playful intention in architecture stating «that architecture is something more than a play of forms, should be evident from the experiences of our daily life, where architecture participates in most activities» (p. 85). He pointed out the necessity of mastering this arbitrary play in terms of «understanding of the building task, of the means, and the planning hierarchies» (Norberg-Schulz, 1968, p. 204).

Paul-Alan Johnson (1994) argued about the definition of a design method as play and its discrepancy as a trace or a strategy of a game, which evolves as a tailor-made design act. He stated that «the rules or conventions of which countermand the action now and then, always mediate, yet are occasionally deferred or deformed to allow flexibility in play to keep the game alive» (Johnson, 1994, p. 256). He further elaborated on diverse notions of composition as artful arrangement, where he asserted that the compositional act «is said to have a high degree of freedom, with room to 'play' untrammelled (to a degree) by fixed rules and with a widely varying repertoire of elements» (Johnson, 1994, p. 416).

Question of autonomy

John Hejduk explored the extent of architectural possibilities in combining the imaginative, poetic realm while defining the notion of mask in several of his projects. While each of his projects is accompanied by a theoretical consideration and represents an autonomous work, it still relates the specificity of the characters and identities to the context. The juxtaposition of architecture with anthropomorphic elements that delineates these masques erased the architectural demarcation and extended the variety of its identity (Fig. 2). His architectural experimentation evolved through several attempts as Ockman (1997) explained that «recycling and canonizing a repertory of personal experiences and allusions, his work has become ever more iconic and self-consciously poetic, its masklike aspect conflated with a performative character of ritual or 'masque'» (p. 8).

A play-driven architecture gives impetus in the creation of a critical self-referential sign while extending the possibilities of a degree of autonomy of the discipline. These spatial manipulations as a framework, which do create a new meaning to the autonomous structure, can be traced in the example of the iconic design of Maison Dom-ino. Even though as Ven (1980) in his book *Space in Architecture* noted that Le Corbusier founded his work on the interplay of masses or «elementary forms: cubes, cones, spheres, cylinders or pyramids» (p. 188), the Maison Dom-ino is a distillation of a modernist architectural principle redefining the elements as the substantial aspects of architecture.

Eisenman (1998) implied several levels of autonomy and freedom of inter-



Fig. 2
John Hejduk - Victims: table and list of characters and structures, 1984. *John Hejduk fonds*, CCA.

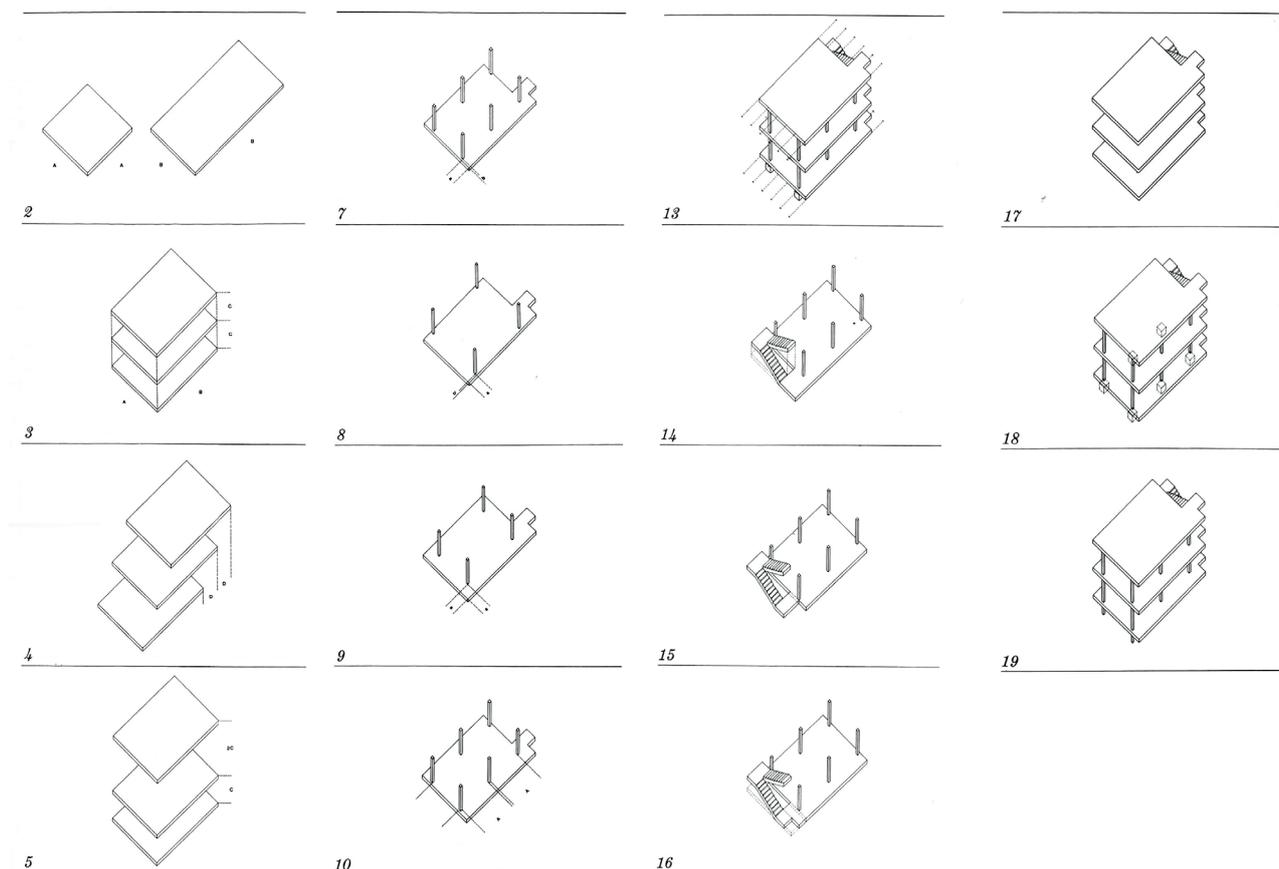


Fig. 3
Maison Dom-ino and the Self-Referential Sign – Conceptual spectrum, Peter Eisenman, *Oppositions reader: selected readings from a journal for ideas and criticism in architecture, 1973-1984*.

pretation in the example of the Dom-ino diagram considering the correlation of essential elements in defining the architecture. He stated, «Thus, architecture is both substance and act. The sign is a record of an intervention – an event and an act which goes beyond the presence of elements which are merely necessary conditions. Architecture can be proposed as an ordering of conditions drawn from the universe of form together with the act of designating conditions of geometry, use, and significance as a new class of objects» (Eisenman, 1998, pp. 197-198). As presented in the conceptual spectrum (Fig. 3), its self-referentiality refers to the distillation and correlation of its essential elements. While Aureli (2014) interpreted the design as a “domino, one of many tiles twice as long as they are wide and assembled in a game according to specific rules” (p. 153).

Outlines of contemporary spatial structures

Focusing on contemporary work, the Chilean based studio Pezo von Ellrichshausen uses the richness of play and assembly in the design process. They consider the spatial structure combinatorics as a substantial part of the building identity and the means in the search for a design solution. In terms of their projects, the application of the notion of play and assembly in the creative intention is denoted by an in-depth elaboration of methods used in extending the possibilities of reinventing architecture. Their building designs embody these notions and represent a criticism of society while establishing a significant impact on future tendencies.

The infinite spatial structures of the architectural duo represent their constant exploration of familiar structures composed on a variety of interlocking possibilities (Fig. 4). This process of repetition and superimposition of diverse elements reinvents the spatial structure and imposes a unique



Fig. 4

Pezo von Ellrichshausen, Examples of spatial structures, *AV Monograph (199)* | Pezo von Ellrichshausen – Esempi di strutture spaziali, *AV Monograph (199)*.

meaning for each architectural work. They explained their design process stating that «each time we finish a building we find we have executed just one specific variation within a panorama of possibilities for the same idea... playing different games with the same set of rules ...» (as cited in Oyarzun, 2017, p. 8). These rules are non-determined in their experimental endeavour while relying only on the topological relations of spatial elements. The richness and quality of their work impose questioning the conventional architectural experience, the totality of architecture as a self-referential object and the possibilities of a taxonomy that redefines typology. Each of their architectural buildings focuses on the duality, alterations, and correlation of specific elements that compose the spatial structure, the door, the platform, the podium or the column create the dichotomy between nature and object, public and private, horizontality and verticality or interior and exterior.

Pezo von Ellrichshausen is an architectural practice driven by the capacity of architecture in redefining elemental relationships, without the reference to anything than the definition of the internal architectural logic. They asserted that the quality and autonomy of their spatial structures focus on «...a form without context and without style or indication of origin. It is the basic form of relation amongst spatial units» (Pezo & Ellrichshausen, 2016, p. 139). Their architectural work is an exploration of spatial structures that consider the «duality of conceptual simplicity, and experiential complexity» (Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 8). This duality of a concept can be depicted in the example of contradictory notions of podium and platform, which exist in diverse residential projects. For instance, the House Cien, Solo House, Guna House, Nida House, Tora House, and Eder House.

The Solo House alternates in diverse manners this duality in the relation of

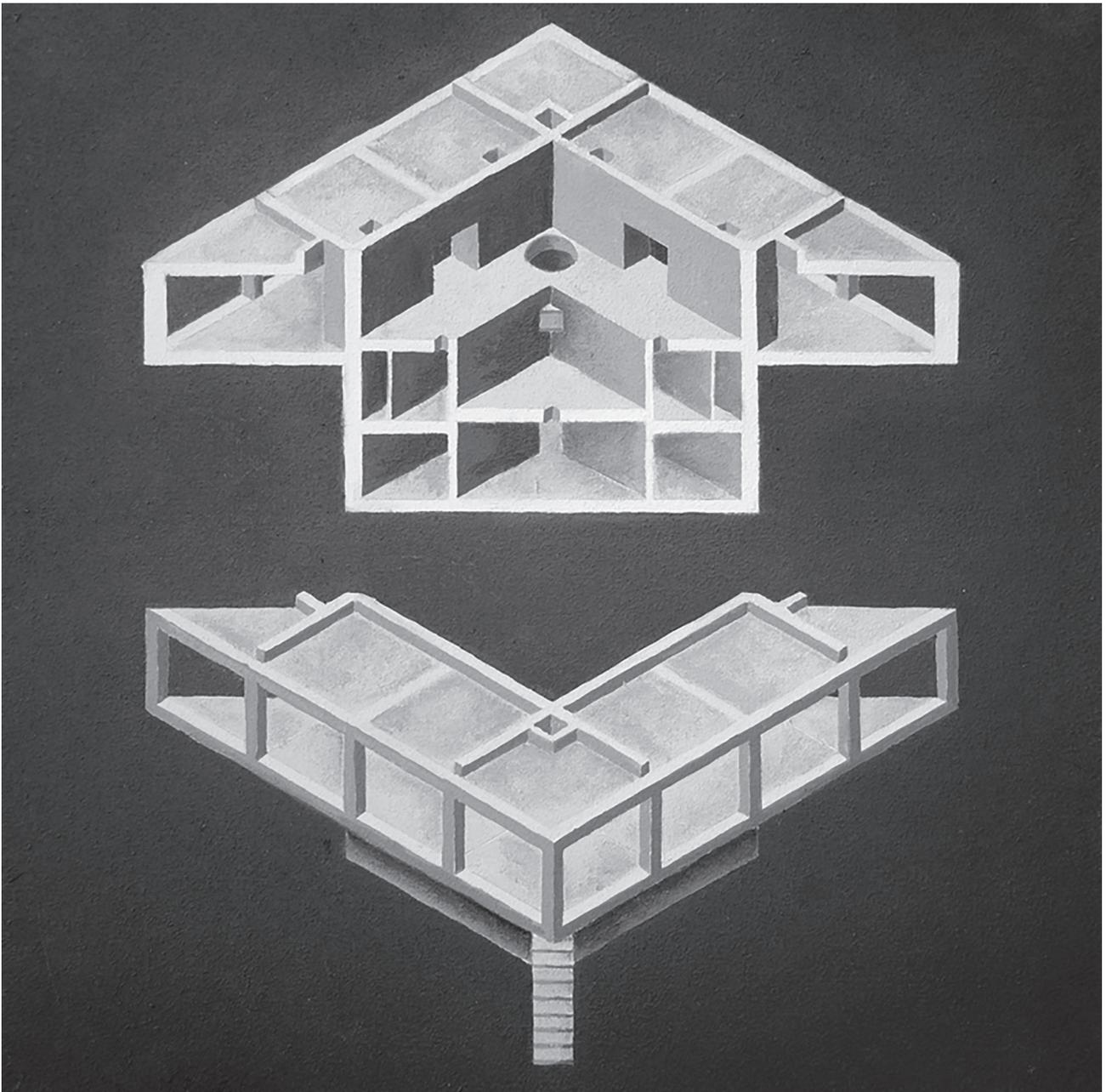
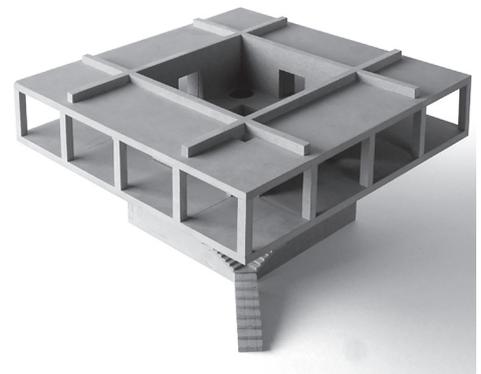
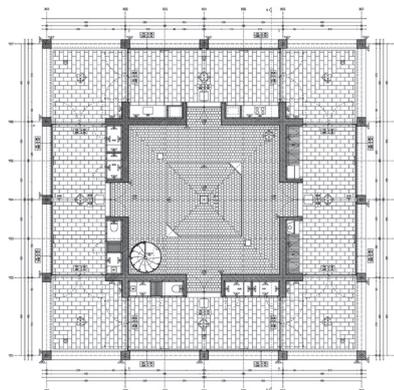


Fig. 5
Pezo von Ellrichshausen, Solo
House.



the opaque podium to the open transparent platform (Fig. 5). In particular, this duality is depicted in the ambiguity and interlocking of interior and exterior with the emphasis on their connection through an open courtyard. Symmetry in the composition gives an impression of monumentality and centrality of a dominant structure in the natural environment. Whereas the experiential complexity exists in the variety of paths and ambiguity created through the spatial articulation. The two entrances embracing the homogeneous symmetrical structure enable a variety of architectural promenades, from the internal courtyard paradoxically completely enclosed but open in comparison to the rest of the building design, to the perimeter of interior spaces open towards the surrounding. As Oyarzun (2017) stated, «like the exact pieces of a puzzle, the works by the Chilean studio compose a coherent whole where art and architecture are carefully intertwined» (p. 6).

Several of their architectural works, as the Wolf House, Fosc House, Arco House or Gago House, represent experimentation on the notion of verticality where the building evolves from a process of diverse layering around a unique staircase. Among them, the architectural composition of the Gago House contains the richness of central staircases around which an interplay of spaces is gradually achieved (Fig. 6). Within the introverted stereotomic volume randomly punctured, occurs a complex spatial play of distinct qualities. Its asymmetrical position decomposes the pure volume and provides the possibility of a spatial hierarchy while distinguishing two paths. One through the central staircases intersecting the corners of each space and second connecting the centre of spaces. While the central void with its ascending spaces portrays the essence of the building design, the ambiguity of the staircases imposes its significance in comparison to other spaces. It is its richest seed and the most livable part of the building.

The third notion of play and assembly in their work refers to the concept of repetition denoted in the addition of assorted spatial structures. Several of their projects are intertwined with a design approach that considers determined addition on a vertical or horizontal axis. For example, in the case of Parr House, Puca Building, Meri House, Ines Building, Ocho House, or Utdt Building. The Parr House consists of a precisely defined repetition of individual spaces composed around nine courtyards (Fig. 7). The rather introverted one-floor building design complexity is depicted in the roof plan composed out of a variety of unique pitched roofs. Their design not only determined the figurative aspects of the building but also enables natural lighting in the introverted structure. Their direction is always pitched towards the courtyard in order not to cast shade, while the façade is punctured with diverse windows which are conditioned by the use of each space. This rather equal grid of thirteen rooms and nine patios abolished any hierarchy while imposing a continuous transition of spatial sequences. What undoubtedly unfolds these architectural approaches is the autonomy of their work. This concept of autonomy, refers to the intrinsic qualities of the nature of architecture which might evolve while incorporating the notions of play and assembly as a design method. In particular, this design method is used in terms of topological relationships while focusing the design intention in the exploration of spatial structures.

