

**useum
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Journal of Museum Studies

Vol. 1/1 - 2024



Exhibited Thoughts of Architecture
Edited by: Anna Rosellini

This issue of MMD - Museum, Materials and Discussions. Journal of Museum Studies is dedicated to Jean-Louis Cohen, one of the greatest architectural historians, and one of the foremost curators and scholars of architectural exhibitions, to which he devoted essays that are destined to remain fundamental. Jean-Louis passed away while this issue was being prepared. We would like to dedicate this research to him, “tendrement et respectueusement”.

The issue was developed as part of the MIUR PRIN2022 research, prot. 2022 CHASRE - Radical Exhibited Thought Exhibitions of Architecture in Italy in the Contemporary Age.



museum materials discussions

Journal of Museum Studies

Vol 1/1- 2024

MMD - Museum, materials, discussion. Journal of Museum Studies is an open access academic journal in English, French, and Italian devoted to museology, museography, Cultural Heritage as well as research on audiences and fruition with an international outlook, addressing both the life of museum institutions and collections, and the latest challenges they face in their broad cultural and social dimension. MMD aims at promoting and enhancing the collaboration among researchers from the field of humanities, social sciences, architecture, and Digital Humanities through their complementary perspectives. It is addressed to scholars, students and professionals working in these specific disciplinary fields, but also readers interested in the current evolution of the debate on issues, methods and tools related to the material and immaterial aspects of museology in its relation to history and contemporaneity, and in connection with the progress of public welfare. All published articles are subjected to the double-blind peer-review process.

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ISSN 3034-9699

<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.3034-9699/v1-n1-2024>

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MMD - Museum Materials and Discussions is published biannually.

All issues are available online at mmdjournal.unibo.it

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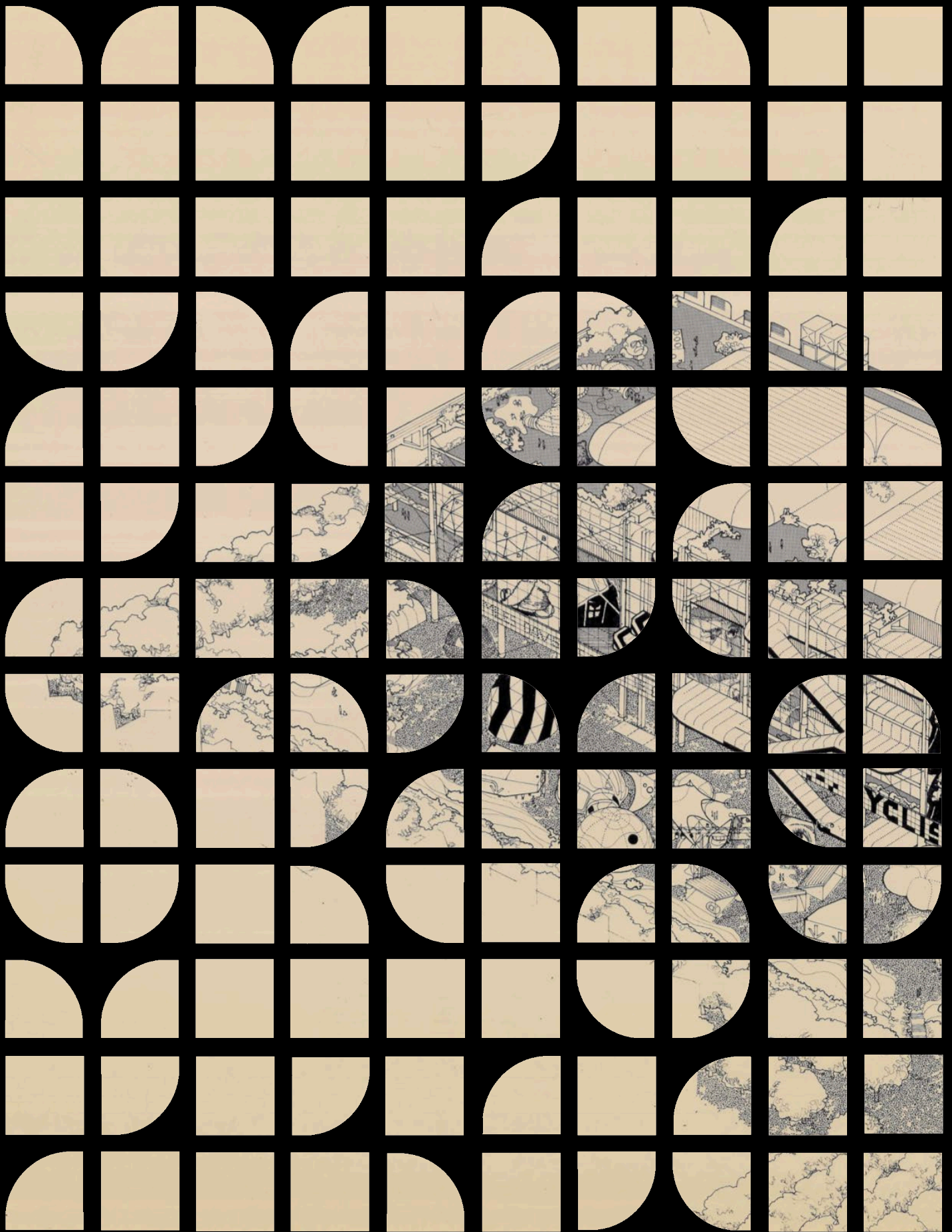


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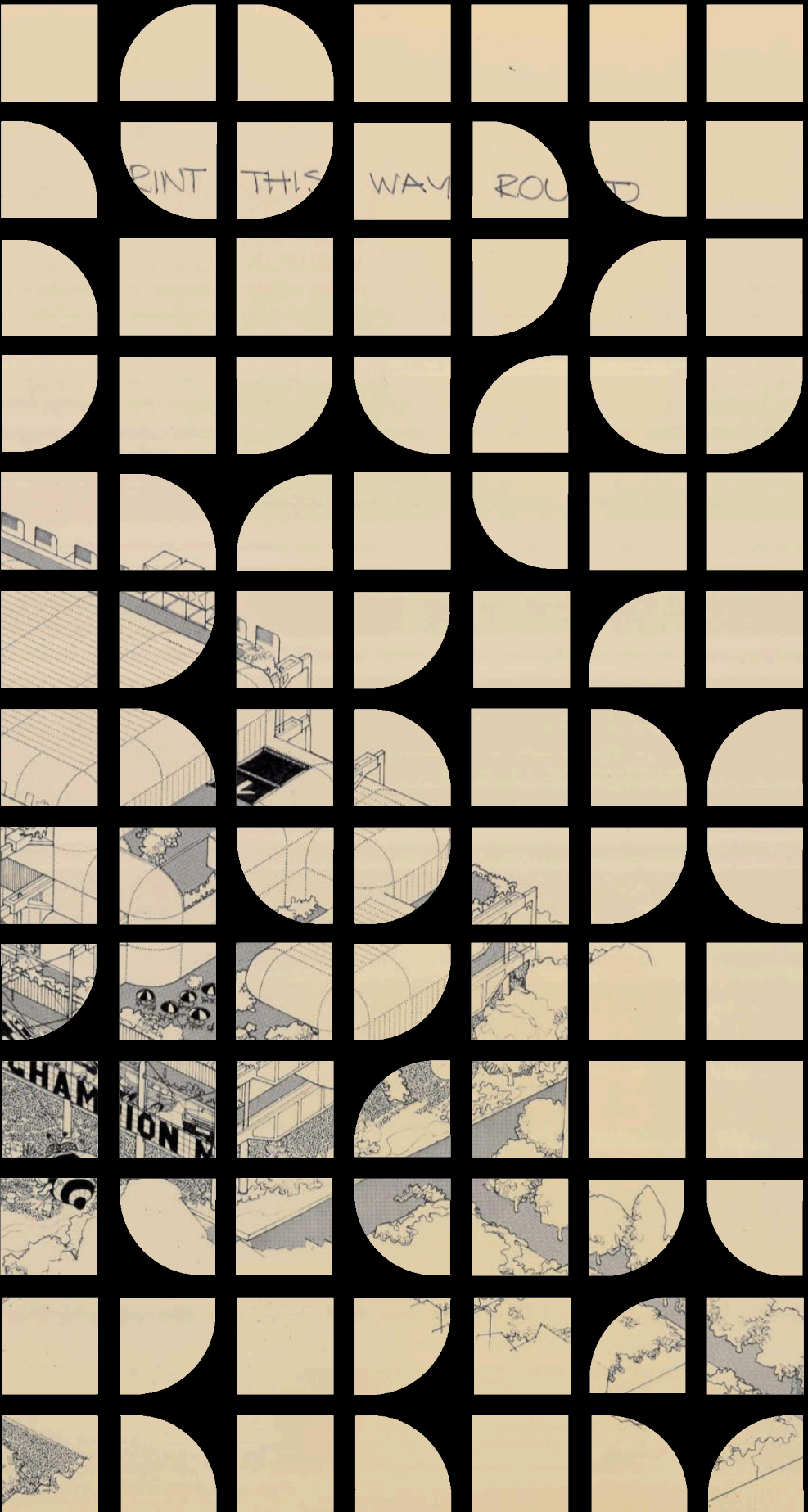
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ERIE DES PEINTU

Exhibited Thoughts of Architecture

Anna Rosellini

Keywords:

Architecture, Cultural Heritage, Curatorship, Exhibition, Valorization, Enhancement

ABSTRACT:

In recent decades, architecture exhibitions have become the subject of a specific study, as corroborated by the international diffusion of conferences and publications dedicated to this theme. Several essays discuss the relationship between architecture on display and publics, and the need to adapt the specific language of the discipline to support processes of presentation of architecture in its innumerable declinations. The essay originates from these inquiries, with the aim to stimulate wide-ranging reflections on the importance of architecture exhibitions in the general historical-artistic and social framework, allowing us to identify some possible forms that architecture display has taken over time, as well as to frame the architecture exhibition as a relevant event in the definition of possible architectural histories, and to interpret it as a tool capable of disseminating design practice and research.

Negli ultimi decenni, le mostre di architettura sono diventate oggetto di uno studio specifico, come confermato dalla diffusione internazionale di conferenze e pubblicazioni dedicate a questo tema. Diversi saggi discutono la relazione tra l'architettura esposta e i pubblici, e la necessità di adattare il linguaggio specifico della disciplina per sostenere processi di presentazione dell'architettura nelle sue innumerevoli declinazioni. Il saggio nasce da queste ricerche, con l'obiettivo di stimolare ampie riflessioni sull'importanza delle mostre di architettura nel generale quadro storico-artistico e sociale, consentendoci di individuare alcune possibili forme che il display dell'architettura ha assunto nel tempo, nonché di inquadrare la mostra di architettura come un evento rilevante nella definizione di possibili storie architettoniche, e di interpretarla come uno strumento capace di diffondere pratiche di progettazione e ricerca.

Opening Picture:

Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine
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<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.3034-9699/19296>

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The issue *Exhibited Thought of Architecture* focuses on the architecture exhibitions and on the idea of the exhibition as an essential opportunity to present the fundamentals of the project of architecture and their cultural, social, political, and economic outcomes.

Architects, artists, critics, and curators have produced an extensive corpus of architecture exhibitions. This corpus shows the multifaceted roles played by architecture exhibitions. They function as manifestos in specific cases, capable of redefining the foundations of the architecture project. Additionally, they contribute to expanding the investigation around the concept of space; offer places of discussion and production of experimental projects; convey new ideas of city, landscape, and countryside; expose, to the publics, the cultural principles of the architecture project; challenge traditional display formats with immersive and multidisciplinary experiences; and reflect over related issues, such as environmental concerns, circular economy, and social engagement.

Given the complexity of the subject, the issue resorts to the use of a scientific approach that combines historical analysis of the different aspects of architecture exhibitions with an investigation of the context of their production and the development of specific case studies.

The issue proposes an interdisciplinary approach that integrates an analysis of the curatorial and design aspects with an examination of the cultural, socio-economic, and political context in which the exhibitions were organized. The evolution of exhibitions, organized by architects, collectives and curators will be the

object of consideration. The role of specific institutions – such as Centre Pompidou Paris, and CIVA Brussels – will also be considered, without neglecting the economic aspects, the collateral cultural investments, and forms of fruition, enhancement, and circulation of the architectural heritage through traditional, analogical, and digital tools.

The various essays serve multiple purposes. They provide an overview of architecture exhibitions organized from the 19th century to today; focus on experimental exhibitions which present theoretical reflections contributing to defining significant design criteria; identify the narrative methods used to present architectural content to the publics; highlight critical aspects useful for framing the position of architecture exhibitions regarding current issues such as digital turn, sustainability, and human rights.

In recent decades, architecture exhibitions have become the subject of a specific study, as corroborated by the international diffusion of conferences and publications dedicated to this theme. Several essays discuss the relationship between architecture on display and audiences, and the need to adapt the specific language of the discipline to support processes of presentation of architecture in its innumerable declinations.¹ The studies have highlighted an evident yet essential problem: exhibiting architecture implies the translation of works, which by their nature cannot be contained in the exhibition space, into forms, images, installations, and devices capable of being framed in limited environments such as exhibition halls.² Furthermore, recent studies

have focused on the importance of architecture exhibitions in the broader historical-artistic and social framework, allowing us to identify some possible forms that architecture display has taken over time,³ as well as to frame the architecture exhibition as a relevant event in the definition of possible architectural histories,⁴ and to interpret it as a tool capable of disseminating design practice and research.⁵ In the bibliography on the subject, the wide spectrum of exhibition events in which architecture was the protagonist has been discussed: from installations created for international exhibitions to exhibitions showcasing architectural drawings to public presentations of competition results, to exhibitions organized by individuals architecture associations, as well as initiatives organized to celebrate the completion of a building, up to recurring events such as Biennials and Triennials.⁶ Each of these phenomena is associated with the different curatorial and display practices necessary to communicate, document, and represent architecture in abstract or interpreted forms – from drawings and models to videos, photographs and immersive installations.⁷ In some research, these display practices are also discussed in relation to those adopted for art exhibitions.⁸

The expansion of studies on architecture exhibitions has certainly been fostered by the growing diffusion, starting from the 1970s, of public and private places, museums, research centers, and institutions dedicated to the presentation, exhibition, and dissemination of architectural heritage.⁹ The essays published so far mainly discuss the installations of a single architect

or architectural collective.¹⁰ Others offer a historical-critical reading of specific case studies or single national or international events,¹¹ or retrace a detailed picture of the exhibitions organized in a well-defined historical period.¹²

The issue *Exhibited Thought of Architecture* originates from these research efforts, but with the aim to underline specific methodological tools of analysis in this important chapter of the architectural discipline, and to investigate the role of exhibitions in the construction, redefinition and presentation of architecture, in its theoretical, cultural, social and political foundations. For this purpose, the organizational, planning, and curatorial strategies, as well as the cultural, social and political implications of architecture exhibitions are analyzed to also identify their potential contemporary developments. To achieve these objectives, it appears essential to consider both international-oriented events, such as the recent editions of the Venice Biennial and the Lisbon Triennial, and those specific and alternative experiences, sometimes of a markedly experimental nature, which have not yet found the right place in the history of architecture exhibitions, but which could prove to be fundamental in describing the peculiarities of architecture exhibitions, even beyond the main cultural poles, already commonly considered by historiography.

The choice to narrow down the research focus to the specific case studies is instrumental to the need to better outline the evident specificities of the architectural debate. However, maintaining the corres-

pendence with what has been happening in the international context will remain crucial, especially in order to identify useful criteria to define the exhibition of architecture as a device to redefine the theoretical and cultural foundations of the discipline, as well as a functional tool for the enhancement, communication, and dissemination of architectural heritage.

Within the chronological period considered by *Exhibited Thought of Architecture*, the architectural discipline and its protagonists have pursued different objectives. These range from the simple explanatory presentation of architectural works (especially through drawings and models) within sector-specific contexts, passing through exhibitions whose installations projected, around the visitor, a new idea of architectural space, up to, in recent years, the presentation of themes and concepts so innovative as to compel architecture to seek support within other forms of art to express those lines of research that traditional means of display had proved inadequate to represent. Therefore, in the history the issue retraces, the Louis-Auguste Boileau's exhibitions and their media coverage, the Piano, Rogers and Hulten layout for the Centre Pompidou, the shows at *ar/ge kunst*, and the exhibitions of OFFICE at the Venice Biennial can coexist, given the common basis, or the radical foundation, that binds together these experiences of exhibiting architecture.

It should also be emphasized how the architectural discipline and its presentation have been conditioned, over time, by the evolution of two 'categories': that of the exhi-

bition promoters (architects, professionals, curators, etc.), and that of those who benefit from their work (publics, institutions, etc.). Both of these categories, in their broadest and most diverse meaning, are treated through Éric Lapiere's experience as chief curator of the fifth Lisbon Triennial of architecture in 2019; the role of exhibitions and participatory interventions in DAAR's practice; Luca Galofaro's work as architect and curator of the exhibition *Architettura a regola d'arte*, opened at the MAXXI in 2023; Socks Studio's use of digital technologies for the presentation of architecture; the architecture exhibition as proposed at the CIVA in Brussels; and the show *Taking the Country's Side*, curated by Sébastien Marot. These different experiences constitute fundamental issues of analysis for evaluating the significance, especially of the design and social aspects, of the events considered. In fact, they have been conceived as occasions not only for the encounter between various architectural actors for the definition of certain cultural orientations, but also as moments for presenting crucial issues to increasingly diverse audiences. These issues were challenging the very foundations of the architectural discipline, encompassing the evolution of the concepts of space and structure, the diffusion of new materials, the image of cities and landscapes, the role of history in the definition of architecture, the relationships between art and architecture, as well as the design of the contemporary habitat, the impact of social, cultural and political contexts on the architecture project, the role of social and environmental sustainability, the coexistence between different species, and hu-

man rights. All these factors have contributed, and are still contributing, to the rethinking of the architectural discipline, as architecture exhibitions continue to document.

From this point of view, in the vast set of exhibitions, the section “Dossier” of *Exhibited Thought of Architecture* focuses, for specific in-depth studies, on those exhibitions that have been specially designed as crucial events in the formulation of innovative theoretical programs and in the definition of project criteria bound to profoundly influence the development of the architecture discipline.

Louis-Auguste Boileau is one of the leading figures in the architectural debate in 19th-century France for his theoretical positions, his experimental projects and partly also for his realizations, which were always characterized by a quest to find geometries for space suitable for new structural systems. Known for his critical stances and for the theoretical conflict that arose with one of the most famous theorists of the 19th century, Viollet-le-Duc, Boileau has been the object of scrupulous historical research, conducted over the years by Laurent Koetz in archives and libraries and through the direct study of his works, the results of which have been translated into essays that finally offer the possibility of a documented and complete picture of both the practical and theoretical endeavors of one of the leading French architects. It was precisely his activity as a polemicist and popularizer of a new architecture, associated with the experimentation of the most recent industrial materials, that had led Boileau, as demonstrated by Koetz, to

participate in various public events with drawings of his works, not infrequently devised as a demonstrative function to exhibit a theoretical thought and to demonstrate the quality of the spaces of the new structures, also through selected perspective shots outlined to make visible the contrast between the grandiosity of the voids and the gracility of the supports made possible by the new industrial materials. The author also traces the strategies of the official press, enters into the mechanisms devised by Boileau to make the most of the public exhibition system of the Salons and to engage the public in order to involve them in the new dimension of experimental space. Through the analysis of reviews written by protagonists of French architecture at the time, including Anatole De Baudot, Koetz delves into the merits of Boileau’s research for a new representation of architecture. Against the backdrop of the various exhibitions discussed and presented in the essay with philological precision, we see the major theoretical themes of the debate on the new architecture, the principles being defined between stylistic aspirations and technical experimentation, and we witness the emergence of a true representation strategy designed to persuade the new audience, facilitated in no small part by the construction of surprising models. Koetz’s research demonstrates Boileau’s ability to create his own ‘system’ of presentation of his work aimed at catching the eye of the exhibition public, and which appears to have been one of Boileau’s decisive contributions to the emergence of the contemporary era architect.

The myth of an architecture that was

appropriate to the second age of the machine, as outlined by Reyner Banham, managed to find its concrete and unexpected celebration in the city that knew in its streets the beginning of the student revolt of May 1968. Among those same streets, a few years later, a machine of metal components, ducts and grandiose voids was already standing, whose very features shunned every possible idea, even the most avant-garde, of architecture. That machine, devised thanks to a fruitful collaboration between London engineers and architects, between Ove Arup & Partners and Piano+Rogers Architects, landed in the center of Paris, wanted by Pompidou next to another metal machine that was nevertheless being dismantled at the same time – Baltard’s Halles. The so-called Centre Pompidou has recently become the subject of a series of publications by Boris Hamzeian, all based on original and scrupulous research in the various archives, supported by interviews with the various protagonists. These publications are by now indispensable in order to understand, in every detail, the origins and meanings of that extraordinary machine for a kind of art exhibition that, at least in its original intentions, should have been an alternative to the usual criteria of museography. Hamzeian’s essay traces all the phases of the definition of the exhibition system, the conflicts between the exhibition vision of Pontus Hulten – the first artistic director of the Centre Pompidou –, eager to shelter art in a series of new “Cabannes” to be set up in the grandiose “Lofts”, and the demonstrative expectations of the designers team, not at all inclined to renounce the expression of the

potential of their extraordinary and pervasive technological devices. Thanks to the reconstruction proposed by Hamzeian, today we can look at the history of the construction of the Centre Pompidou with different eyes; it can even appear to us in the guise of a monument erected to a heroic epoch – that, precisely, of the second age of the machine declaimed by Banham. The freedoms offered by the machine, as it was glimpsed by the London neo-avant-gardes and from which the invention for the center dedicated to art wanted by Pompidou was born, constitute the precious inheritance passed on to us by the Paris monument which must not be dispersed in this phase of critical revision of every design principle. It is also true that precisely in the phase in which Pompidou’s machine is about to be “renewed” or “restored”, it would require a radical interlocutory attitude, therefore an attitude similar to the one that generated it in order to verify whether it could become – and despite the fact that it was the ultimate and accomplished expression of a super-technology – the foundation of a new life cycle where art too would no longer be the official one that invaded its Lofts compartmentalized in conventional rooms.

An art gallery located in the north of Italy, in Bolzano, the *ar/ge kunst*, managed to become a place of experimentation for the genre of architecture exhibition. Consisting of only two overlapping rooms, set up by architect Christophe Mair Fingerle – as Roberto Gigliotti recalls in his essay that is fundamental for understanding the role of this gallery in the history of architecture since its foundation in 1985 –, *ar/ge*

kunst has hosted exhibitions by internationally renowned architects, critics and protagonists of what had been radical architecture, as well as by young people engaged in the search for an alternative contemporary architectural discipline. The analysis of the activities carried out by ar/ge kunst became for Gigliotti the occasion to develop a theoretical framework of the different ways of exhibiting architecture leading him, with support from statements by Colomina or Borasi, to indicate in architectural exhibitions made from specific spaces a sort of laboratory for the enunciation of more general problems concerning the discipline itself. After all, the history of the 20th century is studded with architecture exhibitions whose displays have imposed themselves as experimental experiences for the staging of a certain vision of architecture and have therefore distinguished themselves from being a device for showing the public constructed or designed works, as if the exhibition were an extension of the pages of an architecture magazine. In the reconstruction of the main architecture exhibitions hosted by ar/ge kunst since its foundation, Gigliotti emphasizes some pivotal passages, when the space itself takes on a new significant role for the exhibition design and ceases to be a neutral entity hosting extraneous objects (in this perspective, he recalls the importance of the 1996 PAUHOF installation, designed to enhance the gallery space). The latent risk in the new trajectory of research on space – and thus in the understanding and staging of the intrinsic qualities of each place – lies in the enclosure of the architectural project in its favorite entity – space – which takes on

absolute and abstract forms, like an academic exercise. But the conclusion of Gigliotti's reasoning with the description of Matilde Cassani's installation, *It's just not cricket* from 2018, dispels all doubts by presenting a model in which the essence of architecture – rather than its physical consistency as an object – is a space with devices that require the active participation of the public, as if architecture were therefore nothing more than a stage designed for life.

One of the leading contemporary architectural practices operating not only in Europe, OFFICE, is brought to the reader's attention by Christophe Van Gerrewey. Within OFFICE's important production, art and architecture exhibition installations constitute a decisive chapter. The strategy adopted by OFFICE varies from case to case. Sometimes OFFICE proposes sequences of identical rooms, where the works are displayed, in order to verify a concept pursued in the design of houses or residential buildings. In the beginnings of OFFICE's activity, it is worth mentioning its two first installations in the world's top event dedicated to architecture, the Venice Biennale, in 2008 at the Belgian Pavilion – 1907... *After The Party* –, and in 2010 in the Virgin Garden – *Garden Pavilion* (7 rooms, 21 perspectives). In both cases OFFICE interrogated the existing rooms in the two constructions to enhance the concept of space through an intervention that in the pavilion aimed at the constitution of a high fence with which to correct the orientation with respect to the geometry of the garden, and then to introduce the visitors into the pavilion rooms left empty, covered with a mantle of confetti and with

sparse garden chairs; in the Virgin Garden, on the other hand, it was limited to the addition of an all-white metal and cloth canopy, which formed a portico at once solemn and graceful, reconstituting the unity of the discourses in images set up in each room with Bas Brincen's photographs and OFFICE's collages. The key to interpretation proposed by Van Gerrewey in presenting the installation in the Belgian Pavilion to analyze the complex cultural relations existing between OFFICE's work and the pioneering work of Koolhaas/OMA, is entrusted to the reconstruction of what might appear a detail to a non-specialist of the debate on the theory of architecture in the transition between the 20th and 21st centuries: "confetti". That frivolous carnival game, which OFFICE re-enacts in the installation, is in fact the significant fragment of a theoretical system that OMA had developed on the competition project for the Parc de la Villette in Paris, and from which a new attitude in the organization of the elements on a grand scale had emerged. The confetti sprinkled over the entire surface of the pavilion, including the garden segment enclosed by OFFICE's high metal wall, and the metal chairs of the Parisian model of the Luxembourg garden, scattered at random, bring a new cultural and social perspective to OMA's theoretical system, under the banner of the free appropriation by visitors of the concept of space – thus an attitude, that of OFFICE, very similar to that which had induced the Archizoom to leave the Ambiente Grigio they had set up at the MoMA in New York in 1972 empty in order to offer the space to the free imagination of visitors. During his visit to the pavilion,

Van Gerrewey himself had taken a handful of confetti and thrown it at one of his friends, as proof of the success of an installation that was meant to incite participation and be festive. The invisible appeal of OFFICE was to appropriate the beauty of space and encourage play. Van Gerrewey's sophisticated interpretation, as an active protagonist of those times, follows the paths of literature; it springs from the sheet of paper from which the confetti is made; it calls writing into question; it traverses Victor Hugo's famous opposition between printed words and stone devices; and it ends up glimpsing in OFFICE's installation the death of an era supplanted by the unbearable lightness of the digital age.

In both cases, 1907... *After The Party and Garden Pavilion* (7 rooms, 21 perspectives), as Van Gerrewey points out, OFFICE had succeeded in staging a vision that allowed a glimpse of an architecture so subtle as to appear evanescent, yet at the same time so secure and present by its very geometry, as to create places that suggested what is the subject of the discipline itself: People Meet in Architecture (this was the title of the theme of the 2010 Biennial).

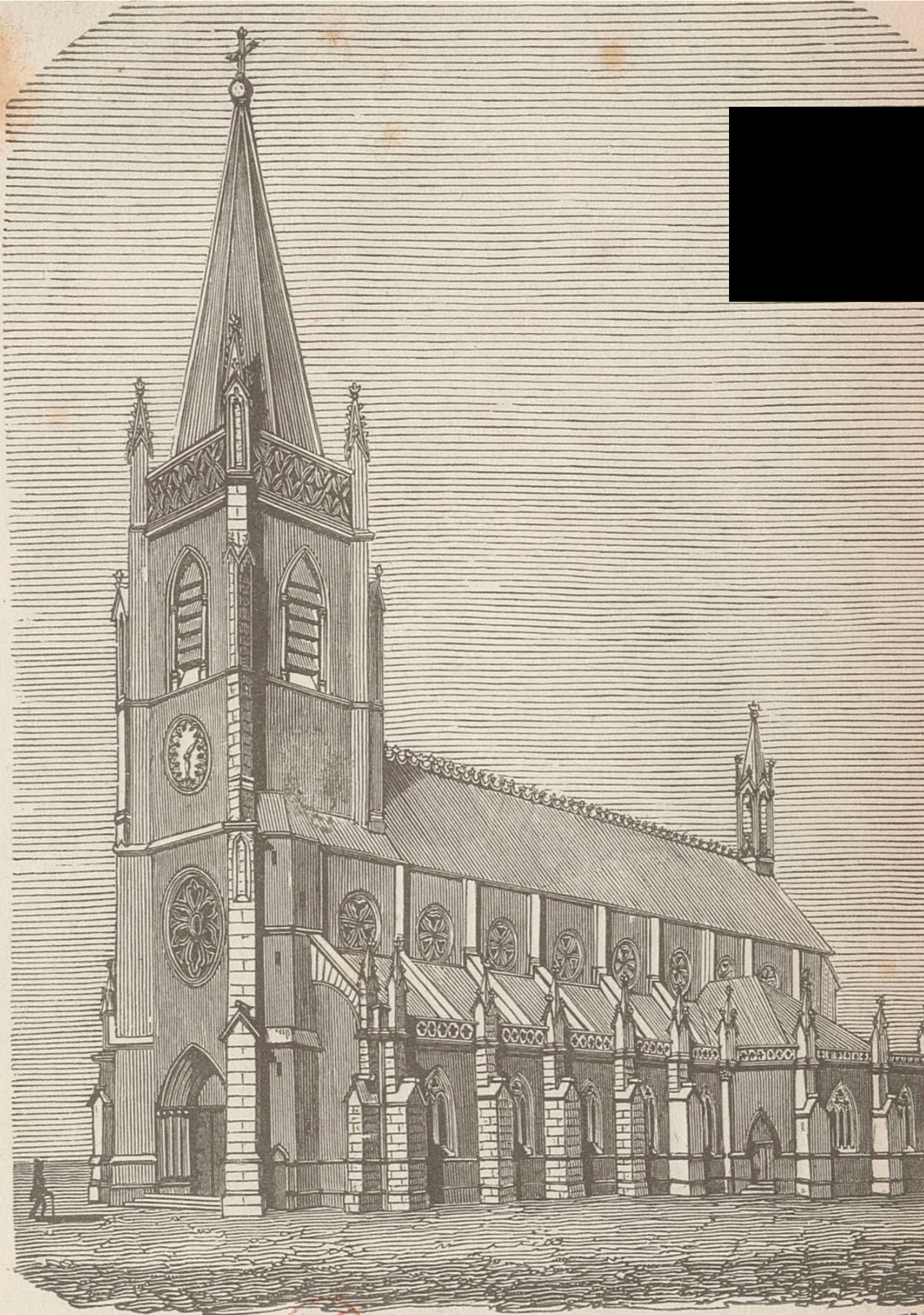
Endnotes

- 1 Bois, Hollier, Krauss 1999; Kossmann, Mulder, den Oudsen 2012; Zardini 2012.
- 2 Di Carlo 2010; Arrhenius, et al. 2014; Chan, Pelkonen, Tasman 2015.
- 3 Polano 1988; Greenberg, Ferguson, Nairne, 1996; Bonnemaïson, Eisenbach 2009; Pelkonen 2018; Dellapiana, Failla, Varallo 2020.
- 4 Cohen 1999.
- 5 Colomina 1996; Sparke, Sudjic 2008; Patteeuw, Vandeputte, Van Gerrewey 2012; Patteeuw, Szacka 2018.
- 6 Chan 2010; Levy, Menking 2012; Figuerido 2018; Lopez Serfozo 2018.
- 7 Urbach 2012; Gigliotti 2015; Watson 2021.
- 8 AA.VV. 2015; Castellani, Gallo, Strukelj, Zanella 2018; Massa, Pontelli 2019.
- 9 Szambien 1988; Cohen 2009; Borasi, Ferré, Garutti, Kelley, Zardini 2019.
- 10 AA.VV. 2005; Lanzarini 2003.
- 11 Pansera 1978; Rocca 1999; Volpiano 1999; Levy, Menking 2010; Szacka 2016; Dellapiana 2020.
- 12 Cimoli 2007; Catalano 2013; Cecchini, Dragoni 2016; Toffanello 2017.

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L.A. BOILEAU. INV.

MIDDER



Vue extérieure.

Convincing the public: Louis-Auguste Boileau's exhibitions and their media coverage

Laurent Koetz

Keywords:

Exhibition, Mediatization, Criticism, Model, Innovation

ABSTRACT:

In the 19th century, the Salon offered artists a major opportunity to build their reputation. Architect Louis-Auguste Boileau participated nine times between 1849 and 1893, certainly hoping, through his repeated presence, to give visibility to his work. Presenting one's work in the Salon was nonetheless a risky venture, for while it enhanced the exhibitor's prominence, it also left them vulnerable to criticism from the public and the press. Strategies were therefore devised to overcome the difficulties of accessing the Salon or to limit the impact of unfavourable opinions. In addition to the Salons, Boileau chose to exhibit his work at home and in a shop. The study of his varied exhibition practices thus sheds light on the processes that contribute to building reputation in the architectural milieu of the second half of the century.

