‘CAPTIONS NOT INCLUDED’
NOTES ON THE ARCHITECTS AND ‘THEIR’ IMAGES

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ARCHITECTS' IMAGERY
CONCEPT DESIGN
VISUAL CULTURE

Architects not only produce images of their projects but also take pictures of the reality around them, eventually appropriating of pictures made by others. In particular, this process of mediated assimilation of reality is quite hard to define as it follows many different criteria that tend to turn the pictures themselves into analogical devices oriented to the design development. Often, a fundamental step of the process is to make them wordless images by removing (intentionally or not) the caption. This action opens the pictures to a wide range of interpretations and uses (as well as misinterpretations and abuses) that are part of the omnivorous creative process of the architects. In order to frame the phenomenology of this process in the extended field of the 20th century art production, this article proposes a chaotic assemblage of major and minor episodes whose considerations indirectly reflects both the mostly unconscious process of the architects and the 'under-construction' mental scheme of the author. In this sense, this early, partial, subjective map provides no answers but questions and conjectural work-areas to be tested through further connections and developments.

AS A FUNDAMENTAL PART OF THEIR EDUCATION

As a fundamental part of their education, architects have been drawing (and shooting photos, videos, and so on) to assimilate the world around them for centuries. During his European travels in 1907 and 1911, the young Edouard Jeanneret recorded a huge number of photographs and pictures in his notebooks, not too differently from his many predecessors. As Gresleri writes,

> what makes Jeanneret's journey different from that of his contemporaries at the *Ecole*, from the tradition of the Grand Tour, is properly that precise awareness of being able to start over that continually emerges from the pages: the notes, the sketches traced, the measures taken are not ends in themselves, they are not part of the culture of travel: they cease to be a diary to become a project (Gresleri, 1991, p. 7).

Like the mysterious vagabond of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, who rakes and renames broken objects along the streets of New York to re-found human language (and indirectly the meaning of the world), Le Corbusier gathered fragments from the past to design the new world, connoting, for example, seashells, stones and consumed bones as *objets à réaction poétique*.

Besides the 'monumental' case of Le Corbusier, a sort of 'architectural world-building' is always a fundamental step in the preliminary conception of an architectural project, although with different proportions and tools. Most of my colleagues currently working as architects share a similar design practice. When they start a new project, they create a folder on their computer and fill it with not only the documents concerning the site but also digital pictures of potential references, precedents and inspirational images that are selected to frame and support the conception, the formal development or the communication of the project itself. Most of these pictures are quickly downloaded from the Web and often saved with self-generated numerical

Fig. 1 Paul Auster, David Mazzucchelli, Paul Karasik, *City of Glass*, 2004 (*Città di vetro*, Bologna, Coconino Press, 2005, p. 74).

codes as name. With this modality, the Web reveals to be a source that favours the dissociation between an image and the information on its content. Although images can be occasionally renamed with a few words to associate essential data to them, they are mainly wordless images that the architects assimilate and reuse in a free, random, often superficial when not distracted way.

This practice is not a novelty. Due to the difficulty to travel, architects' approach to reality was often mediated by visual and textual media. Although there is always someone, from Isidore of Seville to Adolf Loos, who distrusts of images' power to transfer knowledge and truth, architects favor visual tools to develop their projects. Except some who seek for inspiration in literature or use writing as a pre-design or design tool (Corbellini, 2016), architects prefer text to words when this appears to be a more effective or quicker means than drawing to illustrate something (Forty, 2004, p. 38), when they have to deal with pedagogical tasks (Colonnese, 2019) or when their pictures require a caption or an *èkphrasis* (Cometa, 2011). Anyway, modern architects seem to have a conflictual relationship with captions. Sometimes, their writing is nothing more than a huge caption below their beloved pictures. Sometimes they neglect or completely ignore the captions. They generally aspire to let the pictures 'speak' for themselves, with no words to guide their reception, up to using them as an analogical mirror of the design concept.

These generic claims would require the support of objective data, for example statements by architects or statistical data about their attitude towards the images. By the way, the deluge of images produced by books and magazines, by cinema and television and, by the World Wide Web exerts enormous pressure on all the productive contexts, altering practices and definitions established over time. Think of the importance the pictures borrowed from different disciplinary fields or artistic practices as icons to explain the philosophy – definitely, a late 20th century architects' necessity (Mitrović, 2021) that moves the design.