Starting from the child's conception of space to the critical architectural production of some contemporary practices, the notion of play deals with the spatial relations, the correlation of its essential elements and redefinition of conventional design. The intrinsic qualities of a built work evolved out of this design approach lie in its ability to be used as a tool for critical

Fig. 6
Pezo von Ellrichshausen, Gago
House.

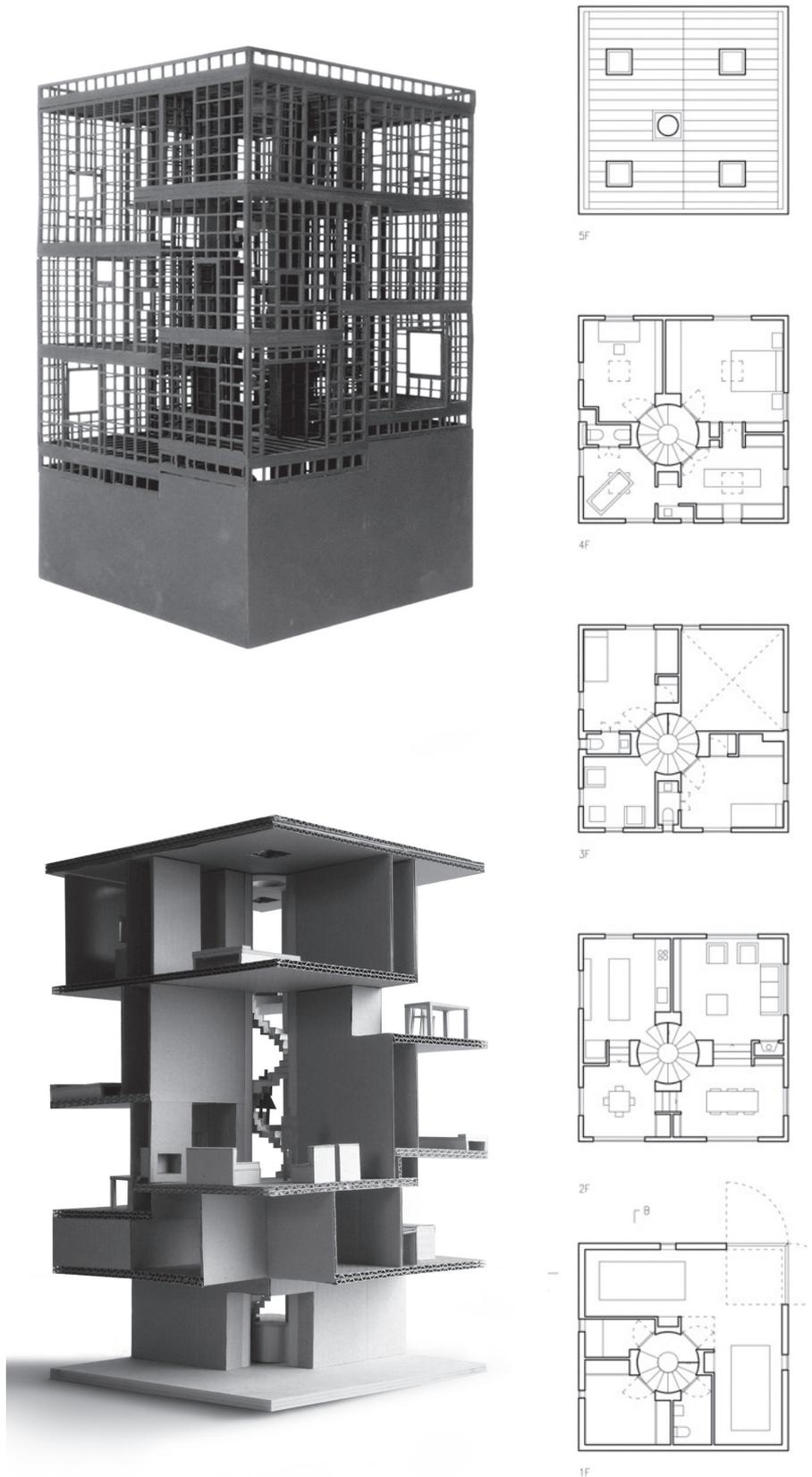




Fig. 7
Pezo von Ellrichshausen, Parr
House.

inquiry in the discipline. Its self-referential and autonomous nature encapsulates the possibilities of rethinking the conventional design while moving forward the architectural discipline. The contemporary practical and educational work of Pezo von Ellrichshausen, not only deals with current problems of the discipline but proposes to re-evaluate the future tendencies and typologies. This playful conception in architecture mediates between what is already known in this realm and what it might be.

This apologia for an architecture of play indicates the necessity to reconsider play and assembly as a substantial and explorative tool in architecture. The application of playful rules in architectural, in practice and as well in education, enable more extendable and flexible constraints and encourage visionary solutions.

References

- AURELI, P. (2014) – “The Dom-ino Problem: Questioning the Architecture of Domestic Space”. *Log* [e-journal] 30, 153-168.
- EISENMAN, P. (1998) – “Aspects of Modernism: Maison Dom-ino and the Self-Referential Sign”. In: K. M. HAYS, *Oppositions reader: selected readings from a journal for ideas and criticism in architecture, 1973-1984*. Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 188-198. Originally published in *Oppositions* 15/16, 1979.
- FORTY, A. (2000) – *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*. Thames & Hudson, New York.
- HUIZINGA, J. (1949) – *Homo Ludens. A Study on Play-Element in Culture*. Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, London.
- JOHNSON, PAUL A. (1994) – *The theory of architecture: concepts, themes & practices*. Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York.
- NORBERG-SCHULZ, C. (1968) – *Intentions in architecture*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- OACKMAN, J. (1997) – “John Hejduk: Architecture as Passion Play”. *Casabella* 649 (ottobre), 4-9.
- OYARZUN, F. P. (2017). – “Border Notes”. In FERNANDEZ-GALIANO, L. a cura di. *Pezo von Ellrichshausen – Geometric Abstraction*. AV Monograph, 199, 8-17.
- PALLASMAA, J. (2012) – “The lived metaphor”. *Pezo von Ellrichshausen - 2G Monograph*. International Architecture Magazine, 61, 4-10.
- PEZO, M., & ELLRICHSHAUSEN, S. VON. (2016) – *Spatial structure*. Architectural Publisher B, Copenhagen.
- PIAGET, J., & INHELDER, B. (1956) – *The Child's Conception of Space*. Routledge, London.
- VEN, C. V. (1980) – *Space in architecture: the evolution of a new idea in the theory and history of modern movements*. Van Gorcum, Assen.

Amra Salihbegovic is an architect and Ph.D. Candidate at Politecnico di Milano, Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering. She completed her BArch and MArch at the Faculty of Architecture in Sarajevo. In addition to studying at the Barcelona School of Architecture ETSAB and conducting an internship at the Barcelona City Council - Department of Urban Planning, she participated in various international workshops and summer schools. Working as a Teaching Assistant at Politecnico di Milano, University of Stuttgart and University of Sarajevo she gained several years of experience in education. She is the author of several publications and participant in organizing student workshops and conferences. Her doctoral research is in the field of architectural design theory and deals with the complexity in contemporary architecture in terms of the phenomena of interdependence between architectural form and space.

Elvio Manganaro
“Montage, mon beau souci”

Abstract

Describing how game and montage act specifically on didactics of architecture. The author deals with this, and afterwards with the reasons why game and montage are taken on in didactics.

The exercises presented come from the Architectural Design Studio 2 of the Politecnico di Milano. They are aimed at students of the second year of the Bachelor of Science degree and have the city of Venice as their field of application. Venice seemed the only city capable of hosting “textual” experiments.

Reality remains out of the exercise. However, the essay also is about: Gianni Rodari, the 2019 Biennale, the avant-garde game and again about Mark Fisher and the montage as a symbolic form of late capitalism; finally, of a return to the “demon” of geometry.

Keywords

Game — Montage — Didactics — Experimentalism

1. This is an account of how games and assemblage played a specific role in a teaching method. It is not a speculative essay on the concepts of games and assemblage, and it is only right to warn the reader of this immediately. Further on, I am going to talk about the 2019 Biennale and the issue of the magazine “Il Verri” on assemblage and also about Mark Fisher and the unavoidability of games and assemblage that distinguishes these years. But first I need to describe our games.

2. The first exercise [Figs. 1-3] was named “Venezianella and Studentaccio” in homage to F. T. Marinetti.

Marinetti spent his last years in Venice. He lived in a palace on the Grand Canal in front of the Rialto and he told his wife and daughters the story of a Futurist student who decided to build a New Venice on the Riva degli Schiavoni. It would have the appearance of Venezianella, an ethereal but sensual figure, and would be erected by assembling Venice’s main works of architecture: Saint Mark’s Basilica, the Doge’s Palace, and the Ca’ d’Oro. For someone who had fought against a conservative Venice (one that was *passatista*) this was virtually a palinode.

This exercise has been presented at other times¹: it is carried out by agreeing a universe of Venetian works of architecture and projects, then, through a recombination of the initial works, various collages of plans, sections and façades are respectively produced. Each collage is self-standing. Each collage is an exercise that is complete in itself and has nothing in common with the others. The only common features are the limits on the perimeter, both in the plan views and in the elevations, which belong to one of the two prototypes of a Venetian palace that Palladio included in his *Four Books*

Fig. 1
 “Venezianella e Studentaccio”,
 prototype in the form of a game,
 Linda Martellini, 2018.



on Architecture.

No functional instructions are given. If it is easy to notice a natural inclination to organize spaces in terms of distributive coherence, this is due to the use of starting elements that already feature such coherence. Albeit dismembered and recomposed on a whim, the various types still maintain their transitive strength in terms of spatial organization.

When it comes to the figures nothing changes. Processes of overturning, scale, and duplication are not sufficient to entirely erase their recognizability, hence, their semantic weight.

Having arrived at this point we proceed in the direction of a further assemblage.

This will be a product/encounter at the level of the potential spatial volume inherent to the collage prepared previously. Limited by the disjointedness of the plan and section the figures usually succumb to the form.

But not always. Given that the process is not mechanical but retains a high degree of freedom, the move is often to preserve the figures.

The perspective view is not worth mentioning. It is a mask and plays no

Fig. 2

“Venezianella and Studentaccio”, model by Chiara Saccani and Arianna Sellaro; the elevations outside the box are by Isabella Nuvolari-Duodo, Matilde Pagani; Bianca Pedron, Valeria Peroni, Carola Perroni, a.a. 2018-19.

**Fig. 3**

“Venezianella and Studentaccio”, above: Mirta Scalabrin, Michela Scuri; Chiara Saccani, Arianna Sellaro; Tobia Morselli, Edoardo Pizzutelli. Below: Benedetta Scarano, Caterina Solini; Mattia Scotti, Chiara Servienti; Julia Ponomarev, Luigi Santoro, a.a. 2018-19.



part in the genesis of the volumetric body. Its tasks are representation and communication, it is a “decorated shed”.

For this reason it is stuck outside the box.

Hence, the box measures its aspiration against the marvels of Joseph Cornell’s toy boxes, but this has nothing to do with the process.

3. The second exercise has a place of application: Ca’ Venier dei Leoni; and a theme: the Palazzo delle Feste [Figs. 4-9]. It is not a prototype like “Venezianella and Studentaccio”, but is a project in good faith, whose constructive reasonableness must be described. There was this challenge to complete an architectural project starting only from formal processes, from techniques which excluded predilections, the subjective choice of images. It was no longer about affirming the arbitrariness of every universe of departure and therefore the legitimacy of the pastiche, but about providing a “passive” tool completely devoid of a sense of distribution, structure or figuration. Working with fragments reduced to a mere formal substance, in order to prevent the ingress of external pre-compositional meanings.

Rosalind Krauss wrote that the grid is the formal device which best identifies modernity². The grid decrees the autonomy of the field of art in opposition to the environmental and historical story. So we have adopted a grid of 5x5. Rather than picking out figures and syntagmata from the context and assembling them according to sensibility, restricting ourselves to 25 blocks assigned randomly. Fragments of no significance coldly extracted from 9 projects for the 1988 Italian Pavilion competition cast onto the Ca’ Venier. Like a Dada experiment or like making an architectural cut-up.

Durand encounters Balestrini is a nice title to record the Ca’ Venier exercise under.

The initial layout is subsequently “corrected”, otherwise there would be no exercise. It is therefore established that it is only possible to intervene on the blocks assigned through a limited number of operations. Namely: rotating, mirroring, resizing. A change of position is only allowed using an “L” movement and is to be understood as a tribute to Shklovsky. These operations are sufficient to orchestrate a new layout, this time featuring a sense of distribution and space. Almost all succeed.

The skill is merely compositional at this point. Merely syntax.

Even if the figures return too. Having rejected mechanical operations, the figures return as a remedy to save the project from being a demonstration programme. For figures are still the most effective way to establish a relationship with the city. They return as a discursive expedient. Because the figures remain within the discourse, even when used with a function of controversy. The figures arrive before the syntax.

4. Anyone who recognizes Gianni Rodari’s *Grammar* in the exercises we have described has understood well. *The Grammar of Fantasy* is a book about composition. It matters little that it is dedicated to the art of inventing stories and not to architecture.

Rodari applied the artifices of the avant-garde to his work as a teacher.

There is a great sense of hope running through the pages of this little book. Not only because its subject is the world of childhood, but because it affirms that an idea of the world (I am not saying *ideology*) and artistic artifice can proceed arm in arm. No fairy tale or game is ever too alien to reality, even if fairy tales and games are necessary to reach beyond reality. Gianni Rodari was a communist.

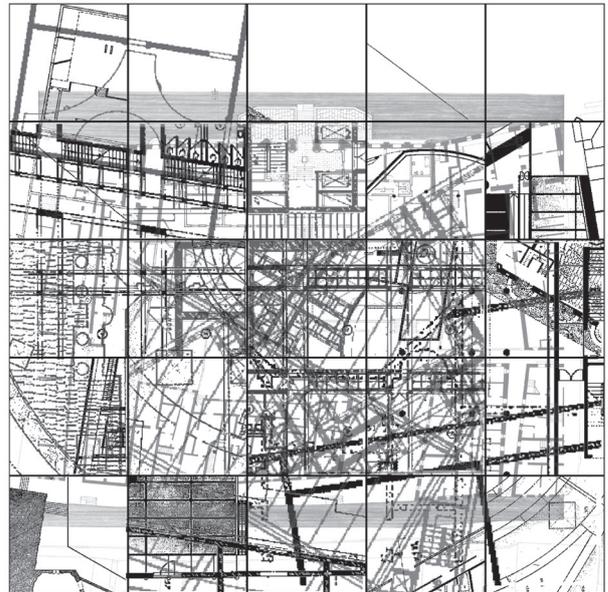
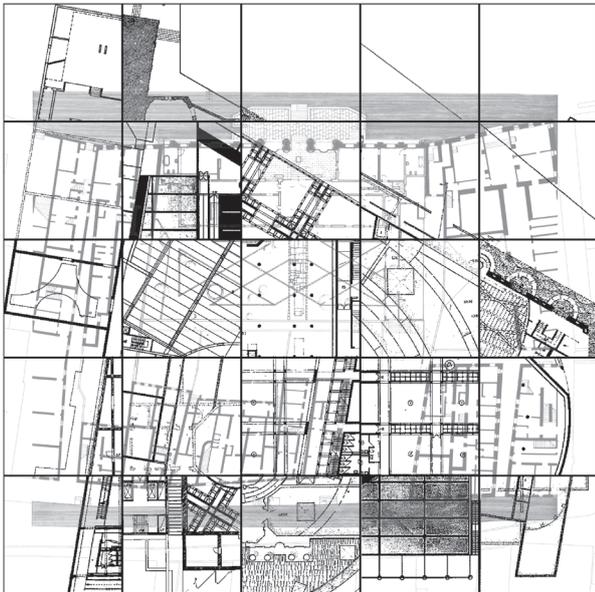
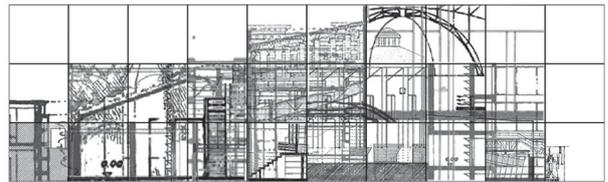
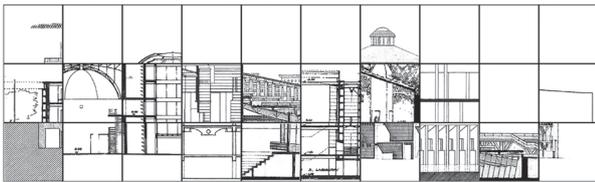


Fig. 4-5-6

Palace of parties, Ca' Venier dei Leoni, random configuration, Tobia Morselli, Edoardo Pizzutelli, a.a. 2018-19.