Nel XIX secolo, il Salon offriva agli artisti una significativa opportunità per costruire la propria reputazione. L'architetto Louis-Auguste Boileau partecipò nove volte tra il 1849 e il 1893, sicuramente sperando, attraverso la sua presenza ripetuta, di dare visibilità al suo lavoro. Presentare il proprio lavoro al Salon era comunque un'impresa rischiosa, poiché se da un lato aumentava la visibilità dell'autore, dall'altro lo rendeva vulnerabile alle critiche del pubblico e della stampa. Pertanto, furono ideate strategie volte a superare le difficoltà di accesso al Salon o limitare l'impatto delle opinioni sfavorevoli. Oltre ai Salons, Boileau scelse di esporre il suo lavoro anche a casa e in un negozio. Lo studio delle sue diversificate pratiche espositive getta quindi luce sui processi che contribuiscono a costruire la reputazione nel contesto architettonico della seconda metà del secolo.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 01: Boileau, Louis-Auguste. Church of Saint-Pierre-Fourier, Mattaincourt, 1844-1859.

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<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.3034-9699/19298>

In the 1849 Salon, Louis-Auguste Boileau presented drawings of the church in Mattaincourt, in the Vosges¹, which he was building at the time². The project marked an important turning point, being the real start of his career as an architect [fig. 01]. Until then, Boileau had made a name for himself with his carpentry work, in particular his Gothic-inspired church furniture. Overall, the project was well received, with the notable exception of César Daly, who remarked, rather condescendingly, in the *Revue générale de l'architecture et des travaux publics*, that Boileau should not have changed course. “M. Boileau made himself known with his Gothic style carpentry, which has been rather successful [...] Caesar would have preferred first rank in a village over second rank in Rome: M. Boileau is not of the same opinion”.³

Boileau was deeply affected by such observations. The son of a watchmaker, largely self-taught⁴, Boileau was keenly aware of the gulf that separated him and most of his fellow architects, and subsequently made great effort to consolidate the social and professional position for which his background had not prepared him. Keen for success, Boileau seized every available opportunity. He exhibited in official Salons, in his studio and even in a shop. Whatever form the exhibition took, it would be reported on in the press or commented on in some publication.

How then does this mediatization work? Is it different if the work is displayed at the Salon, or exhibited by the architect himself? What strategies did Boileau adopt to build his reputation?

By the time Boileau began exhibi-

ting at the Salon, reputation was already a crucial factor in obtaining commissions. The need to be known to the public did not only concern architects, but all artists. Since the end of the Ancien Régime, links between creators and patrons had weakened considerably, and painters, sculptors and architects had to develop new professional strategies to make their newfound autonomy viable. As Oskar Bätschmann's study shows, this emancipation was accompanied by an increase in public exhibitions.⁵ Thanks to these events artists gained visibility and could expect to receive attention. However, while they sought to break free of the constraints of aristocratic commissions and academic norms, their freedom was counterbalanced by the power of public opinion, which could make or break reputations. New obligations were thus imposed on artists, as they had to conform to the expectations of the public, both in terms of their creative output and in the way they acted in society. As such, Pierre Bourdieu noted that the constitution of the 19th century artistic milieu can be understood both as a movement towards autonomy of practice, due to the diminished status of the old benefactors, and as a phenomenon of alienation, notably increasing precariousness.⁶

Architects were no exception. While some were able to avoid the judgement of public opinion by virtue of a close relationship with their patrons, the majority had to find ways to deal with this factor. The architectural press, which had developed considerably from 1840 onwards, played a key role, as did the major newspapers, which took an interest in important projects and gave architects space to express themself-

ves⁷. The Salons were main events within the art world and received a great deal of media attention. Of course, architecture occupied a rather secondary place compared to painting, but its dedicated section was nonetheless systematically commented on in the specialised

Boileau represents an interesting case study as he proves to be particularly reactive, rushing to respond through the press if his work seems to be misunderstood, or knowing, to some extent, how to anticipate critical reactions by adapting his propositions to their judgement criteria.



Fig. 02
Boileau,
Louis-Auguste.
Church of Notre-
Dame-de-France,
London, 1867-
1869. Biblio-
thèque de l'EN-
SBA.

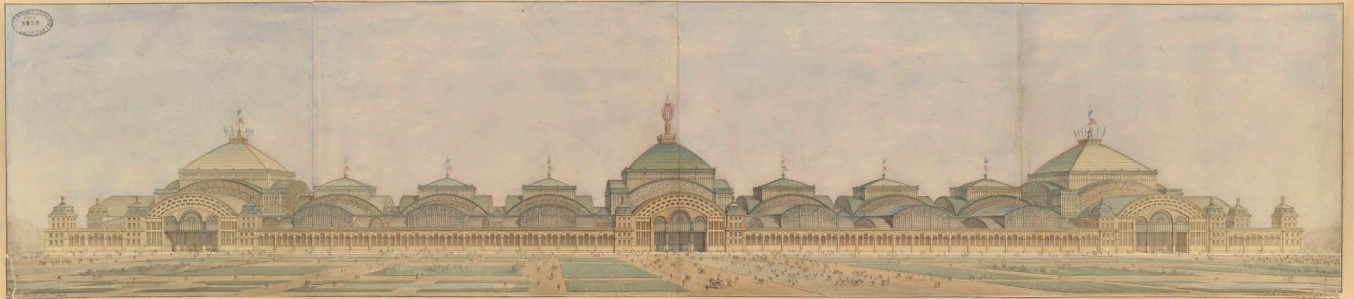
journals, especially in the *Revue Générale* or the *Encyclopédie d'architecture*. Readers who had not been able to visit the Salon could get a good idea about the content of the exhibition. While the reviews primarily described the exhibited designs, they also tended to include a critical dimension, emphasizing the quality or drawbacks of the projects, and thus influencing the way in which they were understood. Being accepted to participate in the Salon was an important first step in building a reputation, and the published reviews formed a second and almost equally decisive stage. Aware of the repercussions of these reviews, some architects developed tactics to amplify or counter their effects. Among them, Louis-Auguste

Boileau's Salons, 1849-1893

Continuing the tradition of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture exhibitions initiated under the reign of Louis XIV, the Salons of the 19th century were a major event in the art world⁸. Their success resonated far beyond specialist circles and the work on display were seen by a wide public, especially since admission to the exhibition was free for all on Sundays. Architectural drawings, engravings and lithographs, however, made up only a very modest part of the exhibited work. During the 1860s, period in which Boileau was particularly pre-

sent in the Salons, the volume of architectural works was between 2% and 4% of the paintings on display. Their quantity varied from around forty (43 items in 1863) to around a

more open than during the time in which the Institut controlled the jury, a situation that would have certainly favoured Boileau.



03

hundred (114 items in 1861), while the number of exhibited paintings ranged from 1500 to 3000. Despite its limited scope, the architectural exhibition was an important occasion for the profession. Being present in the Salon was an opportunity to demonstrate one's talent in composition or draughtsmanship, perhaps more easily than in painting, as the competition was proportionally minor. Passing the selection stage was in itself a form of success, as one had to convince the jury to select the works they presented. It seems surprising that Boileau, whose work was not unanimously admired, participated so frequently in the Salons. His works were included in 1849, 1861, 1864, 1865, 1866, 1867, 1868, 1869 and 1893: a total of nine exhibitions, six of which were consecutive.

His participation largely corresponds with a period in which the organization of the Salon was subject to upheaval and change. Dissolved in 1848, the jury was reinstated in 1849, but the Académie no longer controlled it. The academicians being the minority, it could be concluded that deliberations were

In 1861 the context changed. The jury was once again composed of members of the first four sections of the Académie and officials from the Beaux-Arts administration. However, it was not unfavourable to Boileau. The project he presented with his son Louis-Charles was not only accepted but awarded a "seconde classe" medal.⁹ As well as bringing recognition, this prize opened the doors of future Salons to the father and son. Medal holders were exempt from the jury procedure and could exhibit their works without submitting them to examination, an opportunity that Louis-Auguste and Louis-Charles seized.

The drawings and engravings that Boileau Sr. exhibited at the Salon showed completed buildings, design propositions responding to topical themes, or free compositions. The built churches of Saint-Pierre-Fourier in Mattaincourt, Sainte-Marguerite in Le Vésinet¹⁰ and Notre-Dame-de-France in London¹¹ were illustrated in the 1849, 1865 and 1868 submissions respectively [fig. 02]. The submissions of 1866, 1867 and 1893 exposed his

Fig. 03
Boileau,
Louis-Auguste.
Design for a
World Fair palace
[1865]. Biblio-
thèque de l'EN-
SBA.

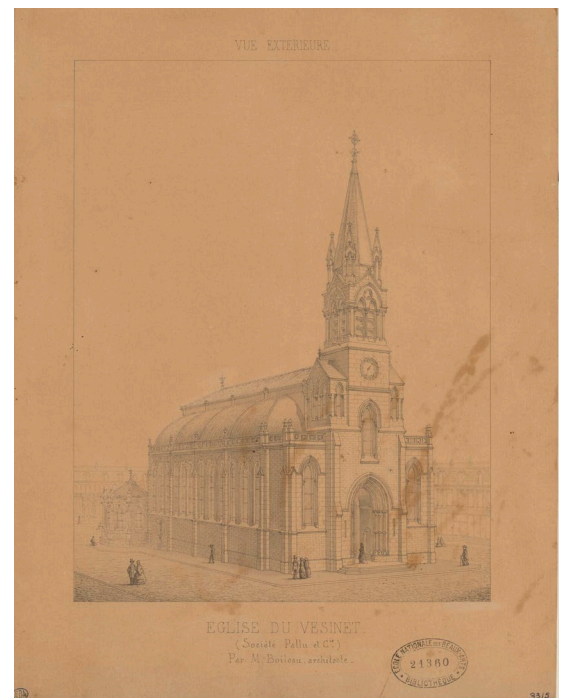
desire to participate in the architectural debates of the time. By presenting an exhibition palace in 1866,¹² he aimed to contribute to the advancement of thinking about large, covered spaces and their lighting, in view of the 1867 World Fair [fig. 03]. One of the 1867 submissions shows Boileau's response to the consultation initiated by the City of Paris on the subject of economic church design.¹³ The series of drawings presented at the 1893 Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts was a proposal for a monument commemorating the 1789 Revolution, a period that was being studied by the administration.¹⁴ In addition to these propositions, which respond to specific contexts, were contributions that more freely illustrated Boileau's ideas about metal construction and programmatic typologies. This is particularly the case for the submissions of 1861, 1864¹⁵ and 1867, which illustrate church projects or civil monuments. Whatever might have initiated these buildings and projects, nearly all of them used structural systems developed by Boileau. Taking advantage of his exemption from the jury, he multiplied his submissions and used the Salon to show his inventions in different forms, from modest churches to grand palaces.

The reception of the exhibited works

Fig. 04
Boileau,
Louis-Auguste.
Church of
Sainte-Margue-
rite, Le Vésinet,
1862-1865.
Bibliothèque de
l'ENSBA.

The Salon reviews frequently mentioned Boileau's built works and propositions. If the form and content of the reviews vary according to the critic and the year, going from a few lines to several columns, the continuous reference to his work incon-

testably strengthened his reputation. However, such publicity comes at a price. When the judgment is unfavourable or intentions are misunderstood, it becomes necessary to



produce a counter-argument. Boileau reacted in this way after his exhibition at the 1865 Salon, where he presented the church of Le Vésinet. Following the criticism, he picked up his pen to defend his vision of architecture and express his opinion on new materials.

In his article on the 1865 Salon in the *Gazette des architectes et du bâtiment*, the question of innovation is directly addressed by Anatole de Baudot. Unusually, Baudot complements Boileau. “We recognise that, in this study, the author has made an effort that should be applauded, and that we must take into consideration the difficulties constructors always encounter with new materials. To undertake research is worthy of merit in itself, and this merit is even more admirable for its rarity”.¹⁶

Baudot was referring to the Coignet concrete used for the church's walls and bell towers [fig. 05]. While praising the experimentation undertaken at Le Vésinet, he criticized the falseness of the elevations that give the impression of a stone construction rather than a moulded form.



005

However, the most important point raised by Baudot concerns the use of concrete. In his eyes, the innovation of the church lay in the use of concrete for the building's envelope, rather than the metal vaulting [fig. 06]. Yet, for Boileau, this perception, which minimized his role as an innovator, was far more problematic than the remarks about the building's design. At Le Vésinet, he was in competition with François Coignet, who was also a talented self-publicist. This can be seen in the space given to concrete in certain press articles, such as the one in the *Petit Journal* which speaks of a "pseudolithic [monument] in the Gothic style".¹⁷

Boileau felt the need to act to correct the perception of his work and prevent it from being easily associated with Coignet concrete. Writing in 1867 in the *Moniteur des architectes*, using his expertise in the field of construction as a pretext, he said he wished to give some feedback about his experience with concrete.¹⁸ He set out a damning verdict on the material, attacking its permeability, lack of sharpness, and cost. Coignet counter-attacked, publishing a response in the same periodical criticizing Boileau's attitude, suggesting that he did not understand the value of such experimentation.¹⁹ Boileau responded in another article, citing the compliments he had received from Victor Baltard, director of the architecture service of the City of Paris, for his previous observations.²⁰ Boileau's analyses reached Great Britain, where a slightly abridged translation of his critique of Coignet's concrete was published in 1868 in *The Builder*.²¹

Therefore, Boileau's exhibition in the 1865 Salon cannot be understood as an isolated event. In the battle to establish whether concrete or iron brought the greatest innovation, Boileau had to defend his own interests. The process of mediatization thus included not only Baudot in the role of critic, but also Boileau himself, who in turn involved a third actor, Coignet, who also participated in the construction. This multiplication of viewpoints complexified the reception, as the Salon constitutes ultimately only one aspect of a series of interpretations.

Fig. 05
Boileau,
Louis-Auguste.
Church of
Sainte-Margue-
rite, detail of the
façade in Coignet
concrete (photo
by the Author).

Designing for the Salon

Considering the strong mediatization of the Salons, and the role they played in career development, putting together a submission that anticipates the reaction of the jury, and above all, the public must have been tempting. The work would thus find itself partly determined by the reception of the jury that the artist seeks to anticipate. In the world of painting, Gustave Courbet, accustomed to scandals, said he had created the painting “Le Retour d’une Conférence” with the aim of it being rejected by the Salon, out of a desire to shock and for financial gain²². Among architects, provocation appears to have been less important. However, in seeking to anticipate the jury’s reaction, were they not operating in a similar way, even if, unlike Courbet, they were trying to please?

This question arises particularly in relation to Louis-Auguste and Louis-Charles Boileau’s 1861 submission. With this project, the work of Boileau Sr. appears to follow an inflection. Until then, he had been principally known for a project titled “Composition synthétique” in which he applied a vaulting principle he had invented [fig. 07]. Considering this experimentation and its later developments, the design of a church built of metal and masonry in 1861 appears rather conventional [fig. 08].

Fig. 06
Boileau,
Louis-Auguste.
Church of
Sainte-Margue-
rite, interior
view showing the
metal structure.
Old postcard.

Several reasons could be put forward to explain this change of attitude. Firstly, the collaboration with his son might have been a factor. Louis-Charles had developed a distinct architectural and theoretical line of thought from that of his

father. His work was also often better perceived by critics, in particular by Edmond About who wrote: “Mr Boileau Jr. did not invent a new architecture, like his father did, but he understands old architecture and does it well, which is better”.²³



The 1861 project might also owe its shape to an anticipation of the jury’s reaction. In this hypothesis, Boileau Sr. would have intentionally abandoned his search for new forms in order to present a more acceptable architecture at the Salon. Apart from metal, the project did not express a strong desire to innovate. In 1861, the use of cast iron and iron for a church, though not common, was nonetheless allowed on certain occasions. The Boileaus demonstrated their potential at Saint-Eugène in 1854-1855. Victor Baltard also used them at Saint-Augustin, the construction of which he over-



07



08

Fig. 07
Boileau,
Louis-Auguste.
Model of the
“Composition
synthétique”.
Photolithograph
in *Nouvelle
forme architectu-
rale*, cliché Bisson
frères.

Fig. 08
Boileau,
Louis-Auguste
and Louis-
Charles. Design
for a church
built in metal and
masonry. 2nd medal
in the 1861 Salon.
Bibliothèque de
l'ENSBA.



Fig. 09
Boileau,
Louis-Auguste.
Model of the
“Composition
synthétique”,
photograph
attributed to the
Bisson brothers.
Bibliothèque de
l’ENSBA.

saw from 1859.²⁴ In all evidence, Louis-Auguste and Louis-Charles sought to seduce the jury with a composition that did not take unnecessary risks and with beautiful design. Among the drawings, the exterior perspective illustrates the sequence of linked volumes culminating in the dome while the transversal section reveals the attention paid to the interior decoration, subtly distinguishing between structure and infill without overemphasizing the contrast.

These precautions about the composition as well as the quality of the submission certainly contributed to its success. The panels were accepted and awarded a “seconde classe” medal. In the architectural press, Adolphe Lance praised the project, though he did comment, not without irony, that this success had only been possible because the father had benefitted from his son’s partnership to abandon the path of

architectural invention. “In his first attempt at innovation, Mr Boileau had sought, and believed he had found, in unfortunate, impossible forms, an original architecture, but all he had discovered was a new expression of the opposite of beauty; he seemed to believe that being bizarre was all it took to be original. The project exhibited at the Salon, which is the combined effort of father and son, proves that Mr Boileau father has since learned a lot and forgotten a lot, for which we congratulate him twice”.²⁵

The editor of the *Encyclopédie* was well aware of the estrangement that the 1861 project represented in Boileau Sr.’s work, but he was wrong in his interpretation: the architect had not forgotten his ambitions, he had just temporarily put them aside, perhaps to allow his son the space to express his talent, possibly to maximize their chances of success at the Salon.

Thanks to the medal and the automatic right to exhibit that came with it, Boileau Sr. would use subsequent Salons, after 1861, to promote his innovations. In 1864, he presented a monumental construction and churches conceived with his “système des voûtes butantes”²⁶. The omnipresence of Boileau elicited a certain exasperation from Baudot who expressed, in 1867, his weariness with the systematism of the compositions presented at the Salons. “Mr Boileau father. – Another church like Saint-Eugène or rather Le Vésinet: another pyramid system. It must be recognized that Mr Boileau has great perseverance, but his creations show neither a serious construction system nor artistic value”.²⁷

Taking the initiative to exhibit

While being particularly present in the Salons, Boileau also knew how to use other means to publicize his

work. In 1850 he organized an exhibition in his own studio, and another one in 1862, this time in a commercial space that was lent to him. This form of exhibition, stemming from an individual initiative, differed from the Salon in that it allowed freedom from the institutional framework, and especially from the jury and the display format restrictions imposed by the sheer quantity of exhibitors. Although it offer greater freedom, it did not provide the same level of recognition, as the works were not subject to examination.

The 1850 exhibition took place at a key moment in the architect’s career. Having overseen the construction of the church in Mattaincourt in the Vosges, he returned to Paris to devote himself to two important projects, the writing of a book on the history of progress in architecture, and the conception of the “Composition synthétique”.

Making use of his talent as a carpen-



Fig. 10
Léon Isabey,
Courbet Pavilion,
built in 1855,
photograph by
Charles Thurston.
V&A Museum.

ter, he created a large model at the scale of five millimetres to one metre, made of wood and cardboard, which he exhibited in his home studio [fig. 09]. He edited a brochure inviting the public to come and see it “on working days, between 2pm and 6pm, at the author’s studio, rue de Sèvres, n°11”.²⁸

With this initiative, Boileau sought to boost his reputation. As a former carpenter, starting his career as an architect and constructor, he had neither prestigious education nor built work to enhance his status as intellectual and innovative architect. Thus, as he confirmed in his brochure, persuading the public appeared to be a necessary stage to achieve his ambition. “Firmly convinced that he has found the solution to the problem [...] the author needs to appeal publicly to all men of progress, his fellow citizens [...] An outsider to cliques and gos-

sip, he addresses enlightened public opinion [...] Whose help, which he greatly needs [...] could be given in two ways: by getting those who commission public buildings to adopt his architectural system, and by recommending his book”.²⁹

By appealing to the public for support, Boileau hoped to receive commissions. This appreciation of the role of public opinion as judge and means of influence could be compared, proportionally, to the one formulated at the same time by Gustave Courbet. Although the context was different, the painter also tried to influence the public opinion in his favour. Feeling under-represented in the Beaux-Arts Exhibition organized as part of the 1855 World Fair, he had built, at his own expense, an independent pavilion designed by architect Léon Isabey, in which he installed around forty of his paintings³⁰ [fig. 10]. The critic



Fig. 11 Magasins Delisle, neighbours of the premises Boileau exhibited his projects in 1862. Advertising image.

Champfleury noted the reaction this provoked. “It is unbelievably audacious, it is a means of overthrowing the jury and the institutions, it is a direct appeal to the public, it is freedom, some say. It is a scandal, anarchy, it is art dragged through the mud, these trestles belong in the fairground, say the others”.³¹ Boileau’s exhibition did not cause the same stir as Courbet’s, but, like that of the painter, owed its existence to the conviction that all members of society are capable of judging artworks.

In 1862, Boileau organized another exhibition. He set up his work in a commercial premises situated at n°6 boulevard des Capucines. The location was excellent, close to the famous Delisle shops [fig. 11]. *The Album pratique de l’art industriel*, edited by Charles Alfred Oppermann, promoted the event, noting that among the exhibited works, the project entitled “Monument des arts libéraux et industriels” provided the best summary of the research carried out by the architect over the past twenty-five years.³² The article, which did not describe the work precisely, nevertheless stated that it displayed the advantages of great size, stability, the development of a metallic frame, economy – particularly in the suppression of flying buttresses – and good acoustics.

If Boileau benefitted from this opportunity to exhibit, it was possibly because in 1853 the Salon had become biennial and thus was not held in 1862. It did not become annual again until 1863. This 1862 presentation allowed the architect to continue to receive attention after the success of the 1861 Salon. Charles Garnier did not miss the opportu-

nity to highlight the stubbornness that this showed. “Mr Boileau uses every possible occasion to express his ideas to the public. If the exhibition halls are closed, he doesn’t give up, he shows his work in a shop. He is an extremely determined man, which is too easy an excuse to deny him benefits”.³³

Examination of the work, an important guarantee

As Garnier noted, Boileau was highly motivated to find ways to exhibit his work, particularly by organizing his own personal exhibitions. Such exhibitions, however, come with the inconvenience of being perceived as publicity stunts. By definition, privately initiated exhibitions are not subjected to juries to assess the admissibility of works. Apart from possible favourable reviews in the press, nothing guarantees the quality of the exhibits. The Salon suffered from this very problem in 1848 when the jury was abolished. Many agreed that a great number of mediocre works had damaged the event. In 1863, the issue re-emerged with the “Salon des refusés” created on the initiative of Napoleon III to allow those who had not been selected by the jury to show their work. Of the 2800 side-lined artists, only 1200 decided to maintain their submissions, as the prestige of showing in the Salon annexe was too insignificant.

Boileau most certainly measured the risk of submitting his works to the public without having them evaluated. He thus took the initiative to assemble a group of experts in order to carry out a critical exami-

nation of the “Composition synthétique” and its structural system.

Among them, Albert Lenoir offered strong support. The son of Alexandre Lenoir, the administrator of the Musée des Monuments français, Albert was best known for his work on medieval architecture and the project of the Musée de Cluny, inaugurated in March 1844. In 1851 he wrote an essay containing a summary of Boileau’s intentions and explications of his project.³⁴ Lenoir recalls that he wrote the essay after having examined the model together with other people, including engineers, such as Michel Chevalier, a graduate of the Ecole Polytechnique, professor of political economy at the Collège de France and future advisor to Napoleon III, and Léonce Reynaud, professor of architecture at the Ecole Polytechnique and designer of the Bréhat lighthouse. The steam engine inventor Pierre Arnaud Séguier was also present, as were writers, historians, and archaeologists Ferdinand de Lasteyrie, Prosper Mérimée and Ludovic Vitet. This group was joined by the journalist and editor Édouard Charton, and the Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur Sibour. The gathering of such eminent figures around the model represented an incontestable success, especially since their expertise covered diverse fields, from engineering, archaeology, and contemporary theory, to politics, journalism and religion. The attention they all devoted to the project suggests that it sparked their interest. The benefit of this operation would be minor if it was not brought to the attention of administrative departments that might favour a commission, and more generally, to the public’s attention. In order to

record their analyses, several examiners added apostils to Lenoir’s essay. Autographs (a form of lithograph) of these handwritten notes were made for them to be disseminated. Lenoir’s essay, accompanied by these apostils, was for example communicated to the *Conseil des bâtiments civils* in 1853, when Boileau sent them a large set of documents.³⁵

If it was important to engage with the administration, it was also essential to gain public favour. To this end, in 1853 Boileau published the book *Nouvelle forme architecturale*.³⁶ It was a collection of elements presenting his research and promoting his invention. Lenoir’s essay was included, as were the apostils³⁷ and a photolithographic reproduction of the model. Thanks to the book, the public could get a good idea of the project even if they had not been able to visit the exhibition.

The whole set of actions imagined by Boileau to make himself better known was thus not just limited to the exhibition, but included the examination of the work on display and the publication of the result. These actions contributed to change his reputation. He was associated with innovation, even though the opinions on the direction his work was taking remained divided. Viollet-le-Duc, for example, expressed exasperation with Boileau’s insistence on promoting his research, which he did not find pertinent. “We express our doubts about the soundness of the *system* Boileau has adopted, a system that has been greatly publicized, via brochures and articles [...] Mr Boileau sent us his brochure twice, and we read it, whatever he may say”.³⁸

During the 1850s and 1860s, Boileau endeavoured to consolidate his reputation as innovative architect. In parallel with his publications, the presentation of his work in exhibitions allowed him to reinforce his position. He actively participated in the official Salons, and when it seemed useful to him, he took the initiative to organize his own exhibitions. If around 1850 he was looking to consolidate his professional status, in the 1860s his reputation as architect and advocate of the use of metal was better established. Exhibiting thus provided a means to make his built work more widely known and demonstrate the validity of his theoretical principles.

Far from ignoring the institutions, on the contrary Boileau appears to have sought their support. So, his independent exhibitions in 1850 and 1862 should be understood as an opportunity for him to further establish himself rather than as a contestation of the official circuits of recognition. While they provide evidence of a certain autonomy from institutions, for Boileau they do not take the role of permanent alternatives to the official events.

To build his reputation, Boileau thus used both the Salon and his personal initiatives. In each case he tried to control the reception of his work, turning criticism in his favour by responding to, or convening experts to evaluate his proposals. The originality of his approach lies perhaps in the protean aspect of his actions. He was acting as an architect, but his practice also derived from an artisanal and entrepreneurial culture to which he remained strongly attached.

Endnotes

- 1 Anonymous 1849, pp. 208-209.
- 2 Daly 1849-1850, p. 214. The church in Mattaincourt was built between 1844 and 1859.
- 3 All quotes are translated from the original French into English. (Translation by R. Oldham.)
- 4 He also took lessons from the architect Louis Piel, whom he met around 1838.
- 5 Bättschmann 1997.
- 6 Bourdieu 1992. Bourdieu's analysis is quoted in Ten-Doesschate Chu 2007.
- 7 For the development of the architectural press since the 18th century, see Bouvier and Leniaud 2001, Wittman 2007, Hvattum and Hultzsch 2018.
- 8 For the history of the Salons, see Lemaire 2004, Lobstein 2006.
- 9 Anonymous 1861, p. 510.
- 10 Anonymous 1865, p. 428.
- 11 Anonymous 1868, p. 509.
- 12 Anonymous 1866, p. 396.
- 13 Anonymous 1867, p. 351.
- 14 Anonymous 1893, pp. 256-257.
- 15 Anonymous 1864a, p. 477.
- 16 Baudot 1865, p. 34.
- 17 Anonymous 1864b, p. 2.
- 18 Boileau 1867, pp. 187-190.
- 19 Coignet 1868, pp. 19-25.
- 20 Boileau 1868, pp. 67-72.
- 21 Anonymous 1865, pp. 800 and 805.
- 22 "I wanted to know how much freedom our era gave us. I had sent a painting of priests, intentionally: *Le Retour d'une Conférence* [...] I had made this painting for it to be refused. I succeeded. And for this reason, it will earn me money." Letter to Albert de la Fizelière, Saintes, 23 April 1863. See Ten-Doesschate Chu 1996, p. 199.
- 23 About 1867, p. 323.
- 24 Pinon 2005, pp. 190-199.
- 25 Lance 1861, p. 83.
- 26 Which could be translated into English with "Abutting vault system".
- 27 Baudot 1867, p. 82.
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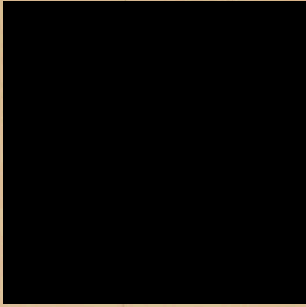
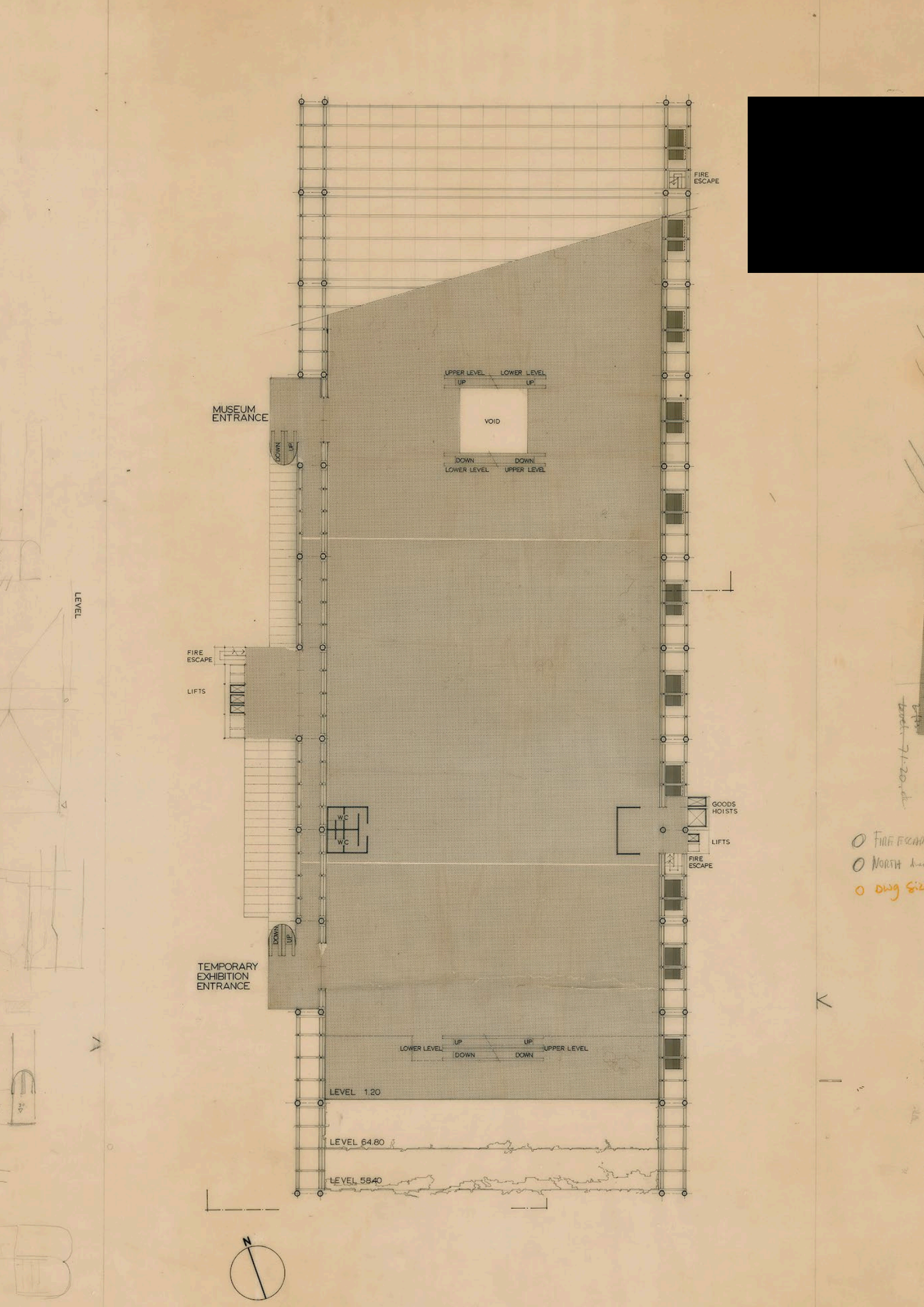
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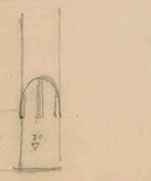
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Piano, Rogers and Hulten for the museum layout of the Centre Pompidou. From the empty loft to the vernacular village of art

Boris Hamzeian

Keywords:

Piano+Rogers Architects, Pontus Hulten, Centre Pompidou, Museum, Paris

ABSTRACT:

The Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou was born out of a desire to reduce architecture to a sequence of empty and internally unobstructed platforms: the manifesto of a kind of democratic, creative and constantly evolving space. Renzo Piano, Richard Rogers, Gianfranco Franchini and Ove Arup & Partners offered these platforms to the Parisians with the idea of designing an anti-museum, where the works of art could be arranged according to the free and creative will of the users, but eventually downgraded behind an audio-visual envelope capable to turn the Centre into a new kind of cultural institution oriented on the emission of counterculture information. Resorting to previously unpublished archive records and interviews, this contribution traces for the first time the complex evolution of the first display for the works of arts of the Centre Pompidou in Paris, from Piano+Rogers Architects' dream of suspended diaphragms for the celebration of a continuous space, to Pontus Hulten's vision of making that kind of loft a mimetic and vernacular device, inspired by the images of the village and its huts and then of the city and its boutiques.

