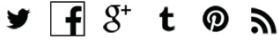


SOCKS

MEDIA ART ARCHITECTURE CULTURE SOUNDS TERRITORIES VISUAL ATLAS

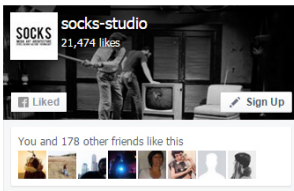


Socks is a non-linear journey through distant territories of human imagination.

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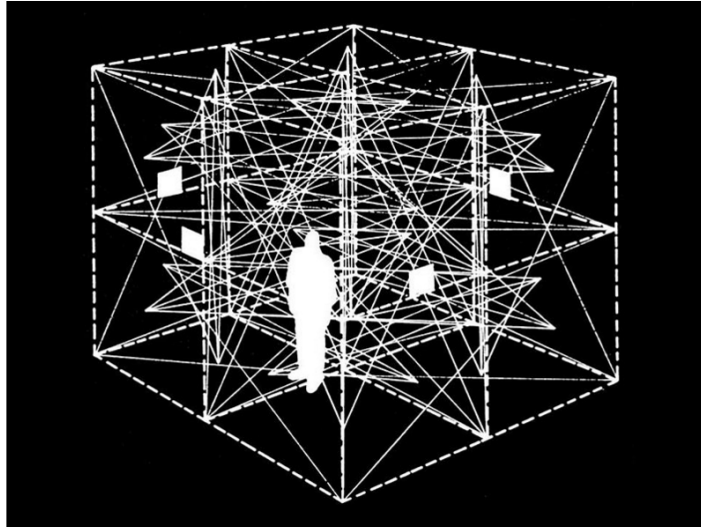
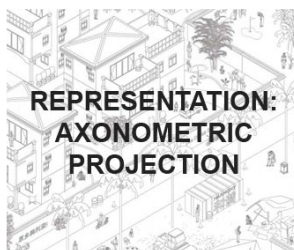
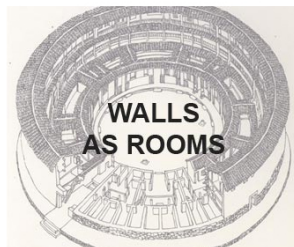
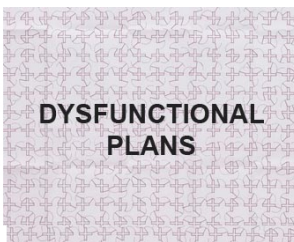
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We are Mariabruna Fabrizi and Fosco Lucarelli of [Microcities](#). [Ask us anything](#)

Topics



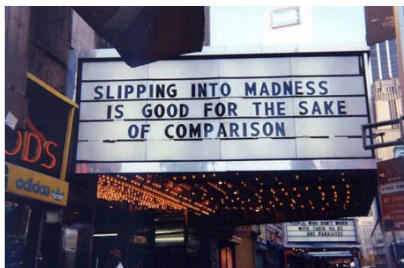
The Knowledge Box by Ken Isaacs (1962)

In 1962, experimental designer Ken Isaacs imagined and constructed a 'knowledge box', a compressed environment for experiencing 'culture': a cube of wood, masonite and steel equipped with twenty-four slide projectors and audio-suppliers. Briefly: a pre-internet device to transmit narratives in a ... [Read More](#)



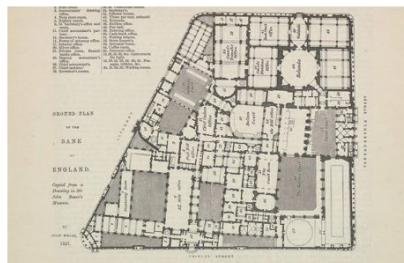
German Cities and Other Prints by Dieter Roth (1962-1970)

German-born artist Dieter Roth (1930-1998) moved to Switzerland in 1943 at the age of 13, seeking asylum during World War II. As he began to work as an artist, he soon became interested in Concrete Art and poetry. His works required a rigorous practice and focused on the production of a systematic imagery coming from meticulous processes. For "German ... [Read More](#)