Palace of celebrations, Ca' Venier dei Leoni, final configuration, Tobia Morselli, Edoardo Pizzutelli, a.a. 2018-19.

Palace of celebrations, Ca' Venier dei Leoni, first floor plan and cross section, Tobia Morselli, Edoardo Pizzutelli, a.a. 2018-19.

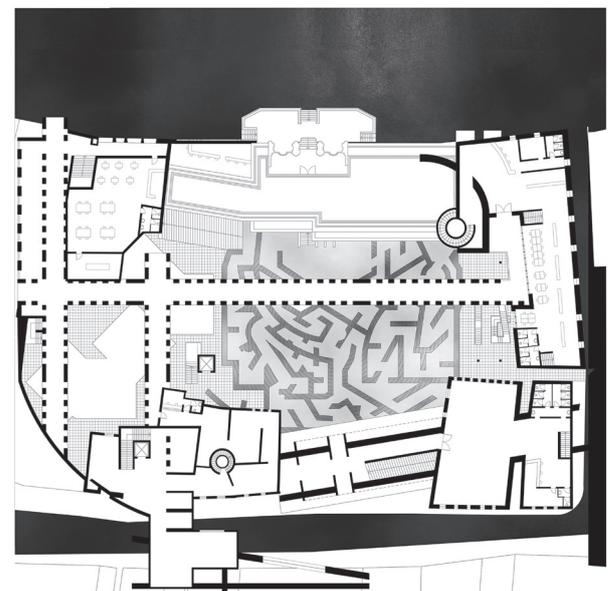
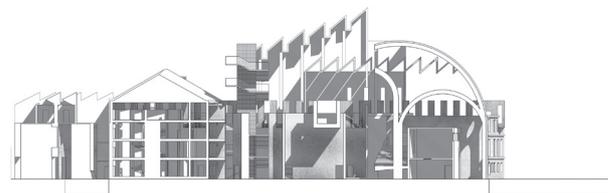




Fig. 7
Party building, Ca' Venier dei Leoni, axonometric view, Tobia Morselli, Edoardo Pizzutelli, a.a. 2018-19.

5. Instead, what unites our games of assemblage is a melancholy for a world that no longer exists. And yet the promises of that world still stir the air, like ghosts.

Only with eyes that are distracted or blinded by prejudice do the violence of pastiche and the brutality of formal decomposition not reveal the love for that world which is crumbling. These are sorry gestures, albeit disguised as avant-garde.

Hence, experimentalism as a strategy to avoid succumbing to reality, the false bottom to smuggle in an idea of the world, only some images and not others.

So, long live assemblage, long live the “kitchen knife” of Dada, long live the game of the avant-garde if among its folds it is hiding something, a “metal part”, that “can only be appropriated by someone who has requested it; and for this reason is deserved”³. Like the “fine steel file” delivered to a prisoner inside a loaf, as Fortini said.

6. Stefano Chiodi and Daniele Giglioli in an issue of the magazine “Il Verri” dedicated to assemblage⁴ denounce this technique as being the symbolic form of late capitalism. In the same way that the perspective view was the symbolic form of Renaissance Humanism. Having divested it of its function to protest reality, assemblage becomes a device of consent.

Chiodi and Giglioli are correct. Having freed the signifiers from their cage of sense, attacking the consequentiality of narrations no longer produces deflagrations in the continuum of history.

The presuppositions of this lengthy present, which has abolished the time and history in which everything flows in a perpetual recombination, must seek its own in the synchronic nature of assemblage (Warburg has finally

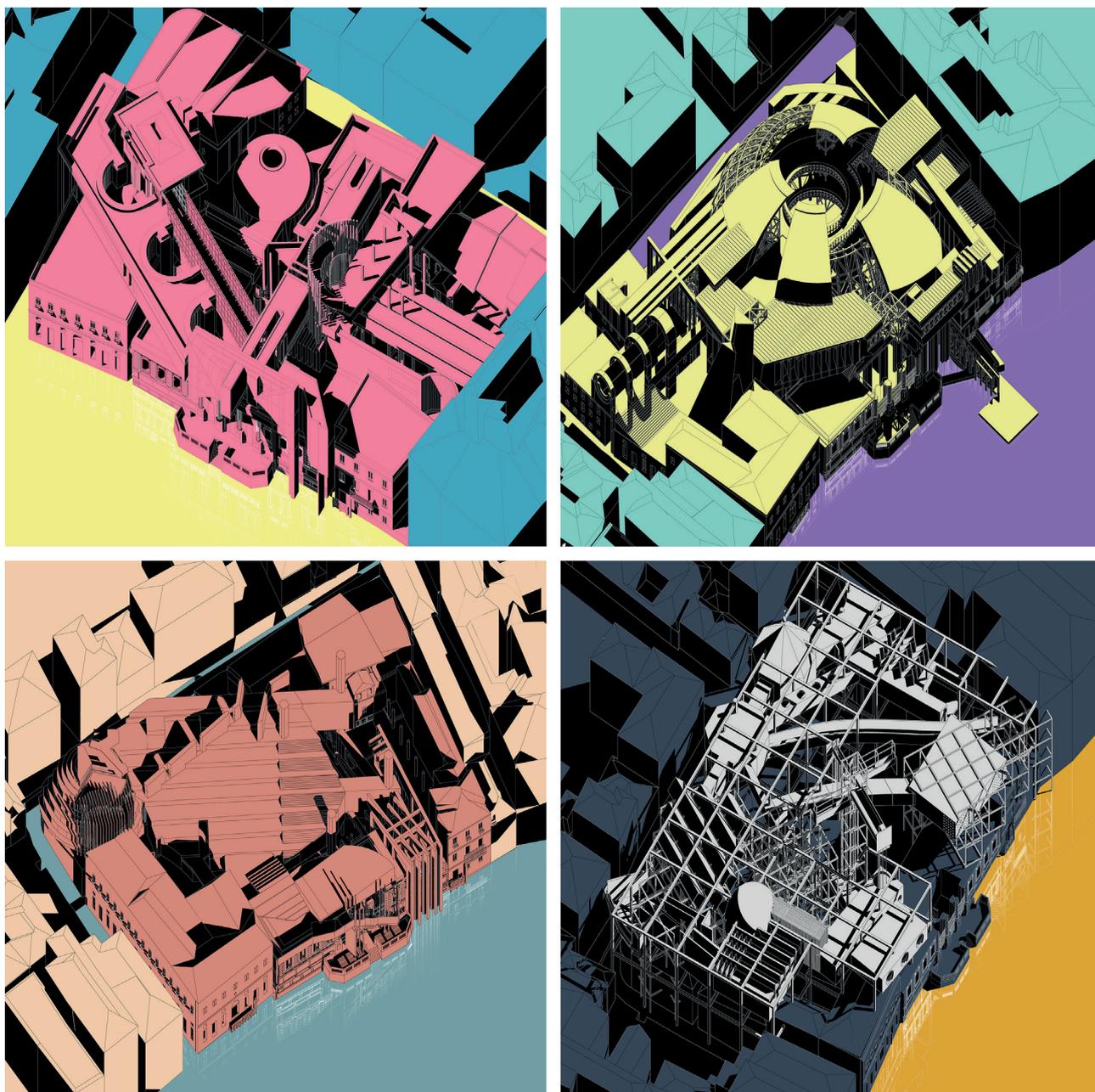


Fig. 8
Palace of celebrations, Ca' Venier dei Leoni.
Clockwise: Susanna Pandolfi, Massimo Pedretti; Julia Ponomarev, Luigi Santoro; Benedetta Scarano, Caterina Solini; Sara De Ponti, Matilda Di Michele, a.a. 2018-19.

won his battle against Vasari and Winckelmann).

Yet it is in the ability to associate “distant and fair” ideas⁵ that the strength of each new image lies; that “wintered seed of the future” referred to by Chiodi and Giglioli.

In fact it is Godard and Balestrini who again indicate the road for an un-pacified assemblage.

And it is to Godard that we owe the title of these notes.

7. The inclination to retrospection and nostalgic reassemblage that characterizes these years is an expression of the condition that Fisher has called “capitalist realism”⁶. Capitalist realism and not Postmodernism because of all the critical incrustations deposited on the postmodern formula. But also for a certain asperity with which Thatcher’s slogan “there is no alternative” has taken root in our society.

Despite everything, we are talking about Postmodernism.

Fisher mourns the promise of a revolutionary potential by virtue of its formal innovation.

Fisher is an orphan of that future promise which has presuppositions of form.

He writes in his book that exhaustion of the future does not even leave us with the past, that without a dialectic towards the past even the concept of tradition will cease to make sense. Since the future is built on the past also the latter never stops reconfiguring itself in the light of any new work. Fisher has taken these things from T. S. Eliot⁷. But also Borges’ take on Kafka,⁸ “producing” his own precursors in reverse, is not far off, like Didi-Huberman and his *anachronism*⁹.

Well, there is melancholy in this coercion to use the words of yesteryear, to disassemble and reassemble the same images over and over again by reusing the techniques of the avant-garde. Fisher describes this particular type of melancholia as “hauntological”¹⁰. “Hauntology” translates the French *hantologie*, which is a pun on *hanter* (torment, haunt) combined with *ontologie* (ontology). Derrida coined it in his book *Spectres of Marx*. What characterizes this condition of melancholia from other forms of nostalgia is the fact of being tied to the promises that a certain situation had the strength to produce. It is the refusal to give up those ghosts in exchange for a mediocre reality. Thus I understand Fisher’s desperation for “promised” futures that never arrived and never will arrive, but which continue to haunt the present. I understand only too well this tomorrow reduced to a game of spectres; unfulfilled promises that are still the promises of modernism, of the avant-garde. Just as I understand Hatherley’s *Militant Modernism*¹¹.

And yet the solution can again be found in assemblage itself. It is the degree of awareness of the operation that distinguishes a “hauntological” assemblage from a reactionary pastiche. The former does not accept the game of illusion that erases the past together with the future. In the glare of an eternally present past as the fruit of a formally perfect reproduction, it pits itself against the joins, patches and blank spaces between one cut-out and another.

Cubism had almost the same problem. Only the discovery of the actual surface of the canvas, through *papier collé*, allowed Braque and Picasso to overcome the spatial illusionism which the fragmentation into small surfaces of the analytical phase had led.

Which is the way that Fisher’s favourite musicians produce their compo-

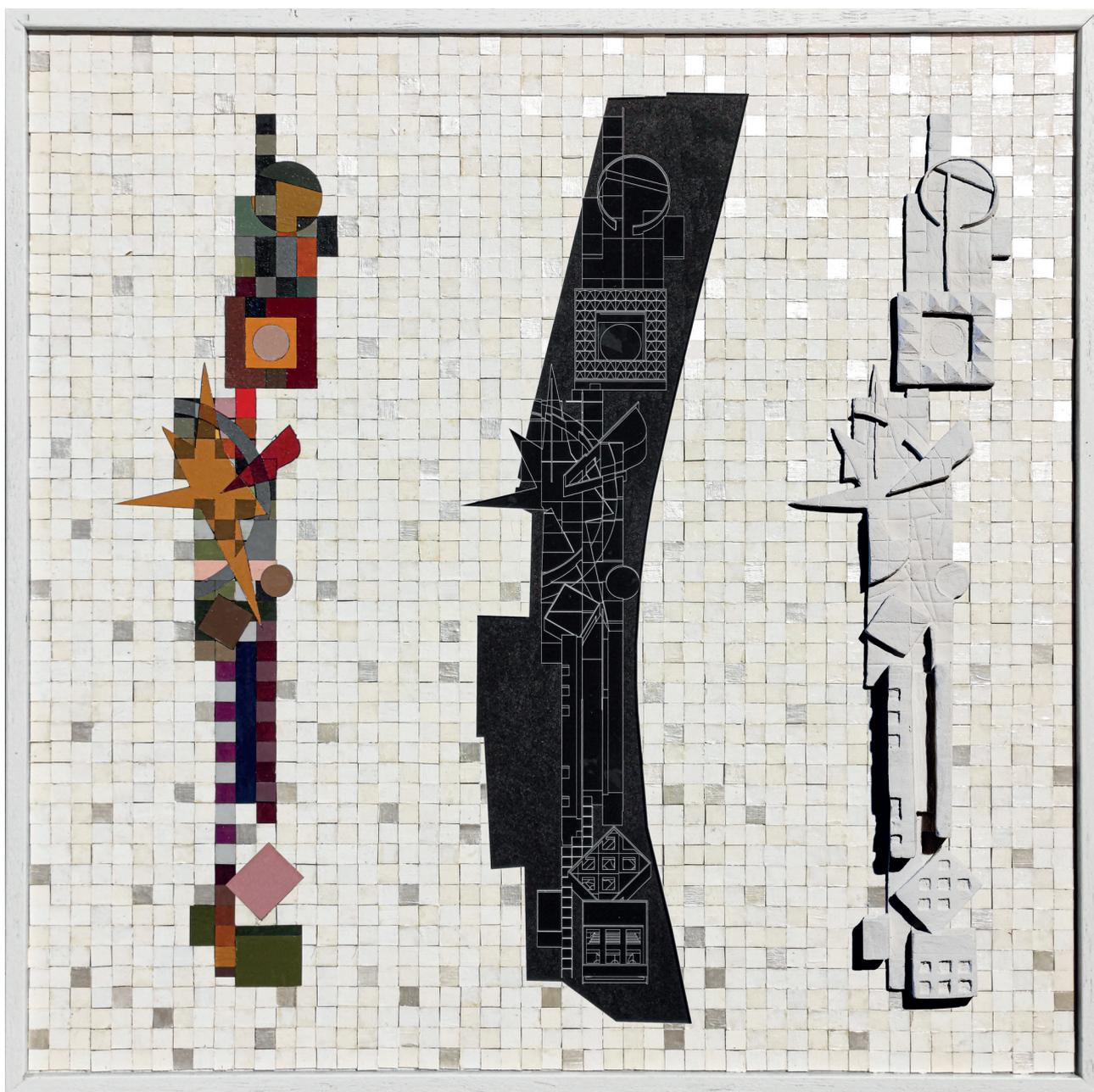


Fig. 9

“La scuola per Nini”. Competition project for the “Scialoia” school, Milan, 2019. Elvio Mangano, Micaela Bordin (Alterstudio Partners), ARCò with Houssam Mahi and Elisa Moro; collaborating students: Sara Cammedda, Linda Martellini, Migena Nezha, Francesco Pavan, Arnold Pere, Benedetta Scarano, Caterina Solini.

sitions, again starting from a “hypermontage” of existing fragments. Re-assembling whatever the cultural undertow leaves by the roadside, abandoned pieces, no longer of interest to anyone.

Like Lévi-Strauss’ *bricoleur* or Benjamin’s children¹².

8. Also the artists that the New York curator Ralph Rugoff sought for the Biennale this year¹³ play with assembling and disassembling what reality produces; employing the techniques of the avant-garde with innocence and experimental commitment, free from *neo neo*-avant-garde cynicism.

On the other hand other situations are not given. And if they are given, it is as a function of reality, in response to ideological constructions of “capitalist realism”.

For this reason, the works hosted at the Corderie and the Central Pavilion are moving precisely because they state their distance from the adult world obstinately and with childlike curiosity, but also the appeal of that world.

For those who superciliously point out that this is yet again the old story of the arbitrariness of the sign and the separation between signifier and signified to be read into these works, we shall answer that it does not matter one whit, since the monologue of a child playing alone is something serious and necessary, when taking apart the games given by his or her parents, or handed down by history.

We have already saved on proclamations, manifestos and theories and *ça suffit*.

Also because the game of the avant-garde nowadays lives only at the level of experimental morality and morality concerns the conscience of each individual artist. The avant-garde is no longer a group game.

In art, group games are called ‘cultural policy’. These are games that used to make sense when they were the expression of an idea of the world.

At this point they have become boring, because with the fall of the idea all that remained was the most marketable aspect.

9. And here comes the hard part.

Because anyone writing about composition cannot make their farewells with words.

I need to show you this drawing (Fig. 10). It is a design entry for a school in Milan.

I am showing it as a confession or a duplicity, since it was not made by resorting to assemblage (be it “hauntological” or stylistic), and its forefathers are quite different from those we have presented up until yesterday.