Il Centre du plateau Beaubourg di Parigi, oggi noto come Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, è nato dal desiderio di ridurre l'architettura a una sequenza di piattaforme lisce, vuote e internamente inostruite per assurgere a manifesto di un genere di spazio democratico, creativo e costantemente in evoluzione. Renzo Piano, Richard Rogers, Gianfranco Franchini e Ove Arup & Partners, hanno offerto queste piattaforme ai parigini nell'idea di mettere a punto un'anti museo, dove le opere potessero certamente essere disposte secondo la libera e creativa volontà degli utilizzatori ma in ogni caso declassate dietro un involucro audiovisivo che avrebbe mostrato al mondo un nuovo genere di istituzione culturale orientata sull'emissione di un'informazione popolare e di controultura. Grazie al ricorso a documenti d'archivio e a una serie di interviste inedite ai protagonisti della sua realizzazione, questo contributo rintraccia per la prima volta l'evoluzione complessa del dispositivo museale originario del Centre Pompidou di Parigi, dal sogno di Piano+Rogers Architects di un gioco di diaframmi sospesi per la celebrazione di uno spazio continuo, alla visione di Pontus Hulten di un dispositivo mimetico e vernacolare, alla scala e alla forma del villaggio e delle sue capanne e poi della città e delle sue boutique.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 04: Renzo Piano, Richard Rogers, Gianfranco Franchini (later Piano+Rogers Architects) and Ove Arup & Partners, Competition design for the Centre Beaubourg (later renamed Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou), plan, June 1971. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at RSHP Archives).

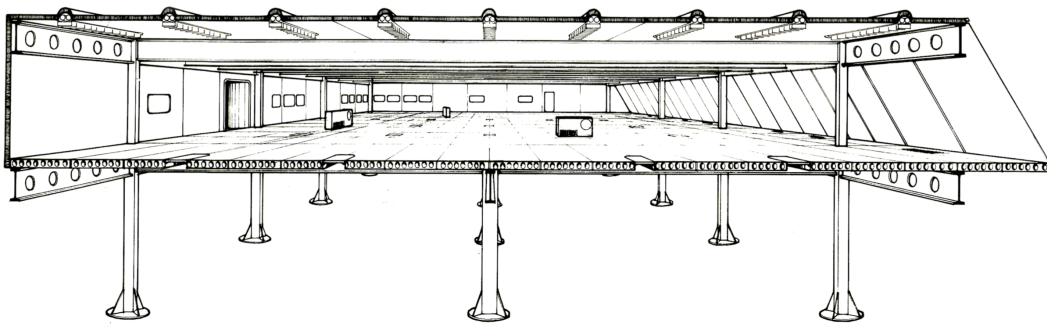
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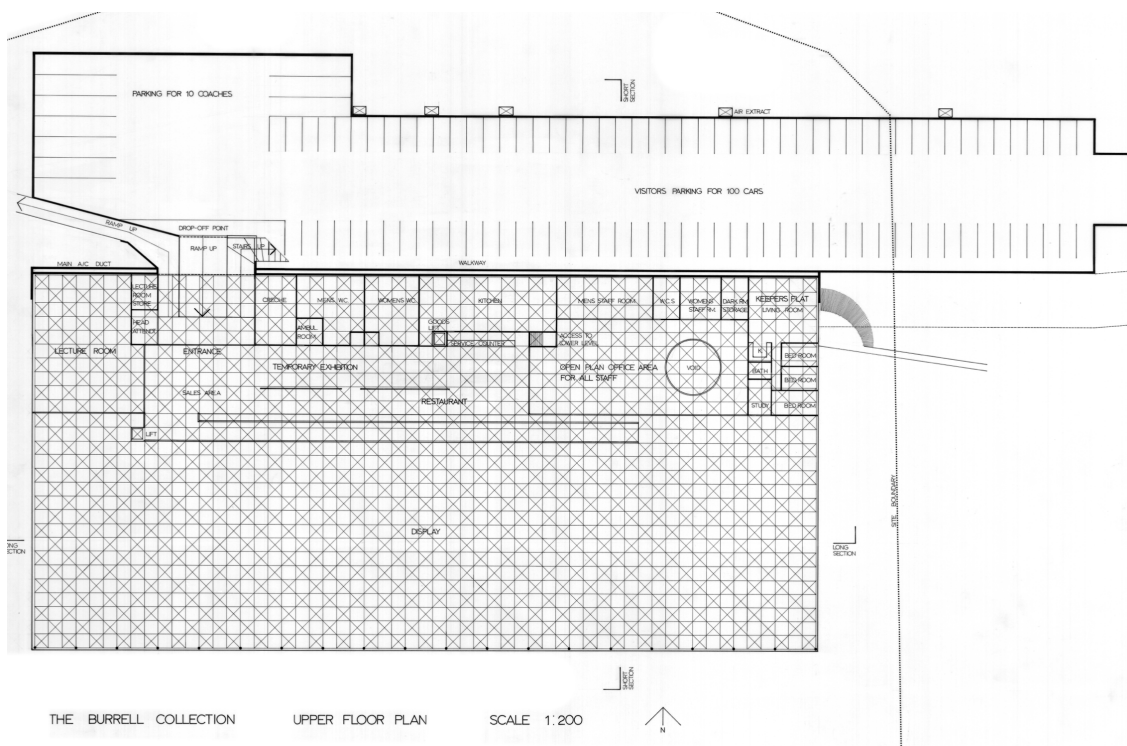
Burrell Art Gallery: the first container for art by Piano+Rogers Architects

The genesis of the work destined to go down in history as the first display for the art collections of the Centre du plateau Beaubourg, today known as Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, can be traced back to a few professional experiments that architects Renzo Piano, Susan and Richard Rogers developed between the second half of the 1960s and the spring of 1971, in the context of the establishment of the firm Piano+Rogers Architects.

Since the “self-supporting shells” of the Zip-Up series developed by the Rogerses against the background of their first meeting with Piano, the idea of reducing architecture to an unconstructed and intrinsically flexible space became clear. The transfiguration of the building into an adaptable environment was achieved with a self-supporting shell without intermediate supports – this is the case of the Zip-Up House, the Universal Oil Products industrial warehouse or the Sweetheart Plastic offices. In case the surface area was such as to require multi-storey solutions, on the other hand, the Rogerses and Piano resorted to



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Fig. 01
Richard+Su Rogers Architects (in collaboration with Hugh Chapman), Zip-Up envelope design for Sweetheart Plastics office extension, interior environment, Gosport, 1969-1970. Copyright Richard+Su Rogers Architects / courtesy Richard Rogers Estates (presso RSHP Archives)

Fig. 02
Piano+Rogers Architects, Competition design for the new siege of the Burrell Gallery, ground floor plan, Glasgow, spring 1971. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at RSHP Archives)

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discrete, punctiform frameworks based on the minimisation of vertical supports, as in the case of the colossal truss of the mobile hospital module of the ARAM Association.

In order to evaluate the potential of an architecture reduced to a simple “infrastructure”, a “system” or a “grill”, the Rogerses and Piano looked at design opportunities with different programmes, ranging from housing to industrial storage and offices. The first opportunity to test the adaptability of this approach to the museum programme can be traced in the spring of 1971 in the context of the competition for

the call for competition, the new-born joint office called Piano+Rogers Architects opted for a variant of the Rogerses’ shells.¹

Rejecting a rigid spatial organisation for the works of art – “The aim has been for the Architecture not to straight-jacket the layout and viewing of the exhibits” - Piano+Rogers Architects envisaged an environment open to a “freedom of organisation to succeeding generations” – an idea, this one, that applied to the museum program the “freedom of choice” the Rogerses wanted to offer to the users of their shells.² With the idea of putting the

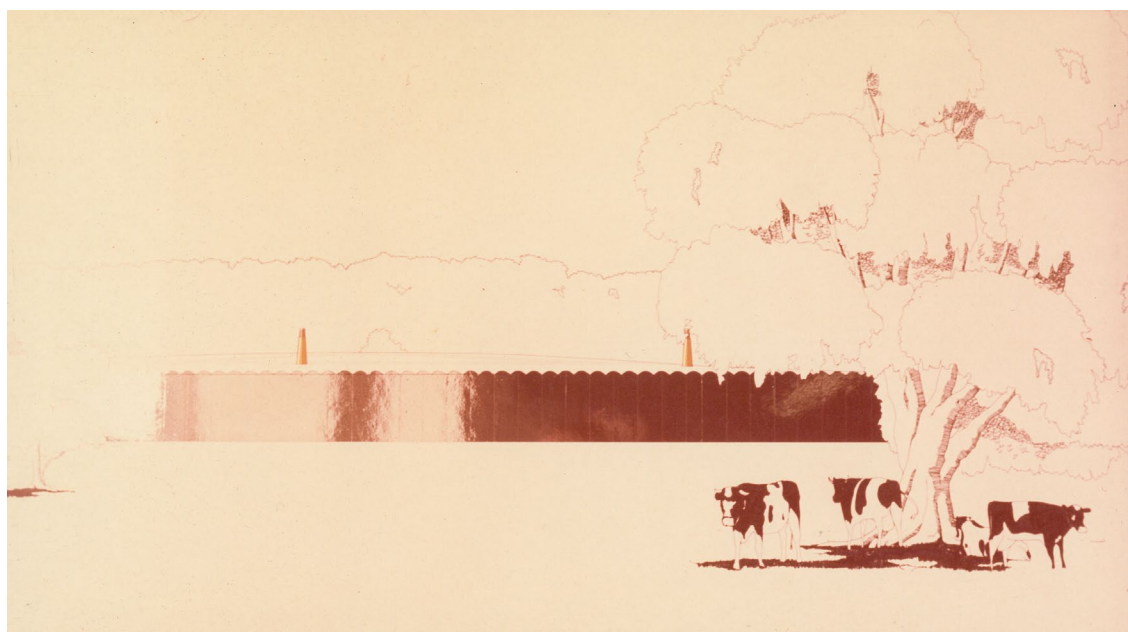


Fig. 03

Piano+Rogers Architects, Competition design for the new siege of the Burrell Gallery, view of the Okalux reflective enclosure against the backdrop of Pollok Park, Glasgow, spring 1971. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at RSHP Archives)

the new headquarters of the eclectic art gallery of the Scottish shipowner William Burrell – a project in which the Rogerses and Piano invested themselves personally and whose fine-tuning preceded by just a few weeks that of the project for the competition for the future Centre Pompidou.

Instead of proposing a traditional building organised according to a succession of rooms, as required by

organisation of the museum space back in the hands of its users and limiting themselves “to provide a highly sensitive environment for the display and conservation of the collection”, Piano+Rogers Architects reiterated the role of the architect outlined since the design for the Fitzroy Shopping Centre in Cambridge (presented to the municipality in the spring of 1971): to offer users a democratic infrastructure in whose free organisation human

beings could emancipate.³

In the project for the Burrell Gallery, the “highly sensitive environment” took the form of a low container with an industrial appearance obtained by combining a spatial metal portal structure based on the Mero system with a translucent envelope with original luminous effects, designed to cover both the perimeter enclosure and the roof. The result took the shape of a “total light box”, a luminous lantern that fitted in with the translucent envelopes of Pierre Chareau and Bernard Bijvoet’s *Maison de Verre*, Philip Johnson’s *Glass House*, and the translucent enclosures that former Rogerses colleague Norman Foster was designing in 1971 for Fred Olsen and IBM, and became a highly technological device at the service of the works of art. “The museum is a total light box, which offers sophisticated controls of degree, quality and character of light, according to the requirements of individual exhibits,” accounts the competition report by Piano+Rogers Architects. The use of a special panel produced by the German company Okalux and consisting of a membrane of microscopic tubes inserted in two glass panels further coated with a mirror-like external finish established a special relationship with the works of art, making the gallery a box to screen and conceal the collection during the day, and to display it at night, creating special correspondences with the park surrounding the site. “The mirror-glass walls and roof reflect the trees and sky during the day, whilst during the night the Museum will become translucent, bathing the surrounding trees in light”.⁴

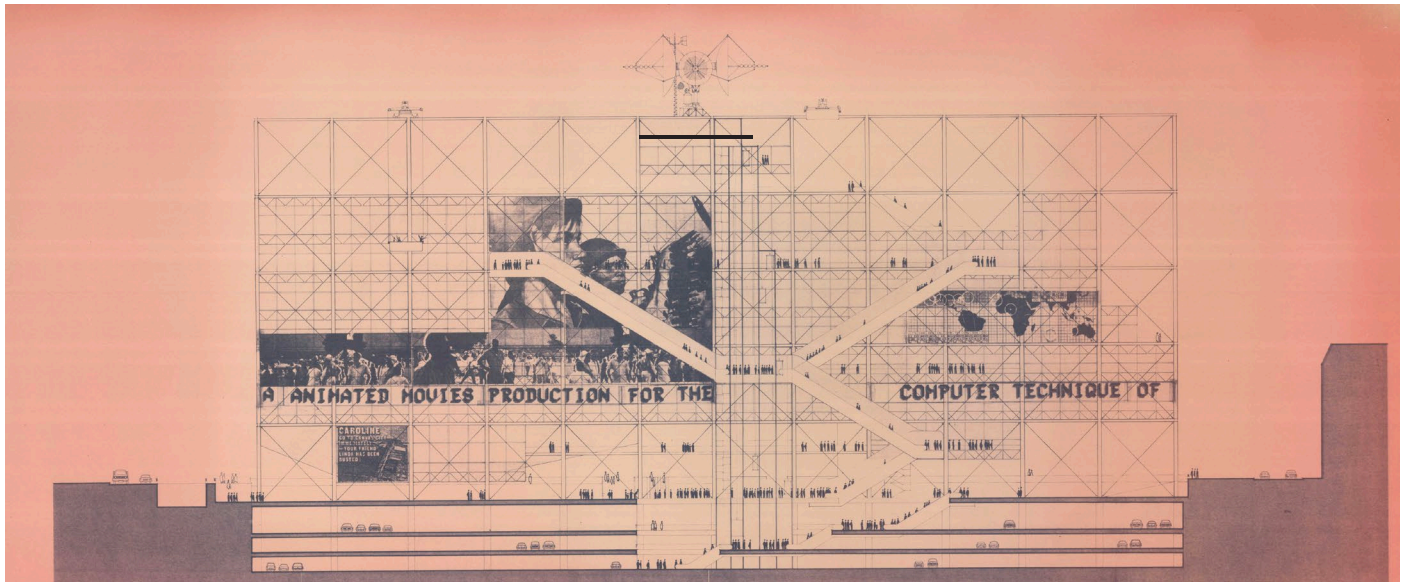
Centre Pompidou: an air-conditioned loft of x cubic metres for contemporary art

The idea of an empty, unbuilt space, which in the Burrell Gallery project was still interrupted by a scenographic mechanical circulation system connecting the exhibition space to a mezzanine, was reworked in the competition project for the Centre du plateau Beaubourg, a centre dedicated to culture and contemporary art that Prime Minister and later French President Georges Pompidou intended to build in order to revitalise contemporary French architecture and offer a place to house the historical collection of the Musée national d’art moderne, the newly-born Centre national d’art contemporain-CNAC and Centre de creation industrielle-CCI and, finally, the future Bibliothèque publique d’information-BPI (the first information library addressed to public reading in France), and the Institut de recherche et coordination acoustique/musique-IRCAM.

Conceived on the initiative of engineer Ted Happold of the Structures 3 division of the London-based engineering firm Ove Arup & Partners, the winning project in the Paris competition was developed by Richard Rogers and Piano, together with the Genoese architect Gianfranco Franchini, a former external collaborator first of Piano and then of the Italian-English team, and John Young, a collaborator and then partner of Richard+Su Rogers Architects and Piano+Rogers Architects. The as yet unresolved idea in the Burrell Gallery to use a perimeter structure to free up the interiors in Paris was

rendered in a pair of steel trusses over one hundred and sixty metres long, known as “3-dimensional walls”, arranged at a distance of almost fifty metres from each other and conceived to support a sequence of platforms varying in size from 5500 to 7500 square metres

cluded from the Floor Areas, from the air conditioning ducts arranged in a cascade configuration on the 3-dimensional wall facing east, to the mechanical circulation system, whose scenographic complex of galleries, escalators and lifts was exhibited on the 3-dimensional wall to the



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Fig. 05

Renzo Piano, Richard Rogers, Gianfranco Franchini (later Piano+Rogers Architects) and Ove Arup & Partners, Competition project for the Centre Beaubourg, elevation on the sunken square, Paris, June 1971. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at the foundation in Genoa-Milan).

and without intermediate supports. These platforms were “large” in order to accommodate all the functions indicated in the notice; they were “uninterrupted” because they avoided any type of encumbrance, from the structure to the technical organs (“totally uninterrupted floor space is achieved by limiting all vertical structure, servicing and movement to the exterior”); they were “flexible” because they allow any type of occupation and compartmentalisation (“the building offers maximum flexibility of use”); they were empty and therefore reduced to simple “floor areas” or “floor spaces”. “[...] a number of large, flexible uninterrupted floor areas” is the definition given in the competition report.⁵ Unlike the Burrell Gallery, for the Centre Beaubourg all the technical services were ex-

west to be admired from a “sunken square” dug into the underground of the historic centre and extended to the entire project site.

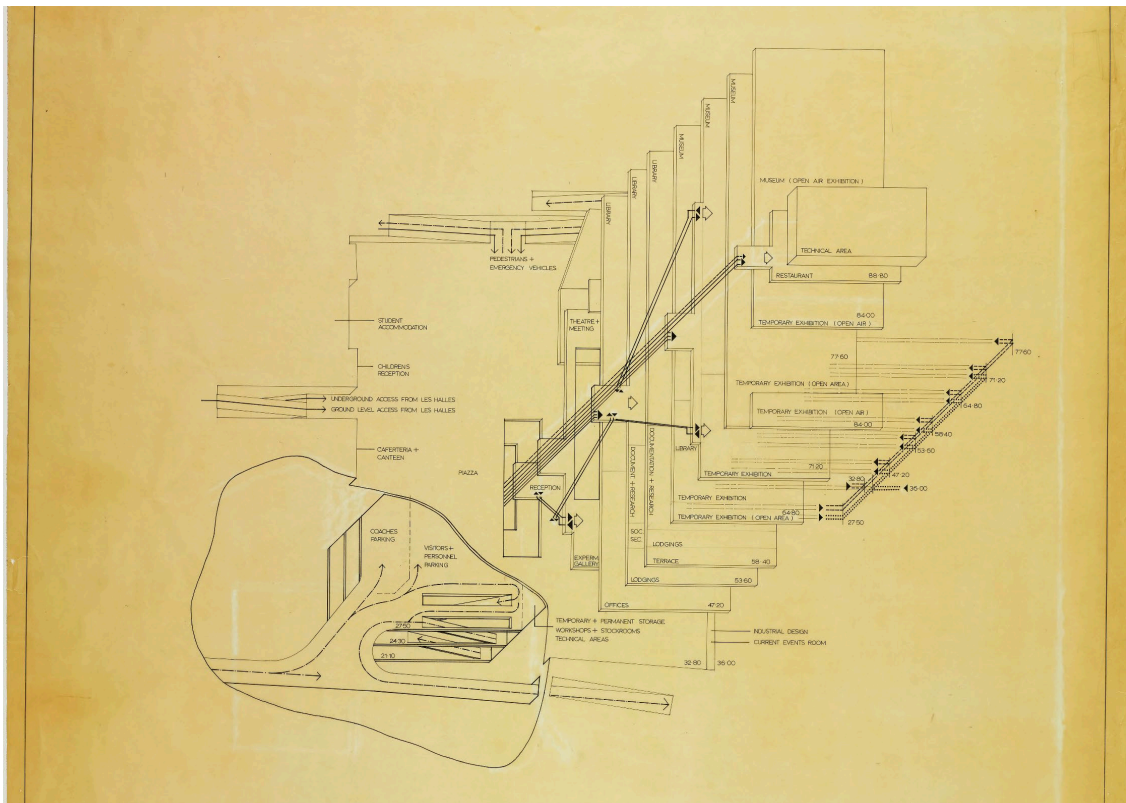
Although Franchini studied the layout of the programme to be placed on the Centre’s platforms, the idea that the platforms could accommodate any function was translated into one of the competition drawings, the 1:200 scale floor plan. Although it referred to a particular floor of what the team ambiguously defined as both a “grid” and a “building” – the Floor Area at an altitude of 71.20 metres above sea level – and despite the ambiguous choice of representing a battery of escalators, a partition and a toilet module inside it, this plan turned into the manifesto of an architecture reduced to a completely empty space, nothing more than a loft of x cubic metres

of air.

The idea of allocating this loft to the kind of works of art contained in the Centre's collections appeared still ambiguous and uncertain. In the idea of Piano, Rogers and Franchini, the Centre wanted to be neither a traditional museum nor a classic library. It aspired to become an

one case for the crowd gathered in the sunken square and in the other for the passing cars on Rue Beaubourg-Rue du Renard.

The fact that in the Parisian competition Piano, Rogers and Franchini were relying on the audio-visual technology to define a kind of anti-museum and that the nature of



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avant-garde educational institution that Piano, Rogers and Franchini had been thinking about since 1970. The team offered President Pompidou a “Live Centre of Information” for the production and exchange of a kind of counter-culture that at the moment had nothing to do with France’s artistic heritage but with a topical genre ranging from “global disasters” to the technological advances of the West. The translucent and reflecting envelope experimented at the Burrell Gallery in Paris featured an original audio-visual envelope to be placed on the 3-dimensional walls and intended, in

the museographic device for the works of art in the collection was uncertain is confirmed in the definition of the project shared in the opening of the competition report.⁶ The fact that the Centre Beaubourg was presented as a “cross” between “an information-oriented, computerised Times Square” and the “British Museum” suggests that in the eyes of the architects, the audio-visual envelope was supposed to combine with a traditional kind of museographic display to be arranged on platforms, probably composed of rooms and galleries, and in any case incompatible with the kind of light,

Fig. 06 Renzo Piano, Richard Rogers, Gianfranco Franchini and Ove Arup & Partners, Competition design for the Centre Beaubourg, axonometry with uses, Paris, June 1971. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at RSHP Archives).

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reconfigurable equipment Piano, Rogers and Franchini were looking at.

The jury's verdict: a flexible suitcase for the satisfaction of users

In spite of the uncertainties entrusted to the competition text, the image of empty platforms where anything can happen did not go unnoticed by the members of the international jury headed by the French builder Jean Prouvé, who in July 1971 were called to the Grand Palais in Paris to identify one among more than six hundred visions that as many teams from all over the world were ready to offer Georges Pompidou. The

arts et de lettres Gaëtan Picon, the curator of the painting collection of the Louvre Museum Michel Laclotte and the former director of the British Museum of London Frank Francis – could only go towards a proposal like the one presented by Piano, Rogers, Franchini and Ove Arup & Partners, since it intercepted the competition organisers' interest in a kind of space that was intrinsically flexible and evolutive. Confirmation lies in the very first ideas Pompidou shared with Sébastien Loste, the man he appointed to outline the content of what he already considered his “monument”. Between the winter of 1969 and the spring of 1970, Loste associated the museum spaces of the future Centre with the image of “large, equipped han-

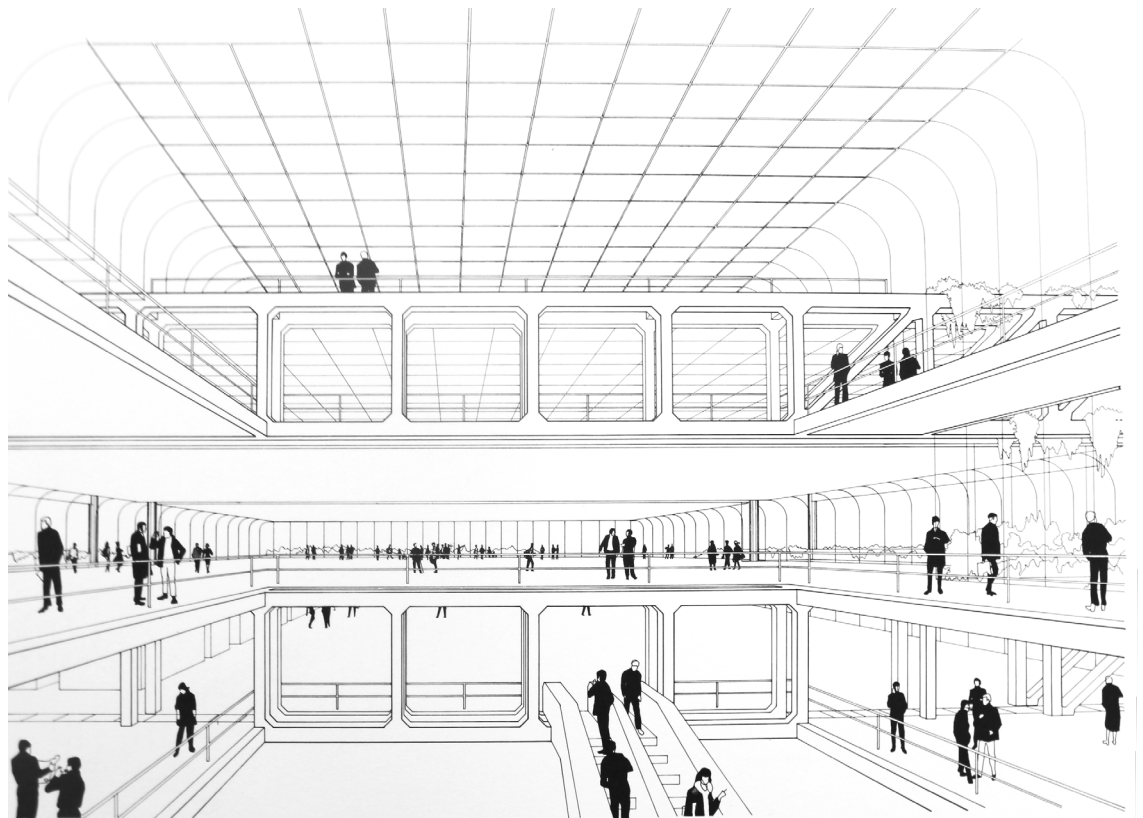
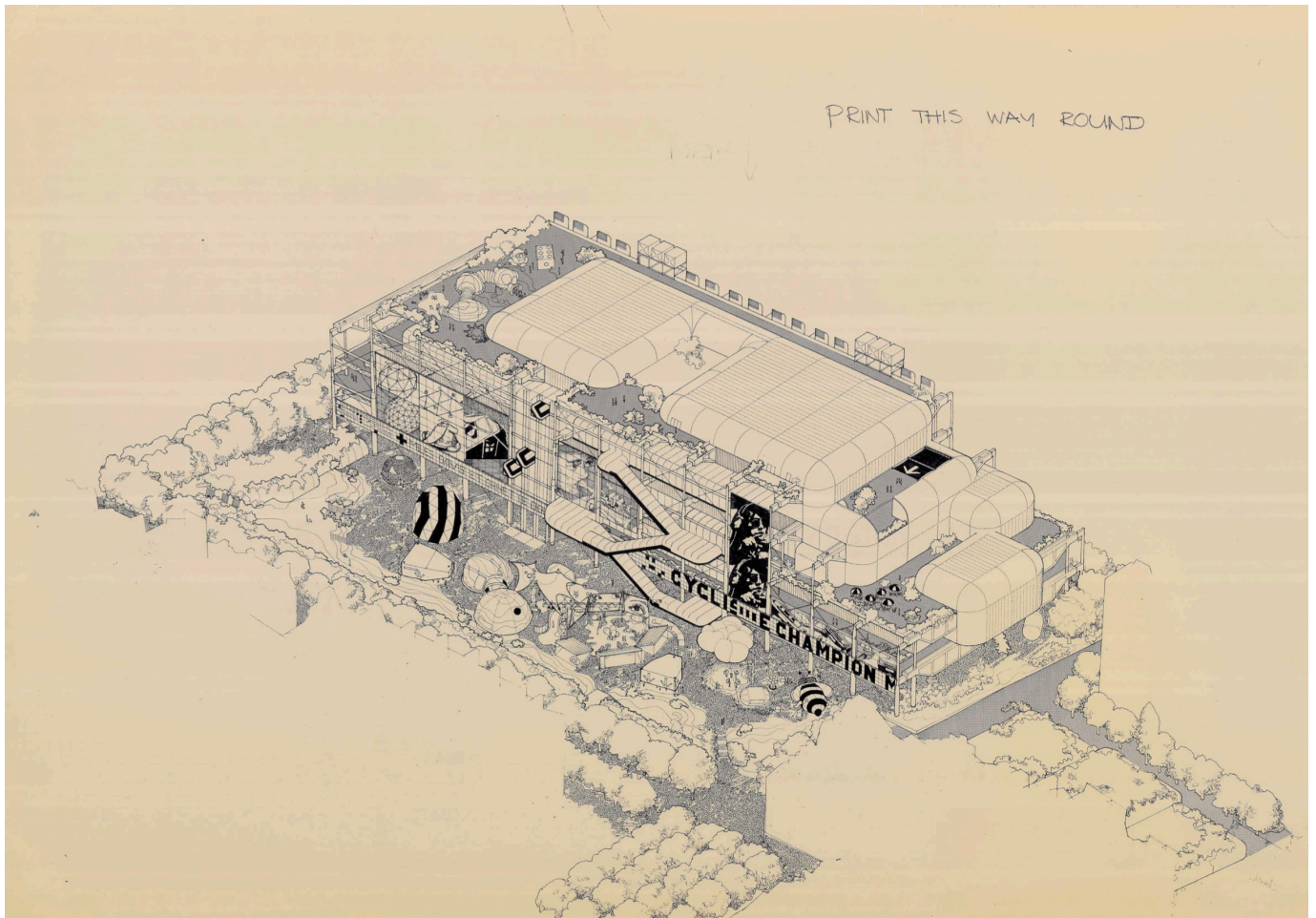


Fig. 07
Piano+Rogers Architects and Ove Arup & Partners, Centre Beaubourg, First fine-tuning of the project (Avant-projet sommaire I), interior view with superimposition of servant and served floors and translucent envelope near the exhibition areas on the top floor, Paris, November 1971. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at RSHP Archives).

interest of the jurors, and in particular of the four members called upon to represent the content of the future Centre – the museum director Willem Sandberg, the former director of the Département des

gars” mentioned by the director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Pontus Hulten, one of the greatest protagonists of post-World War II museography and destined to beco-



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me the first director of the Département des arts plastiques of the Pompidou Centre.

The fact that the flexible platforms offered by Piano, Rogers, Franchini and Ove Arup & Partners satisfied a number of jurors is confirmed by their comments during the selection process. Firstly, they assigned the epithet “valise” (suitcase) to the future winning project, which, in addition to the box-like volumetry, had to do with the inherent flexibility of the Floor Areas. Secondly, in the framework of the final jury meeting for the Parisian competition, Francis emphasised the spatial “potentials” of the project; Laclotte considered it “the best [project] for the museum” and Picon, in the decisive intervention for the victory of this project, highlighted its “flexibility”,

declaring that its victory would “satisfy all the users [of the Centre]”.⁷

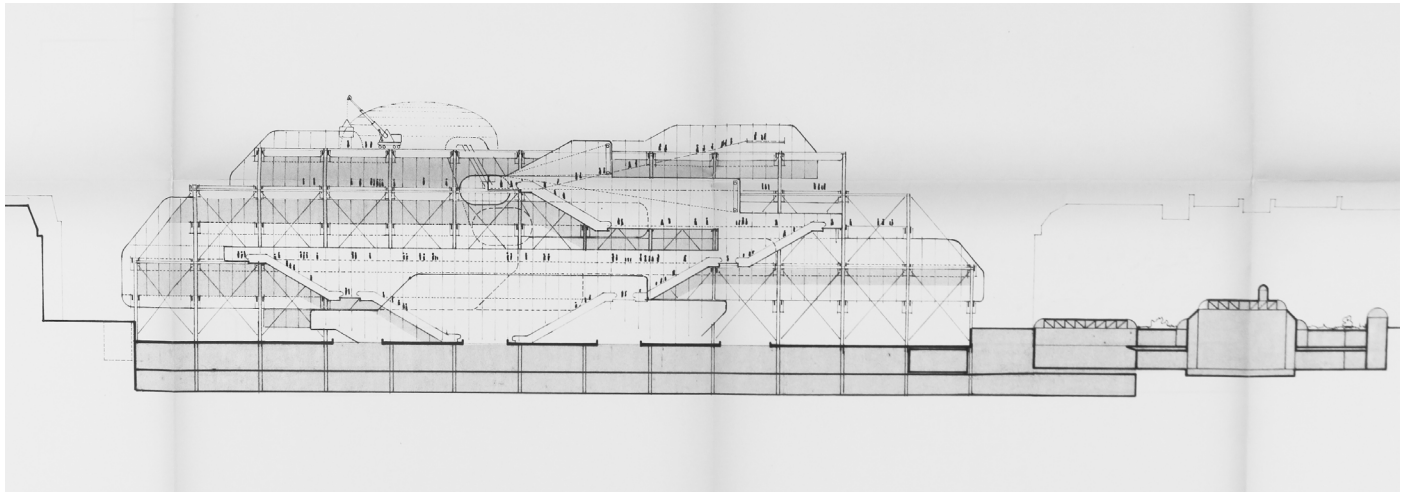
The hesitations of the curator of the Musée national d’art moderne Bozo: “a refusal of the museum”

Following their winning in the Parisian competition, Piano, Rogers, Franchini and Ove Arup & Partners were invited to meet with the main members of the body set up to coordinate the realisation of the project, the Délégation pour la réalisation du Centre Beaubourg (Delegation for the realisation of the Centre Beaubourg), and the representatives of the institutions destined to be contained in the Centre. The Musée national d’art moderne was represented by its director Jean Leymarie

Fig. 08

Piano+Rogers Architects and Ove Arup & Partners, Centre Beaubourg, First fine-tuning of the project (Avant-projet sommaire I), axonometric view of building and active surface, Paris, November 1971. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at RSHP Archives).