In such a dynamic, 'slippery' context, this article follows an intuitive concatenation of free and unconscious reflections on the practice of architecture design. Consistently with the topic of wordless images, the following considerations on contemporary architects and their use of pictures in the concept design process are presented in a fragmentary form, a sort of surrealist *cadavre exquis* played on the author's personal

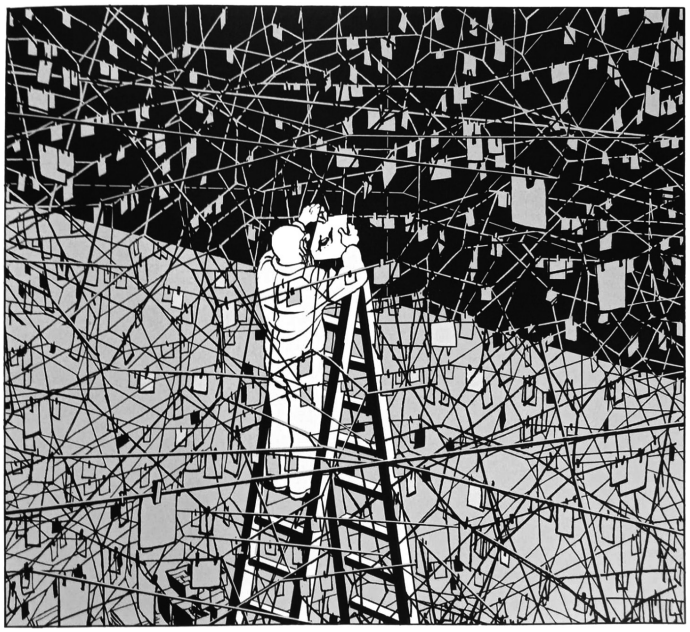


Fig. 2 Marc-Antoine Mathieu, *Otto, l'home réécrit* (*Otto, l'uomo riscritto*, Bologna, Coconino Press, 2016, p. 55).

repository of pictures and memories. Like in the game, each fragment, arbitrarily chosen among many others, acquires a specific sense from the relationship with those that precede or follow it and contributes to compose only a small part of a wider, open network, a mutable landscape of visual knowledge.

AT THE 2012 VENICE BIENNALE

At the 2012 Venice Biennale, the Swiss architect Valerio Olgiati proposed the installation *Pictographs - Statements of Contemporary Architects*, which explores the ambiguous and complex *Common Ground* (the title of 2012 edition of the Biennale) of inspiration and imagination of architects. As Olgiati himself writes,

> some collect images of memories, inspirations and atmospheres. Others talk by collecting images of analysis, explanations or manifestos. And yet others explain principles of their own architecture or simply show the things they

> like, consciously or unconsciously. It is about the visual world stored in the head of architects (Olgiati, 2015, n.p.).

On the occasion, he created a sort of large rectangular altar below a suspended white slab and invited 41 (grown to 44 in the catalog) colleagues to cover it with 3 to 10 pictures they reputed fundamental for their own work. Olgiati writes that:

> the images are explanations, metaphors, foundations, memories and intentions. They are poetic and philosophical avowals. They reveal a personal perspective on thoughts. They show the roots of architecture and expectations concerning projects. Conscious and unconscious (Olgiati, 2015, n.p.).

While in the distance the white surface expresses order and unity, approaching the 323 photographs reveals a chaotic world of forms which have only their materiality and size in common. More than 44 'imaginary museums', as Olgiati suggests, the installation looks like a single museum of the architects' imagery. Photographs of ancient and modern architecture, of drawings and models, of objects and fabrics, of maps and landscapes, of one's personal travel notebooks, of friends and the architects themselves, occasionally mimicking the subject of a painting (see Hans Koolhoff posing like Gaspard Friedrich). Some look antithetic to any architectural idea; others are just provocations chosen to demonstrate the limits of such an iconic approach.

At the exhibition, the pictures presented no caption, except the label that indicated the architect who had selected them, raising questions on their sense and their mutual relationship. This approach is confirmed by the vertical format catalogue (Olgiati, 2013), where each photograph occupies one page and is accompanied by the name of the architect and a fraction indicating the sequential number of the photograph. On the contrary, the book published two years later (Olgiati, 2015) presents an additional brief biography of each architect and, most of all, captions revealing the subject of each picture. This presence has the effect of the puzzle solutions at the end of a magazine, confirming or denying the

Fig. 3 Valerio Olgiati, *Pictographs - Statements of Contemporary Architects*, 2012, Venice. Detail of the pictures chosen by Alejandro Aravena (pages from his travel sketchbooks). Photo by the author.

hypotheses developed by the readers. But there is more. In the passage from the exhibition to the catalogue and then to the book, one witnesses the weakening and normalization of the pictures. By losing proximity to the other photos and then their mystery, they also lose the power to evoke fantastic scenarios and to demonstrate the innumerable and daring ways an architect can use them.

IN 1975, JEAN GIRAUD "MOEBIUS"

In 1975, Jean Giraud, later known as Moebius, published a serial on *Metal Hurlant* magazine. The comic, which today would be labeled as a fantasy, is called *Arzach*. The peculiarity of the comic is that it is free of balloons. It develops in 4

short stories of 8 pages each but is exclusively composed of pictures, without even those short texts that occasionally appeared in silent movies to provide some essential information. Moreover, the word *Arzach*, the only text of the work, is written differently each time, almost declaring the unreliability of words.

This way of narrating through images, which Moebius will often apply, not only exalt the centrality of images and entrust the reader with the task of interpreting the sequence of pictures, like in an open work, but is also the result of a particular methodology that the artist will consolidate over the years. In the first instance, Moebius creates some key-pictures. These work as a sort of key-section or directrix which, in Descriptive Geometry, constrains the development of a complex surface or, to stay in the artistic field, as the key-frames of the head animator that the 'in-betweeners' use to produce all the intermediate positions necessary to create the illusion of movement.