It is an attempt to find simpler words, given that the pastiche is elitist. A pastiche violates history, turns it upside down (great!), but remains a game for those able to take pleasure in the shocks of this figural licentiousness.

Creating pastiches for love, out of an inability to live without their figurative ghosts does nothing to change their status as a precious game.

We have decided to return to the *point*, *line* and *surface*, and therefore to Froebel and Klee and Lissitzky’s tale of the *2 squares*, not only to affirm an idea of art as an activity of the spirit, but because of a problem of language (yet again).

Also for an idea of culture as a battlefield. Of course.

Let me explain: the game of geometry has to be distanced from the rationality of the building process, from technological reasoning. It possesses demonic anti-naturalistic births which must be returned to it. In other words, restoring the magical and mystical symbolic heart of geometry. Because

there is not only Cézanne, and the other origin of abstraction is to be sought in Toorop, Munch, and Klimt.

Mondrian frequented Theosophical circles. Reread Albino Galvano¹⁴ as an antidote to the progressive abstraction of Argan and the equation of formal pedagogy = social pedagogy.

Abstract Art has a core that is irreducibly in opposition to reality, in spite of its materialism. Indeed, thanks to its materialism.

I would like to say to you: seek out the equilibrium point between Rodari and Malevich.

This seems to me a worthwhile research programme for the next few years.

* *The didactic projects come from the Architectural Design Laboratory 2 of the Politecnico di Milano (a.y. 2018-19) of the professors Elvio Manganaro, Micaela Bordin (urban planning), Simone Peloso (structures); archh. Margherita Mojoli, Ilaria Sgaria, Riccardo Zucco; collaborating students: Francesca Cambi, Sara Camedda, Silvia Cazacencu, Riccardo Danese, Daniele Domokos, Francesca Fiumanò, Houssam Mahi, Giovanni Marca, Linda Martellini, Diego Morabito, Migena Nezha, Beatrice Parma, Francesco Pavan, Mattia Penati, Arnold Pere, Matilde Polvani, Riccardo Rapparini, Greta Rosso.*

Notes

¹ Elvio Manganaro, *Assemblages de jeunesse (omaggio a R.R.)*, in “Ananke”, no. 84, pp. 84-86.

² Rosalind E. Krauss, *Grids*, in “October”, no. 9, summer 1979, now in Id., *L'originalità dell'avanguardia e altri miti modernisti*, edited by Elio Grazioli, Fazi, Rome 2007, pp. 13-27.

³ Franco Fortini, *Astuti come colombe*, in Id., *Verifica dei poteri*, Il Saggiatore, Milan 1965, pp. 67-89.

⁴ Stefano Chiodi, Daniele Giglioli, *L'epoca del montaggio universale*, in “Il Verri”, no. 68, “linee di montaggio”, a special issue dedicated to assemblage, edited by S. Chiodi and D. Giglioli, October 2018, pp. 5-9.

⁵ Pierre Reverdy, *L'image*, in “Nord-Sud”, no. 13, March 1918.

⁶ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Zero Books, Winchester UK, 2009.

⁷ T.S. Eliot, *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919), in Idem, *The Sacred Wood. Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, Methuen & Co. Ltd, London 1920. *Saggi di poesia e critica*, Mursia, Milan 1971.

⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, *Kafka y sus precursores*, in Id., *Otras inquisiciones*, SUR, Buenos Aires 1952.

⁹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps. Histoire de l'art et anachronisme des images*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris 2000.

¹⁰ Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life. Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, John Hunt Publishing Ltd, UK 2013.

¹¹ Owen Hatherley, *Militant Modernism*, Zero Books, Winchester UK, Washington USA, 2008.

¹² Walter Benjamin, *Alte vergessene Kinderbücher [II]* (1924).

¹³ See the catalogue of the exhibition *May You Live In Interesting Times*, La Biennale di Venezia, Biennale Arte 2019.

¹⁴ Albino Galvano, *Dal simbolismo all'astrattismo* (1953); *Le poetiche del Simbolismo e l'origine dell'Astrattismo figurativo* (1954-55); *L'erotismo del “Liberty” e la sublimazione astrattista* (1961), in Id., *La pittura, lo spirito e il sangue*, edited by Giuseppe Mantovani, Il Quadrante Edizioni, Turin 1988, pp. 71-90; 111-133; 169-192.

References

- BENJAMIN W. (2001) – “Alte vergessene Kinderbücher” [1924]; ed. it., “Vecchi libri per l’infanzia”. In: Id., *Opere complete, II*, Einaudi, Torino.
- BORGES J.L. (1963) – “Kafka y sus precursores” [1952]; ed. it., “Kafka e i suoi precursori”. In Id., *Altre inquisizioni*, Feltrinelli, Milano.
- CHIODI S., GIGLIOLI, D. (2018) – “L’epoca del montaggio universale”. Il verri, 68.
- DIDI-HUBERMAN G. (2007) – *Devant le temps. Histoire de l’art et anachronisme des images* [2000]; ed. it., *Storia dell’arte e anacronismo delle immagini*. Bollati Boringhieri, Torino.
- ELIOT T.S. (1971) – “Tradition and the Individual Talent” [1919]; ed. it., “Tradizione e talento individuale”. In Id., *Il bosco sacro. Saggi di poesia e critica*, Mursia, Milano.
- FISHER M. (2018) – *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* [2009]; ed. it. *Realismo capitalista*. Nero, Roma.
- FISHER M. (2019) – *Ghosts of My Life. Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* [2013], ed. it. *Spettri della mia vita. Scritti su depressione, hauntologia e futuri perduti*, Minimum fax, Roma.
- FORTINI F. (1965) – “Astuti come colombe”. In Id., *Verifica dei poteri*, Il Saggiatore, Milano.
- GALVANO A. (1988) – “Dal simbolismo all’astrattismo” [1953]; “Le poetiche del Simbolismo e l’origine dell’Astrattismo figurativo” [1954-55]; “L’erotismo del “Liberty” e la sublimazione astrattista” [1961]. In Id., *La pittura, lo spirito e il sangue, a cura di G. Mantovani*. Il Quadrante Edizioni, Torino.
- HATHERLEY O. (2008) – *Militant Modernism*. Zero Books, Winchester UK, Washington USA.
- KRAUSS R.E. (2007) – “Grids” [1979]; ed. it., “Griglie”. In Id., *L’originalità dell’avanguardia e altri miti modernisti*. A cura di E. Grazioli, Fazi, Roma.
- MANGANARO E. (2016) – “Lo stato delle cose e la nostra formazione”. FAMagazine, 38 (ottobre-dicembre).
- MANGANARO E. (2018) – “Assemblages de jeunesse (omaggio a R.R.)”. ’Ananke, 84 (maggio).
- MANGANARO E., RONZINO A. (2018) – *Corpo a corpo con un capo d’opera dell’architettura d’autore piemontese a mezzo dell’architettura d’autore piemontese/ Hand-to-hand with a masterpiece of Piedmontese auteur architecture by means of Piedmontese auteur architecture*. Maggioli, Santarcangelo di Romagna.
- May You Live In Interesting Times*, La Biennale di Venezia, Biennale Arte 2019.
- REVERDY P. (1918) – “L’image”. Nord-Sud, 13.
- RODARI G. (1973) – *Grammatica della fantasia*. Einaudi, Torino.

Elvio Manganaro (Pavia, 1976), architect, in 2009 he obtained Ph.D. in Architectural Composition from the Politecnico di Milano, with a thesis about *Schools of Architecture*. Currently Researcher in Architectural and urban design at the Politecnico di Milano. Among the publications: *L'altra faccia della luna. Origini del neoliberty a Torino* (Melfi 2018); with A. Ronzino, *Corpo a corpo con un capo d’opera dell’architettura d’autore piemontese a mezzo dell’architettura d’autore piemontese / Hand-to-hand with a masterpiece of Piedmontese auteur architecture by means of Piedmontese auteur architecture* (Santarcangelo di Romagna 2018); *Warum Florenz? O delle ragioni dell’espressionismo di Michelucci, Ricci, Savioli e Dezzi Bardeschi* (Melfi 2016); *Scuole di architettura. Quattro saggi su Roma e Milano* (Milano 2015); *Funzione del concetto di tipologia edilizia in Italia* (Milano 2013).

Tamar Zinguer
The Infancy of the *Sandbox*

Abstract

Froebel conceived play inside his childhood gardens not only as a preparatory exercise for future adult activities but as a tool capable of sustaining and “watering” the “natural fertility of the soil” of the child’s receptive mind, so that new ideas could find a foothold, to let children grow rooted in the life of the universe, “just as a plant is rooted in the ground with its head facing upwards towards the light”.

This essay also illustrates the development and establishment of the sandbox as a spatial and material tool, and how it has evolved thanks to the work of pioneers in nursery schooling.

Keywords

Friedrich Froebel — Sandbox — Kindergarten — Gift

Eisenach, May 13, 1847

Dear, fatherly friend:

Yesterday I was engaged in studying your Sunday paper when an idea struck me which I feel prompted to communicate to you. I thought, might not a plane of sand be made a useful and entertaining game? By a plane of sand I mean a low, shallow box of wood filled with pure sand. It would be a Kindergarten in miniature. The children might play in it with their cubes and building-blocks. I think it would give the child particular pleasure to have the forms and figures and sticks laid out in the sand before its eyes. Sand is a material adaptable to any use. A few drops of water mixed with it would enable the child to form mountains and valleys in it, and so on.¹

In this letter to Friedrich Froebel, inventor of the Kindergarten the first mention of the sandbox as a pedagogical tool appears. As a child, Colonel Hermann Von Arnswald was a pupil in Froebel’s Kindergarten. The three years he spent under his tutelage left such a profound impression – in the individual liberty the kindergarten inspired and the sense of community it engendered – that Von Arnswald was compelled years later, as an educator himself, to entertain an active correspondence with his old master about education and the importance of play. This paper follows the development and establishment of the sandbox as a spatial and material tool, how it evolved from the work of pioneering kindergartners, the brainchild of female immigrants in a new land.

Froebel conceived of play not merely as a preparatory exercise for future adult activities; rather, for him, play in the kindergarten was meant to sustain and ‘hydrate’ «the natural fertility of the ground», that is of the child’s receptive mind, so that new ideas could take hold. Just as

Fig. 1
Gardening at the Brooklyn Pratt
Institute Kindergarten, 1905.



Fig. 2
Gardening in a Kindergarten in
Los Angeles, 1900.



**Fig. 3**

Above left, Froebel's second "Gift".

Below left, Froebel's third "Gift".

On the right, Froebel's fifth "Gift".

Von Arnswald experienced, children would grow to become full individuals «firmly rooted in the life of the universe, as a plant is rooted in the ground, and holding his head upward in the light»².

In Froebel's Kindergarten, initially called the «Institution for Self Education», a kindergartner led the children in communal activities: singing songs and working outdoors, planting and tending to the garden (Fig. 1-2). Indoors, in a controlled setting, the children were led from a very young age in directed play at a gridded table. They would handle a series of building blocks called Gifts, as they were meant to draw out the child's inner abilities through observation and manipulation. The Gifts, designed by Froebel and manufactured by his «Institute for the Fostering of the Creative Activity Drive», were wooden solids cut precisely out of maple, which gradually decomposed volumes into planes, lines and points. This breakdown followed rules that were based on the latest discoveries in crystallography emphasizing the polar opposites in matter, which Froebel learned through his advanced studies with the groundbreaking crystallographer Christian Samuel Weiss (1780-1856) (Fig. 3a, b, c). The Gifts meant to impart to a growing child an understanding of a world founded in natural, mineral structures. The ten Occupations that followed were a series of activities, based on common crafts, which gradually reconstructed the points, lines and planes into volumes again. Thus, natural structures and cultural constructs combined to provide an understanding of the solid world. The first Occupation, paper pricking, represented points; it was followed by embroidery, which connected two points with thread, creating a line; then weaving slats of paper paralleled lines forming a plane, gradually leading to free molding of solids with clay. With both Gifts and Occupations, the children were encouraged to observe the world around them and create constructs that elicited *Forms of Life* – reproducing man-made objects, *Forms of Knowledge* – describing mathematical relationships, and *Forms of Beauty* – forming symmetrical compositions reminiscent of crystals³.

By 1847, when Von Arnswald wrote Froebel about the plane of sand, the Gifts and Occupations had been used in the kindergarten for ten years already. Froebel had written extensively about the first six Gifts dur-

ing his lifetime, while his numerous disciples and trainees developed the instructions concerning the other fourteen Gifts and Occupations. These kindergartners-in-training were primarily women; they rewrote his pedagogical teachings, updated his inflexible guidelines and made his rigid structured program more accessible for younger generations. Froebel believed women were the ones to be entrusted with the «education of man», as he thought a woman would be better suited to carry his voice and ideas to future generations, she would better empathize with the “mind of childhood», since a woman, he stressed, is «the true natural educator of man”⁴. Having briefly attempted to address fathers with no success, he dedicated his lectures and schoolings to women during a time when men, as teachers and headmasters, occupied official positions in education⁵. His editor Arnold Heinemann attested: «If we look over the long array of names that call themselves disciples prepared by the master himself, under his own eyes, and through hearing the living word from his mouth, they are nearly all females. And they all acknowledge that nobody, either male or female, has ever recognized and indicated the true vocation, the life work, the destiny of woman to form and elevate and bless man-kind, as clearly and distinctly as Froebel did»⁶. It is as if Froebel recognized the timely coincidence between the contemporary struggle of women, and aligned it with the necessity for early childhood education when he observed: «women are my natural allies, and they ought to help me for I bring to them what shall relieve them of their inner and outer fetters, terminate their tutelage, and restore their dignity with that of still undervalued childhood»⁷. These women would become instrumental in founding the sandbox as a grounding space of play.

Froebel had thought his young trainees, would dedicate themselves to the profession only until they married; nevertheless these kindergartners never stopped working and became pioneers devoted to a life-long mission. For years after Froebel’s death, these women carried the kindergarten’s message and championed its cause, and regardless of Froebel’s original motivation, they used that institution for their own empowerment and to promote women’s emancipation. These first kindergartners were often motivated by difficult family circumstances, a wish to elevate their financial circumstances, and a way to support their large families. Others still, looking to find alternatives to their orthodox upbringing, sought another course for women in society, an alternative to the anticipated marriage. Froebel’s niece for example, Henriette Schrader (1827-1899) who would later establish the Pestalozzi-Froebel House in Berlin, refused to accept the dutiful domesticity that was expected of her as the eldest of ten children of a pastor, and defying her father, enrolled in her uncle’s Kindergarten course. The new profession offered her a possible vocation: through education she would gain a voice, a social position and a salary, hence the opportunity to be autonomous financially.

Simultaneously, the cause of the kindergarten and early childhood education became a conduit of the voices of some aspiring revolutionaries, and offered opportunities for self-expression afforded beforehand only to men. Innovative social reformers, these women were unified by their aspirations of equal educational opportunities and religious freedom, and assembled around this common cause. This model society, where female kindergartners would work throughout their lives and children

would be actively engaged, appealed to those hopeful feminists seeking an alternative kind of living. They greeted favorably the social and political revolutions of 1848 in Germany, and, during that time, the kindergarten movement flourished briefly with the hope that a liberal constitution of a new unified German state would support their efforts. However, when the socio-political revolutions failed and monarchical governments sustained conservative agendas, a ‘Kindergarten Verbot’ was issued by the Prussian government in 1851, a decree calling to close all Froebelian Kindertgartens as they were believed to promote a revolutionary political agenda, propagate atheism and stand against the church. Froebel himself died a year following the decree, in 1852, and did not see the reversal of the ban take place in 1860⁸.

Ironically it is specifically the Verbot that led to the propagation of the Kindergarten message across Europe and the United States. The numerous newly trained and idealistic kindergartners were suddenly unemployed, yet persisted with their mission of reform and looked for more favorable grounds elsewhere. At the time, the United States seemed to offer hope for a better future and the freedom to develop new opportunities; and early childhood education – along with other aspects relating to domestic life and child rearing – was accepted as an area where women could seek autonomy and self-reliance.

With the promise of liberty and opportunity for the political exiles of 1848, America also seemed to be open to the kind of changes the kindergarten offered. Froebel, without having ever visited, had written guidelines for kindertgartens in the U.S.A⁹.