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and curator Dominique Bozo, while the Centre national d'art contemporain was represented by its director Blaise Gautier and curator Germain Viatte. The representatives of the programming teams of the Délégation and the Centre national d'art contemporain approved the museum layout of the winning project, while the Musée national d'art moderne raised numerous observations. The meeting in this case took place in the presence of Loste, François Lombard, head of the programming team of the Délégation, Hubert Landais, adjoint of the director of the Musées de France Jean Chatelain and Bozo, but without Leymarie, whose absence was already a forewarning of what would in the following months turn out to be a resistance and then a boycott of the transfer of the museum's collection from its historical location at the Palais de Tokyo to the Centre Beaubourg. In the framework of the discussion with the architects, Landais criticised the ambiguity of the quotation on the British Museum, judging it as an outdated model; he applauded the use of an inherently flexible device; but he urged the team to back up what he interpreted as a volumetric approach to the museum with a detailed design.

Landais hinted that the loft design had, at least in some cases, to be reworked into what he described as "rooms".⁸

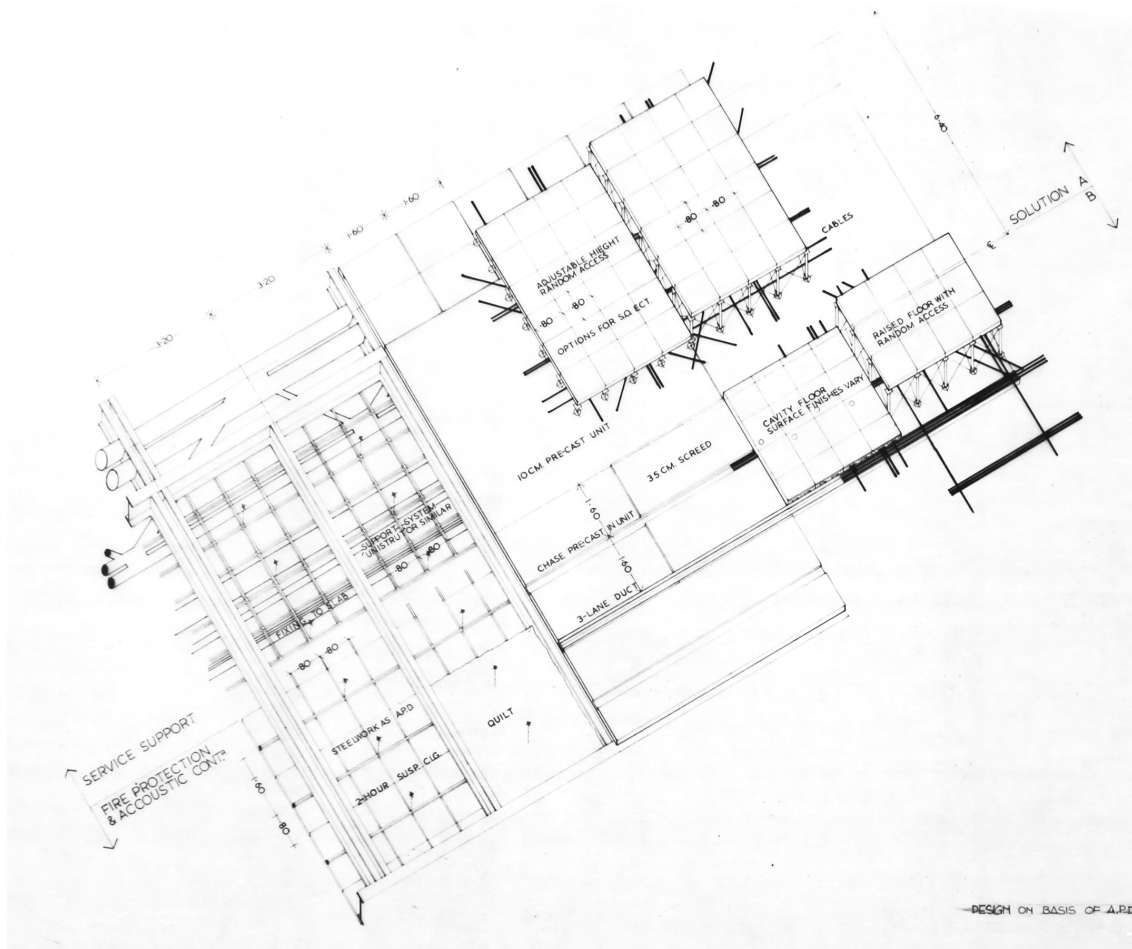
From this stage of the project, Bozo also seemed to share Landais' opinion. After all, Bozo is the same person who, years after the inauguration of the Centre, would have undermined the flexible museum layout imagined by the architects with the kind of "rooms" Landais was speaking about in the summer of 1971. At that meeting, Bozo did not yet make explicit his own museum vision for the Centre, but he did hint at his aversion to the idea of reducing the museum to a sequence of empty platforms. Both in their nature and in their arrangement on the upper floors of the building (and consequently in a position away from the street and the main access to the Centre), according to Bozo, the Floor Areas of the Centre represented a contemporary tendency that he labelled as "a refusal of the very idea of a museum".⁹

Loste, however, who must certainly have identified those platforms with the avant-garde museology trajectory indicated by Hulten, defended the museum layout of the project from Landais' and Bozo's criticism

Fig. 09
Piano+Rogers Architects and Ove Arup & Partners, Centre Beaubourg, draft for the second fine-tuning of the project (Amended Design), elevation of the building with organic, rounded profile envelope, Paris, February 1972. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at Archives Nationales).

and urged the architects to equip the museum with a zenithal lighting system, according to a solution already experimented at the Burrell Gallery.

Architect did not, however, delve into the museum layout destined to fit into that container, perhaps by choice (as was made clear in the Burrell Gallery report), or perhaps because of the constant absences of the Musée national d'art mod-



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From the attempted organic transfiguration of the museum space, to equipping the loft with high-tech gadgets

During the first two years of the project's fine tuning, from the autumn of 1971 to the summer of 1973, the Piano+Rogers Architects team devoted itself to the perfecting of the Centre's works of art container, from the nature of its envelope to the development of a series of highly technological equipment at the service of its users. Piano+Rogers

erne representatives at the periodic meetings for the adjustment between programme and project.

In the first phase of the project's fine-tuning, between the summer of 1971 and February 1972, under the direction of Tony Dugdale and then that of the young Anglo-Saxon trio composed of Mike Davies, Alan Stanton and Chris Dawson, all of whom had professional and academic experience with the Anglo-Saxon group Archigram, the Centre's platforms lost their nature of emptied and flexible environments. In the

Fig. 10
Piano+Rogers Architects and Ove Arup & Partners, Centre Beaubourg, Third fine-tuning of the project (Avant-projet détaillé), computer floor, Paris, November 1972

Boris Hamzeian

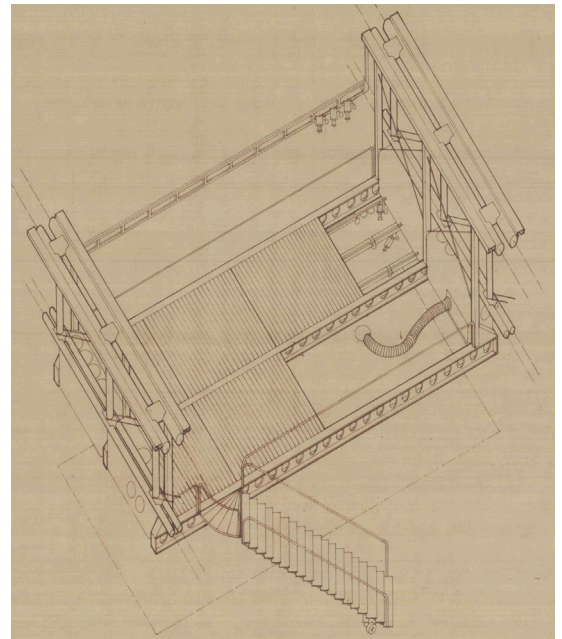
first preliminary design report, the so-called *Avant-projet sommaire* of autumn 1971, the platforms were transfigured into spaces traversed by colossal *Vierendeel*-type floor beams and enclosed by translucent shells offering the zenithal illumination sought by Loste at the price of an enclosure with *archigram*esque rounded profiles similar to those of the *Zip-Up* series. The intention to experiment with a kind of space independent of the trilithic structure of the 3-dimensional walls and platforms was taken to extremes in the second *Avant-projet sommaire* drafted between December 1971 and February 1972. The Centre interiors were transfigured in a play of expansions and contractions of volumes borrowed from the pneumatic forms experimented and realised by Davies, Stanton and Dawson in the United States. The result consisted of a space for art made of concavity and convexity envisioned by Frederick Kiesler in the *Endless House* and then by David Greene in his *Spray Plastic House*.

Fig. 11
Piano+Rogers Architects and Ove Arup & Partners, Centre Beaubourg, Third fine-tuning of the project (*Avant-projet détaillé*), mezzanine, Paris, November 1972. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at RSHP Archives).

Fig. 12
Piano+Rogers Architects and Ove Arup & Partners, Centre Beaubourg, Third fine-tuning of the project (*Avant-projet détaillé*), Model of the Forum equipped with mobile and reconfigurable stalls for performances and meetings, Paris, spring 1973. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at the foundation in Genoa-Milan).

At the instigation of Rogers and with the complicity of the *Délégation*, in the spring of 1973 the project regained the boxy appearance of the competition and Piano+Rogers Architects devoted themselves to equipping the platforms with high-tech gadgets. The floor of the loft was fitted with a modular counter-floor, known as “computer floor”, which, crossed by an infrastructure for the passage of energy, fluids and data, allowed users to imagine evolving set-ups. To offer a further degree of flexibility to the interior, Piano+Rogers Architects equipped the Computer floor modules with pistons capable of transforming the ground into a three-di-

mensional relief reminiscent of the set design Maurizio Sacripanti had

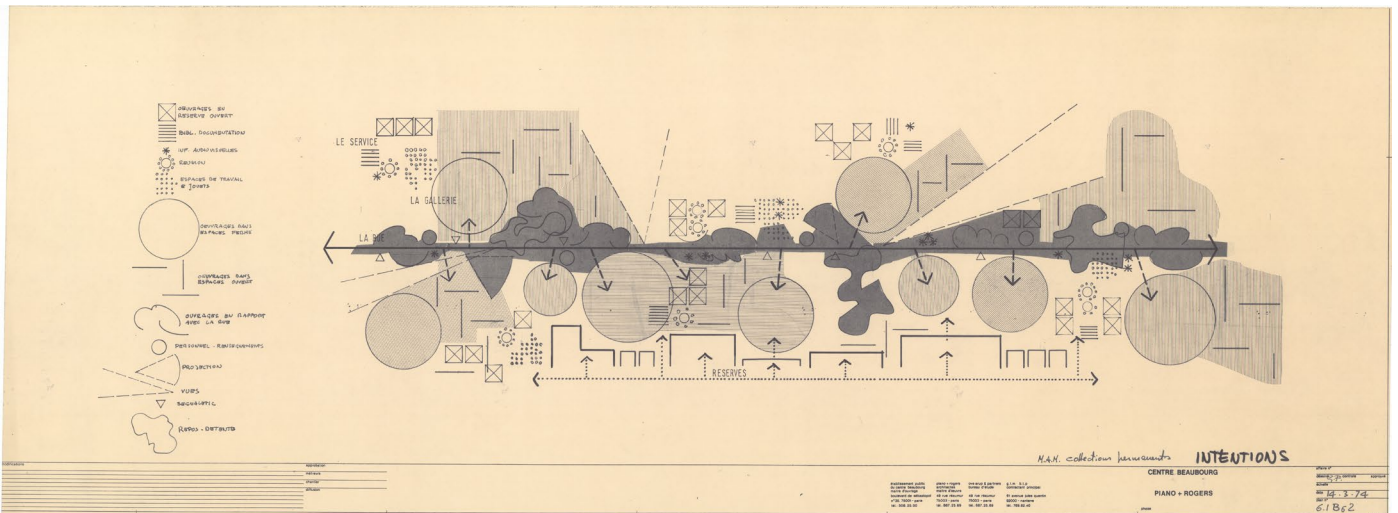


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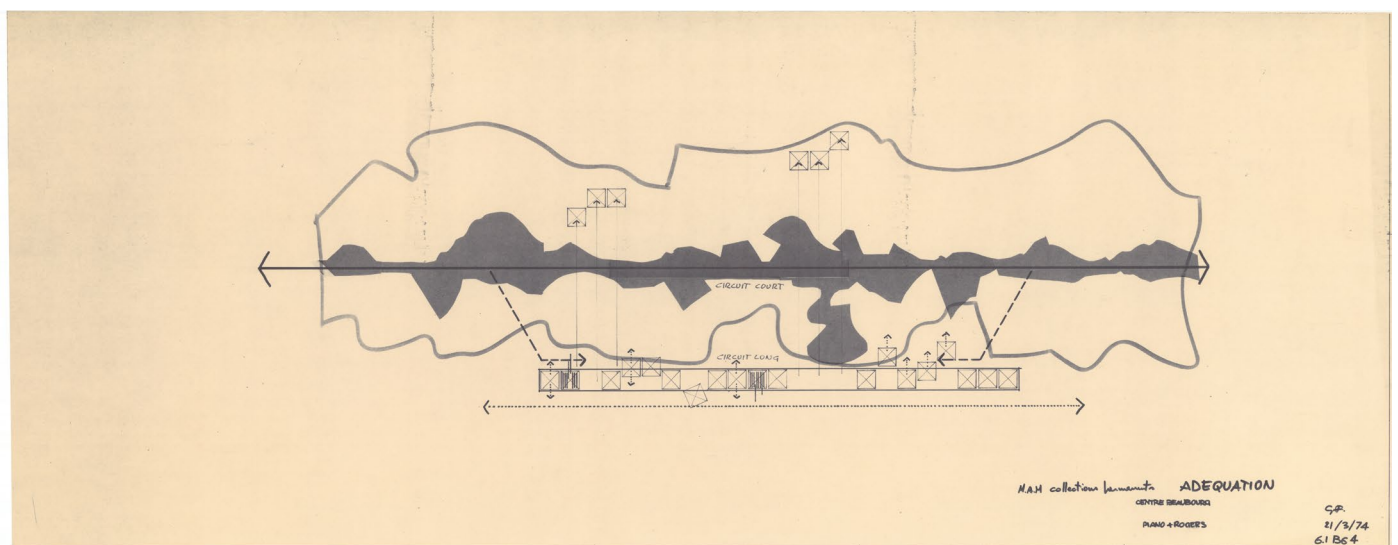


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imagined for his *Teatro totale*. The computer floor was counterpointed by self-propelled mezzanines to compartmentalise the loft into double-height rooms for exhibition purposes. For the enclosure of the loft, an envelope of modular panels was envisaged. Even if Rogers would have liked to reduce it to a pioneering system of hot and cold air jets in the wake of the dematerialisation of the envelope promoted by the critic Reyner Banham, it finally took the form of a more traditional glass enclosure with shapes and proportions similar to those of the Burrell Gallery. The use of a smooth ceiling similar to that of Archizoom Asso-



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ciati's *No Stop City* was called into question by the discovery of the aesthetic and decorative value of the air conditioning system. The colossal air treatment chambers invaded the roof of the building, putting an end to the hypothesis of a translucent roof for the illumination of art. Instead, the air distribution and recovery ducts were hooked to the ceiling in a configuration that, together with the imposing exposed Warren steel trusses, made the technical services the new protagonists of the Centre's interior.

The French fire authorities also contributed to undermining the spatiality outlined in the competition. They required the compartmental-

isation of the loft into three sectors by means of heavy, thick firewalls which Piano+Rogers Architects would have liked to transform into retractable bulkheads to be activated in case of need, but which were ultimately translated into mighty opaque partitions. For the envelope, the fire authorities obliged the architects to forego a completely transparent closure and to resort to opaque diaphragms to be arranged in correspondence with the structural lines of the building and the air-conditioning system intended to run across the entire width of the 3-dimensional wall facing east. Although they devised multiple solutions to ensure total transparency of the envelope – the removal of the

Fig. 13 Gianfranco Franchini (Piano+Rogers Architects), museum layout for the collections of the Musée national d'art moderne at the Centre Beaubourg, schematic plan, Paris, March 1974. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at RSHIP Archives).

Boris Hamzeian

Fig. 14
Gianfranco Franchini (Piano+Rogers Architects), museum layout for the collections of the Musée national d'art moderne at the Centre Beaubourg, schematic plan with indication of the visitor circuits, Paris, March 1974. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at RSHP Archives).

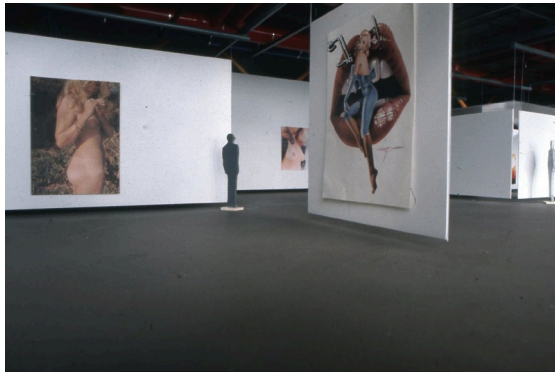


Fig. 15
Shunji Ishida (Piano+Rogers Architects), Museum layout for the collections of the Musée national d'art moderne at the Centre Beaubourg, model, view of suspended panels, Paris, March 1974. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at the foundation in Genoa-Milan).

metal frame and the use of pioneering reinforced glass are being studied – the architects and engineers gave in to the partial infill of the Centre's envelope with an opaque sandwich panel that on the 3-dimensional wall to the east, rendered the entire façade opaque, transforming it into a rear wall, while to the west it drew a heavy grid that turned the main façade into a windowed wall, thus putting a definitive end to what could have appeared as a “total light box” in the heart of Paris.

The museum layout by Piano+Rogers Architects: diaphragms suspended in a fluid and continuous space

Fig. 16
Shunji Ishida (Piano+Rogers Architects), Museum layout for the collections of the Musée national d'art moderne at the Centre Beaubourg, model, view on suspended panels and “cinakothèque”, Paris, March 1974. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at the foundation in Genoa-Milan).

Between the spring and summer of 1973, at a time when the impossibility of using the audio-visual and informational envelope that would revolutionise the very definition of a museum as a container for art had become explicitly clear, Franchini, by then in charge of the team in charge of defining the interiors and flanked by Stanton, drew up the first proposals for the museum layout of the Centre Beaubourg. Franchini and Stanton intended to immerse the visitor in a chronological itinerary to be developed along the longitudinal axis of the platform. The traditional circuit



consisting of a succession of rooms and galleries enclosed by walls and ceilings was replaced by an open arrangement of panels where canvases could be hung according to a solution already experimented in Herbert Beyer's installation for the Werkbund exhibition at the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, in the most famous installations of the British Independent Group, and in the monographic exhibition on Piet Mondrian that Mies van der Rohe adopted in his Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin.

By using a “rolling beam” designed to hook onto the ceiling in the most diverse configurations to accommodate the exhibition panels and the lighting system, and by suspending the panels from the floor, Franchini and Stanton transfigured the wall into a diaphragm that no longer compartmentalised the space into an enclosed environment for the intimate contemplation of the work of art. The diaphragm preserved and celebrated the continuous space outlined at the competition – a space where art floated according to a solution that multiplied the points of observation of the canvas and pushed it to confront other works in the collection according to previously unimaginable visual and perspective games. Although there are no precise indications as to the reserves of the collection, it

is possible that the containers that Piano+Rogers Architects started drawing on the platforms to generate a spatial organisation borrowed from the German *burolanshaft* to enhance the principle of the free plan could also be used to store and display works of art. From panels hovering on rolling beams to self-propelled capsules for the free appropriation of space, Franchini and Stanton are developing a display device that goes beyond the Miesian model that inspired them, enriching it with an unprecedented degree of mobility, impermanence and change.

The arrival of Hulten, the opposition to the expressive display of technology and the use of the metaphor of the village of huts

Following Leymarie's increasingly explicit resistance to the transfer of the art collection to the new Centre,¹⁰ between autumn 1972 and spring 1973 Pompidou convinced himself to entrust the future Département des arts plastiques, born from the merger of the Musée national d'art moderne and the Centre national d'art contemporain, to Hulten, chosen after a round of consultation in which the presidential secretary for cultural affairs Henry Domerg and the director of the Delegation, Robert Bordaz, took part.

Having taken over the new functions at the Centre, Hulten expressed immediately a number of reservations regarding the studies of Piano+Rogers Architects. The Centre's loft certainly resembled the "large, equipped hangars" Hulten had indicated a few years earlier as

the new direction of contemporary museology.¹¹ Hulten was also aware that the Centre's loft represented a great opportunity for an alternative layout – "Beaubourg is a rare opportunity to create a system that differs from what currently exists in the world".¹² Nonetheless, this was precisely the reason that led him to recognize that the complex mechanics conceived by the architects to make the interior of the Centre flexible were eventually incompatible with the quest of liberation of the work of art from its support. In Hulten's opinion, the rolling beam subjected the configuration of the installation to the movements limited by its own mechanics and this was unacceptable because "all systems for displaying works of art are always based on the need to adapt to an existing building" and Beaubourg was an opportunity to conceive "a completely free display layout".¹³

In order to protect the works of art from the cumbersome mechanics envisioned by Piano+Rogers Architects Hulten requested the elimination of the rolling beam and reacted to the opportunity offered by the loft in the definition of a cubicle installed on the ground, ("Mr Hulten felt the need for a fixed element"),¹⁴ enclosed, where the structure and installations disappeared, where technology was reduced to air conditioning and light filtering through a permeable roof, and where art could be contemplated on a scale that was not that of the loft but that of the individual works, to create a "dramatic" and "intimate" effect on the public.¹⁵ This cubicle could bring Hulten back to the room of traditional museology. In the choice of the name "cabane" (hut), clarified as early as October, Hulten

revealed his willingness to colonise the undivided space of the loft with an element capable of generating original aggregations, which, a few months later, in December, would have been specified in the metaphorical images of the village and the labyrinth.¹⁶

With the same assumptions that led him to the hut, Hulten also transfigured the mezzanine and, from a

ginal arrangement on the ground.

Although the huts allowed Hulten to create spatial aggregations new to museography such as the labyrinth, the desire to structure the visit according to a didactic itinerary that conveyed the evolution of 20th-century art guided him towards the linear solution suggested by Franchini and Stanton, which for Hulten, however, echoed the image

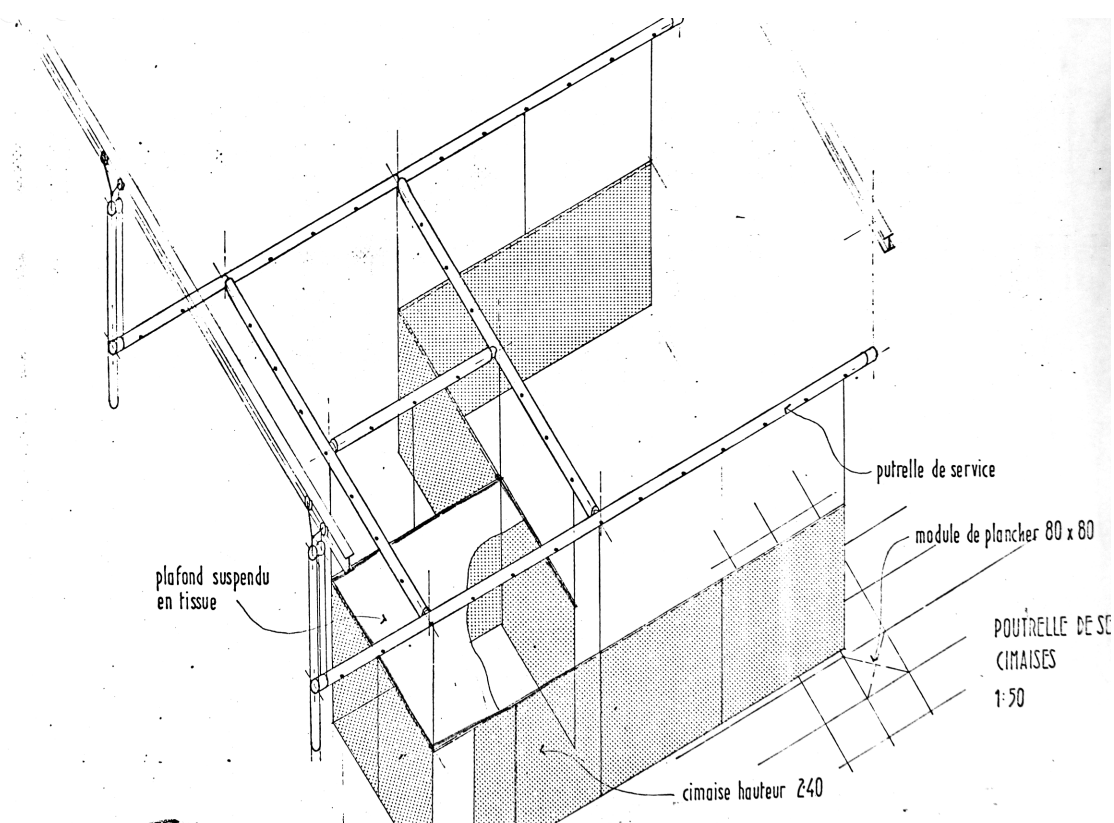


Fig. 17
Gianfranco Franchini and Alan Stanton (Piano+Rogers Architects), museum layout for the collections of the Musée national d'art moderne at the Centre Beaubourg, detail of the panels with exposed tubular frame, Paris, summer 1974. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects / courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (located at Archives Nationales).

self-propelled technological device, turned it into a closed and fixed container, where the works of art normally arranged in the museum's reserves could become accessible to the public, and where the suspension system could be used to extract the paintings with an original curtain mechanism.¹⁷ In this way, Hulten revived the architects' idea of using container-capsules to arrange the collection's reserves but deprived it of the degree of freedom of movement provided by their ori-

of village dwellings arranged on the sides of a road. The aggregation of the huts on the sides of an axial path risked returning the layout of the Centre to the traditional configuration of a sequence of rooms and galleries, but Hulten avoided this risk because, true to the metaphor of the village, he arranged a maze of huts on either side of the main axis where the visitor could enter to discover the works of art. The result consisted of an itinerary based on the combination of two museum

circuits: one chronological-axial, to show the evolution of 20th century art through major works of art, and for this reason also suitable for a non-expert public; and the other, thematic-lateral, to allow visitors interested in particular works to penetrate between or inside the huts, to admire other works by the same author or of the same era, like a passer-by who, attracted by a shop window, enters to study the merchandise.¹⁸ The number of huts also contributed to this analogy between the exhibition space and the evolution of art: they had to be more numerous in the areas of the route corresponding to historical periods of intense artistic production, they had to disappear and be replaced by rest areas in those of rupture or creative silence. For the display of art, in addition to huts and suspended containers for works in reserve, Hulten foresaw as well vertical panels resting on the ground for the display of individual works in a “dramatic” function, and as yet unspecified devices for arranging artworks horizontally on the ground.¹⁹ Like Loste, Hulten also suggested the use of a zenithal lighting system on the fifth floor, but this appeal was to remain unsuccessful given the final positioning of the technical installations on the roof of the building.

In Hulten’s vision, art had not to be confined to the exhibition areas of the Département des Arts Plastiques but should find its place in the Centre’s main areas, from the terraces, to the entrance on the ground floor, to the 3-dimensional wall, in order to reach the visitor at every moment of his visit and to encourage a popular and democratic artistic enjoyment. Although the hypothesis of making the 3-di-

mensional wall a support for the contemporary artistic avant-garde was studied by Piano+Rogers Architects according to a solution combining information screens and optical art panels capable of interacting with the building’s mechanics, this solution was destined to remain on paper. The fate of the Centre’s large access room on the ground floor, now known as the Forum, is different. Hulten called for the transformation of this environment, which Piano and Rogers had imagined as a vital popular theatre for the crowd, into a museum showcase that anticipated for visitors the kind of artworks housed in the museum arranged on the upper floors of the building. The Forum took the form of an exhibition space to host large-scale contemporary art installations, of which Hulten already mentioned “an experience of collective creation” by Jean Tinguely and an installation by Salvador Dalí.²⁰

The reworking of the museum layout without Piano+Rogers Architects: from village’s huts to neighbourhood boutiques

Between December 1973 and February 1974, Piano+Rogers Architects had to deal with one of the most delicate phases of the project’s fine-tuning. The difficulty of controlling the design of the colossal steel structure and the technical installations (both moved under the control of Arup’s engineers) convinced Rogers to review his positions and to design not only the Centre’s main equipment but all its elements, from furniture to ashtrays, in the attempt to reaffirm the role of the architects in the project of the Centre.

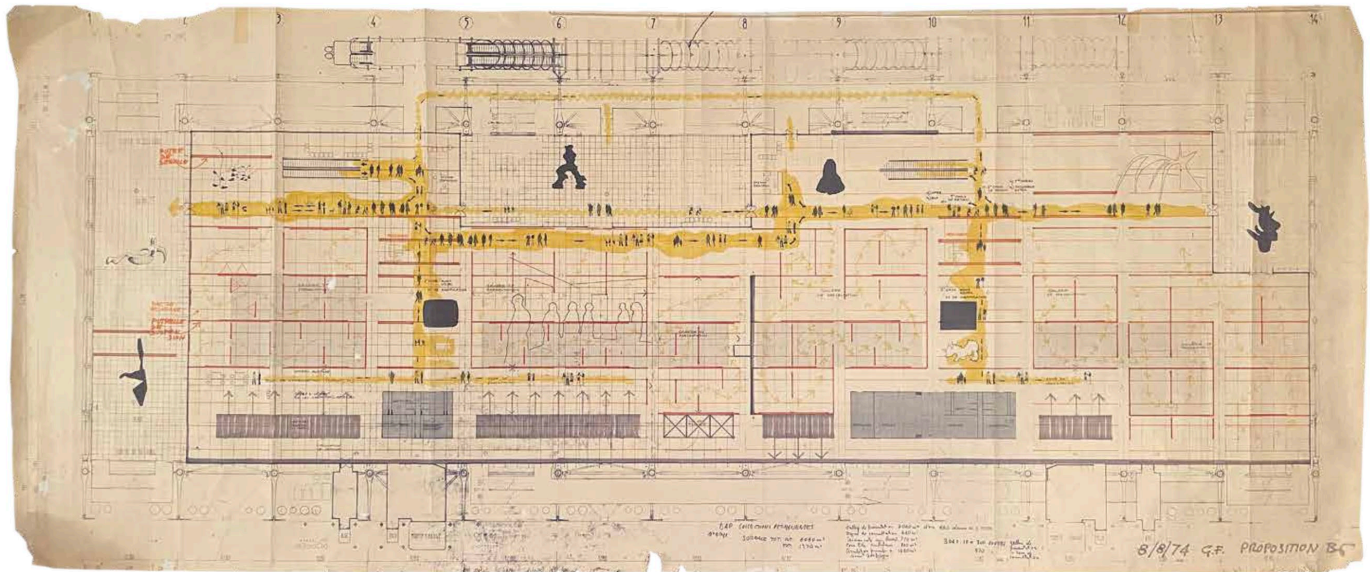


Fig. 18
Gianfranco Franchini (Piano+Rogers Architects), Museum layout for the collections of the Musée national d'art moderne at the Centre Beaubourg, plan, August 1974. Copyright Piano+Rogers Architects/ courtesy Fondazione Renzo Piano (private archive Gianfranco Franchini).

However, the continuous delays in finalising the architectural project convinced Lombard and his team to take an increasingly central role in its development to the point of convincing themselves to be able to finish it without Piano+Rogers Architects. With this idea in mind, in the first quarter of 1974 Hulten and his team pursued the study of the display device with a member of Lombard's team, Claude Pequet, who produced a preliminary study of the exhibition spaces in February.²¹ The idea of a didactic presentation based on a historical and chronological circuit was specified in the decision not to make a distinction between French and foreign artists and to build the itinerary through a succession of “forerunners”, “fauves” and “cubist”, then proceeding with “Dada”, “constructivist-oriented movements” and “Mondrian”, and continuing with “Surrealism” and “Calder”, up to contemporary trends such as English and American “Pop Art” and Optical Art with authors such as Victor Vasarely. Pequet also reworked the urban analogy of the circuit, and the image of the village huts next

to the street is turned into that of boutiques to be explored, from shop windows to backrooms. According to this analogy, the “street” became the place for the “informative-pedagogic” route, the “shopwindow” that for the “exemplary works of art”, the “boutique” that for the “significant works of art” and, finally, the “backrooms” that for the “documentary works”. Pequet also specified the dimensions of the hut/boutique in a parallelepiped 5 metres long, 6 metres deep and 3 metres high, but soon realised that this arrangement could not be extended to the entire collection for lack of surface area.

The comeback of Piano+Rogers Architects and the reaffirmation of a Miesian device with accentuated technological equipment

When Piano+Rogers Architects regained control of the project in spring 1974, the study of the museum's layout also returned into the hands of the architects. On the basis of the surface problems of Pequet's solution, Franchini and Stan-

ton proposed that the huts should be combined with display panels “freely arranged in the space” and “panels assembled according to open compositions”, both of which bring back the De Stijl and Miesian museum layouts conceived the previous year. It is no coincidence that it was these two solutions and not the hut that Franchini and Stanton reworked in spring 1974 by means of models and technical drawings.²² The panels took the form of rectangular “voiles” conceived over the entire height of the floor (7 metres), to serve as a backdrop for works of art, while the assemblages were specified in De Stijl compositions of thin panels lower to the ground but still connected to the floor truss by cables attached to a “service beam”, which was nothing more than a light variant of the rolling beam. The drawings produced in March also show an attempt to bring the burolandshaft spatial organisation back into vogue with a compromise solution that on the one hand brought the containers for the works of art in reserve back on the ground and on the other reorganised them within a kind of structural linear spine to be placed at the side of the main circuit from which they could be extracted as required.