The methodology of Moebius is shared by several artists. As known, the dreams that Federico Fellini (2020) noted down in small notebooks have often guided the shooting of his inscrutable movies, postponing the task of 'discovering' a consistent story in the midst of miles of film to post-production editing. Like all constraints, the presence of these key-pictures can be a problem, especially when it comes to coordinating the efforts of hundreds of people grappling with the production of a film, like in the practice of Japanese Studio Ghibli. In *10 Years with Hayao Miyazaki*, Kaku Arakawa (2019) reveals that during the production of Ponyo, there was this watercolour of the main character riding huge waves transfigured into fishes that Miyazaki struggled to translate in a scene for the film. He knew it was necessary but did not know exactly how to place such a scene within the plot, which in the meantime was already in an advanced stage of production.

I recently discussed this working methodology with the Italian artist and architect Manuele Fior, who confirmed that some of his graphic novels were born around a few key-

Fig. 4 Manuele Fior, Approaching Le Corbusier's Hospital in Venice (Fior, 2019, pp. 107, 109, 113).

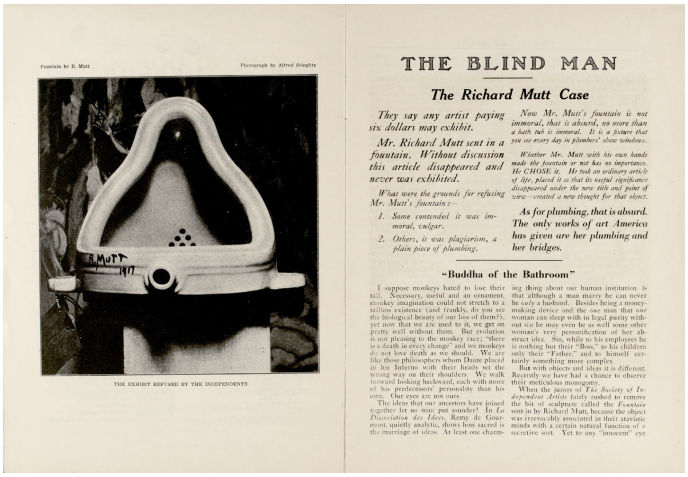
visions, as well (Colonnese, 2021). In some cases, the pictures produced appear mutually distant, almost alien to each other and yet they ask to be somehow linked by the thread of a single story. At that point, the job is to uncover, like a detective, the story of the characters, to understand what led them (or rather will lead them) to that sort of meeting-point. It is therefore a question of adding an *a-posteriori* text, first simple captions, then pieces of a dialogue and, little by little, everything to the details, like an architectural project.

ASSOCIATING A TEXT WITH AN IMAGE

Associating a text with an image is a common operation today. Consider the phenomenon of *memes*. One can take a photograph or a short clip of a celebrity from a film or TV-show

and add a text, the meaning of which is facilitated by his or her expression. In this sense, the former narratives and emotional power of the picture, which is excerpted from the original context and placed in another, enhance the effect of the words. Kenneth Goldsmith (2019, p. 240) recently pointed out that the *meme* is anything but new. Inspired by the cinematographic techniques popularized by Guy Debord, the director René Viénet made two films according to the principle of 'detouring' by adding a new soundtrack to existing movies, in this case from 1970s popular cinema. But it is possible to go back and think of Marcel Duchamp's Dadaist *Readymade*, which revolutionized art with a few clever moves (Bonfante, 2017).

On April 10, 1917, Duchamp chooses and buys a ceramic *pissoir*, takes it to the first exhibition of the newly formed Society of Independent Artists in New York, turns it upside down, places it upon a pedestal, calls it *Fountain*, and signs it with the pseudonym of R. (Richard) Mutt (in agreement with both the *J.L. Mott Iron Works* plumbing and sanitary ware shop, where the *pissoir* was purchased, and the protagonists of *Mutt and Jeff*, a very popular comic strip). *The Blind Man* issue of May 1917 shows the photograph shot by Man Ray, unsigned, with the caption "The exhibit refused by the Indipendent". On the front page, a text reads:


Fountain by R. Mutt. Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz

R. Mutt 1917

THE EXHIBIT REFUSED BY THE INDEPENDENTS

THE BLIND MAN

The Richard Mutt Case

They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit.

Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.

What were the grounds for refusing Mr. Mutt's fountain?—

1. *Some contended it was immoral, vulgar.*
2. *Others, it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.*

Now Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bath tub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows.

Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.

As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.

"Buddha of the Bathroom"

I suppose monkeys hated to lose their tail. Necessary, useful and an ornament, monkey imagination could not stretch to a tailless existence (and frankly, do you see the biological beauty of our loss of them?), yet now that we are used to it, we get on pretty well without them. But evolution is not pleasing to the monkey race; "there is a death in every change" and we monkeys do not love death as we should. We are like those philosophers whom Dante placed in his Inferno with their heads set the wrong way on their shoulders. We walk forward looking backward, each with more of his predecessors' personality than his own. Our eyes are not ours.