Therefore, after 1851, the German female Kindertgartners sought a receptive ground across the Atlantic, where by mid-century most American elementary schoolteachers were women, compared to Germany, where teaching was still dominated by men¹⁰. In addition, the separation of church and state – which by 1833 was complete across the United States – allowed for the positive reception of the early childhood ideals of Pestalozzi and Froebel and the proliferation of the kindertgartens. Altogether, in a land with many new immigrants, the focus on education was a way to create a shared culture that would mediate among the different ethnicities. Cultivating a common ground was key to the future growth of a healthy society – and it is in the U.S.A that the idea of sand play took root and developed. While it had been employed elsewhere, it is in a new country that the women kindertgartners recognized sand as an important element of play, and wrote about this grounding matter that should occupy a special position in the Kindergarten, outside the structured spatial sequence of the Gifts and Occupations. It is as if in a new land, a new engagement with the pedagogical mission could take place. A new flexible attitude – and malleable material – could better conform to a changed version of the kindergarten in new society.

The women who brought the Kindergarten to America differed from other women immigrants, who resettled with a family. They were for the most part financially independent, single, and like pioneers were willing to travel distances for the professional opportunity. A few key women, German and American working in tandem, were instrumental in propagating the knowledge of the kindergarten in the United States. Their writings — both loyal to Froebel and seeking change — revealed that through reciprocal exchanges and influences, the idea of play with sand developed and took hold.

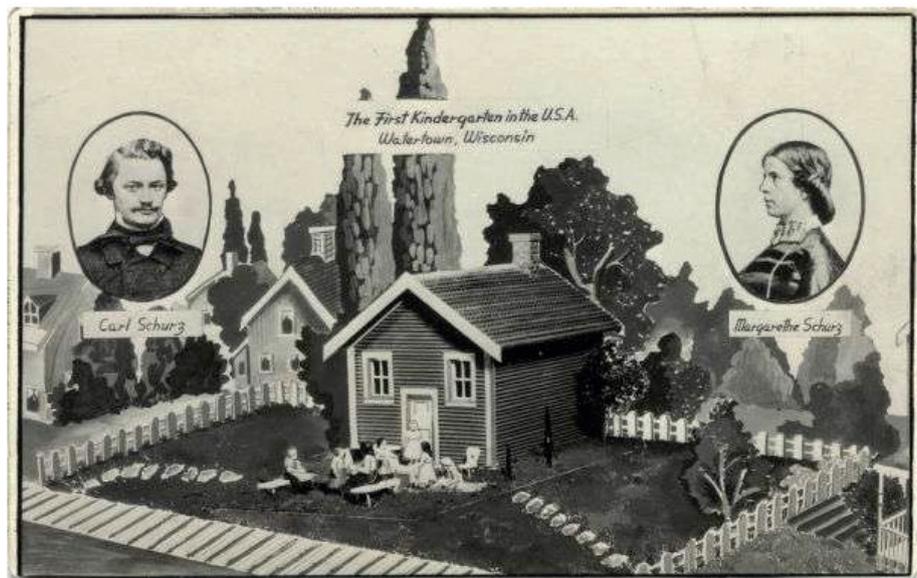


Fig. 4

Artistic representation of one of the first kindergartens in Watertown in Wisconsin. On the sides of the postcard are the portraits of Carl Schurz and Margarethe Schurz, 1856.

Margarethe Meyer Schurz (1833-1876) had trained to become a kindergarten at the college for women in Hamburg before it was forced to close in 1851, and a year later visited her sister who had already opened three Froebelian kindergartens in London. She then immigrated to Watertown, Wisconsin, where she opened the first Kindergarten in the United States, German-speaking to accommodate the large immigrant population there¹¹ (Fig. 4). In 1859 she met Elizabeth Peabody (1804-1894), who, as accounts go, marveled at her ‘well-behaved’ daughter who had been taught with the Froebelian curriculum¹². Hearing then for the first time about Froebel and his method, Peabody, then in her fifties, decided to dedicate the rest of her life to the establishment of English speaking Kindergartens in the United States. A former bookstore owner, the editor of a journal of the Transcendentalist Movement, and the sister-in-law of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Horace Mann, Peabody had been very involved with the cause of education. She was familiar with Pestalozzi’s writings, but Froebel’s idea of the kindergarten as developed in his book *The Education of Man* (1826) that was presented to her by Schurz, incorporated the communal aspects she deemed so important and that Pestalozzi’s pedagogy lacked. Enthusiastic to learn more about the system, she travelled to Germany in 1867, where she met Froebel’s widow Luise Levin Froebel (1815-1900) and Baroness Bertha von Marenholtz-Bulow (1810-1893), who had become Froebel’s main advocates¹³. They enlightened Peabody as to the kindergarten practices, and Peabody, eager to “establish the real thing [in the U.S.A.] on the basis of an adequate training of the kindergartners” enlisted women who had been trained by Froebel, and who were eager to move to America, since Froebel himself had believed that «the spirit of the American nationality was the only one in the world with which his creative method was in complete harmony and to which its legitimate institutions would present no barrier»¹⁴.

Emma Marwedel (1818-1893) was one of the most influential kindergartners who had immigrated to the United States following the solicitation of Elizabeth Peabody, whom she met during her first visit to Hamburg in 1867 and the first one to write about the importance of play

with sand.

Marwedel wished to elevate women's role in society. She had traveled extensively throughout Europe to assess the working conditions of women, their different wages and the disparity among them, and witnessed the general lack of institutions dedicated to their training¹⁵. Nurturing women students in vocational schools, she claimed, meant nurturing the mothers of the future generations. Marwedel was one of the founders of Germany's first feminist organization, the German Women's association (*Allgemeiner deutscher Frauenverein*), and for one year, in 1867, she was the first director of The Girls' Industrial School (*Gewerbeschule fuer Maedchen*), which she helped found in Hamburg. It is then that she met with Elizabeth Peabody, who inspired her to adapt and develop the Kindergarten for the United States, in English¹⁶. The kindergarten – with the income it would provide – could help support a single woman who wished to never marry; or if married, it could give her supplementary income so as not to be dependent on her husband. In fact, many of the early kindergarteners, like Emma Marwedel herself, never married nor had children, as if equating this newly found independence with the opportunity of a completely different lifestyle. She sought to create a holistic education for Kindergarten teachers and their pupils, addressing body and mind introducing daily walks, bathing and gymnastics. Rather than these acts pertaining to the home and to 'motherly care', she incorporated these practices in the curriculum of a contemporary woman's education¹⁷.

In America, despite her great enthusiasm and Peabody's support, Marwedel's plan to form a school for kindergartners was not immediately successful; therefore she developed a practical agricultural institute for women instead, to become actual gardeners of fruits and vegetables. The president of Cornell University, Andrew Dickson White (1832-1918) offered her a piece of land, but she declined, as Ithaca was too far from a metropolitan center necessary for access to the markets, she claimed. Changing course five years later, she established an Institute for Women with an adjoining private kindergarten in Washington D.C.¹⁸. It was the work of her kindergarten class that was on display at the Centennial Exhibition in 1876 in Philadelphia, where according to Frank Lloyd Wright's account, his mother bought him the Froebel's Gifts that left such a profound influence on his life-work¹⁹. Subsequently, Marwedel moved to Los Angeles and established a school for kindergarten pedagogy in a picturesque building resembling an assembly of Froebel's solids, a structure that was known as 'The Round House', with a sign on the gate announcing - 'Paradise of Eden'. It seemed like an ideal location for the housing of the pedagogy that the Kindergarten manuals in English named the "Paradise of Childhood"²⁰ (Fig. 5).

In her first book, *Conscious Motherhood, or the Earliest Unfolding of the Child in the Cradle* (Chicago: Interstate, 1887), Emma Marwedel established that sandboxes (or sand-tables) were so important that «even the sea-shore should have one»²¹. Sand-tables should be part of every nursery, she wrote, but as she knew them at the time, «nurseries were not made for children», she wrote, yet they could become ideal spaces «if mammas would make the plans of houses», she emphasized²². (Fig. 6) In the nursery, the biggest and sunniest room in the house, built on the ground floor as an extension of the garden,



Fig. 5-6
Round House in Los Angeles,
1885.

Sand table Vienna alamy.





Fig. 7
Sand table at a Harrisville nursery, Chicago, 1919.

children would gain knowledge by «self-instruction». The sand-table would be there, alongside different collections from nature –shells and pebbles, pressed flowers, and branches, which would be included in the children’s play as props when stories were told. The sand-table could embody the ‘first garden’, literally a place where the children could sow seeds and watch them grow. Once the garden has sprouted, paths, streets and houses would be designed, Marwedel explained. Children would work together to form entire neighborhoods. More than any other game or occupation in the nursery, this long-term project in the sand table would be “leading the child to a high moral development by making him... a member of a social organization, learn quite early as an individual to respect the work of others, and to overcome his own selfishness»²³, Marwedel said. By gathering around this framed piece of earth, building together cities in small, the children would learn «to share generously, to accept graciously, and to yield courteously to the *social training*, – one of the most important features of the kindergarten, she wrote²⁴ (Fig. 7). And breaking from Froebel, she insisted children play with sand unsupervised, and therefore the sand-tables should be placed in the least observed places, since it is there that the «children’s greater imaginative power [would] form the root of their higher inspiration». Such an indispensable space for personal growth is necessary everywhere, Marwedel added; since it is especially around the sand-table that “the child is led unconsciously from the created to the Creator»²⁵. At the invitation of the Ethical Society, Marwedel founded the first free public kindergarten in San Francisco, the Silver Star Kindergarten in Oakland. She remained in San Francisco to her death in 1893, and continuously dedicated her life to Froebel’s teachings. (Fig. 8)

In 1878 Marwedel asked Kate Douglas Wiggin (1856-1923), who had completed her Kindergarten training with her in Los Angeles, to head that school. Years later, after having been a kindergartner for eighteen years and a very successful children book author, Wiggin published with her sister Nora Archibald Smith (1859-1934) books on the educa-



Fig. 8
Tomb of Emma Marwedel Oakland CA.

tional principles of Friedrich Froebel²⁶.

In the book *Froebel's Occupations* (1896), the last chapter was entitled “Sand Work”, proof that Kate Wiggin afforded work with sand as much importance as any other Occupation conceived by Froebel. That chapter, the first scholarly summary of the history of the sandbox, established Sand Work as a basic practice and an important addition to Froebel’s pedagogical canon. Wiggin quoted Froebel and interpreted: «The little child employs itself for a long time merely by pouring water or sand from one vessel into another alternately... for building and forming with sand and earth, which precedes clay work, opportunities should be afforded even to the child of one year»²⁷.

Wiggin made the sand-table kid sized and set on rollers, just as the rest of the furniture in the Kindergarten. It was to be approximately five by three feet, one foot deep and lined with zinc, to allow the children to pour water and form landscapes. Most importantly it was to be large enough to allow for a dozen children to gather round, as the sand table, she emphasized, was to be used solely for communal work²⁸. All activity at the sand table should be cooperative, Wiggin stressed, as the greatest value of this work is that it promotes and demands cooperation, following Froebel’s remark that «the feeling of community is commonly not only not early awakened or later nourished in the child, but on the contrary is early disturbed and even annihilated»²⁹.

Wiggin too, following Marwedel, instructed the kindergartner to remain in the background so as to promote spontaneity, without which a growing person’s originality and sense of creativity would be crushed, she wrote. The teacher, Wiggin added, «must endeavor simply to be one of the children and not force her ideas upon the community»³⁰. All in all, she wrote, work at the sand table is an «unexcelled teacher of social morality and of self-control, ...it develops the creative instincts, which if suppressed, entail a loss of power upon the whole being of the child»³¹. It is in the sand that children experiment being architects first, Wiggin emphasized as she quoted Baroness von Marenholz: «The hands of children commence their first rough trials at building, whilst digging in earth and sand. The scooping of caverns, the building of houses and bridges, forming and fashioning of all kinds... – all spring from the instinct of construction, the true instinct of work»³². Thus, recognizing the sand table as the most important tool in the kindergarten, she added, «there is nothing in the kindergarten which is capable of such varied, helpful, and beautiful uses as is the sand table, and it alone, were all our other helps to child training removed would support the claims of the system to be considered as a great educational agency»³³. And recognizing the sand as a creative and pedagogical tool of prime importance, she called the ‘plane of sand’, a «fit drawing board for giants»³⁴.

That instinct to dig in earth and sand was often repressed in city children, following what she called the «first commandment of maternal catechism» – «Thou shalt not make thyself dirty» parents would say³⁵. The children would hence suppress their most natural instinct, as they would be deprived of what could please them most – touching mud and soil. Wiggin described in her autobiography, *My Garden of Memory*, the sand table on her first day of teaching at the Silver Spring free kindergarten in San Francisco. Forty little children came on that first day, ages 3-8, she recalled. While thirty students acquiesced and sat quietly

waiting, another ten would not let go of their mother's hand, at which point most of those mothers took their children outside for a spanking and returned them crying even more. Most mothers just left the children there – crying. When they would not quiet down, Wiggin asked her assistant to take those crying kids to the sand table outside where they eventually calmed down and then returned³⁶. The sand table, this model earth, could provide warmth, pliability, calm, a supportive background and connective matter – a powerhouse of sorts. Children should dig in earth and sand, she emphasized, since «children renew their strength at the touch of Mother Earth»³⁷. Wiggin wrote.

When in 1882, Henriette Schrader-Breyman (1827-1899) founded the Pestalozzi-Froebel Haus in Berlin, a training institute that also featured a Kindergarten, she was critical of the Kindergarten as it had been established by Froebel, her uncle. She questioned whether a place for educating young children should resemble the institution of the school altogether, rather than emulate the supportive environment of the home. The complete control given to the kindergartner, leading the children through series of successive detailed instructions appeared to her as rigid and excessive. «The idea that playing according to direction could make men noble seemed to me so narrow and limiting», she said³⁸. Just as a child's early years are usually spent near the mother and under her guidance, the Kindergarten should emulate the warmth of home and allow for the expression of emotions, rather than inculcate to the strict discipline of a school (Fig. 9).

Based on universal concepts of mathematics and geometry, Froebel's Gifts and Occupations transcended language barriers and were easily adapted to different cultures. Nevertheless, in time and with the move to a new continent, interpretations and criticisms emerged, and numerous changes were made to the system with its adaptation to the new cultural climate of the United States. With the translation to English came a moderation of the strict instructions and a greater flexibility of the structure overall. It became evident that the rigid framework – even the gridded surface that was to underlie all play – might not be able to sustain young children's attention for very long. In her book, *The Transatlantic Kindergarten*, Ann Taylor Allen contended that while the American kindergartners contributed significantly to the institution's reform, it is Schrader-Breyman's critique of the kindergarten that proved pivotal. She introduced manual skills, domestic work and exercise into the curriculum, changes that were much appreciated by the American adepts of the Froebelian system. While domestic in nature and involving manual tasks from around the home, these aspects of learning followed new reforms favoring experiential over theoretical education.