Franchini and Stanton put an unprecedented emphasis on the visual and aesthetic presence of the artwork supports. The use of panels with tubular metal frames left exposed, their suspension to the ceiling truss, their sizing according to the modular system of the computer floor and the enclosure, and the use of metal systems for fixing the paintings left exposed, all these solutions made clear the intention to relate the display support to the

mechanical and technological aesthetics that had already invaded the ceiling, to the point of making the museum display yet another cog of the highly technological machine that the Centre Pompidou was supposed to be.

Towards the final compromise for the Centre Pompidou museum works of art: thick walls and translucent curtains suspended from the ceiling

The discussions between Piano+Rogers Architects and Hulten and his collaborators on the design of the museum’s layout that took place between 1975 and 1976 should be interpreted as the search for a compromise between two museum visions that essentially diverged on the aesthetic and visual preponderance of the technological and service equipment. At this stage of the project, in fact, architects no longer intended to simply display these machineries on the ceiling. They wanted to boost their decorative and aesthetic appearance featuring them thanks to a pop colour code of garish yellow, blue, red and green tones capable of revealing the function and nature of each element.

Under pressure from Hulten, Piano+Rogers Architects reintegrated the huts into the museum layout. From individual panels to any kind of open or closed assembly, all partitions abandoned the nature of light diaphragms framed by tubular frames to turn into boxy, hollow exhibition panels – an ambiguous compromise between Hulten’s vision and that of the architects. In its volumetric nature and significant

thickness (almost ten centimetres), the panel, at Hulten's instigation, seemed to reaffirm the concept of the wall as the preferred solid and stable support for 20th century art. This position was definitively undermined by the final choice to suspend the panels a few centimetres above the ground by means of the system of cables and service beams conceived by Franchini and Stanton, eventually made even more complex by fastening points hidden in the ground to give the panel greater stability.

The same hesitations about the conceptual and spatial nature of the support for the Centre's artworks are reflected in the roof of the hut. Hulten and Bordaz would like to provide it with a flat, opaque roof to make it an intimate, enclosed place, while Piano+Rogers Architects wanted to free it from any kind of roofing to reaffirm its nature as a diaphragm suspended in space and to relate the artwork to the ducts running through the ceiling. Hulten succeeded in de-emphasising the problematic visual presence of these elements through a pictorial treatment in white of all the ceiling ducts in the museum floors of the Centre. Hulten also managed to provide the huts with the much sought-after cover, but the fact that it took the form of a thin fabric curtain attached to the ceiling and suspended a few centimetres from the top of the hut's walls reaffirmed the nature of the hut as an open assemblage of diagrams in continuous space.²³

On 31 January 1977, the museum display of the Département des arts plastiques was finally opened to the public. All its elements, from the

hut and panels of the permanent collection to the accessible reserves eventually suspended on the ceiling and known as "kinakoteques", to a pioneering "mur d'images" designed by Young for the Centre de création industrielle, were suspended from the ground and presented to the visitor as technological gadgets ready for reconfiguration and change. Their systematic suspension, however, no longer had anything of that natural propensity for displacement, flexibility and reconfiguration with which Piano+Rogers Architects intended to make the centre a self-propelled machine. As will be proven by the limited reconfiguration of the museum display between 1977 and mid-1980, the museum layout by Piano+Rogers Architects and Hulten turned the suspension from the ceiling into the symbolic form of a degree of flexibility that the Centre was intended to possess, which the museum layout failed to offer to the full, which Bozo would undermine in 1985 with the refurbishment designed by architect Gae Aulenti, and which only the architects and curators called upon to direct the Centre's approaching transformation (2025-2030) could bring back.

Endnotes

- 1 John Young, in discussion with the author, 25 July 2017.
- 2 Piano+Rogers Architects 1971.
- 3 Piano+Rogers Architects et al. 1971.
- 4 Piano+Rogers Architects 1971.
- 5 Piano+Rogers Architects, Ove Arup & Partners 1971.
- 6 Piano+Rogers Architects, Ove Arup & Partners 1971.
- 7 Loste 1971.
- 8 Lombard [attr.] 1971.
- 9 Lombard [attr.] 1971.
- 10 Domerg 1972a, 1972b.
- 11 Établissement public du Centre Beaubourg 1973a, 1973b, 1973c.
- 12 Établissement public du Centre Beaubourg 1973c.
- 13 Établissement public du Centre Beaubourg 1973a.
- 14 Établissement public du Centre Beaubourg 1973c.
- 15 Établissement public du Centre Beaubourg 1973c.
- 16 Établissement public du Centre Beaubourg 1973b, 1973c.
- 17 Établissement public du Centre Beaubourg 1973b.
- 18 Établissement public du Centre Beaubourg 1973d.
- 19 Établissement public du Centre Beaubourg 1973c.
- 20 Établissement public du Centre Beaubourg, 1974.
- 21 Pequet 1974.
- 22 Stanton, Franchini 1974.
- 23 Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou 1976.

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Abbreviations:

AN: Archives Nationales, Paris

AP: Private Archives

C: Collection

CNACGP: Collection Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou

F: Folder

RSHPA: RSHP Archives, London.

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Établissement public du Centre Beaubourg 1973d: Établissement public du Centre Beaubourg, *Compte-rendu de la réunion sur la présentation des œuvres du musée le mercredi 12 décembre 1973*, 27 December 1973, AN, CNACGP, F 161.

Établissement public du Centre Beaubourg 1974: Établissement Public du Centre Beaubourg, *Comité des Utilisateurs du 21.02.1974*, 25 February 1974, AN, CNACGP, F 78.

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From the exhibition of architecture to spatial practices. The shows at ar/ge kunst, Bolzano (1992-2019)

Roberto Gigliotti

Keywords:

Architecture, Exhibition, Display, ar/ge kunst

ABSTRACT:

This text is the result of an archival research conducted consulting the records of ar/ge kunst, the Kunstverein of Bolzano, where, among others, several architecture exhibitions have been presented over the last 35 years. From the very beginning, the founders chose to work on the different languages of contemporaneity, integrating in the visual arts program of the small space further disciplines like architecture, among others. Regarding the presentation of architecture, the focus of the different artistic directors of the space moved throughout the years from traditional architectural exhibitions to the display of works that understand the relation with space in a more extended way. Some of ar/ge kunst's exhibitions are introduced here as examples in order to address issues, such as architecture, its exhibition and the spaces of its narration. The aim is to highlight the relationship between the display of architecture and the form taken by the design of the show. How does the contents of the exhibition influence its setting? In these lines there is no ambition to exhaustively list and describe the possibilities of narrating architecture through exhibitions nor the role played by their design. Instead, the purpose of this analysis is to identify some possible forms of architecture exposition, and to intersect a genealogy of recent architecture exhibitions. ar/ge kunst seems to be a useful case study in this context because it allows to explore a phenomenon, which is broad and elusive at the same time, studying some examples that are concrete and comparable since they have been hosted by the same institution.

Questo testo è il risultato di una ricerca archivistica condotta consultando i documenti di ar/ge kunst, il Kunstverein di Bolzano, dove sono state presentate diverse mostre di architettura negli ultimi 35 anni. Fin dall'inizio, i fondatori hanno scelto di lavorare sui diversi linguaggi della contemporaneità, integrando nel programma artistico del piccolo spazio ulteriori discipline come l'architettura, tra le altre. Riguardo alla presentazione dell'architettura, l'attenzione dei diversi direttori artistici dello spazio si è spostata nel corso degli anni dalle tradizionali mostre di architettura all'esposizione di opere che riflettono sulla relazione con lo spazio in un senso più ampio. Alcune mostre di ar/ge kunst sono qui illustrate come esempi al fine di affrontare tematiche come l'architettura, la sua esposizione e gli spazi della sua narrazione. L'obiettivo è evidenziare il rapporto tra il display dell'architettura e la forma assunta dal design dell'esposizione. Come i contenuti della mostra influenzano la sua ambientazione? In queste righe non c'è l'ambizione di elencare esaustivamente e descrivere le possibilità di narrare l'architettura attraverso mostre né il ruolo svolto dalla loro progettazione. Lo scopo di questa analisi è invece quello di identificare alcune possibili forme di esposizione dell'architettura e tracciare una genealogia delle recenti mostre di architettura. ar/ge kunst sembra essere un caso studio utile in questo contesto perché consente di esplorare un fenomeno ampio e sfuggente al tempo stesso, studiando alcuni esempi che sono concreti e comparabili poiché sono stati ospitati dalla stessa istituzione.

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Opening Picture:

Fig. 09: Matilde Cassani, *It's just not cricket*, 2018, installation view (courtesy ar/ge kunst)

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<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.3034-9699/19300>



ar/ge kunst and its spaces

ar/ge kunst was founded in 1985 as exhibition space for the production of culture in Bolzano, a bilingual city close to the border between Italy and Austria. The official description states that «the name is an abbreviation of the German word *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* (working group) [...] chosen to promote the idea of collective work on the language of contemporary art and on its relationship with disciplines such as architecture, design, performance and cinema»¹. The translation from German of the two words *ar/ge* and *Kunst* is uncomfortable art.

Many shows have been organized in this space's more of 30 years of activity and in the past; next to the artists, the rooms of ar/ge kunst also hosted the exhibitions of today's well-known architects, such as Peter Zumthor, David Chipperfield or Steven Holl, just to mention a few of them. After a break at the beginning of the 2000s, under the artistic direction of Emanuele Guidi (2013-2022) and in a subtly reinterpreted sense in its enlarged role as so-called spatial practice, architecture takes prominence once again. The photographic series *La mia scuola di architettura* by Gianni Pettena was presented in the gallery² and gave its name to a series of lectures within the gallery's public program, while long term research projects were curated in which space, architecture, culture and society meet in the production of exhibitions that let the borders between art and architecture blur. As we will see, Gareth Kennedy, Can Altay, Matilde Cassani and Lorenzo Pezzani from Forensic Oceanography are the contributors that so far have been invited to

produce their work for this format, three of whom are architects. Kennedy, Altay and Cassani's contributions will be examined in this text.

In 1985, a former sewing machines shop was transformed into exhibition space by one of the founder of the *Kunstverein*, architect Christoph Mair Fingerle, who directed the gallery in its first years. ar/ge kunst basically consists of two adjacent rooms on the ground floor of a historical building in the very center of the city of Bolzano. The two spaces have approximatively the same surface and both have an elongated form and an irregular geometry due to the age of the building [fig. 01]. The first room is characterised by a large shop window that puts the spaces of the gallery in non-mediated visual contact with passers-by on one of the main commercial roads of the city. The most significant elements of the second space are a door opening to a backyard, an ancient vaulted ceiling and a staircase leading to the office and storage spaces underground. A small cabin hosting the toilet is positioned to the side of the door that connects the two spaces. Both the service elements (the staircase and the cabin) considerably reduce the surface available in the second room for exhibition purposes. Eventually the ones who exhibit in the spaces of ar/ge kunst have a total length of about 26mt, an average width of 5.50mt and a height between 3.30mt and 3.70mt.

Exhibiting architecture

In the exhibition space the idea of architecture as bricks and mortars is

hard to maintain and the notion and border of architectural work comes under discussion

Arrhenius, 2014

Architecture is, by its nature, public, and one could argue that for this reason it would not need to be presented in an exhibition space. Nonetheless, the moment architecture enters the context of a show, different kinds of necessary translations are possible. Important exhibitions have marked the history of architecture and the architecture exhibition has become an established and consolidated format in the dissemination of architectural knowledge: an integral part of the discipline, so to say. Furthermore, nowadays we are even witnessing a growing diffusion of architecture generated by its public presence, by its exposition: a sort of overexposure that responds to the desire of being visible, which increases almost exponentially. The outcome of the architecture exhibition has become more public than architecture itself. Together with books and journals, the exhibition has reached the role of barometer, not only for the presentation of architecture, but also for actively feeding the debate on architecture.

At the end of the 1970s, the landscape of cultural bodies has been marked by the foundation of institutions dedicated to the conservation, storage and presentation of architecture. This was followed by an equally intense diffusion of curatorial studies in general, some of which specialized on the particular case of the display of architecture. After the first Architecture Biennale in 1980 in Venice, venues for periodical events dedicated to architec-

ture have proliferated worldwide. The explosion of architecture biennials and triennials proves this, and literature about architecture exhibitions has meanwhile become vast and exhaustive. The chronological sequence that begins with the first architecture museums and continues with the consolidation of the architecture exhibition format and the consecutive proliferation of periodical shows frames the research question in the background of the argumentations at stake here: what do architecture exhibitions produce today?

We can distinguish different kinds of architecture exhibitions: on one hand, we find expositions that aim to document the built substance of an edifice (even when this cannot be displayed in the space of the exhibition because it is physically elsewhere) through a variety of elements ranging from drawings and three dimensional models, and extending to photography and video. On the other hand, we observe the diffusion of exhibition forms in which the object is not so much architecture (or building) *per se*, but issues relevant to it, such as the social, economic, cultural and artistic backgrounds that have led to the formation of a project and the possible realization of architecture. Among others, we could address a further kind of exhibition: the ones which purposely set a distance between the presented content and architecture in terms of building (realized or to be realized), and open up to a broader way of looking at the architectural phenomena. These exhibitions move towards issues connected to the production of space and can almost be considered as pure spatial/architectural experi-

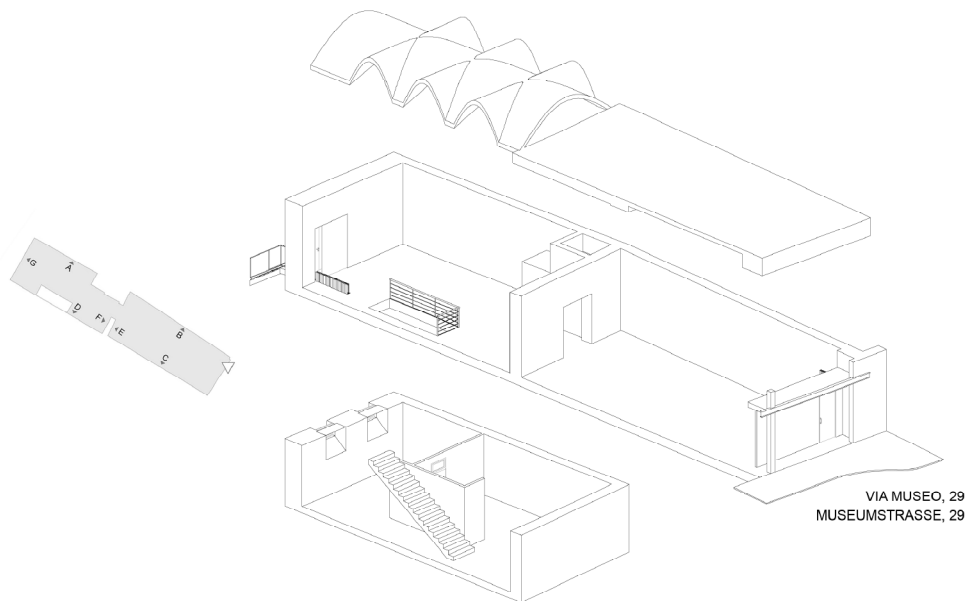
ments, since it is acknowledged that *«the most extreme and influential proposals in the history of modern architecture were made in the context of temporary exhibitions»*.³ This latter approach establishes a radical distance from the seminal belief about the architecture exhibition, according to which there is only room for surrogates in the exhibition space, since architecture is elsewhere outside. On the very contrary, the architecture belonging to the content of this kind of shows finds its reason for existence in the show itself.

As it already happened long ago in the art world, the space of the architecture exhibition can today be easily described as a field of action,

tool capable of fostering debate on architecture. It is not so much an instrument of representation but an opportunity to investigate and reflect. The architecture exhibition is therefore neither ‘on’ nor ‘about’ architecture: it is ‘for’ architecture.⁴

Exhibitions are transformed into exploration of themes and attempts to suggest a different role for architecture and planning today:

This change in the role of the curator reinforces this stand that considers an exhibition not merely as an objective per se but rather as a strategical tool, among other possible ones, for fostering ideas, challenging positions, introducing new



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a space of intense debate on the meaning of narrating and making architecture public, a space of reflection on the multiple roles that an exhibition can acquire in the construction of a shared knowledge around architecture. In this respect, Giovanna Borasi insists on the significance of the architectural exhibition and its nature as a strategic

themes, questioning current topics and, ultimately, for advancing new theories and changing current practices, that the objective of an exhibition is not to document the absent work, but to propose the idea for potential architecture, their relationship to the surrounding world, and the shaping of thought through exhibiting.⁵

Fig. 01
ar/ge kunst,
isometric view
(courtesy ar/ge
kunst)

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From the exhibition of architecture to spatial practices. The shows at ar/ge kunst, Bolzano (1992-2019)

Significance of the setting in the architecture exhibitions

An architecture exhibition can be described as a space that shows space and for this reason the formal language of the design assumes here a fundamental role, probably even more than in other kinds of exhibitions. Here design becomes a curatorial device.⁶ As Borasi says:

«If in a traditional exhibition the display considers the relation between the materials in the show, in the case of an exhibition for architecture the setting is what takes on a significant role. The design becomes an integral part of the curatorial strategy, it participates in the interpretation of the objects in the gallery and in the narrative, and along the process it contributes to a better definition of the scope of the show and to the construction of a precise point of view. Finally, design determines the overall character and the atmosphere of the exhibition, establishing which way it will be read and the impression that the visitor will have.»⁷

From this point of view, the perspective of introducing surrogates into the exhibition, since architecture won't fit into the exhibition space, is also turned upside down. Just to quote a possible example: what is the deep meaning of an intervention in scale 1:1 in the architecture exhibition? Is it a fragment of an architecture that did not find enough space in the show or is it architecture *per se*? Does it present, re-present or does it carry an intrinsic meaning? Through the architec-

ture of the architecture exhibition, the gallery space is transformed into an architectural gesture. What is shown in the exhibition space, the way it is shown and the work it refers to become the same thing. The question is shifted from the issue of representation to the very experience of the exhibition 'here and now'.

Architecture exhibitions at ar/ge kunst

At the very beginning of its activity, several architecture exhibitions have been organised by or imported to ar/ge kunst since some of the founders were young practicing architects interested in activating a debate around the production of space not only through the construction of buildings, but also through the organization of cultural initiatives that addressed architectural issues. Exhibitions were among these. Bolzano never had an architecture faculty and the young architects of the ar/ge kunst's board took the occasion to keep in contact with significant personalities they encountered during the time of their studies elsewhere, as proved by the fax exchanges still preserved in the archive of the institution. From 1986 to 2000 ar/ge kunst presented the work of Peter Cook (1986), Raymund Abraham (1986), Carlo Mollino (1989), Peter Zumthor (1990), Behnisch and Partner (1991), David Chipperfield (1992), Steven Holl (1993), Juan Navarro Baldeweg (1994), Hans Kollhoff and Helga Timmermann (1994), Gonçalo Sousa Byrne, Joao Luis Carilho Da Graca, Eduardo Souto De Moura (1995), Antonio Cruz and Antonio Ortiz (1996), Luigi Ghirri

on Aldo Rossi (1997), Jean Nouvel (1999), Florian Beigel and Tony Fretton (2000). Some of the exhibitions were directly imported, some co-curated and organized in collaboration with prestigious venues, such as Arc en Rêve Bordeaux (Holl), deSingel Antwerp (Chipperfield, Kollhoff, Timmermann and Baldeweg), Canadian Centre of Architecture and Architekturzentrum Luzern (Zumthor and Nouvel). In most cases, they



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contained original drawings and models, but some of them became an opportunity to experiment with the construction of the exhibition space through the articulation of the design. If, as already mentioned, exhibiting architecture means to show space in/through space, these displays position themselves somewhere between the content presented through the exhibition (which speaks of the construction of space) and the production of space itself. Without being buildings, they gave the possibility to observe on a 1:1 scale some of the architecture principles mentioned in the exhibition.

Adding architecture to architecture through the exhibition. David Chipperfield: *Architettura 1985-1990 Architektur* (1992)

From 17 January to 15 February 1992 ar/ge kunst presented the work of David Chipperfield in its spaces through an exhibition imported from deSingel in Antwerp where it had been displayed in 1991 [fig. 02]. The exhibition was curated by the architects Giordano and Izzo (the latter was a collaborator of Chipperfield's studio) and Chipperfield's studio designed the display. Furthermore, an indication in the 1991 program of deSingel refers to the fact that the installation of the exhibition was planned by Chipperfield himself.⁸ ar/ge kunst's archive holds: descriptions of the presented buildings, extensive fax exchanges in relation to the organization of the exhibition, documents for the insurance of the exhibits, an isometric view of the exhibition spaces, installation views and pictures taken during the opening.

Chipperfield's projects realized between 1985 and 1990 in the UK, in Japan and in the United States were exhibited through 22 models, a series of 15 square panels all with the same dimensions and further miscellaneous material (mainly pictures of the realized projects). The fact that the 15 panels have all the same width and height of 990mm is a sure indication that they have been produced for exhibition purposes. The design of the exhibition space allows Chipperfield to put in place an architectural exercise. In front of the gallery window stood a building crane which base was covered by a coating of rough timber. The title of the exhibition was positioned in the street, printed on the plinth of the crane. There is a cross-connection between the space of the street and the inside of the gallery. In fact, the material of the coating of the

Fig. 02
David Chipperfield, *Architettura 1985-1990 Architektur*, 1992, installation view (courtesy ar/ge kunst)

crane base is used to make a pier that enters the gallery space and crosses it lengthwise becoming the main axis of the exhibition. In the first room, on the left side of the pier, the 20 models are positioned on high plinths, while the right side is dedicated to the 15 panels hanging on the wall in front of a grey background, and to the remaining miscellaneous material, preserved on tables under transparent horizontal showcases. Dark grey is the dominant colour. The display becomes a proper spatial intervention in the passage between the first and the second room where toilets and staircase are hidden behind mock-walls that give a new shape to the spaces [fig. 03].

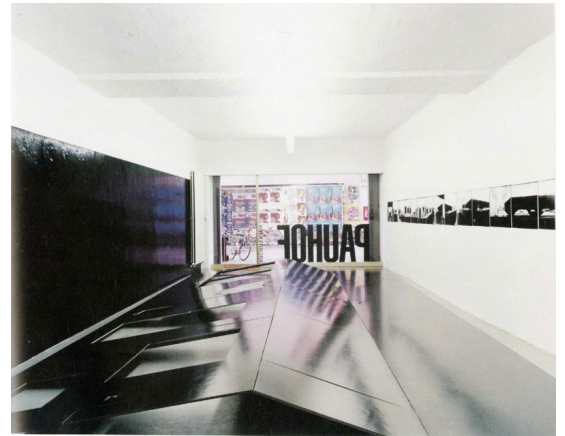
It can be argued that the display is a further architecture element added to the ones exhibited. Although it doesn't open a clear dialogue with the presented contents, it assumes the role of a 1:1 project still keeping the materiality of a model. Despite this is one of the few of the first ar/ge kunst exhibitions that extends beyond the mere presentation of documentation of an architect's building activity (as it is confirmed by the decision to ask Chipperfield to develop a proper setting for the exhibits presented expressly for Bolzano), the press release does not refer at all to the exhibition itself; it has words for an enthusiastic description of the author's architectural production, but never mention the fact that it is presented in an exhibition.

The result is an exhibition intended strictly for the presentation of the author's work. At the centre is the content and the display, although

it has the autonomy of an architecture, only supports the documentation of the buildings. The intrinsic, potential power of the exhibition is reduced to the vision of represented architecture: technical drawings as original artefacts, while the 1:1 scale architecture of the display is mere support.



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Fig. 03
David Chipperfield, *Architettura 1985-1990* Architektur, 1992, installation view (courtesy ar/ge kunst)

Fig. 04
PAUHOF, 1996, installation view

Fig. 05
PAUHOF, 1996, installation view



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An exhibition space in four phases. PAUHOF (1996)

From 13 April to 18 May 1996, the spaces of the gallery were literally manipulated by the two Austrian architects Michael Hofstätter and Wolfgang Pauzenberger (PAUHOF) who received *carte blanche* for their exhibition at ar/ge kunst, curated by architect Susanne Waiz. There are no drawings or other forms of documentation or representation of buildings in the exhibition. As it can be read in the webpage of the photographer Walter Niedermayr, who was directly involved in the project, the exhibition was followed by a publication containing the pictures taken by Niedermayr himself, while PAUHOF were modulating the space of the gallery according to their intentions. The photographer underlines that «*architecture was shown not as something final and static, but as a dynamic result that was subject to temporal changes*»⁹.

The modulation of the space was presented in different phases that corresponded to different forms of the space displayed to the public. Basically, the PAUHOF exhibition can be read as the interpretation of the relationship between space (architecture) and its representation (through text and/or photography, for example).

Schwarzer Winkel (black angle), *Faltung* (fold), *Freier Blick* (open view) and *Graue Zone* (grey zone) are the title given to the different episodes. During the first one, rubber panels were spread out on the floor and the spaces were not accessible to the public but could be seen only from the street through the shop window. Blank spaces in the panels were references to the future architecture models to be exhibited in the gallery. The second phase is a sculptural gesture. The rubber surface is lifted along a line defining a fold in the space and the name of the studio appears on the glazed surface of the window [fig. 04].

Fig. 06
Gareth Kennedy,
The uncomfortable science,
2014, installation
view (courtesy
ar/ge kunst)

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Afterwards, seven different scale models of unrealized projects by PAUHOF were exposed (Synthese Museum – Vienna, Trigon Museum – Graz, EXPO Pavilion – Sevilla, Stadtplanung Wien Nord, Neuer Urbaner Komplex – Linz, Regierungsviertel im Spreebogen – Berlin, Austrian Cultural Institute – New York). Thanks to the height of the models the visitor was offered a glimpse into an imaginary PAUHOF city. Eventually, the black horizontal surface was turned and hung over the black surface of the wall, while the previously hung models sunk into the plinth, which was transformed into a temporary office where Michael Hofstätter and Wolfgang Pauzenberger personally encountered the visitors of the exhibition [fig. 05].

The only two-dimensional features that enter into dialogue with the space of the exhibition created by PAUHOF is the photography series *Berge und Haus P* (Mountains and House P) hanged on the walls of the gallery from the beginning of the exhibition.

With regard to the architecture exhibition, Moritz Küng, who contributed to its catalogue, argues:

«Unfortunately the curators of architecture exhibitions all too often use conventional forms of presentation – plans, models, photographs, photography arbitrarily displayed behind glass and under plexiglas domes as artefacts to be celebrated. Hence there is the danger of thinking that architecture as attractive and miniaturised exhibition material, instead of seeing it as the basis and starting point of a future oriented realisation. In short: architecture isn't made to

*be shown but to be built. The contemplative element inherent in the exposition of architecture often ends up being neglected in the exhibition. Through their, in part, very elaborate exhibition contributions, however, PAUHOF seek to translate their vocabulary into a real if only temporary architecture. This inherently contradictory procedure has made possible and opened up new paths of thinking in the architecture debate, for they have given substance to the mental process».*¹⁰

Differently from any other architecture exhibition at ar/ge kunst, PAUHOF is the first one in which a certain awareness of architecture on display emerges. The exhibition distances itself from a mere presentation of buildings and opens up to a territory for debate on the very issues of architecture. «Architecture is put up for discussion».¹¹ Architecture, its representation through three-dimensional models and photography, and also the time of its production (the studio) are first brought into a dialogue and presented to the visitor to question them and then documented by photography again.

Spatial practices

The issues addressed here somehow resonate with a more general question. So-called spatial practices have been extensively examined by scholars like Jane Rendell¹² who, in turn, bases her arguments on the legacy of the seminal text by Rosalynn Krauss *Sculpture in the expanded field*,¹³ among others. Krauss assumes that, in a well-defined histo-

rical moment, a very special kind of spatial interventions were being developed, which could neither be described entirely as art nor as architecture. These could be seen as practices that followed the artists' need to leave the art space of the gallery and position themselves outside, where other issues, as for example, the social or relational relevance of their work, could become integrating part of the work itself. But what we are witnessing today – in a moment of huge explosion of architecture exhibitions and institutions devoted to them – is that some architects deliberately abandon the space of the very building and almost 'seek refuge' in the spaces of the galleries. We could provocatively speak of a 'compressed' field instead of an 'expanded' one. The building site produces something worth examining and showing. The presentation within an exhibition, however, allows to produce something that is architecture in itself, but derives its own reason for

existing from the very exhibition space. This distinction between building and architecture in the context of the architecture exhibition has been precisely described by Maristella Casciato, who writes that «*This is already a major challenge: architecture exhibits/performs outside the museum. The building is just not present when the exhibition is running. The very expensive and complex way of creating architecture inside a museum space remains a challenge and removes architecture from its everyday life and context*». ¹⁴ It is indeed this removal from the everyday life and context that summarizes the multiple alternatives we have when we exhibit architecture and the possible, open interpretations of the idea of displaying architecture (or maybe, more broadly, displaying space) that can be traced as we continue our journey along the sequence of the architecture exhibitions at ar/ge kunst. When we refer to the more recent exhibitions at the Bolzano gallery, we can speak of an



Fig. 07
Can Altay, VFI – Virgolo Future Institute (such claims on territory transform spatial imagination into obscure anticipations of repartition), 2016, billboard space (courtesy Lungomare)

architecture that has been expressly produced for exhibition, an architecture that exists when it is shown in an exhibition context.

An exhibition as architecture surrounding a content. Gareth Kennedy: *The Uncomfortable Science* (2014)

The uncomfortable science is the result of the research conducted by Irish artist Gareth Kennedy as part of the first *One Year Long Research Project* and has been presented in the spaces of ar/ge kunst from 20 September to 15 November 2014. Invited because of his previous works on folk and popular culture, Kennedy starts an exploration of the burdened history of folklore and visual anthropology in South Tyrol [fig. 06]. Due to perverse agreements between Hitler and Mussolini, during WWII, the South Tyrol inhabitants were forced to decide whether they wanted to remain in the territories recently annexed to Italy (giving up their culture and tradition) and become Italians, or move to the territories of the growing Third Reich with the promise of getting back all the possessions they had left behind and become Germans. The need to document these circumstances from an anthropological point of view saw the dictatorial regimes employ a group of 'uncomfortable scientists' whose task was to document and give a scientific foundation to this violent intervention. Gareth Kennedy translates the results of his research into an exhibition consisting of five wooden masks carved by local artisans representing the personalities involved in this forced

displacement process, a video documenting the production of the masks and the display of extensive photographic and filmic original documentation from the archives explored during the research that preceded the exhibition.

The exhibition layout was designed in collaboration with designer Harry Thaler. The walls of the main exhibition space are painted black, a gesture that negates/erases the spatial borders of the gallery. Masks hang on the black walls, illuminated by a directed, concentrated light and seem to float in an empty space. The wooden coating of a historical Stube (the dining room of the traditional rural house in South Tyrol) is suspended in the centre of the space enveloping the empty space in the middle of the room. This empty space is intended to host the projection of a movie shot during the carving of the masks and a public program to which archive experts, scholars, anthropologists and dramaturgs are invited to participate.

Once an exhibition, Kennedy's year-long research becomes an emptied space full of symbolic meanings. The idea of inhabiting the spaces of the exhibition takes shape around a convivial gesture: a shared meal in the reconstructed Stube, as per local tradition. The Stube is indeed an intimate place inside a home that, according to the tradition, has also a semi-public function. During the wintertime, it is the place where traditionally small handicraft works are carried out. It is a place where, according to the research conducted, small theatre plays were staged. The display of *The Uncomfortable Science* becomes a meeting space. Through his work, Gareth Kennedy

generates a comfort/neutral zone in a space devoted to the presentation of art where people, who would otherwise not have an exchange, can meet and share thoughts.

An exhibition as a supporting structure. Can Altay: VFI – Virgolo Future Institute (such claims on territory transform spatial imagination into obscure anticipations of repartition) (2016)

The exhibition¹⁵ starts from the request to address issues collected under the evocative title of *Radical Hospitality* (i.e. what happens when the ritual/gesture of hospitality is brought to its extreme? Who hosts and who is hosted and what happens between the two parties?). After his first visit, Altay orients the focus of his research on mount Virgolo, which stands in the municipal territory of the city of Bolzano and attracts the attention of the artist because of a specific episode: after WWII, some citizens of Bolzano whose houses had been bombed and destroyed started living in the unfinished road tunnel that was being built under the mountain due to the scarcity of housing. This episode, witnessed by an old newspaper article¹⁶, represented the initial input for preserving and collecting unknown stories about the mountain. The reason that moves the artist to focus the attention on the mountain comes also from the global references that such a specific place can engender. The exhibition in the spaces of ar/ge kunst is the last episode of a series scattered along a timespan of one year. The project starts with a short-lived exhibition that represents the first moment of

a lasting experiment in creating and showing work. The unconventional exhibition is then followed by a poster campaign in the public space of the city of Bolzano. The billboard spaces of the city are occupied by a series of posters that focus on neglected desires and unfulfilled promises: like advertisements for an imaginary tourism, they function as a campaign on episodes from the history of the mountain mixed up with issues to be discussed in a public conversation [fig. 07].