The ideas that our ancestors have joined together let no man put asunder! In *La Dissociation des Idees*, Remy de Gourmont, quietly analytic, shows how sacred is the marriage of ideas. At least one charming thing about our human institution is that although a man marry he can never be *only* a husband. Besides being a money-making device and the one man that one woman can sleep with in legal purity without sin he may even be as well some other woman's very personification of her abstract idea. So, while to his employees he is nothing but their "Boss," to his children only their "Father," and to himself certainly something more complex.

But with objects and ideas it is different. Recently we have had a chance to observe their meticulous monogomy.

When the jurors of *The Society of Independent Artists* fairly rushed to remove the bit of sculpture called the *Fountain* sent in by Richard Mutt, because the object was irrevocably associated in their atavistic minds with a certain natural function of a secretive sort. Yet to any "innocent" eye

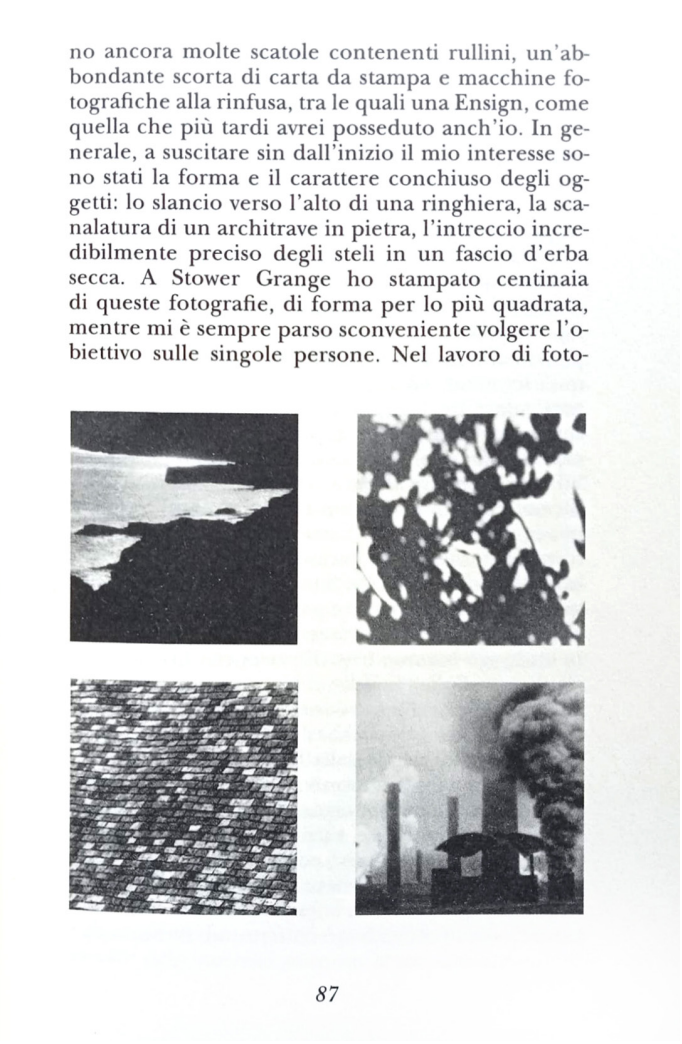
Fig. 5 *The Blind Man* 2, 1917, pp. 4-5.

> Whether Mr. Mutt made the fountain with his own hands or not is irrelevant. He chose it. He has taken an ordinary element of existence and arranged it in such a way that the utilitarian meaning disappears under the new title and the new point of view – he has created a new thought for this object (*The Blind Man* 2, 1917, p. 5).

In addition to the de-contextualization and the podium, the title is fundamental to transform the meaning of the *pissoir*. In ancient times, works such as paintings and sculptures did not have a title. It was the need to describe them in the lists of the collections (and to move, buy, sell or inherit them) that led to the introduction of the titles (and then of captions on the museums' walls). In this sense, the fact that a building can have a 'name' but almost never a 'title' could be tied to its intrinsic immobility, besides its representative ambiguity (Rocca, 2009).

Although the titling of pictorial works is earlier, Gombrich noted that titration is a by-product of the mobility of images and that "the relationship between images and words, between works of art and their headings or titles, has undergone many changes in the history of art, but only in the 20th century has it really become a problem" (Gombrich, 1985, p. 213).

Obviously, this approach exalts the idea over the production of the work itself. The materiality of the work and the artist's technical skill suddenly become secondary, opening the door to Conceptual Art. But it also tells us that the world of shapes and images that we have before our eyes is available to be transformed and reused. The pictures without captions that Winfried Georg Sebald (2001) included in novels such as *Austerlitz*, which is incidentally dedicated to modern architecture, are an indirect example of the power of the artist's gaze. Sebald used to visit small markets, to buy these anonymous photos from old family photobooks, and to 'overwrite' their history with original narratives. In this way, he turned them into documents of a literary fiction that indirectly challenge the reader's faith in images. As Nicola Ribatti (2013, p. 1, my translation from Italian) writes, "the interaction and


no ancora molte scatole contenenti rullini, un'abbondante scorta di carta da stampa e macchine fotografiche alla rinfusa, tra le quali una Ensign, come quella che più tardi avrei posseduto anch'io. In generale, a suscitare sin dall'inizio il mio interesse sono stati la forma e il carattere conchiuso degli oggetti: lo slancio verso l'alto di una ringhiera, la scanalatura di un architrave in pietra, l'intreccio incredibilmente preciso degli steli in un fascio d'erba secca. A Stower Grange ho stampato centinaia di queste fotografie, di forma per lo più quadrata, mentre mi è sempre parso sconveniente volgere l'obiettivo sulle singole persone. Nel lavoro di foto-