Schrader-Breyman had claimed that, «the first years of life create the basis for the individual's entire existence», and therefore «natural motherliness... and the quiet work of women in the home and with her children must be given a new significance for public life»³⁹. The new profession of Kindergartner, would allow a woman to employ in her educational role the maternal qualities of care and warmth that she innately possesses, regardless of whether she has children of her own. In 1870 Schrader-Breyman coined the term 'geistige Mutterlichkeit', or 'Spiritual Motherhood', specifically to denote that a woman need not

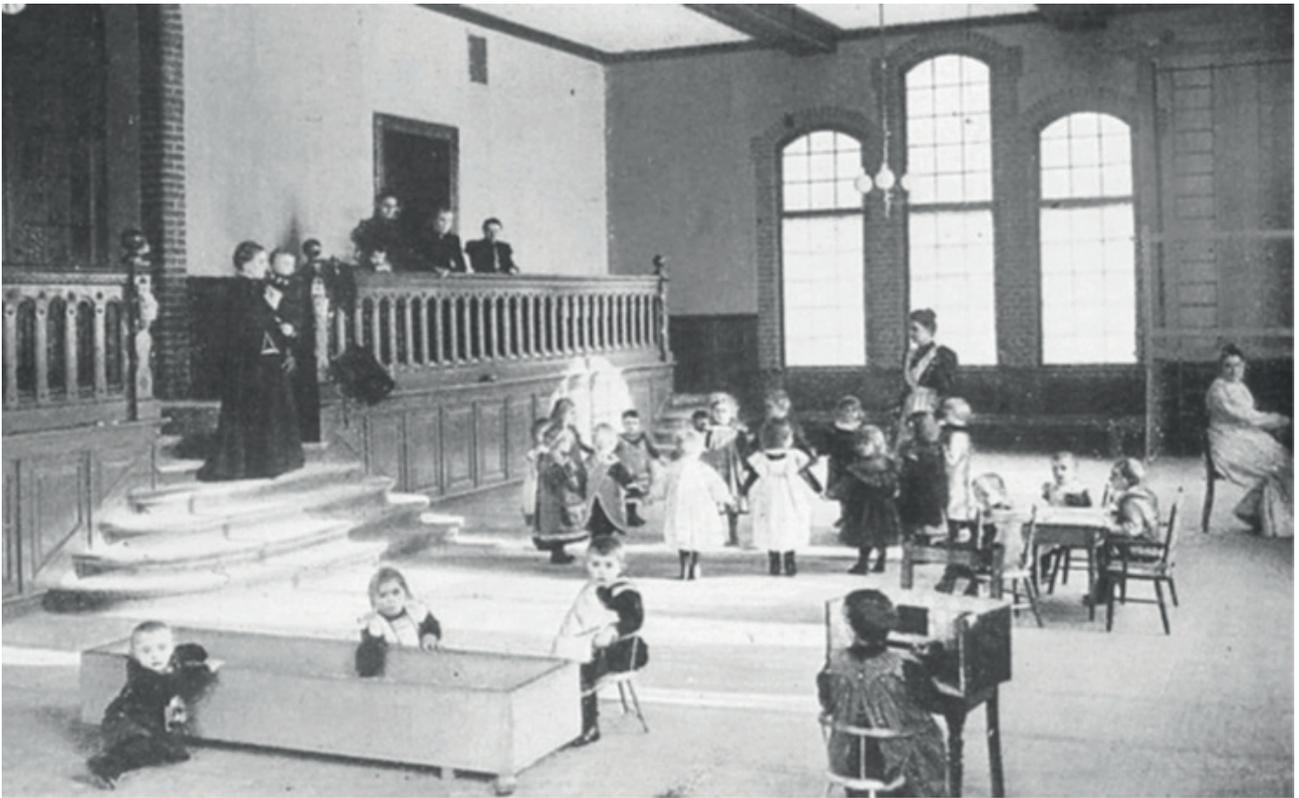


Fig. 9
Sand Table Froebel-Pestalozzi
House Berlin, 1904.

have a family in order to express her maternity: her maternal instincts could be directed to and benefit the children of the kindergarten and society as a whole. The Women's Movement took up the concept of 'Spiritual Motherhood' and utilized it to explain a woman's ability to benefit society at large and the necessity for women to partake in societal roles. Agnes von Zahn-Harnack, women's rights activists and author, wrote in her history of the movement, *Die Frauenbewegung* (1928), that «It is only where physical motherhood purifies itself and breaks through into spiritual motherhood that we can speak of the highest fulfillment of life, which does not at all consist in the fact that a newborn child is lying in a cradle»⁴⁰. In practicality the movement used this concept to demand for women's employment. During a time when teaching positions were held primarily by men who followed formal educational training and requirements, a formal establishment of women's abilities and roles seemed to offer them a new professional appeal. Historian and social scientist Irene Stoehr wrote, «The women's movement took... ['Spiritual Motherhood'] up later and made it refer to the demands for employment and participation by mostly childless women, arguing that maternity was in principle a quality of all women, and expressed not only in the family»⁴¹.

The achievement of Henriette Schrader-Breyermann was to order these nurturing acts in a system that could then be taught and would allow the mother of a family to expand her domestic role to the public sphere. Rather than being the mother of a few children, she could become a mother in society at large. This embodied a continuation of Froebel's thought who rendered early childhood education – as reflected in the Gifts especially – as a precise science with its specific tools⁴².

Henriette Schrader-Breyermann had said, «I foresee an entirely new age dawning for women, when she... will bring to the broader community a quality which until now has been entirely lacking—the spirit of

motherhood in its deepest meaning and in its most varied forms»⁴³. The sandbox then, warm, embracing and conforming, became the physical manifestation of these thoughts, the actual brain-child of these women, 'spiritual mothers' who attempted to redefine what motherhood could be.

The sand table, this model earth would act as a supportive background or connective matter – a mother earth of sorts – where an individual discovery of the child could take place. The study of the child – and her environment-provided spiritual mothers with new territories to explore. Kate Douglas Wiggin had written: «For many of these women, the study of the child had provided the basis for a new understanding and affirmation of the self... The child, any child I had almost said, is the Columbus of the undiscovered world within you, in your heart, that goes without saying, but in your mind as well»⁴⁴. And the sandbox became for children a model continent that remained to be explored.

Notes

¹ Friedrich Froebel, *Froebel Letters*, edited by Arnold H. Heinemann, Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1893, p. 61.

² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³ For a detailed description of Froebel's Gifts, see Tamar Zinguer, *Architecture in Play: Intimations of Modernism in Architectural Toys*, Charlottesville, VA: UVA Press, 2015, chapter 2.

⁴ *Froebel Letters*, p.2, p.8. Froebel admitted that by his own account his letters, expressed more clearly and fully his views on education than his formal writings, such as *The Education of Man* (1826) or *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (1861).

⁵ He had originally founded 'Educational Unions' where fathers were to be enrolled, but he was not satisfied by the responses he received from fathers and men. "Does Herr Froebel mean we shall eventually have women university professors?" asked a (male) member of the audience at a teacher's conference as the assembly broke in laughter. See Zinguer, *Architecture in Play*, p. 20.

⁶ Heinemann wrote: "Having clearly recognized the great vocation of woman as the true, yea, he thought, almost the only, educator of man, Froebel thenceforward devoted all his time and energy to the problem of winning the adhesion of woman to his educational scheme; of interesting and training her in the art, and, as far as feasible, also in the science of education; of persuading her to take up the great task of educating man, and to recognize in the sublime mission and heavenly blessedness of a woman's life." *Froebel Letters*, p. 163.

⁷ Bertha von Marenholtz-Bulow and Mary Tyler Peabody Mann, *Reminiscences Friedrich Froebel*, Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1905, p. 60.

⁸ Froebel had set up a Kindergarten and Training Institute in Hamburg, when another innovative educational institution intersected with the history of the kindergarten and precipitated its closing. The "College for the Female Sex" (*Hochschule fuer das weibliche Geschlecht*), the first institution for higher education for women, founded in Hamburg too, was headed by Carl Froebel, Friedrich Froebel's nephew. This college offered a general curriculum but also courses in 'feminine' areas, such as nursing or teaching, as well as a Kindergarten course following Froebel's principles and methods. The institute's leaders—Jewish liberals and Christian reformers, including Bertha Meyer and Johannes Ronge who would start a few years later the first Froebel kindergartens in London—strove to lead women to financial independence and equal rights. "Froebel" being the same last name of the two institutions' leaders, led the authorities to think the college and the Kindergartens were related.

⁹ See "Friedrich Froebel, "Die Kindergarten in Amerika" in Helmut Heiland, ed., *Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel, (1782-1852) Baltmannsweiler: Schneider-Verl. Hohengehren, 2002, pp. 252-53.*

¹⁰ For detail see, Katja Munchow, "The relationship between the Kindergarten Movement, the Movement for Democracy, and the Early Women's Movement in the Historical Context of the Revolution of 1848-49, as reflected in *Die Frauen-Zeitung*", *History of Education* 35, No. 2, 2006: pp. 183-92.

¹¹ She was sixteen when her father, Heinrich Christian Meyer, and sisters were among the founders of the college for women in Hamburg, under the direction of Carl Froebel. Her older sister, Bertha married an ex-communicated priest, Johannes Ronge, who was also among the founders of the college. They moved to London where Bertha founded three kindergartens in 1851, one in Manchester (1859) and another in Leeds (1860). Margarethe, Bertha's younger sister, married a German émigré she met in London, Carl Schurz, who would later become a prominent member of the Republican Party, a senator and minister of the Interior. Margarethe founded the first kindergarten in the United States, at Watertown Wisconsin, where she used her sister's Bertha manual "Practical Guide to the English Kindergarten."

¹² See Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, "Origin and Growth of the Kindergarten," in *Education* 2, no. 5 (May 1882), pp. 522-23.

¹³ Luise Levin (1815-1900) joined Froebel's training institute in 1849, became Froebel's assistant and second wife in 1851, a year before his death in 1852. She never remarried, nor did she have children, and dedicated herself to his legacy

and to advancing the cause of the kindergarten to the end of her life. Baroness Bertha von Marenholtz-Bulow (1810-1893) met Froebel in 1849. When she realized Froebel's play activities with children embodied an actual education, she embarked on the study of Froebel's principles and became his chief advocate throughout Europe. She wrote numerous books about Froebel – *Woman's Educational Mission: Being an Explanation of Friedrich Froebel's System of Infant Gardens* (1855), *The Child and Child-Nature* (1868), *Reminiscences of Friedrich Froebel* (1876), and *Hand Work and Head Work* (1883).

¹⁴ Fletcher Harper Swift, *Emma Marwedel 1818-1893: Pioneer of the Kindergarten in America*, University of California Publications in Education. Volume 6, No. 3, pp. 139-216. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1931.

¹⁵ The pamphlet she published upon her return in 1868 received a five-page review by Elizabeth Peabody in Harper's Magazine, in 1870. See Elizabeth Peabody, "Industrial Schools for Women," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 40, May 1870, pp. 885-891.

¹⁶ Peabody said about Marwedel: "She inspired me with the courage to make it the main object of the remainder of my life to extend the kindergarten of my own country." Swift, *Emma Marwedel*, p. 153.

¹⁷ Fifty years before the criticism of Austrian culture by Adolf Loos and at least 60 years before the inclusion of such daily rites into 'clean' modernist spaces, Marwedel advocated that all public institutions should introduce daily bathing, as well as daily walks outdoors and daily gymnastics. See Swift, *Emma Marwedel*, p. 152.

¹⁸ Her kindergarten was opened in connection with her School for Physical Culture in D.C., educating among others the three children of James Garfield, who was to become president of the United States. By 1873 she had 50 pupils studying five days a week for 4 hours each day. The school prospered, educating 95 students from ages three to eighteen years old, and employing six assistants most of whom versed in the Froebel curriculum.

¹⁹ See Vincent Scully, "Frank Lloyd Wright and the Stuff of Dreams" in *Perspecta*, Vol. 16, 1980, pp. 8-28, 31, and Norman Brosterman, *Inventing Kindergarten*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997.

²⁰ *The Paradise of Childhood: A Manual for Self-Instruction in Friedrich Froebel's Educational Principles, and a Practical Guide to Kinder-Gartners* was a manual of instructions to Froebel's system written by Edward Wiebe and published by Milton Bradley as early as 1869.

²¹ Emma Marwedel, *Conscious Motherhood; or, The Earliest Unfolding of the Child in the Cradle, Nursery, and Kindergarten*, Chicago: The Interstate Publishing Company, 1887, p. 272.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 225.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

²⁶ Kate Douglas Wiggin and Nora Archibald Smith, *Froebel's Occupations*, Boston and New York: Houghton & Mifflin (1896). The book detailed Occupations such as Perforating, Sewing, Interlacing and Peas Work, and then added such activities as Freehand and Nature Drawing, Circular Drawing and Paper Cutting, which were not originally described by Froebel, but were deemed important by Emma Marwedel. In the early 1880s, members of the North America Froebel Institute welcomed changes and adaptations to the rigid Froebel system, greatly based on rigid stereometric principles, and adopted Marwedel's proposal to embrace the curved line since it was present in all natural forms – animal and vegetal.

²⁷ Friedrich Froebel, *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten, or his Ideas Concerning the Play and Playthings of the Child*, translated by Josephine Jarvis New York: D. Appleton, 1895 p. 146; also quoted in Wiggin and Smith, *Froebel's Occupations*, p. 293.

²⁸ Wiggin and Smith, *Froebel's Occupations*, p. 295.

²⁹ Friedrich Froebel, *Education of Man*, Translated by Josephine Jarvis, New York: A. Lovell and Co., 1885 p. 74, also quoted by Wiggin and Smith, *Froebel's Occupations*, p. 295.

³⁰ Wiggin and Smith, *Froebel's Occupations*, p. 303.

³¹ Ibid., p. 308.

³² Wiggin is quoting Baroness von Marenholtz-Bulow, no source given, *Froebel's Occupation*, p. 297-8.

³³ Ibid., p. 298.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 290.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 291.

³⁶ Kate Douglas Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory: An Autobiography*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923, pp. 117

³⁷ Wiggin and Smith, *Froebel's Occupations*, p. 291.

³⁸ Henriette Schrader, "Girlhood Days at Keilhau," in *Kindergarten Magazine, Monthly Text Book of the New Education*, Vol. VIII, No. 5, Chicago, 1896, p. 325.

³⁹ Henriette Schrader-Breymann and Erika Hoffmann, *Henriette Schrader-Breyermann: Auszüge aus ihren Schriften*, Langel salsa: Beltz, 1930, p. 160 Translation by Ann Taylor Allen, *The Transatlantic Kindergarten: Education and Women's Movement in Germany and the United States*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 96.

⁴⁰ Agnes von Zahn-Harnack in her account of the Women's movement, *Die Frauenbewegung* (1928), pp. 76-77, quoted in English in Irene Stoehr, "Housework and Motherhood: Debates and Policies in the Women's Movement in Imperial Germany and the Weimar Republic" in Gisela Bock and Patricia Thane, *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States 1820s-1950s*, Routledge, 2012, p. 222.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ann Taylor Allen explained: "Far from trusting to mere instinct, Froebel insisted that child-nurture was a complex science, best taught in a specialized training institution attached to the kindergarten itself. In the role of educated mother—whether to the biological family or to the spiritual family of the kindergarten—Froebel saw the fulfillment of women's demand both for responsibility and for respect." Ann Taylor Allen, "Spiritual Motherhood: German Feminists and the Kindergarten Movement, 1848-1911," *History of Education Quarterly*, Volume 22 no. 3, Special Issue: Educational Policy and Reform in Modern Germany (Autumn, 1982), pp. 322

⁴³ Mary Lyschinska, *Henriette Schrader-Breyermann: Ihr Leben aus Briefen und Tagebuechern zusammengestellt*, Berlin and Leipzig, 1922, vol. I. p. 64, 86. Translated and quoted in English in Ann Taylor Allen, "Spiritual Motherhood," pp. 323-24.

⁴⁴ Kate Douglas Wiggin, "The Training of Children," in *The Woman's Book: Dealing Practically with the Modern Conditions of Home-Life, Self-Support, Education, Opportunities and Every-Day Problems*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894, p. 320.

Tamar Zinguer is an architect, educator and historian whose overall work is concerned with the pedagogy of design through history and across scales, from the level of the object to the landscape. Her book projects position architecture within larger cultural fields and discourses. *Architecture in Play: Intimations of Modernism in Architectural Toys*, (UVA Press, 2015) explores how breakdown and collapse have positioned toys as tools that advanced the constant reevaluation of spatial design. Forthcoming is *Sandbox: An Architectural History* (MIT Press, 2021), which follows the ubiquitous space from its beginnings in 19th Century pedagogy, to its rebirth in 1970s as a significant trope in art. Zinguer was trained at The Cooper Union, Technion, and Princeton University, and has been Associate Professor of Architecture at Cooper Union since 2006.

Enrico Bordogna
Il ragazzo dello luav

Author: *Luciano Semerani*

Title: *Il ragazzo "dell'luav"*

Language: *italiano*

Publisher: *LetteraVentidue*

Characteristic: *dimension 21x15 cm, 211 pages, paperback, back/white*

ISBN: *978-88-6242-401-1*

Year: *2020*



A book begging to be read and reread, each chapter addictive, abounding in cross-references, digressions, reflections, remarkable characters, and anecdotes whose variety represents as many “trails” to be followed, which buttonhole and propagate new curiosities, questions, and thoughts in the reader.

A rhapsodic autobiography in the form of a fable, made up of stand-alone episodes without a temporal or topical framework, which seem to gush out from a long session of the author’s self-reflection, gradually constructing a polyhedral Borges-like self-portrait page after page. And the whole narrated with a skill in writing, impossible to know whether well-thought-out or intrinsic, wherein high and low tones, affectionate and not infrequently picturesque and humorous anecdotes, reflections and considerations of a theoretical ilk, with interpretations and value judgements on facts, personalities, works of architecture of an important past era, are arranged in a complementarity of antagonisms (to borrow the Samonæsque title of one chapter), offered to the reader with a pleasantness of reading which winds throughout the book, the whole enriched by frequent interjections in dialect.