Limited Experience is a performative walk, a choreographed movement of a dozen of participants along the fence of the former social club on Virgolo. It reflects on the meaning and function of borders. It is a score that gives all the necessary indications to make a performative encounter happen. *Split Horizon* is an observation apparatus positioned in different parts of the city. It is oriented towards the mountain, but allows for different views.¹⁷

The Virgolo mountain is always the centre of the attention. If the first extemporary exhibition is a spontaneous reaction to the first encounter with the hosting institutions, the posters in the city are a gaze directed not at the mountain but that let its collected history resonate. While the walk is on the mountain, the split horizon is a device oriented toward it that shows something else instead. In the end, all the impressions are collected in the spaces of the gallery and tell a story that starts from Virgolo and Bolzano, but has a meaning that includes other episodes, other people and other times. Inspired by the dual idea of tunnel and shelter, Can Altay literally translates the concept of the exhibition into an



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inhabitable structure and occupies the first space of the gallery with a large timber construction that modifies the space, dialogues with it, orientates the vision and choreographs the movement of the visitors [fig. 08].

The timber structure supports a phantasmagoria of materials coming from the research and at the same time documenting the interventions. All this generates a combination of information that enlarges the different topics emerged from Virgolo and places them within a wider framework of cultural references and international cases. In the second space, Altay positions an appositely developed table that houses *Ahali*, a collective journal intended as a growing collection of works, statements and voices from artistic and spatial practices that translates and extends the contents of the first part of the exhibition into an editorial project.

The exhibition at ar/ge kunst focuses

on supporting structures¹⁸, whether physical or metaphorical, such as the publication *Ahali*. It is the production of contents and their translation into an aesthetic artefact, which is the very structure supporting the material selected to narrate the story of a place which is not Virgolo itself, but all the spatial considerations that its stories contain (in a social, historical, anthropological sense) and should have a meaning that affects other places too.

An installation that translates behaviours (of the communities living at the border between Italy and Austria). Matilde Cassani: *It's just not cricket* (2018)

In her exhibition that ran from 23 February to 05 May 2018, after a year of research at the Brennero border between Italy and Austria, Matilde Cassani put in the spaces of ar/ge kunst objects that refer

Fig. 08
Can Altay, VFI – Virgolo Future Institute (such claims on territory transform spatial imagination into obscure anticipations of repartition), 2016, installation view (courtesy ar/ge kunst)

to the cricket game [fig. 09], but do not represent themselves. The cricket game is used as a double metaphor here: what happens to the traditions of a community when it is displaced? *It's just not cricket* is an English idiom meaning that not everything is going well, that it is not completely right. Thus, the first room of the ar/ge kunst gallery is occupied by an imaginary cricket pitch that does not fit within the walls of the exhibition space. In the same way the cricket player belonging to the Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and Sri Lanka communities living on the Brennero border and other northern and South Tyrol territories adapt the rules of the game to the few places where they are allowed to play, Matilde Cassani's cricket pitch is compressed in the spaces of the first room and becomes deformed. The surface is reduced, the goals are oversized, the two bats are tied to a rope that recalls the constriction to which the player are forced and limits the posture of the visitor that wants to try them. The game staged in the exhibition is described as interrupted, a suspended match waiting for the players to come back. The *mise-en-scène* of an imaginary cricket match in the gallery space represents the opportunity to introduce a reflection on contemporary geographies, the use of the territory and other categories of time, entertainment, and spectatorship. In fact, the cricket game arrived in Asia during the English colonization and comes back today with the displaced communities that embodied that tradition. Today, in South Tyrol, cricket is often a forbidden sport. In the second room, Matilde Cassani installs functional devices for a series workshops addressing

issues related to the transformation of identities and of the forms of use of the territory.¹⁹ The installation is completed by a green curtain that divides the two rooms, an extra designed table, a shelf for bats and cups and a hanging metal rod for the T-shirts of the teams involved in the research that lead to the exhibition.

Matilde Cassani – whose aim is to assemble structures capable of hosting an upcoming exhibition²⁰ – fills the space of the gallery and activates it through her interventions that possess both a sculptural and an architectural strength. “I design small celebrations and people are part of the piece, without audience the project is incomplete. The design ends when people arrive. I explore a very specific context, record collective habits and individual behaviors and then propose something that is not always meant to be used, sometimes only to be observed.”²¹

Conclusions

If, as mentioned, the basic question underlying all the issues presented here can be summarized with: what do architecture exhibitions produce today? The story of ar/ge kunst enables us to add further episodes to an ongoing narration and to argue that an increasing number of architecture exhibitions today concentrate on spatial practices and the autonomy of the architecture on display. The exhibitions analysed can be ordered along a line that describes a phenomenon and traces back to the evolution of the architecture exhibitions in general. We

are witnessing the growing proliferation of ‘exhibitionist’ architects and architectures, and the architecture exhibition has become to all intents and purposes an accepted and shared tool in the international debate. On a closer scrutiny, it could be argued that it is possible to trace a path from more retrospective exhibitions to the display of artefacts that are recognized as architecture *per se* and deliberately take a distance from the contingency of the building. They become spatialization of an architectural thought instead. This does not come to terms with the needs of the construction and takes advantage of the licenses allowed by the exhibition context, which is an artificial place with a wide range of experimentation possibilities even in constructive terms. The exhibitions by Kennedy, Altay and Cassani are not documentation of architectures or buildings. Rather, they are spatial translations of stories, episodes and narrations. Maybe this is not the right context to linger on the question of whether all this can be considered architecture. They are certainly useful examples to amplify the meaning of the term architecture and at the same time they seem to be antennas capable of providing a very clear picture of what is happening when the exhibition is no longer to be considered only a hosting context, but the very site of the production of a spatial intervention.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.argekunst.it/info/>.
- 2 The work was part of the exhibition, titled “Prologue – Part two: La mia scuola di architettura”, that run from 15 November 2013 to 11 January 2014 (<https://argekunst.it/it/programma/prologue-part-two-la-mia-scuola-di-architettura-2>).
- 3 Colomina 2008.
- 4 Borasi 2015.
- 5 Borasi 2015.
- 6 Borasi 2015.
- 7 Borasi 2015.
- 8 «David Chipperfield ontwierp voor deSingel de installatie waarin de gehele tetoonstelling wordt gepresenteerd» (<https://s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/desingel-media/a1i0N00000P06HdQAJ.pdf>).
- 9 “Während mehrerer Wochen modellierten Pauhof an ihrer Vorstellung von Raum, die sie in verschiedenen Phasen präsentierten. Architektur wurde nicht als finales und statisches, sondern als dynamisches Resultat gezeigt, das zeitlichen Veränderungen unterworfen war.” (<http://walterniedermayr.com/en/remixed-niedermayr-pauhof-hauser/>).
- 10 Küng 1998.
- 11 Küng 1998.
- 12 Rendell 2006.
- 13 Krauss 1979.
- 14 Casciato 2017.
- 15 The project by Can Altay is the result of a collaborative research project between ar/ge kunst and the cultural association Lungomare, also based in Bolzano.
- 16 Ettore Frangipane, “Uomini come le talpe. Campionario della miseria sotto la galleria del Virgolo. Dormono in piccole nicchie scavate entro il tunnel. Il gelido soffio del vento del nord canta loro la ninnananna.”, in *Alto Adige* 07.12.1948.
- 17 For a detailed description of the episodes preceding the exhibition in the spaces of ar/ge kunst see <https://www.lungomare.org/archive/project/lungomare-residency-radical-hospitality-can-altay/>.
- 18 Also in his display intervention “The way beyond art” (2017-2021) at the Van Abbemuseum in Maastricht, Can and Asli Altay produce an artistic work which is support for works of the collection presented in the semi-permanent exhibition.
- 19 <https://argekunst.it/en/programme/its-just-not-cricket-matilde-cassani>.
- 20 <http://atpdiary.com/extreme-land-matilde-cassani/>.
- 21 <http://atpdiary.com/extreme-land-matilde-cassani/>.

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Krauss 1979: Krauss R., *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, in "October", 1979, 8, pp. 30-44.

Küng 1998: Küng M., *Epilog*, in PAUHOF, Niedermayr W., Hauser S., REMIXED, Walther Köln, König, 1998.

Rendell 2006: Rendell J., *Art and Architecture. A Place Between, London – New York*, I. B. Tauris, 2006.



Pull out a chair. OFFICE in Venice

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Keywords:

Venice Architecture Biennale, OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen, Architecture exhibitions.

ABSTRACT:

Fifteen years ago, the architects of OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen participated in two editions of the Venice Architecture Biennale, in 2008 in the Belgian pavilion, and in 2010 in the *People Meet in Architecture* exhibition, curated by Kazuyo Sejima. The meanings of these interventions – the way they exhibited thoughts concerning architecture – are examined in this text. In 2008, *1907...After the Party* put the Belgian pavilion itself on display, enclosing the historic building and separating it from the Biennale by means of a wall. Confetti, scattered both inside and outside, added layers of meaning to this ‘installation’, which can be interpreted as a reflection on both the architectural exhibition and on the state of architecture in the 21st century. Similarly, the smaller, more traditional *Garden Pavilion (7 rooms, 21 perspectives)* exhibition in 2010 was an opportunity to create a new space for architecture culture, within the machinery of the Venice Biennale.

Quindici anni fa, gli architetti di OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen parteciparono a due edizioni della Biennale di Architettura di Venezia, nel 2008 nel padiglione belga e nel 2010 nella mostra *People Meet in Architecture*, curata da Kazuyo Sejima. I significati di questi interventi – il modo in cui hanno esposto riflessioni riguardanti l’architettura – vengono esaminati in questo testo. Nel 2008, *1907...After the Party* mise in mostra il padiglione belga stesso, racchiudendo l’edificio storico e separandolo dalla Biennale mediante un muro. Coriandoli, sparsi sia all’interno che all’esterno, aggiungevano strati di significato a questa ‘installazione’, che può essere interpretata come una riflessione sia sulle mostre di architettura sia sullo stato dell’architettura nel XXI secolo. Allo stesso modo, la mostra del 2010 *Garden Pavilion (7 rooms, 21 perspectives)*, più piccola e tradizionale, è stata un’opportunità per creare uno spazio nuovo per la cultura architettonica, all’interno dell’apparato della Biennale di Venezia.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 01: OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen, *1907... After The Party*, Venice Architecture Biennale, 2008. (Photo by Bas Princen).

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<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.3034-9699/19301>



Confetti became an officially recognized architectural element in 2008. The English word is adopted from the Italian confectionery of the same name: at weddings, baptisms or graduations, it is a tradition to distribute (or throw) almonds with a hard sugar coating. The Italian word for paper confetti, however, is *coriandoli*, in reference to the coriander seeds originally contained in this dessert.

In the early 1980s, confetti emerged as a metaphor in the architectural discourse to describe a compositional method, used by the early members of OMA/Rem Koolhaas, to deal with the distribution of programmatic components over an area, randomly scattered after being thrown in the air, yet with a final effect of total colonization. While a plan, or any other representational document in architecture, is traditionally drawn or made by hand, throwing confetti involves a different manual gesture – first grabbing and holding the snippets, then releasing and spreading them, with a result that is at the same time predictable and always different. In 1981, Elia and Zoe Zenghelis, two founding partners at OMA, designed a project for sixteen villas on the island of Antiparos in Greece – “an empty expanse by the beach, with just the sea and the horizon”, as the site was described by one of the architects.¹ The houses seem to be scattered over the land, more or less evenly, but without a logic that could be put into words or numbers. The same reliance on chance set the basis, one year later, for OMA’s participation in the competition for the Parc de La Villette in Paris, even though in that project, small point-like service structures are dis-

tributed on a multi-layered grid of horizontal strips and vertical axes. Thirdly and finally, there is a painting by Zaha Hadid, who had worked for OMA at the end of the 1970s, finished in 1983: *Confetti Suprematist Snowstorm*, part of the competition-winning (but unbuilt) project for The Peak, a leisure club in Hong Kong. On this canvas, which Zoe Zenghelis collaborated on, the square shreds of paper are still suspended in the air, fixed in that one moment when they have reached their highest point before falling, proving the spatial potential of confetti also as compositional metaphor.²

Of course, arranging objects in space by throwing (or imagining) confetti seems something completely different from making a proper and exemplary composition. And this is exactly the point: an architect or a painter who relies on confetti – be it in the air or lying still on the ground – to decide what should go where, must be quite clueless, having seemingly exhausted all the other more classical and traditional compositional methods. Similarly, the inclusion of *real* confetti as a material presence within a project, heralds an end point for architecture, or rather: lots and lots of small circular pieces of colored paper are everything architecture is not – aleatory, flat, chaotic, flimsy, and so light that even the faintest gust of wind can disrupt once more the so-called order (although, once again, it would be impossible to describe those two different states – before and after – conclusively).

When OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen showered confetti all over the Belgian pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale in

2008, those different aspects were at stake, or they can at least become elements of interpretation [fig. 1].

The Belgian pavilion was built in 1907, and was the very first (non-Italian) national building in the Giardini.³ The commission was given to Léon Sneyers, a little-known art nouveau architect from Brussels. Of his original project, only the blocks of the central hall with a skylight and the entry section remain today. After extensions and renovations during the 20th century, the pavilion is now a completely enclosed interior, consisting of a large space at the center, with six smaller surrounding rooms or white cubes, all lit from above, and without any window – there is only one small door on the right, leading to the Giardini and to the neighboring Dutch pavilion. In 2008, the curator of the Belgian pavilion was Moritz Küng. He had directed a series of exhibitions in Antwerp since 2005, exhibiting the work of 13 young architecture firms over the course of three years. At the end of these series, he invited all these architects to participate in a competition for the Belgian contribution to the Venice Biennale with the following assignment:

Give the existing building [of the Belgian pavilion], as part of its immediate surroundings, an architectural use and function that can be experienced on a scale of 1:1 with regard to its location (a public park), status (cultural embassy), history (of the Giardini) and/or context (an international platform for architecture).⁴

This brief belonged to a concept that criticized the very existence of architecture exhibitions, and

thus, one could argue, of architecture culture as a whole: instead of showcasing, at a biennale, the many possible derivatives of architecture (such as drawings, photographs, models, texts, or movies), the aim was to show the real deal, and to offer an experience of space. The submission by OFFICE, in turn, criticized this premise by taking it to the letter to an almost absurd degree. Their decision to put the existing pavilion on display, revealed a contradiction in the reasoning behind the brief: exhibiting architecture inevitably takes place within a space, and why should another construction be necessary when the pavilion from 1907 already exists? Thus, from September 14 to November 23, 2008, the Belgian pavilion in Venice was surrounded by an almost seven-meter high double wall made of galvanized steel panels. The fence occupied the entire ground in front of it, in line with the main road of the public park, but at an angle with the pavilion. The oldest building in the Giardini disappeared, hidden behind a dimly mirroring façade [fig. 2].

The two-meter wide corridor behind this facade inside of the wall was accessible from the Giardini and led to the side entrance of the exhibition building. Visitors entered the doorway, walked about twenty meters in almost complete darkness, turned the corner, walked another twenty meters, to suddenly find themselves inside an empty building, which had been invisible the whole time. The pavilion was indeed on display, but only for those who had exited it and stepped into the newly created outdoor space – in between the inner wall of OFFICE's temporary intervention and the ou-



02

ter wall of the building from 1907 – and then turned around to face the historical architecture [fig. 3].

Meanwhile, confetti was everywhere, both on the floors inside the old pavilion, as well as in between the trees, on the ground of the outdoor space, merging both distinctive parts into a single differentiated whole. The primordial thing it represented, within the institutionally charged context of an architectural biennale, was what architecture needs but also combats, or lacks: life, in all its chaotic, varicolored, and very often vexatious but ineradicable mess. One way to make somebody's birthday truly unhappy is opening a nice big bag of confetti in their living room: a present that equals a sentence of weeks of idle cleaning, if not relocation. Particularly confronted with the almost archaic earnestness of a total, impe-

netrable and aggressive wall – and of the classicist aspects of OFFICE's architecture in general – confetti represented everything architecture cannot control, but at the same time requires as its *raison d'être* and as an undermining or relativization of its power. As the Biennale progressed, the shredded paper spread over the Giardini, the other venues, and the city of Venice – and who knows where else the confetti ended up, hidden in the clothes and luggage of visitors from all over the world – possibly making the project the most widely distributed contribution ever to a biennale.

The title of OFFICE's intervention was seemingly straightforward: *1907... After The Party*. It evokes the year the pavilion was built and suggests that a birthday bash had been held somewhere in 2007, on the occasion of its centenary. To be

Fig. 02
OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen, 1907... *After The Party*, Venice Architecture Biennale, 2008. (Photo by Bas Princen).

clear, this had not happened. What visitors saw and experienced was a set of rooms and a walled garden where people, now absent, threw enormous amounts of confetti at each other. Perhaps the real occasion to party had been the final day of the Venice carnival, which would turn this architectural installation into an allegory of Lent, the forty-day period of fasting in the Christian liturgical calendar.

Yet, in retrospect, and not necessarily in line with the intentions of the architects, other parties could have taken place here, whose end was being exhibited. On September 15, 2008, one day after the opening of the 11th Venice Architecture Biennale, the American global financial services firm Lehman Brothers went bankrupt – the climax of the subprime mortgage crisis, which prompted a general financial malaise worldwide, and inaugurated a period of economic insecurity, political austerity, institutional and democratic mistrust, overall budget cuts, growing inequality, and burnout pandemic that is still ongoing. If the Western world had been partying before, then there were certainly enough blatantly present reasons to pull the plug, stop drinking, silence the DJ, turn on the lights, and go home. Something similar can be said of the profession of architecture itself, defined (or determined) as it always is by its economic base. Now that the relative economic prosperity of the Western world was suddenly on a slippery slope, money disappeared in thin air in large numbers, taking the carefree self-evidence of architecture with it. What was being celebrated by OFFICE in 2008 was therefore also a form of architecture the world

was slowly parting from: obvious, detached, intellectual, conceptual, formal, dialectical, autonomous, and, most of all, not openly politically engaged. “Cultural production is part of the world, but it doesn’t change it”, Kersten Geers said in the catalogue of 1907... *After The Party*, in an interview with Andrea Philips, who objected: “Lots of people would say that it does”. “It doesn’t mean”, Geers continued, “that we are resigning from a social and political task. It is simply not ours. Cultural production is bound to fail, in a certain sense. But that’s the important part of it. Cultural production is production without any clear goal or economic value”.⁵ That kind of freedom for architecture (and art), which symbolizes the existence of a purposiveness without a purpose, to put it in Kantian terms, is only possible thanks to its exemption from political and social battles. If there is one moment in the 20th century in which this exceptional status was proclaimed, it was in Manfredo Tafuri’s essay “The Ashes of Jefferson” from 1976, in which the Italian historian wrote about the current architecture being produced in the United States, a country that was once led by an enlightened president like Thomas Jefferson. (Ashes are, after all, a more apocalyptic form of confetti – polluting, gloomy, grey and dirty, as remnants of what was incinerated because it had to go). In the wake of the major economic crisis of the 1970s and writing about the “manipulations of linguistic materials” of the Modern Movement (“whether we are dealing with Eisenman or Venturi”), Tafuri acknowledged, quite bitterly, “a real event: ‘the war is over’”. Architects at the end of the 1970s, he

argued, had resigned themselves to their limited cultural task in society: they realized they could no longer change much, being subjected to the economic ways of the world, and that's why they decided to *show* that predicament –bringing about change was something for others to do, or that might become possible again at a later stage. This end of the direct engagement of architecture with politics and society, of the possibility of architects to go to war, to fight, to change the world, was the beginning of a party that can be labeled as “contemporary” (instead of modern) architecture. After all, what better reason to start celebrating than the end of a war? And what, subsequently, could end the party better than another war, or at least a major crisis? Of course, that pendulum swing between engagement and detachment, or activism and autonomy, is never absolute. If indeed, more than thirty years after the 1970s, the party of contemporary architecture came to an end in 2008, in the Belgian pavilion in Venice (of all places), this would not mean, unfortunately, that architects suddenly regained the power to change the world. Rather, it would mean that most of them would no longer grant themselves the privilege and duty to stay out of that battle. The circumstances had become too serious to fall back on one's own disciplinary pursuits, and it was time to at least harbor the illusion or cherish the desire that something could be done, also by architects. To ignore that something was lost that way too would be naive, since architecture (and art and culture in general) as a symbolic bastion for society against politicization and instrumentalization, was beginning

to be dismantled from within.

Following this interpretation, *1907... After The Party* stages the end of architecture as we knew it, and as it had been exhibited and celebrated during successive editions of the Venice Biennale since the late 1970s – what is this event, after all, if not a celebration of architecture? A more literally materialist but no less historicist reading could zoom in on the material confetti is usually made of. To make confetti, it is necessary to shred or perforate paper: a hole puncher is therefore the most common tool for making confetti, at home or in the office. Although in 2008 hole punchers could still be found on almost every desktop, the ongoing digitalization has since turned the storage of perforated documents in ring binders into an obsolete, if not otherworldly, sad and time-consuming activity. If paper is indeed considered a material we can do without, what does this say about confetti? A deluge of small pieces of colored paper, in the empty building of a pavilion at an architecture biennale, at the end of the first decade of the 21st century: how could this *not* be seen as the enactment of that ancient battle between words printed on paper and meaningful buildings made of stone – a conflict Victor Hugo most famously staged in his 1831 novel *Notre-Dame de Paris*?⁶ Instead of a disagreement, however, it is also possible to speak of an entente: for centuries, architecture culture was based on the continuous collaboration between buildings and books, between constructing and printing, and between stone (or concrete, wood, steel, glass...) and paper. This was a party too, or rather a kind of dance: architects made projects and

buildings, and books and magazines were printed to document those achievements, to comment, discuss, interpret, praise, or reject them. On the other hand, all that paper ignited and nourished architectural production, theorizing the future, and mapping out paths for practice. Wasn't the OFFICE's pavilion, empty and full at the same time, also a calm and cool goodbye to paper? To put it in absolute terms (and ma-

also as a medium that is asking for attention, and wants to influence what we do and what we think.

Whatever was celebrated or mourned in those exhibition spaces, it is clear that the visitors arrived too late – they had not been invited to the party that was over, and were experiencing its very end. This leads to further questions. Who is it that witnesses a banquet hall or a living



Fig. 03
OFFICE Kersten
Geers David Van
Severen, 1907...
After The Party,
Venice Architec-
ture Biennale,
2008. (Photo by
Bas Princen).

king abstraction of toilet paper): the only thing such material is still good for is being recycled into confetti. Whether this is a sad statement, and bad for architecture, remains to be seen: the screen, of a computer or a telephone, has since then become the combination of ally and enemy, as a device for representing buildings through shared images, but

room after the fact? Cleaners? Party crashers who got held up in traffic? Night owls with a hangover looking for their keys? Or voyeurs, incapable of experiencing real life and pathetically condemned to spy on other people's lives, which always seem better, more authentic, and more intense? The decision to exhibit the remains of an activity rather than that the activity itself – pe-

rhaps not the dust yet, but certainly the confetti had settled – seems a critique of the architectural exhibition, in line with the assignment of curator Moritz Küng. Architecture should be used; it is there to be lived in, to be experienced “in a state of distraction”, as Walter Benjamin expressed it – architecture, just like life, is what happens when you’re making other plans, and doing other things.⁷

What a strange and, indeed, always rather marginal pastime, profession, or passion, so often misunderstood by everyone else: being *interested* in architecture, and above all in its copies and representations! I remember that during my visit to the Belgian pavilion in the late summer of 2008, me and my friends could not resist the temptation to grab bunches of confetti and throw them at each other. The Italian attendant

reprimanded us immediately, possibly out of personal conviction. He started lecturing us, in broken English, on Guy Debord’s theorization of the society of the spectacle. What was being turned into a spectacle here – by us and our apparently inappropriate use of the exhibit, but also by the architects? And isn’t the whole idea of an architecture biennale the most direct proof of the fact that we live in a society hooked on simulacra and spectacles? In 1986, Manfredo Tafuri looked back on the very first architecture biennale in Venice in 1980, the Strada Novissima curated by Paolo Portoghesi – also architectural space at once real and fake – scornfully describing it as “a very different sense of spectacle, confining wood and papier-mâché to the realm of ‘fiction’: a development of a new realm opened to the architectural imagination by more



Fig. 04
OFFICE Kersten
Geers David Van
Severen, *Garden
Pavilion*, Venice
Architecture
Biennale, 2010.

modern circuits of information and consumption”.⁸ *1907... After The Party* showed the belatedness – with paper reduced to its tiniest form – but also the enduring attraction of those circuits, confronting the architectural community (to which OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen of course equally wants to belong and excel in) with its own object of desire, fulfilling and withholding it at the same time.

It may well go on like this for a while, and risk yet more *Hineininterpretierung*: perhaps particularly today, such temporary marriage of an existing building with confetti, sealed by a few walls, can continue to lend itself to exegesis, also thanks to its encouraging title. The question is, however, if all those words are not completely off the mark. The most obvious quality of *1907... After The Party* has nothing to do with interpretation or explanation of a text: it was a real space, a set of rooms to be lived in, which did not exist before as such, and altered a century-old place in a drastic but also temporary and, all in all, subtle or rather concise way. It was a pleasant space to be in, not least because it was quiet, enclosed, calm, like a kind of limbo between inside and outside, real and unreal (an impression enhanced by the ghostlike reflections of the steel walls), but also between private and public, which no party ever is entirely. Anne Lacaton, a member of the jury that selected OFFICE at the end of the preliminary competition, admitted this was an important topic during the discussion:

[They] left room for the ‘housing’ aspect. They made room to receive

people, they offer something, something positive, a garden. They offer a moment of pleasure. They make it possible for the visitor to enjoy the tranquility and calm of the garden and the pavilion. Their creation works on the senses and is generous.⁹

The phenomenological experience presented also connects, or disconnects, *1907... After The Party* with the rest of the 2008 Biennale. The thematic exhibition at the Arsenale, that year was curated by Aaron Betsky, and was entitled *Out There. Architecture Beyond Building*, resulting, as Brian Hatton has suggested, in an “entropic bag, which seemed but a *bricolage* of diffuse mythologies”.¹⁰ That OFFICE’s intervention did indeed go “beyond building” can be both confirmed and contradicted: on the one hand, *1907... After The Party*, showed the results of building, and was conceptually much more than a plain construction; on the other hand, it was beyond nothing at all, affirming (and reducing) architecture as an act of separation from, precisely, the world “out there”. This also gives the project something polemical, not without arrogant and elitist undertones: it was a refuge, presented as the only exception in and from the Biennale, and from everything that passes for architecture culture – by resolutely detaching itself, the whole caboodle, all the other pavilions as well as everything that Betsky had assembled, was put in its place – ironically, with conviction as well as with *sprezzatura*.

That’s why *1907... After The Party* would find its rightful place at the Biennale two years later, curated by

Kazuyo Sejima. It is even possible to speculate about the extent to which the Belgian pavilion in 2008 influenced the concept and the title – *People Meet in Architecture* – of the 2010 edition, given the conspicuous presence of “real” spaces, architectural installations, and proper interventions that year. In any case, OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen was invited by Sejima to also contribute to *People Meet in Architecture*. They were assigned a place that had never been part of the machinery of the Biennale: a semi-relic storage building at the far end of the Arsenale, on the border of the Giardino delle Vergini, and the very last thing that visitors of 2010 encountered. The location itself gave this project, titled *Garden Pavilion (7 rooms, 21 perspectives)* and awarded the Silver Lion for Promising Young Participant, the air of adventure and discovery, but also of ongoing colonization: in search of ever larger exhibition space, the circuits of the Biennale were once again expanding, and also this wild, overgrown, forgotten garden would now be cleaned up and enlisted.

On the one hand, OFFICE seemed to do the exact opposite of what they did in 2008: inside the existing seven rooms, with worn-out brick vaults and old wooden or stone floors, aluminum plates were placed with images of real or imaginary buildings and spaces – photographs taken by Bas Princen (of structures of unknown authorship, but also of projects by OFFICE, such as *1907... After The Party*) or computer-assembled perspective collages of their designs. It was a way to show the affinities between the method of a photographer and that of a duo of architects who had been col-

laborating for years, to explain how looking at a building, a structure, or a space, always also means framing and designing it, by tracing the borders it imposes with the rest of the world thanks to formal abstraction. Quoting a 2016 text by Kersten Geers, Princen’s photography is “about the relationship we have with elements, objects, architectures and (micro)landscapes”, and the juxtapositions in those rooms in Venice showed how this is also true for architecture, and certainly for the architecture of OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen.¹¹

On the other hand, this seemingly traditional exhibition, filled with representations of architecture, was equally seized upon to build yet another new project: on the outside, pencil-thin white steel posts supported a stretched-gauze roof, silvery and reflective, which followed the façade of the existing building, mirroring its pitch roof, and creating – well, yes – an architecture in which people meet [fig. 4].

Exactly this social opportunity and generosity connects 2010’s *Garden Pavilion (7 rooms, 21 perspectives)* with 2008’s *1907... After The Party*: spaces were created in which architecture (the architecture of the exhibition, the projects on show, but also everything the Biennale itself had to offer) could easily be forgotten, but even, of course, contemplated and discussed. The most significant presence in the pavilions from 2008 and 2010 in this respect has not been mentioned yet: chairs, freely available in a confetti-like and ever-changing composition. Although this seating furniture was produced by a Belgian company, its design and colors clearly mimic the classic

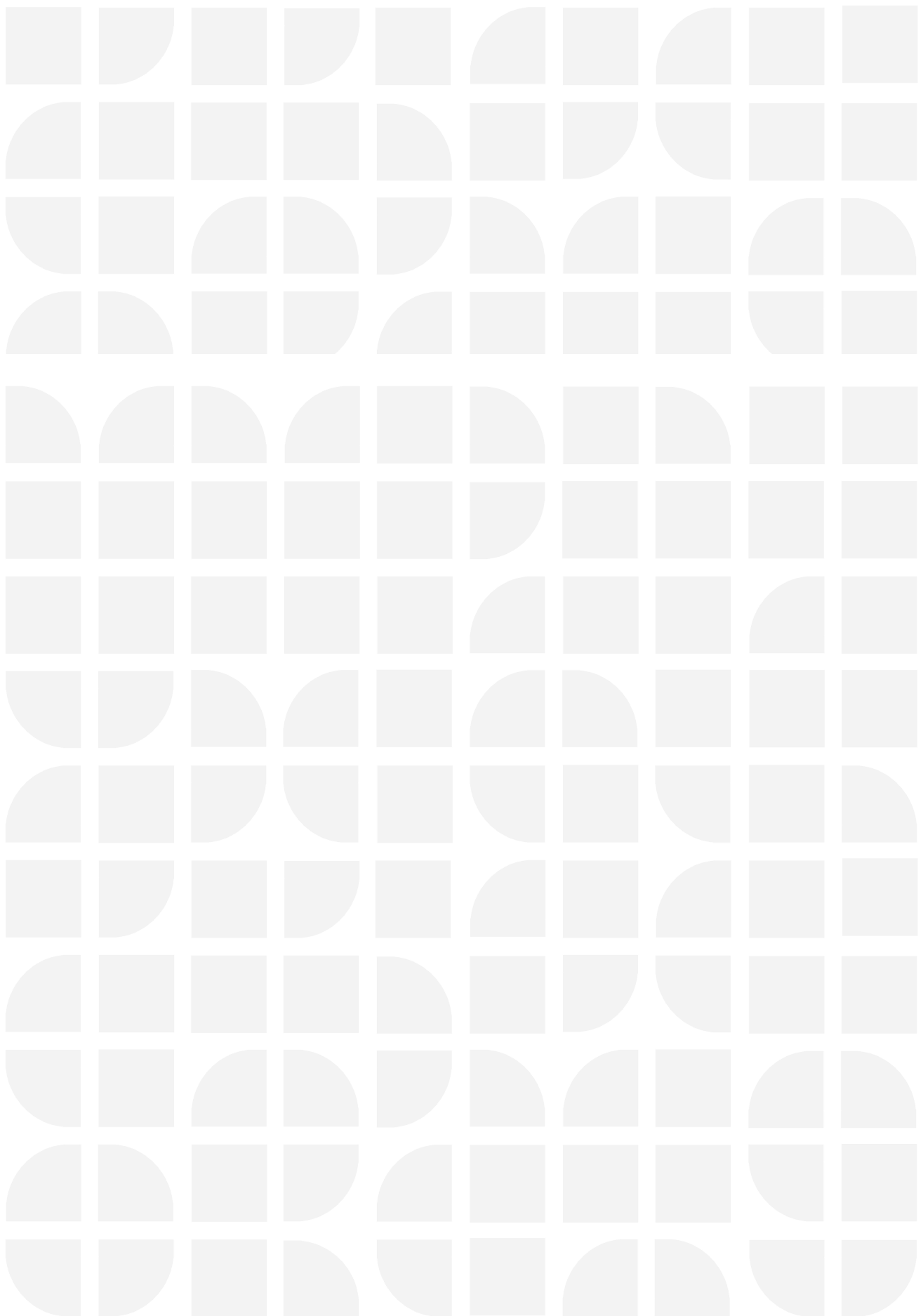
steel chairs that were first commissioned by the city of Paris and can be found since 1923 in parks such as the Tuileries, the Jardin de Luxembourg, and the Palais-Royal. Within the confines of the most important architectural exhibition worldwide, this symbol of modern, enlightened, and metropolitan public life – if not of a Habermasian *Stukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* – becomes both the perfect metaphor and the indispensable tool, not so much for architecture as for architecture culture: everything that makes architecture, and what it relates to, discernible, negotiable, debatable, understandable, and therefore subject to change. Architecture culture is what happens when the subject of architecture is put forward, and when chairs are available to sit on, and then watch, listen, think, and talk.