87

Fig. 6 W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 2001 (Milano, Adelphi, 2002, p. 87).

interference between text and image open up a *Zwischenraum*, an intermediate (and 'intermedial') space in which the extra-linguistic dimension of the drive finds its own 'plastic form'". This gap between text and image "intends to question the indexical function of photography and, at the same time, highlights how the perception of images is closely linked to the dynamics of desire" (Ribatti, 2013, pp. 17, 18, my translation from Italian).

IN DECEMBER 1927, ABY WARBURG

In December 1927, Aby Warburg begins to compile his encyclopaedic project called *Mnemosyne* in the rooms of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek, Hamburg. He composes a visual atlas with nearly 1000 pictures pinned on 40 wooden panels covered with black fabric. The pictures from all kinds of printed sources are organized into 14 categories with arbitrary titles, from *Coordinates of memory* to *The age of Neptune*. Above all, Warburg places no captions below the pictures but rather accompanies them with short texts, leaving great freedom of interpretation to those who observe them. *Mnemosyne* was certainly born as a reaction to the stimuli aroused by the increasing diffusion of printed images and their uncontrollable association in the pages of newspapers and magazines, but it also has the merit of promoting a deep reflection on the methods of art history.

Warburg's discourse on images (on their endogenous semantic value and on the exogenous value activated by the context) feeds Erwin Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology* and gradually shifts from the faculties' classrooms to the streets. Decades before inspiring the 1980s "Iconic Turn" and the rise of the Visual Culture (Mitchell, 1986), it is critically assumed by the Independent Group and its British counterculture activity in the post-war years, which was fundamental in opening the Pop Art season. The Independent Group's activity gains visibility thanks to the *Parallel of Life of Art exhibition*, held in 1953 in the space of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. It consists of 122 photographic panels with photographic images hung in various ways. The pictures come from numerous sources and present different modalities, from macroscopic to microscopic and x-ray; above all, they show no caption, which is provided instead in the catalogue.

Among the curators of the exhibition, who not surprisingly prefer to define themselves as 'editors', are Alison and Peter Smithson. As architects, they also exerted their influence during the *Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne*

Fig. 7 Independent Group, Peter and Alison Smithson, Nigel Henderson, Luigi Eduardo Paolozzi, *Parallel of Life and Art*, Catalogue of the Exhibition, 1953, n.p.

(CIAM) in 1953, causing the split that led to formation of Team X. They declare that they

> have selected more than a hundred images of significance for them. These have been ranged in categories suggested by the materials [Architecture, Calligraphy, Geology, Landscape, Movement, Nature, Primitive, Science Fiction, etc.], which underline a common visual denominator independent of the field from which the image is taken. There is no single simple aim in this procedure. No watertight scientific or philosophical system is demonstrated. In short it forms a poetic-lyrical order where images create a series of cross-relationships (Team X, 1953, as cited in Byrne, 2011, n.p.).

In the same years (July 1950-April 1953), the Roman architect Luigi Moretti personally designs and edits the seven issues of *Spazio* (Tedeschi, 2010). Conceived as a tool for the synthesis of the arts, the over-sized magazine often shows large photographs of sculptural, pictorial and architectural details without captions, indirectly promoting his own plastic, Neo-Baroque architecture. In fact, Moretti places a small numerical scheme on each double page that connects the captions grouped in a single column to the images based on

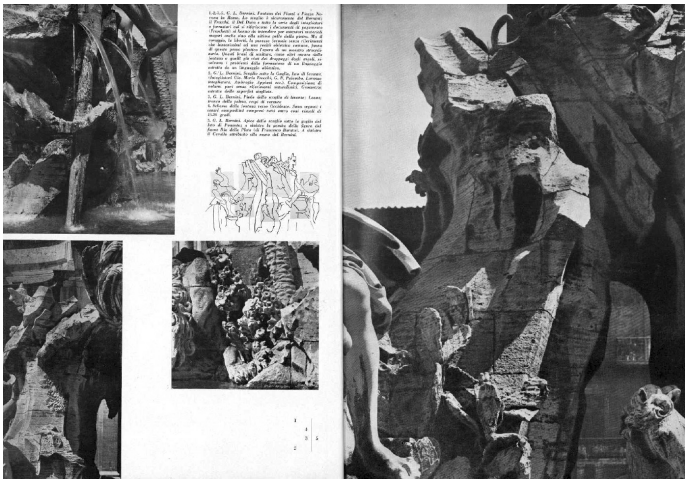


Fig. 8 Luigi Moretti, Dettagli della Fontana dei Fiumi, *Spazio* 3, 1950, pp. 16, 17.

their position. This simple stratagem, which distances the text from the images, manages to free them from their statute of representation and open their content to imaginative speculations that somehow favor a 'transfusion' between architecture, visual arts and scientific illustrations.