Life is not a Rehearsal: "Marquees" by Jenny Holzer, 1993

In 1993, the movie theatres in 42nd Street in New York were abandoned and the whole neighborhood was still filled with pushers and prostitutes. During the few months before the theatres were torn down, artist Jenny Holzer (read also her "15 Inflammatory Essays" on Socks) rearranged the marquees with some of her signature works, the "truisms", for ... [Read More](#)



Infinite Sequence of Interior Space: John Soane's Bank of England (1788-1833)

From 1788 to 1833, Sir John Soane was the architect and surveyor of the Bank of England, his first major commission and the biggest work he had until retirement. During forty-five years the English architect would replace most of the rooms and largely extend the existing building while also being the responsible for all the repairs ... [Read More](#)



Perspective Corrections, by Jan Dibbets (1967-1969)

Between 1967 and 1969, Dutch conceptual artist Jan Dibbets created a series of works, consisting of photographs of walls, floors and lawns, titled "Perspective Correction". In each canvas a square or a circle is drawn in pencil, tape or directly dug into the ground. The precise geometrical forms were obtained through three-dimensional illusion, as in reality they ... [Read More](#)

Socks Studio and the Digital through the Lens of architectural Discipline. Talks with Mariabruna Fabrizi and Fosco Lucarelli¹

Irene Di Pietro

Keywords:

Socks, Fosco Lucarelli, Mariabruna Fabrizi, Architecture, website.

ABSTRACT:

In light of the first MMD's issue, the column dedicated to digital for museums presents an essay about Socks: the web project conceived by Mariabruna Fabrizi and Fosco Lucarelli. Socks was created as a digital archive and currently represents a web platform capable of combining research and architectural practice with original contributions by its authors.

In occasione del primo numero della rivista, la rubrica dedicata al digitale per i musei presenta un saggio sull'esperienza di Socks, il sito web ideato dai due architetti Mariabruna Fabrizi e Fosco Lucarelli. Il progetto nasce come archivio digitale e costituisce oggi una piattaforma web capace di unire ricerca e pratica architettonica e contributi originali degli autori.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 01: Socks, homepage



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<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.3034-9699/19302>

Mariabruna Fabrizi and Fosco Lucarelli, both architects, graduated in Rome and then pursued their research by teaching at the UIC School of Architecture in Chicago, at the École d'architecture de la ville & des territoires in Paris-Est, at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, and at the MIARD Master program at the Piet Zwart Institute - Willem De Kooning Academy in Rotterdam.

They participated in the Lisbon Architecture Triennale as guest editors within the curatorial team in 2016 with the exhibition *The form of Form*, and in 2019 part of the main curatorial team with *Inner Space*.¹

Their idea of architecture stems from the layering of memory traces² and is reflected in the projects realised by their studio, *Microcities*, founded in Paris in 2012.

Aiming to explore the “territories” of contemporary media, learn how they work and understand how they can be considered “epistemological paradigms of thought, production and organisation”,³ they created a project in 2006 consisting of a platform and a visual atlas: *Socks*.⁴ The two authors then initiate a “sort of personal archive” in which they collect their own topics and study interests, but then realise⁵ that other users actually use the blog differently: namely to “extract” kinds of knowledge in other disciplines.

Over the years, Fabrizi and Lucarelli have studied in depth the relationship between architecture and information, and the spatialisation of mental processes.⁶ The editorial project has expanded and today constitutes an online “mag-

azine” that addresses the theme of architecture as a “multiform cognitive tool”⁷ and serves as a platform in which research, discussion and practice are elements that are constantly brought into dialogue.

Socks, however, is also intended to be the necessary counterpart to the *Microcities* studio, the more research-oriented one: the common genesis of the two projects is to be found in what the authors themselves define as “a double practice”.⁸

Socks (fig. 1) is, in fact, a complement to Lucarelli and Fabrizi’s architectural and exhibition activity: it provides an open research system for the content that the duo explores through their projects and exhibitions. Initially, the online platform and design studio were two parallel realities. Then, as the architects state,⁹ the practice developed in *Microcities* found impetus in teaching and in the specific and constant work of writing and research dedicated to the website. The two characters thus intertwined and mutually influenced a common experience.¹⁰

Socks ranges across heterogeneous fields of investigation, that can be explored through different media languages, presenting a selection of themes and using an approach that aims to develop analysis and curatorial practices, to place artistic research, utopian studies and realised projects on an equal footing. In this way, the authors intend to highlight the existing relationships between imagery, technical elements and cultural factors. The chosen way of presenting the different topics is deliberately reminiscent of a process of “surrealistic creation”, as Fabrizi and Lucarelli say.¹¹ This is both be-



02

cause the choice of the explored topics follows a random “encounter”, like the authors had in their architectural practice, and because the online contents are not necessarily related to each other.