The text begins – and not by chance, because the theme of friendship with, esteem for, and loyalty to certain of his peers, Nino, Aldo, Guido, Gianugo, Pierotto, Miela, Gae, and of course Gigetta, and many others, is a guiding thread which runs through all the memories, «for our generation friendship has been a very important thing» – with warm recollections of his friend Domingo Alvarez, a great Venezuelan architect and artist with a Venetian sojourn behind him, visiting the new pavilion of the Hospital of SS Giovanni e Paolo, in which we can appreciate a certain solemnity of pace and composition, reminiscent of the nearby façade of the Scuola Grande di San Marco by Codussi (which «Benevolo says looks like a wardrobe, and instead is a masterpiece»). And «If Domingo likes our work, that’s all that matters to me!»

The theme of the hospital, the architecture and life of a hospital, returns several times, starting from the 1963 competition for the Venice City Hospital, with some young peers won jointly with a project by the elder Daniele Calabi, but both sacrificed upon the altar of Le Corbusier by the benevolent but bitter and unconfutable severity of Giuseppe Samonà, («if

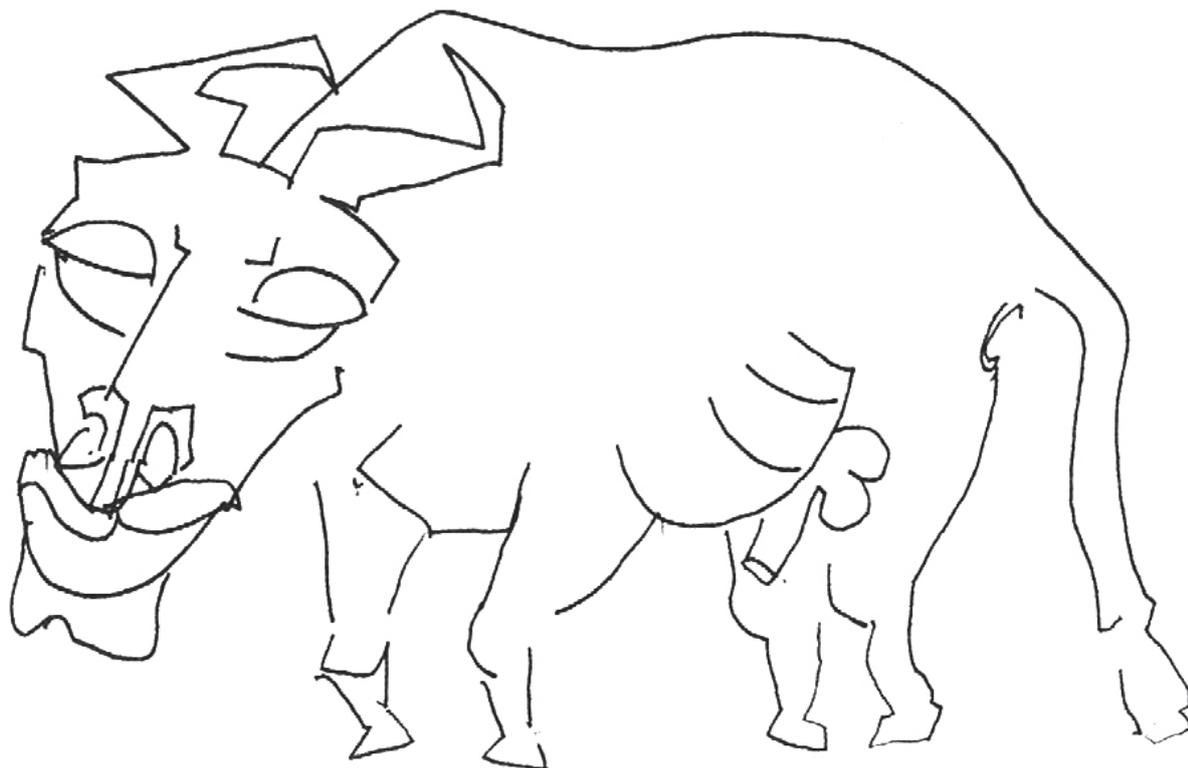
ours is a beautiful hospital which works, that of Le Corbusier is a work of art, ... and we are too young», but also criticized maliciously with the tasty anecdote of the cheque for the fee which fell from the master's hands and ended up in the canal water!). A story which came to an end years later («a real historical nemesis») with the construction, having changed the area of intervention for the new pavilion, the one Domingo likes.

In the midst of all this, the equally roundabout and rather dramatic story of the triple coincidence, again involving Calabi, in the assignment for the Hospital of Cattinara, those two L-shaped towers which «vaunt solidity and safety to shield precarious existences» whose story the author traces with his ward mates, he in turn hospitalized and in a precarious condition: the meeting with Calabi at the *Antica Locanda Montin* in Venice («They may call me to Trieste... I need a partner ... I only know Roberto Costa there... and you ... would you be interested... maybe? Darn right I'm interested!») then his sudden disappearance, the chat with Nordio, the misadventures, the visit to the building site with Zevi, the plans for projects («that way we forget to think that tomorrow it's our turn in the operating theatre»).

Central and recurrent in the book are the pages dedicated to his relations with the two masters, Rogers and Samonà, fundamental in forming the author's personality, but quite diverse: one the "Professor", «so full of ideas about the reasons for the project but reticent on the choices of language», whose method was to use a pressing series of questions which triggered other questions, hence «the need for a theory of architecture»; the other, «Uncle Ernesto, friend and teacher», «authoritatively shy, cheerfully joyless». And in the wake of these two, on the one hand the experience of the Sacca del Tronchetto competition, the reconstruction at Vajont, of Friuli after the earthquake, the Town Hall of Osoppo, and on the other, the apprenticeship in the Via dei Chiostrri studio and at the house in Via Bigli, with their «climate of nobility», the visits to the Velasca building site and Rogers' family tomb in Trieste, the plan to develop the Trieste waterfront, and the tomb of Rocco Scotellaro in Tricarico.

Snippets of private life and snippets of History (with a capital H) in Italian architecture of the second half of the 20th century, recounted as an insider, with an empathy that enthralls and wins over the reader.

Interspersed with these, many but many other glimpses, always narrated with an understated wisdom steeped in depth and culture, which we can but hint at in this rather arid listing which penalizes the sheer vivacity of his writing, but which renders at least in part the fullness and variety of the excitement of the topics covered and the situations encountered: the Milanese period, with the successive houses in Via Ancona, Via Sant'Andrea, Via Boccaccio, and Porta Ticinese, then the hangouts of the Brera, at the *Jamaica*, at the "Maria", with painters, artists and writers of the post-war period in Milan; the fundamental teaching in Venice, which was to see him through his life, and then also the periods in Vienna, at the ABK, summoned by Fonatti and Peichl, and not an entirely happy experience, where few were interested in «my *historismus*», and the Cooper in New York of Hejduk, Eisenman, Abraham – so much better, where «they're looking forward to my criticism, and there is an immediate rapport with the American youngsters» after the presentation by Hejduk who did not know whether architecture had a God, nor where He might live, but «If He lives and He has testicles, his testicles are in Venice»; a long stay in Paris for the exhibition *Trouver Trieste*, arguably a watershed in the author's life; exhibitions at the Masieri, and "Phalaris", the Tyrant of Agrigento,



Images taken from the volume

From above

Toro affaticato, 1983; *Paradiso*

Terrestre: la tentazione, 2001.



who hated architects and who gave the title to his magazine, in which alongside the architecture appeared authoritative names of poetry, cinema, theatre, the figurative arts and cuisine, recommended to him by a theoretical physicist friend of Hermann Henselmann, he of the Stalinallee, who dwelt (the theoretical physicist), in a house in a wood built by Konrad Wachsmann for Albert Einstein; his family origins in Brno («like Mahler, Loos, and Hejduk»), and the change to an Italianized surname, like so many in Trieste; the annual rite to celebrate May Day in Conconello, with the festive participation of motley friends from Trieste, Venice, and Milan – architects, teachers, artists, and politicians; the misunderstandings and a certain coldness with Zevi, the scant empathy, albeit only hinted at, with such famous and important celebrities as Claudio Magris, and the explicit allergy for others like Giancarlo De Carlo or Leonardo Benevolo; the cultural environment of Trieste, from Umberto Saba to the theoretical physicists, researchers and professors of the SISSA and ICGB, Franco Basaglia and his artist brother, that of Marco Cavallo, at the exhibitions at Galleria Arte Viva/Feltrinelli and the Revoltella Museum, against the background of the city's omnipresent tormented modern history, the national, cultural and religious cross-breeding of Trieste, between Mitteleuropean, Italian, Slovenian, Tito supporters, allies, which impregnated the personal story of the author and his family. And at the end of the volume, an essential selection of black and white line drawings, among which stand out those dedicated to images of bulls, in particular that of the 'worn-out bull', not by chance ending up on the back cover.

Closing the volume is a dramatic narration, a true piece of literature, about his liver transplant, at a little over fifty years old, an age at which «in Britain they won't operate on you any more». Dramatic, but recalled with a cold objectivity perhaps permitted only in retrospect but dramatic nonetheless in the radicalness of the diagnosis, the variability of the therapy, in the words of hope of the young radiologist from Trieste, called Petz, possibly a relative of one of his students («It's such a shame that an intelligent person like you, with all the things that you could still do is not thinking of a transplant!»), in the nightmares of the operating room, in the anguish of uncertainty on the outcome («60% probability that it will go well, 40% badly»), in the Treccani dictionary entry («cirrhosis is almost always lethal»), in the surgical mechanics described almost sadistically, in spates of delirium which almost become poetry («when you enter the Arena and sense the presence of your Adversary, but you have no means of escape»), visions of unusual animals, lions with a girl's face, until the outcome, with the engineering of the drainage and the uncertainty that persists. Quite different from the self-mockery of the pages on his most recent accident during the night with the triple somersault of the car which ended up in a field of maize («He's not dead! ... He's not dead!»), but sharing that recurrent, mystifying, hospital-based destiny of the author, in life and in work.

In short, an autobiography which is extremely rich, not "scientific" but full of science and humanity, of private and public facts, which at the end of the reading convince the reader to agree with the words of hope of the friendly young radiologist from Trieste and to wish that the author may indeed tackle the many other things waiting to be done.

Giuseppe Tupputi
**The metropolitan architectures of Paulo Mendes da Rocha.
 Between spatial conception and structural design**

Author: *Carlo Gandolfi*

Title: *Matter of space. Città e architettura in Paulo Mendes da Rocha*

Subtitle: *AAC – Arti | Architettura | Città – studi, temi, ricerche*

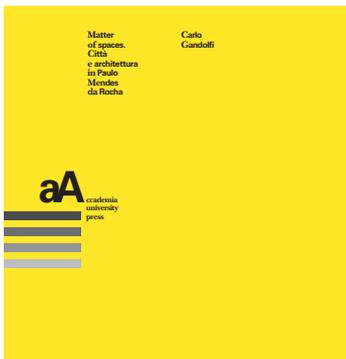
Language: *italiano/inglese*

Publisher: *Accademia University Press*

Features: *format 21 x 21cm, 408 pages, paperback, color*

ISBN: *978-88-99982-27-0*

Year: *2018*



Carlo Gandolfi, in the book *Matter of Space. City and architecture in Paulo Mendes da Rocha*, investigates deeply the concept of space in architecture, understanding it in the double meaning expressed in the title itself by the use of the word *matter*, which refers both to the spatial *question* and *substance*¹. The author, within this general field of investigation, by declaring his interest in a modus operandi that «builds [...] a solid theoretical itinerary through the practice of architecture»², decides to deal with the thought and the work of Paulo Mendes da Rocha and to deepen above all the theme of the collective building project. This choice allows him to turn his critical view towards the discussion of the spatial matter «in its double meaning at the scale of architecture and the city»³.

On the other hand, as Gandolfi explains, for Mendes da Rocha the relationship between building and city places itself within a precise political and cultural point of view that, standing itself upstream of the design practices, coincides with a clear intentionality – a precise conception of the world – in which the architectural space is imagined as a *great collective shelter*, as the expression of a «social project [...], where everyone accepts the co-existence with others, without solid walls, but within new and sought after conditions of human respect»⁴.

Sharing this point of view, the author articulates his treatise by following a logical chain that is cleverly expressed through the development of a cyclical itinerary: a round trip from the city to architecture and, vice versa, from architecture to the city.

The first chapters of the volume assess the main spatial characteristics that connote the contemporary metropolis, of which San Paolo represents an emblematic case. In addition to highlighting its immense extension, Gandolfi also observes the high degree of introversion and entropy of urban spaces. This is the result of a constructive practice which, through a «*doing without figure*», reduces the expressiveness of architecture to a «*word without myth*»⁵ and which, through a «*vivacious proliferation of signs*», generates a «*perceptive callosity*»⁶ in the experience of the metropolis.

In architectural-spatial words, these conditions turn, on the one hand, into the need for public places capable of competing with the large metropolitan scale and, on the other, into the need for collective buildings characterized by a representative architectural language. In other words, these conditions

involve the research of an idea of monumentality based on the eloquence of architecture, which is capable of unequivocally expressing – within the work itself – the relationship between the idea of space underlying the project and its built forms.

In Mendes da Rocha's work, the *concept* of space has its roots in the civil ideal of wanting to release, in the chaotic flow of metropolitan space, a large urban place with a powerful collective sense and capable of freely offering itself to everyone.

At the same time, the space meant as *substance* - and all the architectural elements that conform it - is always based on a structural ideation⁷. As in a game of correspondences, the technical forms of construction become a «vehicle of the [...] spatial form»⁸ of the building, which is modeled on architectural ideas that are based, in turn, on civil ideals conceived starting from the problematization of the relationship with the city: «*the idea is linked to the expression as the form is linked to the structure*»⁹.

In this sense, the structural elegance of Mendes da Rocha's buildings is intended as the result of the search for an audacious lightness; a lightness that however takes on a strong conceptual weight because it expresses through its corporeity the idea of freeing a space, of producing a break capable of resisting the noisy speed of the metropolis, of building a place in which to stop and stay in the shelter of architecture.

At this point, the conceptual itinerary designed by Carlo Gandolfi appears clearly on the horizon of the reader: the question consists in «understanding *how* a building can contribute to contrast the entropy and compression that dominate the contemporary urban space, which is made of shred, interruptions, scars»¹⁰. Specifically, the question consists in understanding how, in Mendes da Rocha's work, the *technical* gesture of architecture succeeds in «cutting away all parasitic senses and in presenting to the public a pure and complete meaning, round as a nature»¹¹; thus, the question consists in gaining a consoling, reassuring dimension towards the «constitutive ambiguity»¹² that connotes spaces and life in the metropolis.

The conceptual categories and analytical techniques adopted for the analysis of the «*metropolitan paradigms*» chosen as case studies are carefully proportioned to this intentionality.

Gandolfi investigates the spatial contents of Mendes da Rocha's architecture through the analysis of a threefold order of relationships: between the building and the urban systems, between the internal spaces and the open spaces around the building, and between the internal spaces that make up the building itself. In addition to the three-dimensional model, through which the essentially structural nature of architecture reaches its maximum expressiveness¹³, the instrument preferred by the analysis is the section, intended as a device capable of reconstructing the articulation and sequence of spaces, as well as of representing its structural logics.

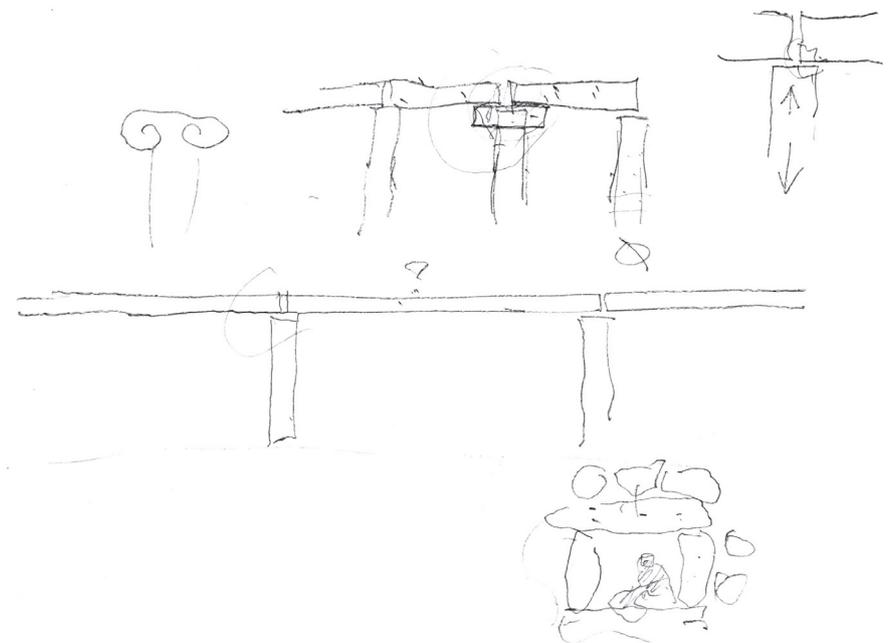
Furthermore, downstream from the analysis, Gandolfi elaborates a critical reflection around some key concepts, which are useful for understanding the constructive syntaxes of Mendes da Rocha's architectural poetics, including the *nakedness* of the structural framework (which is capable of condensing and emphatically expressing the conceptual framework of the space), the *coupling*, which is both a connection and a disconnection point (and which is investigated both in its spatial meaning and in its tectonic and structural meaning) and *proxemics*, namely the control of the distances between the elements that conform the architectural space (which is investigated within the structural logics of the building and the spatial metrics of its urban surroundings).