IN OCTOBER 1989, HERMAN HERTZBERGER

In October 1989, Herman Hertzberger is invited to talk at the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica (National Urban Planning Institute) in Palazzo Taverna, Rome. The conference is illustrated by black-and-white photographs of urban spaces full of people, generally from Italian towns and villages that Hertzberger uses to illustrate the concepts and purposes of his residential and school projects. A few years later, the same photographs illustrate twelve chapters focusing on human relations in urban space in the Italian edition of his *Lessons in Architecture* (Hertzberger, 1996). Most of the 763 figures in the book are photographs that Hertzberger himself took to record the use that men, women and children make of urban space. In this sense, many of the figures have no caption because their purpose is not to represent a place but rather an idea. In parti-

Fig. 9 Herman Hertzberger, Untitled photo of a street of France (Paris?) from *Lessons for Students in Architecture*, 1991 (Hertzberger, 1996, pp. 2-3).

cular, he is interested in the potential of architecture to inspire social behaviours that are not only collaborative but also innovative, divergent, 'outside the box'.

This also applies to his architectures, often photographed post-occupancy to show the users' customization of the space rather than naked architectural surfaces. This idea translates into a formal research oriented to polysemous elements whose abstraction, proportion, size and material quality invite the appropriation, personalization and acceptance of individual needs as well as the imagination of children. It is no coincidence that to present a housing prototype in 1959, he had built a model made of matchboxes, which is both a critique to the monotonous post-war housing models and a demonstration of the possibility of 'hacking' common objects to suggest divergent behaviours (Hertzberger, 1959; Colonnese, 2020).

Hertzberger is a pupil of Aldo van Eyck, another founder of Team X, and certainly feeds on the culture of the Independent Group. Yet this use of photographs as diagrams or ideograms

used instrumentally to demonstrate a thesis, which incidentally features Rem Koolhaas' coeval research on New York and most of his following editorial production, can be considered a legacy of Le Corbusier. Although in *Vers une architecture* (1925) the photographs of silos and vehicles have concise captions, words and pictures constitute two almost independent texts that complement each other. This approach returns in the early volumes of his *Oeuvre Complete*, where the captions often do not indicate the place or the element depicted but the functions, the ideas behind it or even unfulfilled potentials. For example, a key-concept of his architecture such as the *promenade architecturale* is expressed in the caption of a picture of Villa Savoye's *toit jardin* (Boesiger, 1995, p. 30), which is 'distracted' from its representational role and used to illustrate an idea. In this sense, Le Corbusier –but also Rem Koolhaas could be mentioned for similar reasons– shows an unnatural critical attitude toward his own buildings. The fact that Pierre Jeanneret was the main responsible of the construction stages might have contributed to allow Edouard 'Le Corbusier' Jeanneret to consider his works mainly as concepts: a sort of never-ending design process revealed in his famous talks (Quetglas, 2001).

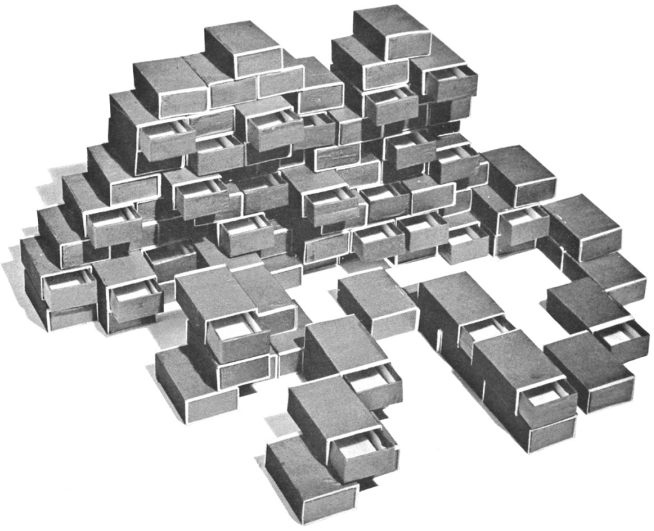


Fig. 10 Herman Hertzberger, *Repeated Living Cells, Maquette with matchboxes*, 1959 (Hertzberger, 1959, p. 277).