The ability of the two architects to maintain a constant reflection through *Socks* over the years has also made it possible to identify the digital space (in which the society concentrates most of the effort to date) as a context in which the very concept of “space” does not seem to be present, since it is enclosed and usable through the two-dimensional surfaces of the device’s screens.¹² The idea that Fabrizi and Lucarelli developed from *Socks* has as its fundamental starting point the concept of “image”.¹³ This element brought them to explore the capabilities of images themselves and the possibil-

ity of creating a dialogue from them. While this particular “territory” remains of great interest to them, both considering their practice as architects and their role as lecturers, they argue¹⁴ the importance of expanding the discussion on the spatialisation of mental processes and knowledge. Another topic that has been explored is related to the production of the image of memory and the possible role of architecture in conceiving and organising spaces in which thought is organized according to simple, logical and rational criteria. In this historical moment, authors are challenged with data that is almost always related to the digital world.¹⁵ In the last decade, they claim,¹⁶ information technology tools have encouraged the multiplication of accessible information sources, now available

Fig. 02
Database
Network
Interface, view
of the exhibition.
Photo © Olivier
Christinat

as a continuous flow. The collection, organisation and transmission are ensured through social networks, new media and online databases. In this regard, it is also relevant to mention Fabrizi and Lucarelli's use of curated digital archives that promote free access to culture as tools to be used for their curatorial practice: notably *Internet Archive*, *Ubu-Web* and *Monoskop*.¹⁷

Socks is defined as “an expanding visual atlas”.¹⁸ This particular suggestion came about, “quite naturally”, as the authors say,¹⁹ by searching for a way to collect all the topics described in their articles within a common, digital medium. Namely, the blog initially had a form of an intangible repository. The main references to which the project intentionally refers²⁰ are Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* and Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*. Fabrizi and Lucarelli state²¹ that before the internet's “reign”, the organizing principle of ideas mostly obeyed the model of the atlas as a knowledge tool. Through the collection of images, the most heterogeneous topics were namely presented in a systematic way, and with the scientific revolution, starting in the 17th century, these objects also assumed a certain “aesthetic sophistication” that they, as architects, cannot disregard in their design concept.²² In the early 20th century, however, once photography became a tool of knowledge in its own right, reproductions of works of art began to be used in Warburg's tradition to compose new meanings through association, juxtaposition, and the creation of new themes. The Atlas becomes the medium in which memory gets associ-

ated with the categories of imagination and thought.²³

In *Socks*, however, these archetypal objects are updated with the new possibilities provided by online tools.²⁴ In Fabrizi and Lucarelli's vision, the atlas constitutes the most common form of organization to be found in human thought; and nowadays the web proposes numerous types of immaterial atlases. The image galleries offered by social networks are among the most evident examples.²⁵ Subjects on digital media can constantly be reorganized through different filters that allow new relationships to emerge. The ability to continually add information on *Socks*, and the navigation through links, are, according to the authors, the distinctive features of the web that best support their project, and “the way the web is completely interconnected enhances the potential of subjects to resonate with one another”.²⁶

A second suggestion in the setting of the project, are the *Number Shows* by conceptual art curator Lucy Lipard, who, as early as 1969, has been involved with the theme of the progressive dematerialization and detachment from the value of original works of art.²⁷

Socks features a structure divided into articles that follows neither a linear sequentiality, nor a chronology, nor a traditional mode of classification, nor the desire to necessarily showcase something unprecedented, but brings to light, in Fabrizi and Lucarelli's conception,²⁸ “permanences, correspondences and anachronisms” within distant in time and space investigations, defining a non-chronological journey

through different “territories”, but still referable to issues inherent in the spatialization of the human imagination.²⁹

The contributions appear different in approach and subject matter, and the topics addressed are chosen through a random process derived from an “encounter” or an image about which the authors know little and wish to deepen and understand.³⁰ The imagination category, the most relevant to Lucarelli and Fabrizi, thus accompanies the editorial freedom that characterizes the project’s choices.