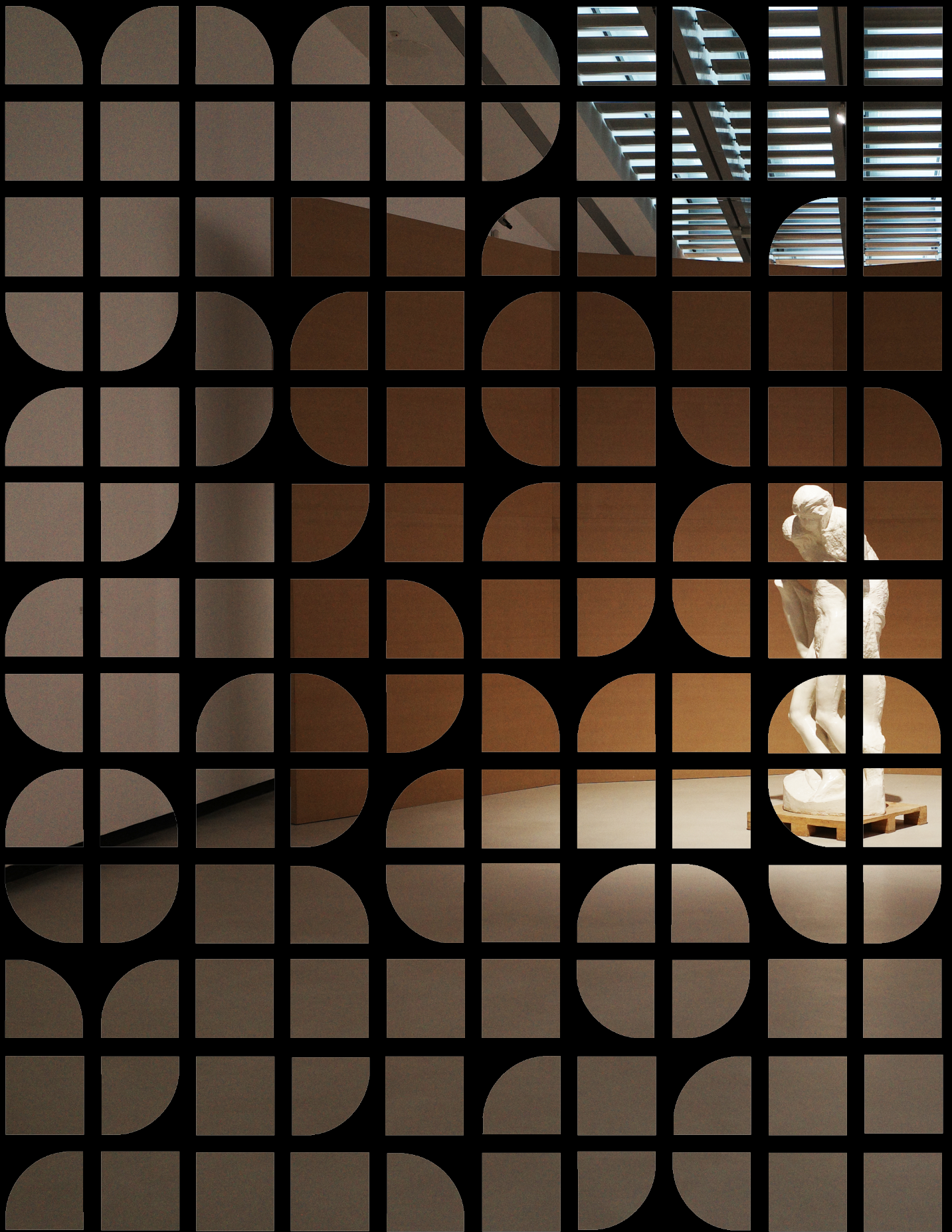
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- 2 Khosravi 2021, p. 32.
- 3 Verschaffel 2013, pp. 23-26.
- 4 Küng 2008, p. 12.
- 5 Philips, Davidts 2008, p. 32.
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- 7 Benjamin 2003, p. 268.
- 8 Tafuri 1989, p. 187.
- 9 Vandermarliere 2008, p. 75.
- 10 Hatton 2008, p. 49.
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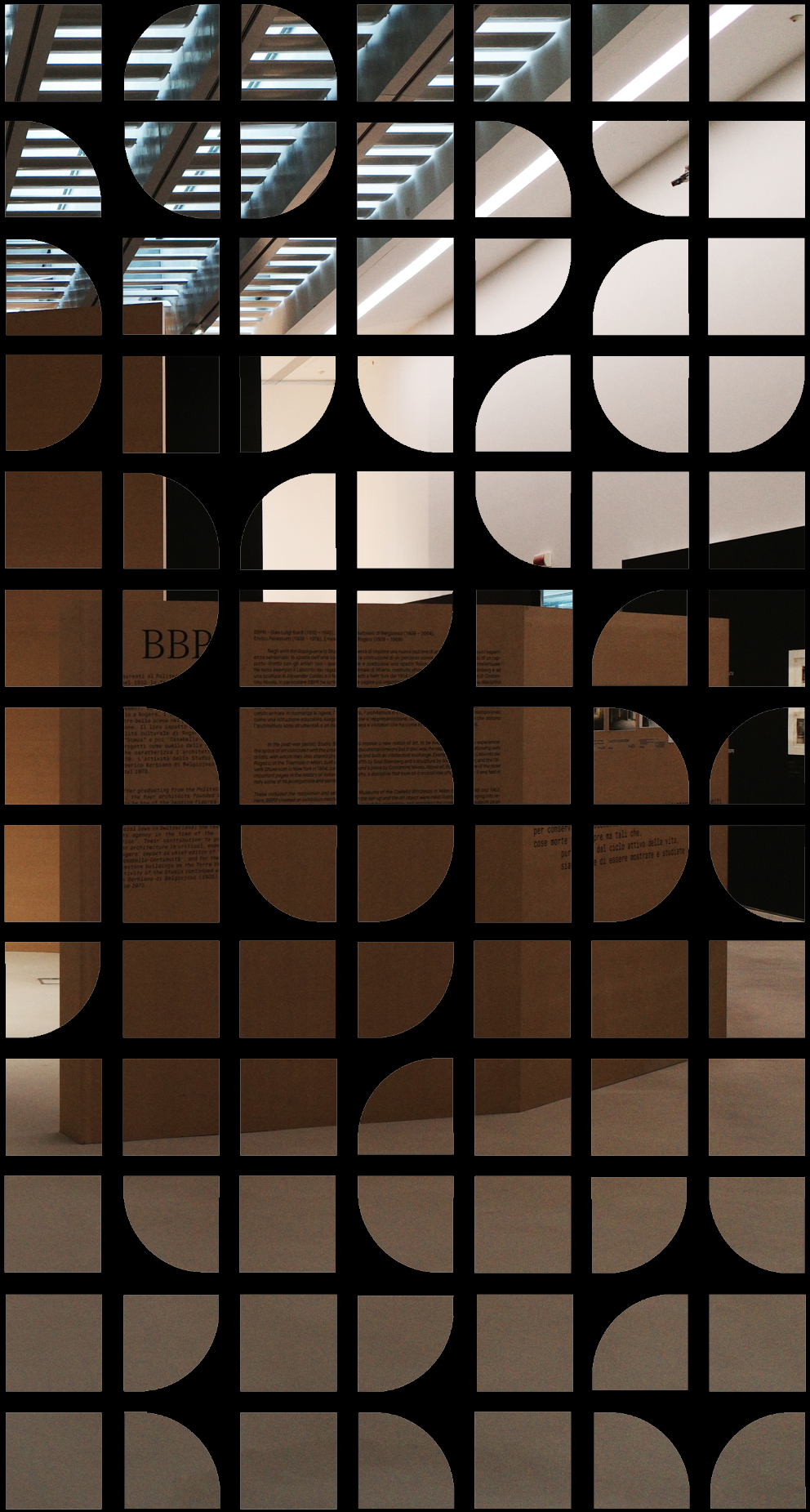
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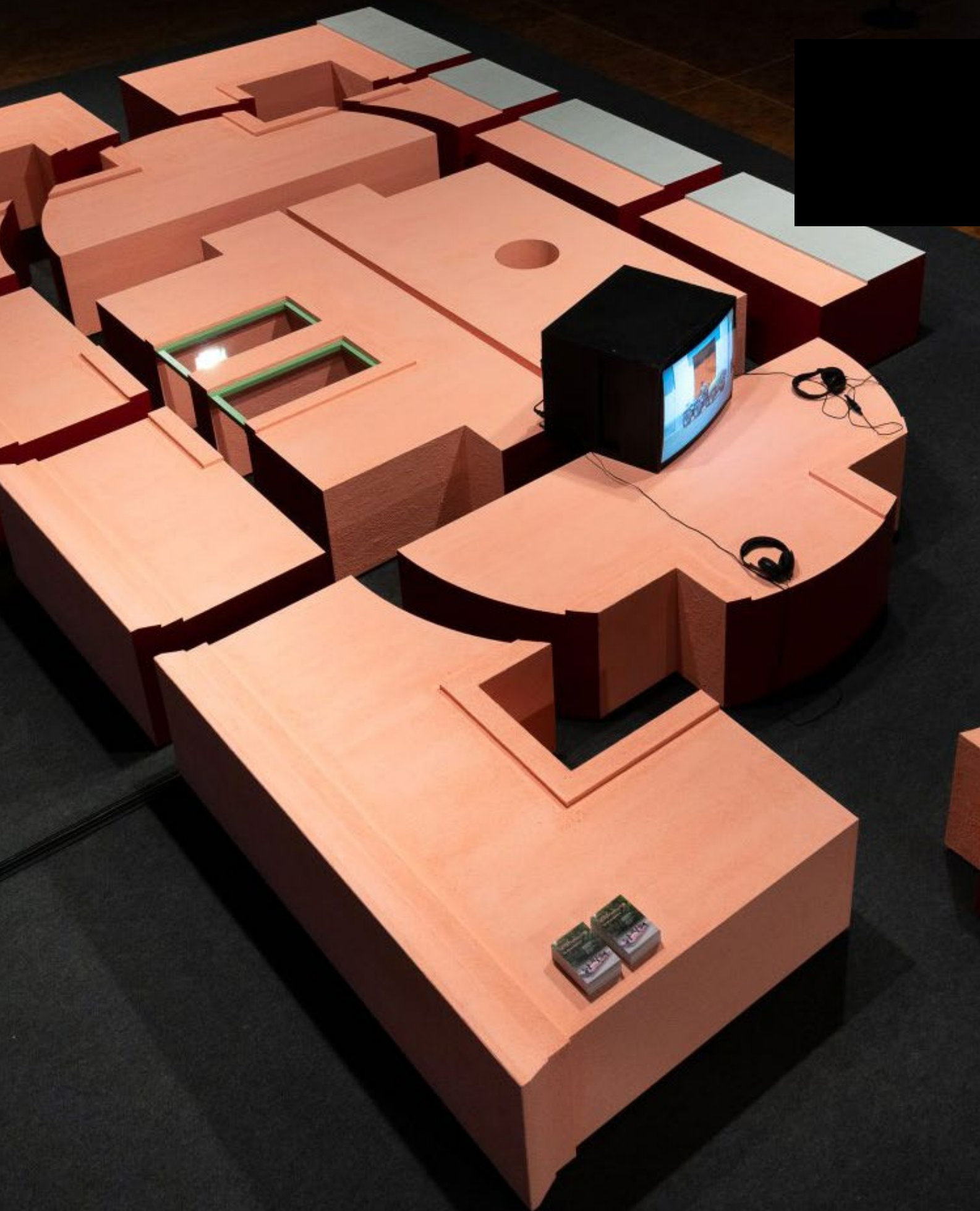
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sections.





Exhibition as Site of Transgression: An Interview with Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti (DAAR - Decolonizing Architecture Art Research)

Alessandro Paolo Lena

Keywords:

DAAR, Sandi Hilal, Alessandro Petti, Decolonization, Architecture, Exhibition.

ABSTRACT:

In light of the thematic dossier presented in the inaugural issue of MMD, this section dedicated to experience and publics features an interview with architects Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, founders of DAAR – Decolonizing Architecture Art Research.

In occasione del dossier tematico sulle mostre d'architettura presentato nel numero inaugurale di MMD, la sezione dedicata alle esperienze e ai pubblici propone un'intervista agli architetti Sandi Hilal e Alessandro Petti, fondatori di DAAR – Decolonizing Architecture Art Research.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 03: Ente di Decolonizzazione – Borgo Rizza, 2022, Berlin, 12th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, Akademie der Künste, installation view.

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<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.3034-9699/19294>

DAAR – Decolonizing Architecture Art Research

The practice of DAAR – Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti – is situated between architecture, art, pedagogy and politics. Over the last two decades, their artistic research practice has garnered several awards: Golden Lion at the 18th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale Di Venezia, the Prince Pierre Foundation Prize for artistic research, the Keith Haring Fellowship in Art and Activism at Bard College, the Loeb Fellowship Harvard University, the Price Claus Prize for Architecture.

In light of the thematic dossier presented in the inaugural issue of MMD, this column dedicated to experience and publics features an interview with architects Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, founders of DAAR – Decolonizing Architecture Art Research.¹

Their practice encompasses architecture, art, pedagogy, and politics, with a focus on decolonisation in various contexts. In their work, exhibitions function as both sites of display and catalysts for action that expand into other contexts, such as built architectural structures, critical learning environments, and participatory interventions that challenge dominant narratives.

DAAR's latest project, *Ente di Decolonizzazione – Borgo Rizza*,² investigates the possibilities for a critical reappropriation and subversion of fascist colonial heritage and its modernist legacy. Borgo Rizza is a village built in 1940 by the Entity of Sicilian Latifundium based on blueprints of colonial architecture built in former Italian colonies such as Eritrea, Somalia, Libya, and Ethiopia. In Borgo Rizza, DAAR collaborated with the local municipality of Carlentini in the Syracuse province in Sicily to reuse the village's fascist architectural heritage, establishing the Difficult Heritage Summer School.³ The school activated site research, organised public events and group discussions on the reuse possible reuse of the abandoned town in dialogue with local communities. Over the years, DAAR started to discuss with the local municipality how to turn the former Entity of Colonisation of Sicilian Latifundium in Borgo Rizza into an Entity of Decolonisation.

Besides their engagement on-site, Hilal and Petti expanded the discussion through exhibitions held in Naples, Berlin, and Brussels. The activation of the project during these shows involved a “profanation” of the Borgo Rizza façade, which was decomposed and recomposed into several modular seats. Their most recent exhibition at the Architecture Biennale in Venice has granted DAAR the Golden Lion for Best Participant, for their long-standing commitment to deep political engagement with architectural and learning practices of decolonization in Palestine and Europe.

Hilal and Petti's exhibition practice blurs the boundaries between architecture, art, and activism, creating a space for critical dialogue and reflection. In this case, the façade is transformed into a gathering space for decolonial assemblies, where the public is invited to reconsider the social and political legacies of fascist and colonial heritage while collectively imagining new common uses for the installation.

Hilal and Petti's research is deeply rooted in challenging and decolonising spatial narratives and structures in various contexts. In 2012, they established *Campus in Camps*,⁴ a programme conducted for several years in Palestine that sought to recognise the camp as a site of history and knowledge production, employing exercises of collective unlearning with local communities and international participants.

DAAR's extensive efforts in Palestine have made a significant contribution to the reassessment of the intangible heritage associated with refugee camps by reusing, misusing, and redirecting UNESCO Wor-



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ld Heritage guidelines and criteria. The project, known as *Refugee Heritage*⁵ (2015-2021), enabled DAAR to reconceptualise the notion of the refugee. Tracing, documenting, disclosing, and representing refugee history beyond the narrative of suffering and displacement, Hilal and Petti challenge the prevailing perception of refugees as passive victims and emphasise their agency in political change as well as the transformative potential of the social, political, and spatial expressions produced by the culture of exile.

The interview was held on 6th April 2023 and conducted by Alessandro Paolo Lena, together with Anna Rossellini.

One of your last projects, titled *Ente di Decolonizzazione – Borgo Rizza*, explores the possibility of critical reuse and subversion of fascist colonial architecture. How does the concept of demodernisation contribute to producing

knowledge on the legacies of colonialism in Europe and creating counter-hegemonic narratives?

ALESSANDRO PETTI: To begin with, one must first ask: what does decolonisation mean in Europe today? If in Palestine, for us, it meant a very specific thing, namely a practice of opposition to the colonial regime of Israeli's apartheid, occupation and colonization in Europe this question meant in particular challenging all the mythologies linked to modernisation that still exist today. We should start from the assumption that modernity cannot exist without the colonial trait, as they are two sides of the same coin. Some people see decolonisation as something that has to happen somewhere else in the world – hence not in Europe – or they see decolonisation simply as a historical process that, after all, has somehow ended. Asking how, within the larger movement of decolonisation, practices of demodernisation can be placed involves questioning some of the assump-

Fig. 01
Ente di Decolonizzazione – Borgo Rizza, 2022, Napoli, Mostra d'Oltremare, installation view.



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tions, which in our perspective still survive, associated with the mythology of modernity as a normative element, still capable of establishing the separation between the human and the inhuman, between nature and culture, between public and private. A reasoning by dichotomies that emerges through the project of modernity, that is fundamentally a project of disintegration, separation, zoning and segregation, which unfortunately is still present in our society today. So, for us a project of demodernisation is also a project of desegregation, because if the central project of modernity was precisely to establish categories, to separate the areas of the city, to separate gender, to separate humans from nature, a project of demodernisation is the transgression of these separations.

Another important aspect to consider is that demodernisation does not equate to anti-modernity or to being anti-modernist. We understand that anti-modernism has often been as-

sociated with the idea that we must reject technology or abandon new discoveries. However, in our view, it is not about rejecting the new, but rather abandoning the rhetoric associated to of endless progress. Modernity tricked us into associating itself with everything that was new or that had just been invented, and the term “modern” is commonly used to refer to something that is simply new. Therefore, demodernisation does not mean rejecting technology or infrastructures, but rather questioning the modernist dichotomy according to which you are either modern – and therefore must believe in the dogmas of development, the continuous search for novelty, consumerism, and progress – or you are anti-modern and traditionalist. This is an approach that we must absolutely reject.

In architecture, the interpretation imposed by modernity has been that anything that is not modern is considered history, and history has been classified as well. The nar-

Fig. 02
Ente di Decolonizzazione – Borgo Rizza, 2022, Napoli, Mostra d’Oltremare, installation view.

Alessandro Paolo Lena

rative of a monolithic history has been constructed from the Greeks to the Romans, the Renaissance, the Baroque, and up to the moment of modernity and its rupture. We must question this violent and simplistic view. Our thinking and acting should aim to move beyond the dimension of opposing and of being “anti-something”, and, instead, we should recover a way of being in the midst of things that do not fall within the schemes or paradigms that are still tied to the concept of modernity and that postmodernism has not been able to fully overcome. Postmodernism has done important work as a critique of modernity, but it has failed to offer other ways of being in the world. Fortunately, with the emergence of indigenous movements and the recognition of the colonial legacy, a new chapter has opened in which practices of liberation and emancipation from modernity are also taking place. A project of demodernisation also means liberation from a modernist way of thinking. Being back in Europe and teaching at the university, our focus differs from the work in Palestine, and is primarily concerned with knowledge and decolonising it. In this case, decolonising knowledge means thinking about a project of demodernisation primarily as a practice.

Another key aspect, in fact, is that when we talk about decolonisation and demodernisation, we should always start from the practice. There is no recipe, there is no standard definition, it is not about the new game in town that people can pick up and consume, and then maybe in five years’ time we will talk about something else. For us, this term only makes sense if it can

describe something that is done practices and in a specific context. For example, let’s taken the idea of the white cube so present when we do exhibitions, the idea that we only use the senses that are in our head, our gaze, and all other senses do not exist. This is unfortunately a modernist attitude towards approaching the exhibition. Reasoning about a demodern practice is also theorising through practice; therefore, it is not simply trying to construct a theory that then has to be applied everywhere. Also because a demodernisation project means something in Europe, but in other contexts it means other things. It is therefore important to always localise and try to understand well how these terms can be useful to describe a practice and to what extent we need them, so that they are not an end in themselves.

To provide concrete examples of an exhibition, in the *Ente di Decolonizzazione - Borgo Rizza* project, you employ a physical overturning of the façade, transforming it into a meeting place. After its first activation at the Mostra d’Oltremare in Naples, the project has been subsequently presented at Hansa Quarter in west Berlin and at La Loge in Brussels. How do these activations respond to the different sites and communities?

SANDI HILAL: This project, in some way, relocates us to Europe, and I would like to start by addressing the concept of community because, even among ourselves, we understand that we come from different positions. Our practice is to investigate

the lines that nationalism imposes on us and, therefore, to understand what it means to work in Italy for me and what it means to work in Italy for Alessandro, in a way to recognise and appreciate the richness of our differing approaches. In this sense, the community has changed significantly compared to Palestine. In Palestine, the focus was on building together and living under a colonial regime, while understanding the structures of knowledge production and architecture that can be used to actually deal with such a situation and resist it. If in Palestine the emphasis was on building together, in Europe, on the other hand, we have felt the need to “destroy” together, in a positive sense, that is, to transgress together. How can we transgress such a situation?

When we came back to Europe, on a personal level, I did not want to return. I wondered why I didn't want to return to Europe, what was holding me back. At the root of it is an idea of accepting almost structurally to be inferior. Coming to Europe from a certain national category – being Palestinian in Italy or being Palestinian in Sweden – would therefore involve accepting a modern structure, I must say, that already categorises you within certain discourses. When you transgress these categories or express yourself in your own way, the first thing you hear is: “you are different from them”. But who are “they”? Who am I? I did not want to return to a place that categorises me in this way, as it puts me inside a frame that limits me. Therefore, I could only return if we had a structure that enabled us to transgress these frames. It was the only way back.

Often, when we talk about the *Ente di Decolonizzazione* project, I say that this is a “return project” for us, a reflection on how to return to Europe, especially Italy. But to return to what community? And where, actually? What intellectual community can we return to? And if there is none, is it possible to create it? Our projects sometimes start from very simple and often very personal needs and questions. We cannot return to Italy as equals unless the colonialist idea is destroyed and fertile ground for equality is established. Let us not forget that colonialism arrived in other parts of the world, claiming to civilise others. I, myself, fell for this deception when I came to Italy to study, intending to return to Palestine and bring modern architecture to my community as a means of civilising it. For so many years, I suffered from the idea of being inferior, thinking that my knowledge was worth less. But you accept certain things at certain ages, and then you reach a point of almost privilege – the possibility of having a stable practice – and you ask yourself: what to do with this privilege so that it opens up to others?

In fact, when we went to Sicily, the first question we asked ourselves was: how can we work in Sicily at a time when the seashore of Italy is piled with dead bodies? What does this mean? But then we wondered: who has the task of creating a community, an intellectual soil? And what is our role in all this? I think we, people that hold certain privileges and do not have to deal with simply surviving, we have the responsibility to be the first ones to create this soil and then to say: look, there is this soil; it is fertile; if you want, you could start planting things. Ins-

tead, precisely because we live in a society that is all about separation and classification, the tendency is always to go to the more vulnerable and say I am “including” you in my discourse. We decided to go the other way: why do I expect a person who has other priorities in her life at the moment to solve my problem? we need to take the responsibility to articulate the question by creating space and ground for discussions and actions. So we have realised that the fascist façade in Borgo Riz-

whom we started talking about decoloniality, realising that it is still something very much present in Europe. Or Charles Esche, who came as a museum director to understand what it means to work in a modern museum. Therefore, we also have around us an intellectual community with whom we are in discussion, seeking to understand what it means to transgress a fascist façade. Different points of view – pragmatic, artistic, and life – to understand what it means. Because it is not



Fig. 04
Ente di Decolonizzazione
– Borgo Rizza,
2022, Berlin, 12th
Berlin Biennale
for Contemporary Art, Akademie
der Künste, installation view.

za is a place where it has been clearly specified who can be Italian and who, even with an Italian passport like me, will never be. Opening up such façade like this, putting it on the ground, and encountering other ghosts of fascism and the modern was a way of asking ourselves how we build our community and how we go on from there. Fundamental was also being in conversation with people like Walter Mignolo, with

enough to return, there must be fertile ground to be able to return, not to die, not to suffocate in a soil that has no oxygen.

A.P.: The question also relates to how we approached the device of exhibitions. To distance ourselves from the idea of the white cube, the exhibition must be understood not only as space of representation.

In our practice, exhibitions, are a pretext to start asking questions and create new spaces of inhabitation. The exhibition has always been an important space because it allowed us to keep our practice experimental. The exhibition for us has always been the place where we first clarify to ourselves the mechanisms we are interested in and then create experiences, or think of the exhibition more specifically as a place of production itself. This is exactly what happens for example when an exhibition gets activated; we often have clashed with the device of the modernist exhibition because we wanted the objects on display in the exhibition to be touched, to be profane, to be reused. This is fundamental for us, but it drives the museum crazy. The museum is practically the opposite. For the museum, you have to make an object; you cannot touch it; you have to put it there and just watch it.

The device of the modern exhibition is space for sacred space. Instead, for us, linked to the exhibition, there was always the idea of transgression, emancipation and of action. the exhibition for us is always in tension with the outside; the experience we always try to achieve in the exhibition points to the outside and escapes the idea of having an object that functions only as an aesthetic object. Exhibitions have been one of the constants throughout the last twenty years for us and have always allowed us to develop projects and share them, but we have never just submitted to the idea of an exhibition that then reduced what we do to an object to be contemplated. On the contrary, the exhibition was always a bit of a starting point for a process, an

invitation. In this specific case, in the project of the *Ente di Decolonizzazione*, the exhibition is based on the idea of almost physically taking that façade, of reproducing it, in a mechanism of reappropriation that can only take place in the exhibition. The process that we do there in Borgo Rizza with the municipality is a process of reappropriation and reuse, but in the exhibition, that project becomes even more radical and evident. Why? Because overturning the building, sitting on it, profaning it, breaking the façade itself to recompose it in a completely different way with completely different narratives is exactly what we want and what we cannot do on the site yet. So, the exhibition is perhaps the most radical and purest form of an idea, which then helps to go back and clarify it on the site. The architecture is interesting; it is on the site, it is on a 1:1 scale, but it is also full of compromises. The exhibition is paradoxically a space where you can radicalise some of these ideas.

Activating a project in exhibitions also makes it possible to invite people, as in Brussels, for example, where we invited a group working on the decolonisation of public spaces. These are spaces where we ourselves have learnt new things, where we do not present ourselves with a dogmatic attitude to just tell our story. We can tell the story of the *Ente di Decolonizzazione* in Sicily, but when the exhibition goes to other places, it enters into dialogue with other situations. In Brussels, precisely, the presence of a group dealing with decolonisation spaces attracted schools, activist groups, etc. Not only did we ourselves use the exhibition to meet other people,

but the museum itself was also invited to physically use the spaces, not only as a place of production, but as a meeting place as well. Otherwise, the exhibition would simply be a moment where you have an opening, have a drink and then say: “why are we doing this? Just for us?”.

S.H.: To continue along these lines, when we met in Borgo Rizza and thought that it could be a place to start research, we went to meet the mayor and deputy mayor. After just twenty minutes, they had already given us the building of the Entity of Colonisation and said “Yes, let’s do it”. Since Alessandro is a university professor, we thought it best to start by involving universities – Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm [where Alessandro Petti teaches] and the University of Basel with Emilio Distretti – to create a pedagogical project. However, we also wanted to maintain a critical approach to Borgo Rizza and integrate it progressively. We could not scare everyone by introducing “decolonial” and “demodern” terms too quickly, as they would have wondered what we were doing. After being entrusted with Borgo Rizza, we worked together with the mayor, the deputy mayor, the municipal administration and the people of the Carlentini community. The deputy mayor, a visionary young man, followed us to all the exhibitions, during which we understood together what was best to do and how to best communicate with each other. Although we didn’t have the right words to describe what is done in Borgo Rizza – we didn’t understand what it is, where we can go, how –, participating in

exhibitions and the cultural dimension gave courage to the municipality. They understand that they are not alone, and that other institutions like the Museo della Civiltà and Madre Museum are interested in working with us, in inviting us to exhibitions, in collecting our works. When you want to engage in a discussion where words do not yet exist and must be slowly constructed, the exhibition becomes a fundamental space – not only for us, but for all the community members involved in this project – to comprehend our intentions and actions. For us, the exhibition has always played the role of a place for transgression and disobedience, a space where you can do things without hurting yourself or others. This is because of the nature of art and exhibition spaces, where the autonomy of artists has been a fundamental issue for centuries. How do you use this autonomy to transgress in a way that helps you understand how you can change from within? The political language is slowly developing along with this exhibition, which is essential for us. It means understanding how these two things feed off each other.

Regarding the dimension of transgression, which is a prominent aspect of your work, I would like to ask you about the elements within your exhibitions that have effectively embodied this transgression. In other words, how does this transgression manifest itself? Additionally, earlier in the conversation, you mentioned two possibilities of the exhibition: one that is more urban, and another that is connected to a system (apparently, as it transgresses the

system). In these two moments, what distinguishes the participation of those involved?

A.P.: On the one hand, we mentioned the idea of transgression as an act of desegregation. On the other hand, an additional important element that is tied to this, also as a practice, is the concept of profanation. If we

the exhibition when we ask people to sit down, touch and eat and drink on art objects and engage in conversation. Transgression manifests itself at many different levels, from the experiences of exhibition visitors to the politically more relevant transgression of not accepting the lingering fascist narrative that unfortunately still exists in



05

consider the example of the Borgo Rizza façade, a fascist façade built as propaganda, the idea here was overturn it and reuse it. In this sense, transgressions are exactly in these actions – that is, not respecting the sacredness of this heritage. Transgression as act of profanation aims to reuse things for different purposes they were design for. This forms the fundamental basis of transgression, as it involves rethinking the common use of things. It occurs on the site in Borgo Rizza, with the façade itself, but it also takes place in

Italy. This possibly constitutes our real transgression, and politically, it is the most important one we seek to achieve. However, it must also manifest through many other small practices. For instance, if we consider the modernist separation of public and private, in Borgo Rizza, transgression occurred when we asked people to donate their old furniture, that they no longer used. When we conducted the Summer School, we placed the furniture in the square, specifically in the public square designed for gatherings, parades, and a variety of other func-

Fig. 05
Ente di Decolonizzazione – Borgo Rizza, 2022, Berlin, 12th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, Akademie der Künste, installation view.

Alessandro Paolo Lena

tions, using it as a domestic setting. People rediscovered their personal connections to the objects and regained possession of them: a lady finding her sofa, a boy recognising his grandmother's furniture, and so on. This notion of transgression and the domestic element became fundamental because, even though we were in a public square, it felt like a "private" space as people shared their memories of the place and the origins of the furniture itself as well. This is an example of another act of transgression. Furthermore, transgression also defies the traditional perception of a school environment. By bringing my students to this unconventional setting, they engaged in discussions on these matters, stepping beyond the boundaries of a typical school experience. Transgression, therefore, manifests itself as a practical approach operating on different levels. Through such experiences and observations, individuals can be inspired to understand how they can claim their own right to transgress.

S.H.: A central aspect lies in comprehending how the exhibition facilitates our act of transgression. We came to realise that we didn't want to be encompassed within a predetermined narrative frame, meaning we didn't want our discourse to be "included". The pervasive tendency to assert, "we include you", prompts us to question the nature of such inclusion because, in the end, you include me in a narrative to which I do not belong. Thus, the exhibition allows us to assert our own frame: we establish the frame, invite people and assume the role of hosts in facilitating discussions,

rather than being guests within a preexisting structure in which we are included. This represents a transgression of the concept of inclusion. For too long, I had accepted the idea of being included, only to realise that it led me to lose my own voice rather than find it. Instead, we strive to create as many imaginable frames as possible and stand on the threshold, rather than always being included. We have come to understand that for DAAR, a return to Europe can only occur if we begin constructing our own framework and engaging with people. They can come to us, or we can go to them, but the threshold remains, serving as a space for negotiation. I negotiate with the mayor and deputy mayor not solely within the context of Italian political discussions, but also within the framework I establish through the exhibition. These are the discussions and ideas we put forward. They understand us, and we understand them, which allows us to meet at the threshold. To me, that is the true act of transgression.

In Arabic, in fact, the word "transgression" has multiple origins. One of its origins is the concept of "you must and you can", which signifies the ability to bypass or transgress because it is necessary and important to do so. It grants the right to transgress in order to move forward, effect change, or overcome difficult situations. We are intrigued by the potential of exhibitions to facilitate transgression because we have the capacity to transgress. How can we create a space for transgression that allows DAAR to come to a place like Italy and take on the role of hosting a discourse, rather than being hosted within one? This question remains essential to us, as without

it, a return is unthinkable. For example, during my time teaching in Abu Dhabi, I encountered an Italian politician who saw me in a prestigious position and remarked: “why don’t you come back?”. He was concerned with the brain drain issue; thus, he proceeded to discuss various economic incentives to encourage the return of those who had left. In response, I asked him: “but where do we return to?”. That is, what intellectual community can we return to? If we desire to come back, how can we establish an intellectual and political community that we can return to? This is particularly pertinent in the art world, where exhibitions serve as spaces for creating these frames, producing new narratives and challenging the old ones, enabling transformative experiences. I believe that exhibitions have offered us the opportunity to transgress because we can do so. This is the real contribution of exhibitions in our case – they play a pivotal role.

Your research also challenges the idea of heritage as part of the identity narration of nation-states by investigating the ways in which such heritage is mobilised to connect sites located in different territories. In *Refugee Heritage*, in particular, you are working within the framework of an international organisation, UNESCO: what is your relationship with international institutions?