THE BRIEF EXAMPLES PRESENTED HERE

The brief examples presented here (and others could be found) are taken from different contexts and times and contemplate two different situations. In the former, the artists first create the pictures and then the story (and the meaning); in the latter, they appropriate and transform existing pictures by attaching a novel text. Architects work both ways. They create sketches and compositions and attribute them a place, a time and a program only later; or they appropriate existing places and figures, by drawing or photographing them, to introject them into their design process; they can also appropriate existing images and interpret them as analogical representations of the project itself. On the other hand, architects

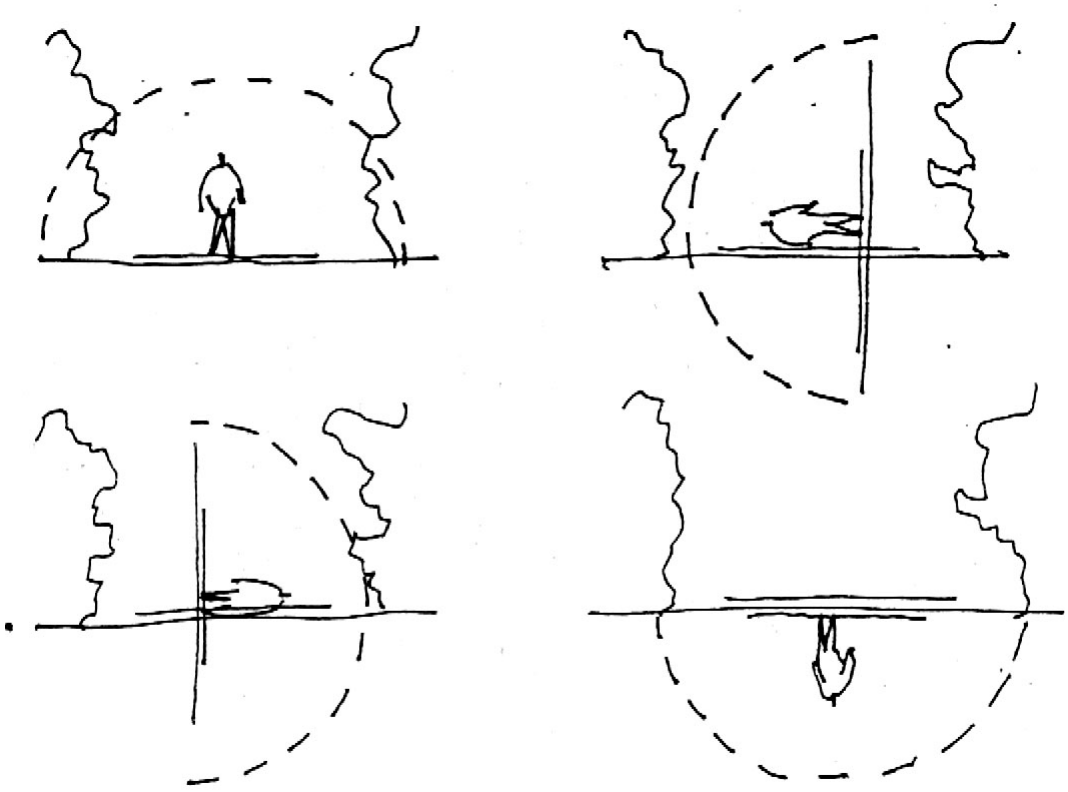


Fig. 11 Giancarlo De Carlo, Sketches of the subverting effects of the rock-cut architecture, 1989 (De Carlo, 1996).

live in a constant liminal condition. They move on the threshold between art and science, oscillating between creative acts, in which they project fantastic images onto reality, and acts of rationalization, in which they geometrize and translate their visions into measured lines, data and numbers.

Architects' liminal condition is precarious and tiring. While industrial society asks them to formulate the design process in objective terms (and new tools come out every day to optimize and speed up the engineering component), the creative thinking is often felt as an ambiguous, undefinable and unorthodox practice that require the subversion of consolidated hierarchies.

Enric Miralles (2020, n.p.) suggested the possibility that the beloved Catalan architect Antoni Gaudi was a character invented by the pen of Italo Calvino. This is obviously a temporal and dimensional paradox, a subversion of effective hierarchies, which however opens the doors to further possibilities, to paths not yet practiced. This is an example of the search for a key-image that is outside the conventional representations of reality and which contains the vision of a new world. Giancarlo De Carlo, an engineer-architect and Team X member, experimented with this sort of visions. Observing a huge tree covered with vines, once he said that, although it is obvious that the climber plants leans on the trunk, it would be much more interesting and fruitful for a designer to think the opposite, to think of the tree supported by the climber plants. This sort of static subversion is a way to ignore the force of gravity that will feed, for example, his projects for the museum in Salzburg and the Tower of Siena and the Urban Gates of San Marino (De Carlo, 1996, p. 39).

Jørn Utzon suggested to imagine the vision of an insect that flies between cups and bottles on a breakfast table to feel the space delimited by those surfaces (Weston, 2001). In this case it is a paradox of scale, quite common in architects who use models to explore their project. At the same time, it reveals the importance of using the shapes around us as models, as occasional, precarious representations of some-