Pursuing the goal of keeping vivid both the fields of scientific research and practice, through the elements presented by *Socks*, readers can enjoy “unconventional viewpoints on visual and spatial knowledge”³¹ and tools for contemporary investigation and productions. The platform, as a matter of fact, has evolved over time, and while the interest in architecture remains central, the authors have chosen to delve into the topic of *how* other disciplines use knowledge of architecture.³² It is possible to observe the outcomes of this specific reflection in the design idea of the exhibition *Database, Network, Interface*, as will also be explored later, where Fabrizi and Lucarelli³³ analyse the ability of architecture to structure access to information and physically build relationships between different contents according to associations and similarities.

Socks is organized in “categories” that were not chosen a priori, but through a process that Fabrizi and Lucarelli call “reverse psychoanalysis”,³⁴ in which some topics that recurrently emerged in their research are made explicit: *dysfunctional*

plans, walls as rooms, representation: axonometric projection, when photography catches time, housing the multitude, fields. Each “topic” features an introduction with a structured starting point so that new considerations can be produced, and other topics can be explored.³⁵ The rise of multiple interconnected groups of subjects that constantly enrich the authors’ research constitutes a process that can be assimilated to the hidden affinities and specific relationships concerning the images collected in Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas*, but which is today enhanced by the advantages of digital technology.³⁶

Hence, in the structure of the website, users are given the opportunity to search for traces of architectural practice and thinking that manifest themselves in different expressions,³⁷ and at the same time, users can also follow individual paths through the articles and topics that constitute *Socks*, the authors state.³⁸

Among the objectives made explicit by Fabrizi and Lucarelli, there is the desire to learn from a second web paradigm after the rational organisation of content in the archetypal Atlas. Namely, the concept of a collaborative web, understood as a surreal, chance-driven experience, in which millions of strangers cut and assemble texts, images - even from different periods - and video content, which can be related to the chaotic way of composing that they are inspired by in the production of heterogeneous contents for *Socks*.³⁹

As the authors intend to learn from the two paradigms that guide digital devices, this research also influences their practice as architects within *Microcities*. Indeed, the nonlinear

structure of the website has also inspired some of the logic of reading the exhibitions they curated, leading them to develop open pathways through the contents on show.⁴⁰

The relationships between cultural evidence, techniques and imagination have led Fabrizi and Lucarelli to develop, over time, tools to intervene in different spheres with the idea of reflecting on the modes of communication between the analogue and digital dimensions.⁴¹ For instance, in the *Critical Landscape* project for the 2017 Orleans Biennale, some of the main topics developed in *Socks* were synthesized and materialized within an installation that displayed a sort of city composed of different parts, one for each topic chosen by the online platform. But the most recent culmination of the architects' consideration of the diffusion of knowledge and the spatialization of mental processes is the exhibition *Database, Network, Interface*, as already anticipated (fig. 2).⁴² In the spirit of the authors' idea⁴³ of deepening the investigation of the uses of architecture within other disciplines as well, this exhibition was conceived as a pathway on the continuity existing between the ways of constructing logical computer-thinking, which were already present even before the invention of the computer and the Internet.⁴⁴

The authors' interest in this specific field is also demonstrated by the architectural metaphors that computer science has adopted⁴⁵ to define its own concepts, organise and structure thought. Fabrizi and Lucarelli, however, followed a process in which they employed three figures from the digital world. Concepts capable of developing knowledge

and giving shape to an architectural configuration are thus defined.⁴⁶ The *database*, as a metaphor for the collection, accumulation and organization of data; the *network*, representing the idea of possible interconnection with systems, multimedia elements and people to organize information. Finally the *interface*, understood as a metaphor for the possibility of showing hidden content to the outside world, thus allowing two different systems (in this case, the user and the software) to communicate.⁴⁷ The key "figures" identified by Fabrizi and Lucarelli evoke three ways of information management, as the authors make explicit in the introduction to the exhibition's essay-catalogue,⁴⁸ but they also correspond to three fundamental functions of museological practice: collection and preservation, transmission and communication, and the ability to build relationships with the users.