Images taken from the volume

From above

the deck of the MASP of Lina Bo Bardi in San Paolo; model of the Brazilian Pavilion at the Osaka Expo (1969-70) created by Carlo Gandolfi; Paulo Mendes da Rocha, tectonic sketches, the cap, the architrave, the shelf.



The conformation of the architectural elements is intended and investigated as the outcome of a figurative process that takes shape «not so much from the perspective of a moralistic constructive sincerity, but rather according to a narrative of the element itself which is compared with the conceptual economy of the building»¹⁴.

«For Mendes da Rocha - writes Gandolfi - architecture is a *poetic technique*»¹⁵ and crossing this poetic world of tectonic construction, made up of elements, forms and connections, the journey back to the city begins.

In addition to establishing the control methods of the spatial relationships inside the building – which are structured according to a hierarchical and at the same time unitary articulation - the conformation of the architectural elements and the art of their connections also define the opening relationships, the continuity, visual permeability and physical accessibility between the internal spaces of the building and the surrounding open spaces of the city.

Finally, the expressiveness of the forms of construction lays down also the relations with the large-scale urban systems. In fact, referring to the profound civil value of architecture, Mendes da Rocha's projects seem to refer to an idea of a city made of isolated points, (or «remarkable places»). Within the expressive field offered by tectonic construction, his research is aimed at identifying the most suitable spatial and morphological characters for corresponding to the sense of the building within the city, namely for relating, interacting and modifying the places and systems of urban places where this building is located.

In this book, Carlo Gandolfi describes the ways through which Mendes da Rocha managed to assume the city and the knowledge of its deepest contrasts and its most intimate contradictions as starting point for the spatial and structural ideation (as well as for the real construction) of its architecture.

By analyzing his works and by getting close to his thought, this book opens up to a broad and deep reflection on the theoretical and methodological teaching handed down to us by the work of Mendes da Rocha: an architect whom Gandolfi fully elects to his Master, because he is able to offer us a clear point of view and some concrete operational tools to return to experience the positive transformation of the city through the practice of architecture.

Notes

¹ Gandolfi C. (2018) – *Matter of Space. Città e architettura in Paulo Mendes da Rocha*, Accademia University Press, Turin, p. 13.

² *Ivi*, p. 14.

³ *Ivi*, p. 13.

⁴ Motta F. (1967) – “Paulo Mendes da Rocha”. *Acròpole XXIX*, 343 (september), pp. 17-45.

⁵ Assunto R. (1984) – *La città di Anfione e la città di Prometeo. Idea e poetiche della città*, Editoriale Jaca Book, Milan, p. 149.

⁶ Gandolfi C. (2018) – *Matter of Space*, op. cit., p. 38.

⁷ Moccia C. (2019) – “Apologia della costruzione”. In: Gandolfi C. e Fidone E. (ed.), *Paulo Mendes da Rocha. Spazio tettonico*, Lettera Ventidue, Syracuse 2019, pp. 25-27.

⁸ Neumeyer F. (1996) – *Mies van der Rohe. Le architetture, gli scritti*, Skira, Milan, p. 313.

⁹ Falasca C. C. (2007) – *Incontro con Livio Vacchini su tecnologie e cultura del progetto*, Franco Angeli, Milan, p. 98.

¹⁰ Gandolfi C. (2018) – *Matter of Space*, op. cit., p. 27.

¹¹ Barthes R. (1957) – “The world of wrestling”. In: Barthes R., *Mythologies*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1957, pp. 5-14.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ De Marco M. L. (2015) – *Studio di “Spazio” n.6: Struttura come Forma*, Luigi Moretti. [online] <http://www.arcduccitta.it/2015/12/struttura-come-forma-luigi-moretti-spazio-n-6-studio/> [last access: 20 april 2020].

¹⁴ Gandolfi C. (2018) – *Matter of Space*, op. cit., p. 223.

¹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 236.

Giuseppe Verterame
Living the space through archetypes.
Readings of the works of Kahn and Mies

Author: Federica Visconti, Renato Capozzi

Title: Kahn e Mies

Subtitle: Tre modi dell'abitare

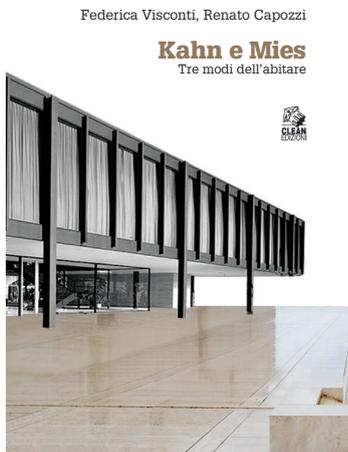
Language: Italian

Publisher: Clean

Features: format 12x17 cm, 96 pages, softcover, black and white

ISBN: 978-88-8497-722-9

Year: 2019



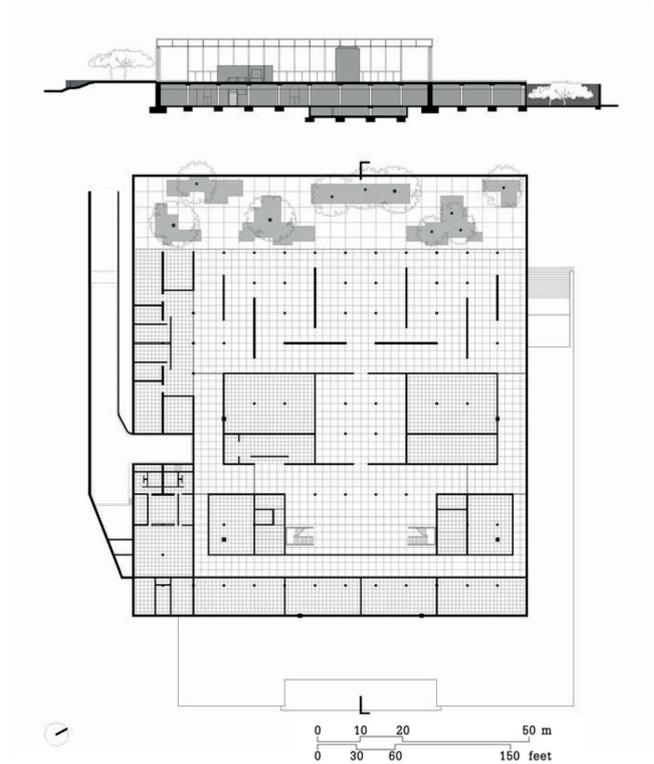
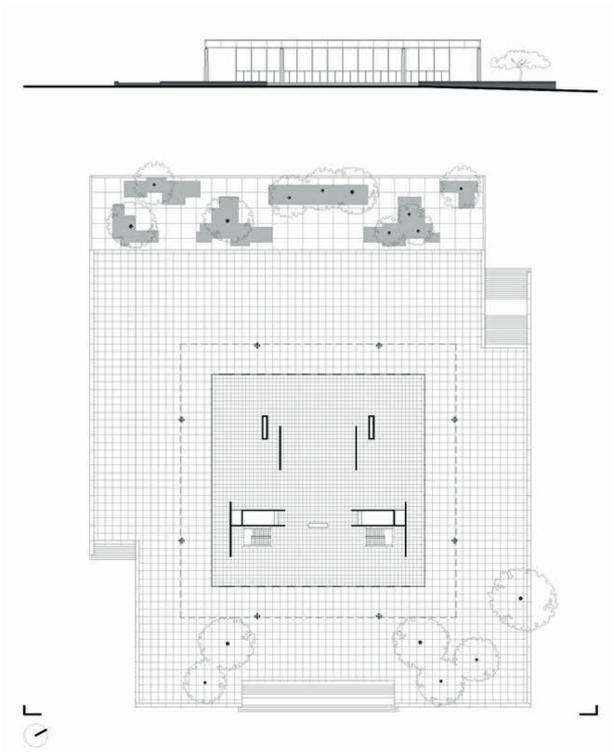
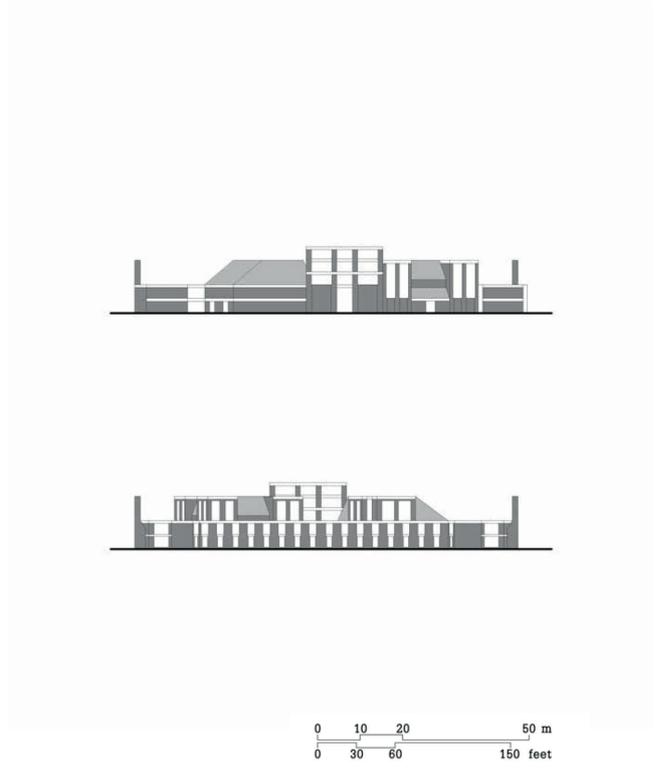
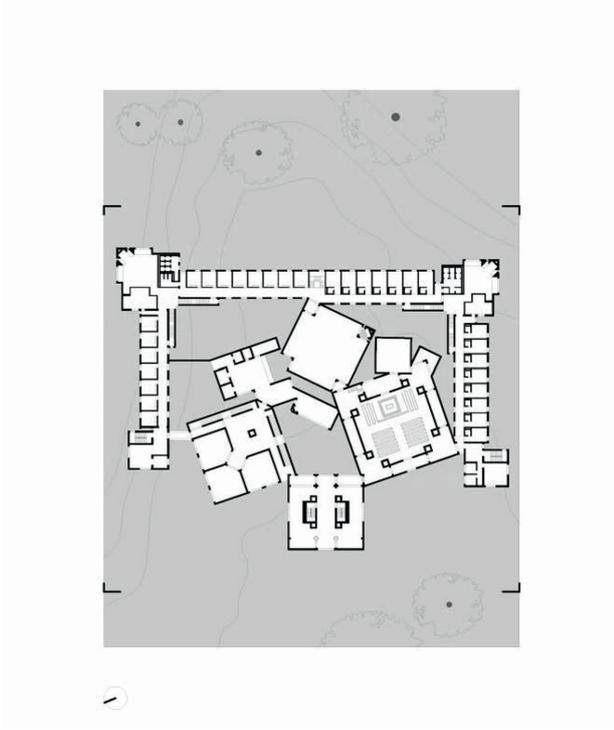
The contribution that the small and dense volume *Kahn and Mies. Three ways of living* by Federica Visconti and Renato Capozzi wants to transmit is clear from the title, then remarked by the image on the cover – a collage of the hall of the Mies Bacardi Building laid on the travertine floor of the complex for the Kahn Salk Institute – to compare the work of the two Masters through the analysis of selected works, presented in the pages of the book through re-drawings, in search of similarities and differences, starting from the theme of living, intended as a constitutive subject of architecture.

As asserted by Giorgio Agamben, indeed, «dwelling – or, rather the link between building and dwelling – is the *a priori*, the exercise of power of architecture. Architecture is the art of building, to the extent that it is, also, the art of dwelling»¹.

The volume, which is the seventh volume of the series ‘Moderni Maestri’ by the Neapolitan publisher Clean, has the merit of dealing a key theme of architecture through readings that break down and analyze the projects to highlight the formal reasons, according to different interpretative keys, equally relevant to the theme. The result proposes interesting reflections on the works and issues raised, able to convey to the reader a sort of solid *pedagogical consistency*. This is made possible by the structure of the book that proposes regular thematic intersections between the essays of Federica Visconti and Renato Capozzi: they develop, starting from the analyses of composition, critical issues, respectively of Kahn and Mies, simultaneously and according to three interpretative categories as *the private living*, *the collective living* and *the public living* – with those of Marco Maninno (*Room, hall. Materiality and clearness*) and Carlo Moccia (*Modern Masters*).

Conveying a long-term research work like the one made by the authors² demands a warning, that they express from the beginning in the introduction – about the «need, in architecture, to choose Masters, and with them, the reference architecture with which measure», suggestion that reveals a particular way of teaching of the authors, showing to the students the importance of measuring oneself against references and «discover while seeking».

The reading of the projects highlights the ways of composing of the two



Images taken from the volume

From above
 Dominican Motherhouse, Louis Kahn, pages 52-53.
 Neue Nationalgalerie, Mies van der Rohe, pages 86-87.

Masters and in the re-drawing it identifies a tool of compositional investigation to understand the architecture, that references ideas of *living* the space expressed in different forms. The design approach of Mies tends to strip down the architecture and reduce the *matter* to a few elements that set up the inner space and that represent the tectonic character of the building, idealized in a formal process that reaches the archetype of the Hall which, according to Renato Capozzi, represents the model of the modern public building, «a concise type where the parts and its articulations get subordinated to the whole».

Kahn, instead, provides the idea of a domestic *living* starting from the archetype of the room, through which he designs paratactic buildings that define architectural sequences, swerve of the plan that connect fullness and voids and that express an inner character of the space, as asserted by Marco Mannino.

Such *living* conditions produce different outcomes and experiments, though all equally interested in thinking about the meaning of the forms and the value of order for the modern architectural body, as argued by Carlo Moccia.

Mies builds a fluid space, where the space itself – refusal of perpetual distinction between enclosure and content – becomes constructive matter, able to articulate the concept of *order* according to a hierarchy of compositional elements that give to the architecture the characteristics of an absolute and pure space. In his buildings a limit or border is not perceivable, because the space becomes free from visual obstructions in order to be able to spiritually meet the ground and the sky, absorbing the archetype of the shelter, which promotes the realization of a «*aspiration of a modern living* to the ‘openness’ and to the ‘crossing’» formally accomplished in contemplative spaces that visually link interior and exterior.

Kahn, instead, researches an overall *order* starting from the singularity of the room, that is the origin of the architecture³ and which – as written by Kahn and reported by Federica Visconti in the essay *Kahn. The room as principles of architecture* – «characterizes an harmony of spaces suitable for a certain activity of man»⁴, in other words, makes the domestic living possible.

Notes

¹ Lecture by Giorgio Agamben, held at Facoltà di Architettura Sapienza of University Rome on 2018, 7th December.

² The authors have studied and done research about Kahn and Mies during the PhD study period; in particular I point out – as specified by Roberta Esposito in her essay ‘10 texts about...’, at the end of the book – Federica Visconti, *L’architettura per la ricerca scientifica*, PhD thesis about Progettazione Urbana, XIII cycle, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, 2001 and Renato Capozzi, *Il tema dell’aula nelle architetture di Mies van der Rohe. Ideazione, costruzione e procedure compositive*, PhD thesis about Composizione Architettonica, XVI cycle, Università IUAV di Venezia, 2004 resumed in Renato Capozzi, *Le architetture ad Aula. Il paradigma Mies van der Rohe*, Clean, Naples 2011.

³ Cfr. The well-known sketch done by Kahn ‘Architecture comes from the making of the Room’ of 1971, kept at Philadelphia Museum of Art.

⁴ L.I. Kahn, *Form and design*, in V.J. Scully, *L.I. Kahn: Makers of Contemporary Architecture* [1962], it. transl., Il Saggiatore, Milan 1963.