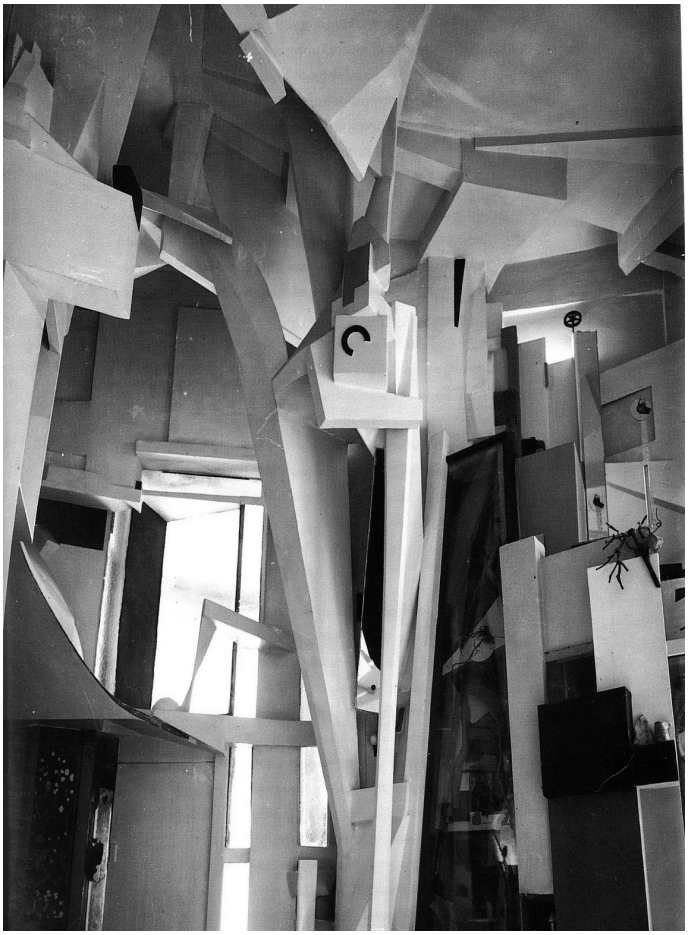


Fig. 12 Kurt Schwitters, Merzbau, Hannover, 1933 (Mindrup, 2014).

thing that is distant or still in our mind. This approach had been explored by the Dadaist artist Kurt Schwitters. In 1923, he constructed Haus Merz or *Merzbau* by assembling scraps and *objet trouvé*, which were intended to give them an aura through a new unity (Mindrup, 2014). The same approach is central in the work of architects such as Frank Owen Gehry, eventually acquiring an environmental connotation in recent decades. It is no coincidence that Olafur Eliasson argues that the artist must have a gaze capable of transforming reality into models available to be transformed: "the idea that the world consists of a conglomeration of models carries a liber-

ating potential as it makes the renegotiation of our surroundings possible" (Eliasson, 2007, p. 19).

THESE INVITATIONS TO SUBVERT

These invitations to subvert consolidated hierarchies are common in 20th century art and literature and became common in the post-war architecture research, when alternative and less-rational approaches to design were explored. In this sense, architects explored the opportunities provided not only by abstract compositions inspired by the vanguards' research but also by considering existing pictures out of their original context, depriving them of their 'natural' text and, somehow, of their 'statute of representation'.

The cases here presented concern with the production of original 'mute' pictures (Hertzberger and the comic artists), the appropriation of pre-existing objects (Duchamp) and pictures (Olgiati's colleagues and many others) to either open or readdress their interpretation and some techniques of reorientation of their semantic potentials. Most of them share the ambition to involve the mind and body of the reader and, indirectly, of the designers themselves. Whereas a caption builds an expectation that orients the visual perception according to a comparison with a pre-existing concept, its absence calls for the reader's 'active cooperation' and individual intentionality, which have the power to modify the phenomenology of the perception itself (Searle, 2015, p. 37). Of course, each case shows a different way to hack the images and may hide different intents.

While Aby Warburg's and the Independent Group's experiments promote a contamination of the sources to test the artistic parameters and extend the visual culture to a larger audience, Moretti's photographic details contribute to reconnect the contemporary architectural research into the wake of antique and Renaissance masters. Generally, even when the caption is removed, another implicit and invisible

caption is placed, like in the case of Hertzberger's photos associated to his projects or Le Corbusier's photo of his own building used to convey other interpretations. Although the architects' pictures Olgiati exhibited in Venice miss their caption, this is replaced by the name of the architect who chose them and this association (which implicitly requires that the reader knows about architect's ideas and production) does promote a multitude of thoughts and suggestions. It is no coincidence that on his professional website, Olgiati proposes a sequence of (his own) photographs of places and architectures made by others with no caption to explain this, eventually pushing himself to the borders of plagiarism to create a 'common ground' with (and intrigue) his potential clients. On the contrary, the captions of his second catalogue nail the pictures to their statute of representation, dampening their analogical or figurative potentials and actually betraying the anti-philological, 'hacking' modality the architects used them with. Eliasson's words are an implicit invitation to abolish prefigured captions and to conceive the world as an open work awaiting new interpretations and further interventions. An architect like Hertzberger shows how hacking a photograph, a pile of match-boxes or a canonical architectural piece are parts of the same rule-breaking attitude. The provocations of Miralles, De Carlo or Utzon are conceptual tools of such a creative agency, which implicitly implies the overwriting of a new caption over consolidated figures. In this sense, they may potentially work like the key-pictures of Moebius, Miyazaki or Fior, orienting the development of the design process and demonstrating that the eye of an architect engaged into a project is never 'innocent' and is always ready to manipulate reality or to invent a new one.

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