However, when considering other projects that feature similar approaches to their online visual atlas, the authors refer⁴⁹ to *Hidden architecture*⁵⁰ or *A Series of Rooms*,⁵¹ which have emerged in recent years based on similar principles to those of *Socks*. The main difference that emerges when comparing *Socks* with these cited examples is Lucarelli and Fabrizi's intention to range, starting from the field of architecture, and to find similarities and correspondences in other domains. Indeed, *Socks* is introduced as a "non-linear journey through distant territories of human imagination",⁵² which readers can take through different entry points (via the home page, individual posts, or the web).⁵³

The spreading of the dematerialization phenomenon in cultural production and the subsequent information transmission constitutes for Fabrizi and Lucarelli a framework in which to continue their research into practices focused on knowledge organization, in particular, the authors assert,⁵⁴ through the application of strategies developed in an analogue context to the digital sphere.

Endnotes

- 1 Fabrizi, Lucarelli (2019). For a complete overview of the exhibition see Ricci (2019).
- 2 Galofaro (2016).
- 3 Material from the lecture held 4/11/2019 at the Graduate School of Design – Harvard University available at: <https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/event/mariabruna-fabrizi-fosco-lucarelli-microcities-socks-studio-inner-space/>
- 4 <https://socks-studio.com/>
- 5 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.
- 6 Material from the exhibition opening conference *Database, Network, Interface* held 27/9/2021 for Archizoom – EPFL available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfWi9QKvLPA>
- 7 Galofaro (2016).
- 8 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.
- 9 Galofaro (2016).
- 10 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.
- 11 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.
- 12 Material from the Archizoom conference.
- 13 Material from the Archizoom conference.
- 14 Material from the Archizoom conference.
- 15 An example of research applied to this reflection is the exhibition *Database, Network, Interface* (27/09-07/12/2021, Archizoom, EPFL, Lausanne) curated by Fabrizi and Lucarelli. The exhibition constitutes, in the project idea, an opportunity to explore the historical role of architecture in the organization and communication of knowledge, in the representation of information, starting with physical and mental issues “beyond the rhetoric of digital architecture”. See also Fabrizi, Lucarelli (2021).
- 16 Fabrizi, Lucarelli (2021)
- 17 From the interview.
- 18 <https://socks-studio.com/introducing-socks/>
- 19 From the interview.
- 20 From the interview.
- 21 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.
- 22 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.
- 23 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.
- 24 From the interview.
- 25 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.
- 26 From the interview.
- 27 Galofaro (2016).
- 28 <https://socks-studio.com/introducing-socks/>
- 29 Material from the Archizoom conference.
- 30 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.
- 31 <https://socks-studio.com/introducing-socks/>
- 32 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.
- 33 Fabrizi, Lucarelli (2021).
- 34 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.

- 35 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.
- 36 <https://socks-studio.com/introducing-socks/>
- 37 <https://socks-studio.com/introducing-socks/>
- 38 Material from the Archizoom conference.
- 39 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.
- 40 From the interview.
- 41 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.
- 42 See reference 16
- 43 Material from the Archizoom conference.
- 44 The path starts with images from the corpus of Ramon Llul, presented as the ancestor of computer logic and artificial intelligence (the first one who imagined cognitive processes outside the human brain), to reach a direct confrontation with questions concerning the relationship between cybernetics, algorithms and architecture. The case studies include manifestations of architecture across other disciplines (literature, art, gaming, interaction design) and are chosen for their ability to exemplify spatial systems that can promote access to information and cover a time span from the ancient to the contemporary. See material from Archizoom conference.
- 45 In Fabrizi, Lucarelli (2021) are cited as examples the case of terms “windows”, “wall”, “software architect” and “architecture of an information system”.
- 46 Material from the Archizoom conference and see also Fabrizi, Lucarelli (2021).
- 47 Fabrizi, Lucarelli (2021).
- 48 Fabrizi, Lucarelli (2021).
- 49 From the interview.
- 50 <https://hiddenarchitecture.net/>
- 51 <https://aseriesofrooms.com>
- 52 <https://socks-studio.com/introducing-socks/>
- 53 Material from the lecture at GSD – Harvard University.
- 54 Fabrizi, Lucarelli (2021).

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