A.P.: *Refugee Heritage* is a very broad chapter, that encompasses a wide range of topics. It is important to begin by exploring its origins and understanding why the provocative

idea of designating the refugee camp Dheisheh as World Heritage gained significance. After many years of working within these camps, the fundamental questions that arose were centred on understanding the multi-layered history spanning several decades, from the initial establishment of the camps in the late 1940s up to the present day.

It is a history that, unfortunately, remains largely unrecognised and consistently denied. Nation-states, of course, deny the existence of these camps as they represent spaces of exception, that can exist only outside national territorial space. However, even those working in the camps within the realm of humanitarian assistance fail to recognise them. The narrative surrounding these camps has predominantly focused on suffering, reducing their story only to that of victims. Moreover, within the community itself, the self-narrative has often been limited to that of victimisation.

In our perspective, it is important to acknowledge that while we do not seek to diminish the tragic origins of the camp, nor do we intend to romanticise its existence – recognising the very fact that camps should not exist in the first place – over time, living outside the confines of the nation-state, the camp has produced and fostered intriguing social and political structures as well. In our quest to envision a life beyond the nation-state, the camp serves as a valuable learning ground. By observing the developments that have taken place within these camps, our objective has been to understand how to best dignify these experiences and creations.

Hence, the provocative question

arose: “why not nominate the refugee camp to the UNESCO World Heritage List precisely due to its tragic history?”. We proposed designating it as a world heritage site to acknowledge its historical significance. However, initial discussions with UNESCO often reduced the camp to a folkloric notion—a place where one goes to recover lost things that obviously no longer exist, remnants of a bygone era in the 1940s. In reality, what intrigued us the most was what we referred to as *Refugee Heritage* – the heritage of exile that emerged from the late 1940s until the present day – which represents an unrecognised history. This history is one of resistance, a testament to the possibility of building social structures that transcend conventional notions of public and private spheres. As you can see, our projects are inherently interconnected. *Refugee Heritage* served as the foundation from which we subsequently embarked on the work of Difficult Heritage in Sicily with the *Ente di Decolonizzazione*. Our efforts in Palestine aimed to engage in a broader debate, challenging the prevailing narrative that assesses the camp solely as a place of suffering or a humanitarian space, and the refugees solely as victims of state persecution or of the absence of a state. Instead, we sought to subvert this narrative, not solely out of preference, but because we recognised the presence of subjectivity within the camp and the existence of complex political and social structures.

Our intention was to narrate a space that is fundamentally different, from which we can draw valuable insights. For instance, a pivotal aspect for us was understanding how we live in the modernist dichotomy

of public and private spheres. In the camp, these categories practically do not exist. The houses that refugees build cannot be legally owned as private property. There is no such thing as private property in the camp, and even the roads do not fall under the purview of public ownership, as there is no municipal authority. Hence, we needed to mobilise alternative categories and carve out a space that exists between the realms of public and private, aiming to understand other forms of life within the camp.

One can understand that in the present, the constitution of a public space becomes unattainable when, simultaneously, we construct its dark side, which is precisely that of the camp where people are unjustly deprived of their rights. The narrative of the project, culminating in the idea of nominating it as a World Heritage site, aimed to reclaim a history that encompasses not only suffering but also tremendous inspiration, particularly with regard to the right to return. Even after seventy years, this right still exists thanks to the efforts of those who resisted annihilation, as seen in other places as well. Thus, our objective is to ascribe the appropriate value to this type of narrative, which continues to inspire people worldwide, shedding light on the meaning of return and its potential implications, particularly from a perspective that extends beyond the notion of return to a nation-state.

Therefore, it was a narrative that challenged not only the dominant narrative but also the prevailing narrative within the Palestinian community itself. Even there, it was not easy to grasp that the notion



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of return is not simply about going back to one's original village, but rather about articulating and enacting multiple "returns", in the plural, acknowledging that the concept of return can take on various forms. From a political standpoint, what intrigued us the most was how "returns" extend beyond a physical place. It prompted us to reconsider the idea of the nation-state and put it back into play, challenging the notion that being a refugee is a condition that can be cured. Instead, our political focus centred on questioning whether we can effect change within the nation-state, considering the very fracture where the nation-state no longer works and an alternative political space emerges, one that allows people to have a sense of belonging to more than one place. Unfortunately, the nation-state confines individuals to the notion of exclusive affiliation to only one entity, whereas the history of migration and the condition of being refugee indicate a sense of

belonging to multiple places simultaneously as a result of being exiled. This leads to the question: is it possible to envision a political space that is rooted in this very need people have? In the best scenario of inclusion, one's diversity must be shed in order to assimilate into the new society where they reside, conforming to predetermined norms. The focus of the *Refugee Heritage* project, instead, was to explore whether there exists a political space that can articulate the notion of return as a dynamic movement through places beyond the nation-state.

S.H.: You can understand why, when we began thinking about the *Ente di Decolonizzazione*, the question was: where do we return to? Return is not just a political matter. The right of return remains a fundamental right for the Palestinian cause, but it is also a right within this abstract movement. What does it truly mean to return? Where do

Fig. 06
Ente di Decolonizzazione – Borgo Rizza, 2023, Brussels, La Loge, installation view.

we return to? How can one accomplish this return? *Refugee Heritage* was then presented in two key exhibitions: one in Abu Dhabi and another at the Van Abbemuseum. The underlying idea was this: if you live in a condition of permanent temporariness, if your life is characterised by temporariness rather than stability, if you have several homes rather than just one place that you call home, what kind of heritage can you claim? Where is your audience? How can you have an audience that goes beyond those who simply include you? The challenge lies in not having to diminish who you are and suppress your potential, as you are more than just one thing and you do not need to constantly prove your worth to everyone in terms of your behaviour. The whole discourse surrounding immigration, upon reflection, revolves around a particular notion: if individuals come to a new place, they have to learn how to behave. Inclusion often comes with a set of rules and regulations that force you to live in a certain way. Consequently, individuals are defined and confined by external expectations: “you are this because I tell you to be this way”.

The first exhibition was held in Abu Dhabi, where 90% of the population consists of immigrants, while the remaining 10% are locals. We are talking about an absolute majority, an incredibly vast reality of migration, with all these individuals being temporary residents. Currently, UNESCO does not acknowledge the right of these people, who are scattered across the globe, to have a heritage or a public space that represents them. They are not granted the right to claim belonging to more than one place; instead, they must

choose. Making such a choice is very difficult as it forces you to simply be included.

In my opinion, the real public space is a space composed of so many of these narratives that the real encounter does not occur within someone's individual public space but rather at the intersection of these spaces, at the threshold between these public spaces, so that we can truly all be ourselves. It is not a space where one must take care of and include others, but a space of constant inclusion, where one day I include others, and the next day I am included. I can be both a guest and a host, both including and being included. It is the right of every human being to constantly hold power and be embraced by a power. However, what has modernity done? Modernity has imposed a way of being, declaring it the only way of being, where everybody has to look and assimilate. If one is modern, they are deemed progressive, while those who do not conform are labelled as backward, traditional, and excluded from the contemporary world. This notion is utterly atrocious, as it restricts the possibilities in today's world. If you think about it, it serves as a means to maintain a certain power and to continue exploiting the world, the planet, and the people.

Your architectural practice is often related to the creation of learning environments, and you are engaged with university teaching. What are the overlaps between your teaching activity and your architectural/artistic research?

A.P.: The relationship between research and teaching is an ideal ecology for us, as they mutually enrich and inform one another, creating a fundamental exchange. Learning environments, in particular, are deeply influenced by the questions arising from research. One example of this is the *Ente di Decolonizzazione*, which consists of parallel trajectories. On the one hand, the initial phase of the investigation involved visiting villages in Sicily, culminating in our engagement with the municipality of Carlentini. This provided the foundation for the subsequent year, when we took students to the university, establishing a school known as Difficult Heritage. On the other hand, the more experimental and, at times, solitary nature of research is transformed into a more convivial experience through teaching. Both phases are essential, much like the act of breathing: inhalation and exhalation. Without this movement, proper breathing becomes compromised. The connection between research and teaching allows for the sharing of research questions and experiences, creating a space to explore them together, be it for a moment or an entire year. For instance, in next year's upcoming course, we will delve into the concept of the rural commons, which originated in Palestine with the notion of *Al Masha*. We also discussed this idea during our fieldwork, contemplating how to reopen the possibilities between the private and the public spheres. At times, the course presents wonderful opportunities on an institutional level, such as when we brought the university, as an institution, to Carlentini. We created a space of teaching – a learning envi-

ronment that extends beyond the idea of making an exhibition, where you have to create a specific product. Teaching is beautiful because it emphasises the process and the idea of learning within that process, regardless of the course's specific contents. This relationship between research and teaching has been integral to our path, accompanying us throughout, whether we were organising campuses in Palestine or continuing with the Tree School, as we are doing at the moment.

S.H.: Transgressing, learning, and unlearning are integral parts of our practice. If one desires to transgress, the only way to do so is by embracing learning and unlearning as essential components of the practice itself. Otherwise, understanding becomes impossible. If I were to acknowledge one thing we have become good at over the years, it is the ability to always unlearn. When we were working in the camps in Palestine, we had to unlearn many concepts instilled in us by a traditional university education that prioritised modern architecture. We came to realise that we cannot incorporate everything we observe into our existing knowledge. First, we must unlearn, and then we can learn anew. This cycle of unlearning and learning is a constant process for us. When we deal with students or activate our projects, it becomes an intrinsic part of the practice; we simply open it up to others. It is something we engage in every day, and there are moments when we do it collectively with others, whether they are students or individuals participating in the activation of our projects.

Endnotes

1 <https://www.decolonizing.ps/site/about/>

2 <https://www.decolonizing.ps/site/ente-di-decolonizzazione-borgo-rizza/>. Hilal and Petti strike out the name Rizza to negate its commemoration, but at the same time they do not want to erase the meaning of what stood for.

3 <https://www.decolonizing.ps/site/difficult-heritage-borgo-rizza/> and E. Distretti, A. Petti (2021). “Architectural Demodernization as Critical Pedagogy: Pathways for Undoing Colonial Fascist Architectural Legacies in Sicily.” In *Architectural Dissonances*, edited by Corina Oprea, Alessandro Petti, Marie-Louise Richards, Tatiana Pinto, Roberta Burchardt, L’Internationale online.

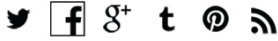
https://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/208_architectural_demodernization_as_critical_pedagogy_pathways_for_undoing_colonial_fascist_architectural_legacies_in_sicily/

4 www.campusincamps.ps

5 “Refugee Heritage” by DAAR – HILAL S., PETTI A., photographic dossier Luca Capuano Art and Theory Publishing 2021.

SOCKS

MEDIA ART ARCHITECTURE CULTURE SOUNDS TERRITORIES VISUAL ATLAS

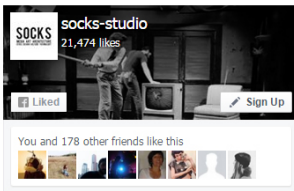


Socks is a non-linear journey through distant territories of human imagination.

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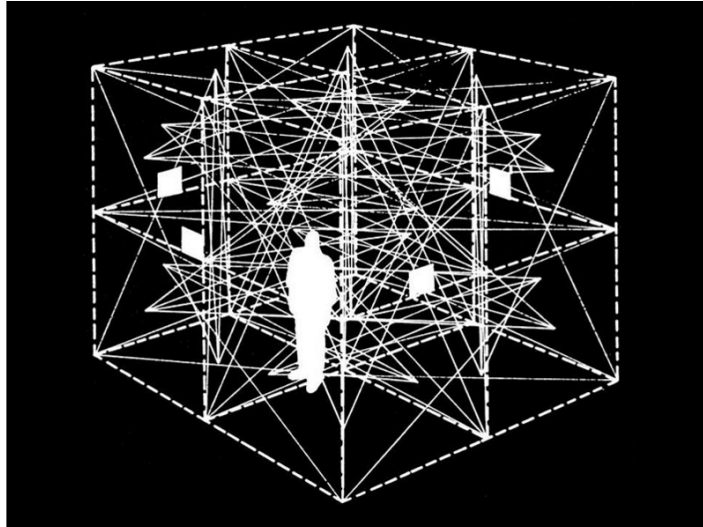
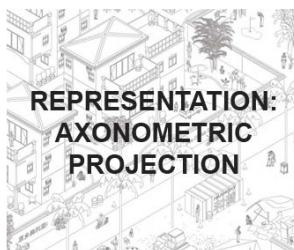
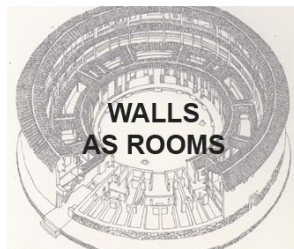
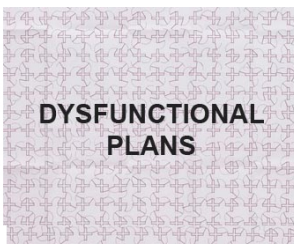
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We are Mariabruna Fabrizi and Fosco Lucarelli of [Microcities](#). [Ask us anything](#)

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](#)



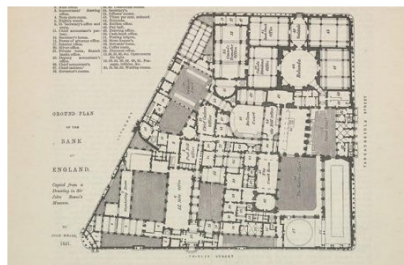
German Cities and Other Prints by Dieter Roth (1962-1970)

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-



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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.
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- 27 Galofaro (2016).
- 28 <https://socks-studio.com/introducing-socks/>
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- 38 Material from the Archizoom conference.
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- 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.
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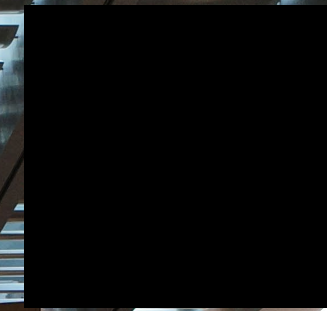
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BBPR

Il gruppo di architetti di Milano, fondato nel 1932 da Giuseppe BBPR, protagonista del Razionalismo italiano, elaborò un'idea del fascismo e del socialismo, che portò la città di Roma (Imperatore e mito) nel campo di architettura. In un'operazione di razionalismo e fascismo, il gruppo del gruppo, come al centro della scena nel periodo della Repubblica, il loro rapporto è evidente nella costruzione culturale di Roma, che viene vista come "città" o più "città" (città-città) e in rapporto con la città di Roma. Un'operazione di razionalismo e fascismo, che viene vista come "città" o più "città" (città-città) e in rapporto con la città di Roma.

After graduating from the Politecnico di Milano, the four architects founded BBPR in 1932. In the view of the leading figures of Italian Rationalism, led by Giuseppe Terragni and Gian Luigi Rossi (BBPR's first and last), the group's architecture was a synthesis of the two main trends of the movement: the functionalist and the fascist. Their contribution to post-war Italian architecture is original, especially for the design of urban areas of "città-città" and for the design of buildings designed in the Torre Velasca. The activity of the group continued with Alberto Rossini in Bergamo (1931), 1937, and 1942.

BBPR - Gian Luigi Rossi (1902 - 1980), Ludovico Ermenegildo Zegna (1902 - 1976), Ernesto Nathan...

Negli anni dell'apogeo di Roma, BBPR è stato protagonista di un'operazione di razionalismo e fascismo, che portò la città di Roma (Imperatore e mito) nel campo di architettura. In un'operazione di razionalismo e fascismo, il gruppo del gruppo, come al centro della scena nel periodo della Repubblica, il loro rapporto è evidente nella costruzione culturale di Roma, che viene vista come "città" o più "città" (città-città) e in rapporto con la città di Roma.

In the years of the apogee of Rome, BBPR was the protagonist of an operation of rationalism and fascism, which led the city of Rome (Emperor and myth) into the field of architecture. In an operation of rationalism and fascism, the group of the group, as in the center of the scene in the period of the Republic, their relationship is evident in the construction of Rome, which is seen as "city" or more "city" (city-city) and in relation to the city of Rome.

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These included the response and set up of the BBPR's operation within the structure of the fascist regime, which led to the design of the Torre Velasca in Bergamo, designed by the group of architects in Bergamo (1931), 1937, and 1942.

Archives, Art, and Architecture at MAXXI: Interview with Luca Galofaro

Federico Maria Giorgi

Keywords:

Exhibition Design, MAXXI, Architecture, Art

ABSTRACT:

For this column dedicated to architecture and display topics, in the thematic dossier of the first issue of MMD, the decision was made to interview with Luca Galofaro, architect and curator of the exhibition *Architettura a regola d'arte*, held at the MAXXI in Rome from December 7th 2022, through to October 15th, 2023.

Per questa rubrica dedicata ai temi dell'architettura e del display, nel dossier tematico del primo numero di MMD, si è deciso di intervistare Luca Galofaro, architetto e curatore della mostra *Architettura a regola d'arte*, ospitata al MAXXI di Roma dal 7 dicembre 2022 al 15 ottobre 2023.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 01: A reproduction of the Pietà Rondanini is the starting point of the exposition *Architettura a regola d'arte*. (Photo of the author).

Luca Galofaro

Luca Galofaro is an architect and university lecturer, with an extensive and internationally recognized experience in the field of the relationship between architecture and curatorial practice. A gold medal winner for Italian architecture in 2006, he curated the 2017-2019 architecture biennial at the FRAC Center (Fond Régional d'Art Contemporain) in Orleans, where the MAXXI's collection played a fundamental role.

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<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.3034-9699/19295>

Archives, Art, and Architecture at MAXXI: interview with Luca Galofaro

by Federico Maria Giorgi

For this column dedicated to architecture and display topics, in the thematic dossier of the first issue of MMD, the decision was made to interview with Luca Galofaro, architect and curator of the exhibition *Architettura a regola d'arte*, held at the MAXXI in Rome from December 7th 2022, through to October 15th, 2023.

Luca Galofaro is an architect and university lecturer, with an extensive and internationally recognized experience in the field of the relationship between architecture and curatorial practice. A gold medal winner for Italian architecture in 2006, he curated the 2017-2019 architecture biennial at the FRAC Center (Fond Régional d'Art Contemporain) in Orleans, where the MAXXI's collection played a fundamental role.

The aim of the Roman exhibition was to present four new archives dedicated to the professional work of BBPR, Costantino Dardi, Vincenzo Monaco and Amedeo Luccichenti, and Luigi Moretti – all of them now hosted in the MAXXI. The common ground shared by these very different creators is the importance they gave to the relationship between art and architecture, as highlighted by the exhibition.

Its first, prominent theme was the attention paid by the curatorial team to provide an exhibition accessible to a non-professional audience. Making architecture available to a broader audience is a challenge common to many architecture ex-

hibitions. Original works cannot be displayed, so the latter are instead forced to show technical and specialized materials, like drawings and models, whose language is not always clear to a non-professional audience. In this respect, the design of this exhibition was an excellent example of the best practices that can be developed in similar situations, i.e. temporary exhibition design in museums. In each room, it was decided to create reworkings of installations previously realized by the architects protagonists of the exhibition, in order to give voice to their different design languages. Avoiding to fall into the trap of forging banal copies, such installations became both didactic materials and evidence of the fertility and actuality of the design ideas developed by these celebrated 20th-century masters. In addition, original technical drawings, texts, and photographs have been recovered from their archives to offer visitors a gateway into the imagination of each architect involved. Even the decision to divide the exhibition into four monographic sections, although dictated by the need to focus on the singular material in each new archive, had the positive implication of introducing visitors not only to the architectural work itself but also to the cultural world and biographical history of the individual designers. By highlighting the materials in each archive, the exhibition gave visitors an understanding of the creative process behind the architectural work and the context of the designers' biographies. This helped create a more complete picture of the designers and their designs, allowing a deeper appreciation of their work.

The relationship to the imaginary and to the design process are themes Luca Galofaro has been studying for a long time. They were brought to the forefront in this exhibition, in particular highlighting how art and its relationship with the design process were central elements in the design and work of each of the aforesaid architects.

The first questions I asked concerned the creative choices on which the design of the exhibition was based upon. In particular, I was interested in how to approach the creation of previous spaces anew on a one-to-one scale. This curatorial proposal, aiming to help visitors immerse themselves into the otherwise bidimensional spaces of drawings, is not as straightforward as one might think. Recreating a building/design always entails a readjustment to a new space both in dimensions and materials so as not to stand as a mere copy, a fake, but to become a new entity instead, that can be used to better explain the original design.

F.G: In this exhibition, you play a dual role, being both its curator and its architectural designer. How did this double perspective, this short-circuit so to speak, have an impact on your project?

L.G: For me, it is very difficult to distinguish between curating an exhibition and designing it, because for me the way of telling a theme is closely related to how this theme is subsequently set up and how it is placed within a given space. For this reason, the large gallery of the Maxxi has been divided into four rooms, precisely to create a break and separate the work of one architect from another's. Those walls are actually a double wall¹. They create narrow passages that prepare us for a change of pace, a change of vision. Many of the rooms have seats because for me the museum is also a place where to stay, not just a place to pass through. So, the four rooms are divided by interspaces or *Wunderkammern*, inside which we are prepared to showcase what I call



Fig. 02
Exposition *Architettura a regola d'arte*. (Photo of the author).



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“micro-museums”, that put on display a bit of the imagination of the architects. They are also a crossing space that prepares you for the next space. The other key element is that in each room we tried to think of an object, of a device capable of telling the ways that these architects used to show architecture. In the BBPR room, we built a fragment of one of their Exhibitions: not the original installation, but one of the tests made by BBPR during the project for the Castello Sforzesco. So, we didn’t build a model of what was achieved, but we have recreated one of the tests, adapting it to the space of the MAXXI in height and size, as well as in the angle of the individual parts, using poor and raw materials, to bring back a piece of the historical exhibition to visitors. In Dardi’s room, we have reconstructed a grid, a reticular structure that Dardi often used within its design, but readjusted its dimensions to the new space and with a different form, precisely so that visitors

could see what the language used by Dardi was like. For Monaco and Luccichenti, we gave the opportunity to make people understand their work, not via a display, but by commissioning a photographer, Giovanna Silva, to photograph-fragments of art pieces reproduced inside Luccichenti’s architecture: from handles to chimney pots to flooring designed by Capogrossi, Consagra and Nino Franchina. The exhibition layout is no longer a matter of staging the design in which I, as an architect, redesign certain elements, but an opportunity where I ask an outside gaze to look at these architectures. And then in Moretti’s room, we redesigned tables that were in fact from Moretti’s studio: they became display objects and the bases for architectural models with a built-in showcase. In a way, it is a collage of fragments of existing installations that emphasize and also characterize the ways that these different architects used to exhibit themselves.

Fig. 03
Exposition *Architettura a regola d’arte*. (Photo of the author).

F.G: In general, architecture exhibitions are often faced with the challenge of engaging an audience that does not know architecture or cannot read plans or elevations. In your opinion, what were the strategies to engage the viewer in this exhibition?

L.G: This is an exhibition based on archive materials, so there were some wonderful drawings. In addition, we also chose to present lists drawn up by the architects, such as BBPR's list of objects shown in an exhibition at the Triennale, or Cos-

for these architects. Finally, another extremely important element was that we relied on photographs from the archives. For BBPR there are extraordinary photographs from the archive of the Musei Civici in Milan, and alternatively the photographs present in the archive of the ICCD² in Rome. Besides, the exhibition includes Paolo Monti's photographs, which depict the real BBPR exhibition setup for the Castello Sforzesco, but also all the photos that were taken at the exhibition rehearsals. As for Dardi, we decided



Fig. 04
Exposition Architettura a regola d'arte. (Photo of the author).

tantino Dardi's list of artists, that he positioned, through drawing, within the spaces. But in my opinion, what helped us a lot were two other elements. First of all, texts. We extrapolated quotes from sentences written by these architects. Then we accompanied the objects in the exhibition with these quotes, precisely to make it clear what the value of art was

to show some of his travel photos, namely those of his trip to the island of Djerba in Tunisia, which he mentions so often in his writings, to create a short circuit between the architect's ideas and his texts. In my opinion photography and text, i.e. the very words of the selected architects, were two essential tools to complete the iconographic part pro-

vided by the drawings preserved in the MAXXI archive.

F.G: What made it possible to find a balance between these different elements?

L.G: In my opinion, it was light, as we recreated a different light condition in each of the four rooms. In an exhibition design, the light of the individual rooms is extremely important to hold all parts together. But the contribution of the museum's curatorial team was fundamental, the MAXXI has a very well-prepared team from this point of view, they were able to control my exuberance to look for too many images. The people who curated the exhibition with me were essential, especially the team working directly on the archives cataloguing the individual works. They were fundamental in the choice of the exact number of pieces so that they would neither exceed nor compete with the photographic material. By the way, all the original materials are framed, while the materials reproduced from other archives are simply nailed to the walls, in order to have visitors perceive the difference between the original materials kept in the archives and reproductions.

The following questions revolved around the concept of an exhibition as a living being evolving and changing during the months when it stays open. Some artworks might be changed, some new displays might be created. More importantly, the exposition becomes more than a simple showcase of the museum's collections, it is also perceived as an educational and didactic event. It is the chance to give new meanings and a new perspective to a given field of study, but also to create new mate-

rials for the archives themselves. Following a recent trend that emerged from the field of contemporary art, they might be considered as dynamic archives³.

F.G: This exhibition has elements that are still in the making and might be described as "alive". How important is this form of vitality to you?

L.G: In my opinion, an exhibition is a living being. This exhibition has produced original materials, such as the photographs made by Giovanna Silva: they will become part of the museum's collection. Besides, we are still re-making another small section of an exhibition made by BBPR for the Triennale in Milan, *Architettura a misura d'uomo*. The current exhibition lasts a long time. This enables us to replace materials that will not be present throughout the exhibition, giving them a new meaning. In turn, this allows the exhibition to change the way we emphasize certain characteristics of the architects' work. Therefore, this project will become an educational workshop. A cast of the *Pietà Rondanini* is part of the collection of the Omero Museum in Ancona⁴, a museum for the blind. With my students at the University of Camerino, we will redraw part of the installations proposed in their exhibition. We will also carry on this exercise within the university. The exhibition will become a teaching exercise for students, who will work on tactile maps that can translate some of the works on display by using different characteristics of representation, to help users who have visual impairments. We will work closely with the Omero Museum. Before the end of the MAXXI exhibition, we



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would like to include this new material. An exhibition like this is not just a place to visit, and looking at dead objects. In my opinion, it is a place where some traces, some elements pick up life to be studied, and reinterpreted, thus influencing an audience of young students. Logically, all this is a work of re-interpretation. This is why in the main rooms we show individual projects from a historical perspective, while in the in-between corridors, we stage architectural imagination at work. The fundamental theme of this project is how the imaginary world of architects takes form, and how art influences different architects. Therefore, I do not analyse language, but rather what comes before the construction of a project.

This exhibition corroborates the widespread idea that the museum is a place where it is possible to connect the past, the present and the future. It offers a way to analyze reality in a way that enables old stylistic solutions to blossom again in the age of

tomorrow. The MAXXI in Rome and its collections are a recurring theme of interest for Luca Galofaro. His previous experience in France helped him consolidate his interest in the relationship between architectural archives and contemporary artworks.

F.G: You have been the director of two editions of the Orléans Biennial, hosted inside the FRAC center. How has this experience influenced your current work here at the MAXXI in Rome?

L.G: The two editions of the Biennale d'Orléans were a job that eventually lasted four years. It was intense research for an exhibition centered on the theme of a specific collection. The FRAC of Orléans is a museum that owns a collection of architectural drawings and models, especially experimental architecture from the 1950s. Logically, the studies I did on the collection for the Biennale worked precisely to put my research and the archive projects in relation to young contemporary architects,

Fig. 05
Exposition *Architettura a regola d'arte*. (Photo of the author).



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who were invited to dialogue with the projects inside the collection of the FRAC. In the second edition, the guest of honour wasn't an architect: it was the MAXXI collection itself. It was interesting, because, for the first time, I immersed myself in the MAXXI collection. The style was a little different, because I chose a series of architects, of the Italian scene, that might be labeled as experimental, such as Dardi, Franco Purini, Luigi Pellegrini, and Maurizio Sacripanti. Thus, I brought the MAXXI collection into the FRAC center. This created a short-circuit, a glance at two types of collections: radical architecture on the one side, and the experimentation hosted within the MAXXI on the other. It is an architecture that always sees construction as the last frontier. Accordingly, it was also interesting to see how these two worlds could meet. Now, here at MAXXI, there is an exhibition on Musmeci. At the time we took the famous bridge designed by Musmeci⁵ and brought it back

within the collection of the FRAC, which included many so-called digital architects. It was interesting to see how some of the experiments present in the FRAC collection as mere drawings were realized in Italy in the late 1960s. Understandably, this work about collections and archives is something I do, not only on my archives but also for an exhibition in which I am looking at both the theme of the archive and the theme of the imagination produced by architecture. I am not so interested in architectural exhibitions that put together a series of buildings. Rather, I am interested in watching the dynamics, that repeat themselves over the years in time and history and the tools for the construction of a project.

Finally, an element of interest was the sometimes-difficult debate created by an exhibition between the architecture of the hosting space and the art of the exposed objects. It is a particularly interesting short-circuit when these two elements are as dis-

Fig. 06
Exposition *Architettura a regola d'arte*. (Photo of the author).

tinctive as in this case. The organic work of Zaha Hadid⁶ might have clashed with the radical architecture of the different architects and artists in the exposition. On the contrary, the counterintuitive choice to separate the open space of the gallery into four small, enclosed spaces allowed the design to take full advantage of the peculiarities of Hadid's architecture.

F.G: The exhibition is hosted in an architecturally distinctive location. What was the relationship established between the artworks of the collection and Zaha Hadid's architecture?

L.G: The space designed by Hadid is extremely distinctive, as is the natural light coming in from above. In the beginning, the most difficult thing for me was to almost interrupt the continuity of this space, fragmenting it with walls. But this was also an attempt to create a dialogue because in each room I changed the position of the walls with respect to the big curve. This gave us an opportunity to read the characteristics of the space, at the same time bringing a kind of order to it, slowing down the visit. Very often, when we are in museums like this, architecture distracts us from the space of the exhibition. In my opinion, reintroducing rooms restores a slow approach to the vision of the exposition, creating a cadence of repeating spaces, which expand and contract. Architecture does not distract-us here. Instead, it is the very works of art that give us a position within the space. And then at the end, in the last room, the inclined wall helped us in the display. The sloping wall was used precisely to make some of the works closer to

visitors. I even reproduced it in the layout of the exhibition because the screen on which we play Michelangelo's film is not vertical, but inclined. My layout controlled Zaha Hadid's creation in some places, but in other places, it captured its shape and brought it into the exhibition. Editing, the exploration of montage and collage are extremely important themes. I tried to use, to be influenced, to take some fragments and bring them back into the exhibition. At the same time, I have tried to avoid distractions when I needed to isolate spaces.

F.G: In the last room you decided not to exhibit any projects directly. What do you think was the strength of this peculiar choice from a conservation point of view?

L.G: Luigi Moretti is an architect who has created incredible works. In my opinion, the fact of not showing them was interesting. My idea was to work on an archive. The archive is not always the place where project drawings are organized: it also hides the architects' obsessions. Art was one of Moretti's great obsessions or rather one of the materials through which Moretti transformed his thoughts into architecture. There was a very close relationship between the two. He once declared that there is no such thing as an architect, but there is an artist. So doing an exhibition on Moretti without including his plans, but only his studies was important. There are the drawings on Michelangelo's architecture he made when he was still a student in '27, there are the collages he re-proposed years later, analyzing Michelangelo's architecture, and the panels he made



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for an exhibition in which he staged a visitor's movements within space and his perception of certain elements of Michelangelo's architecture. Finally, there is the film on Michelangelo. An architect who drew after Michelangelo as a student in the 1920s and then presented a film on Michelangelo in '64 at the Venice Film Festival has had Michelangelo as the object of his studies for more than 40 years. Therefore, I preferred not to dwell too much on the importance of Moretti's architecture in the history of Italian architecture to understand the theoretical value of some of Moretti's reflections on Michelangelo instead. Moreover, his beautiful drawings after Giotto had never appeared in any magazine or publication before. Moretti extrapolates the architectural elements from Giotto's frescoes, redrawing them on transparent paper. This is done precisely to show the desire to understand, study and translate an art form, the space of architecture. This was one of the characteristic traits of Moretti's culture. Perhaps after this exhibition, we will be able to read it even better.

This exhibition is a perfect example of how studying different archival materials and using them can help visitors understand architectural work. This possibility is based on a shift of interest, from the real space created to the history and motivation of its project. It allows the audience to create better connections between architecture, history, art, and the biography of an architect. As the American designer and historian Jeffrey Schnapp⁷ said during a recent interview, activating the notion of an archive within a museum also means shifting the meaning of the exhibition conceptually, focusing less on the product and more on the processes - not on the solutions, but rather on the problems as well. However, if archive materials are essential for the understanding of an architect's work, the use of re-constructions and re-interpretations of existing or fictional works on a one-to-one scale is still important for the immersion of the viewer and remains a major tool to spark his interest.

This interview was held at MAXXI on January 25th, 2023.

Fig. 07
Exposition *Architettura a regola d'arte*. (Photo of the author).

Endnotes

- 1 A reference might be made to Francesco Cacciatore's interpretation of Louis Kahn's work: *The Wall As Living Place, Hollow Structural Forms in Louis Kahn's Work*, LetteraVentidue, Syracuse, 2011.
- 2 Istituto Centrale Catalogo Documentazione.
- 3 See Archivi Dinamici proposed by Fondazione Massimo e Sonia Cirulli.
- 4 It is the Museo Tattile Statale Omero, Toccare l'Arte, opened in Ancona in 1993.
- 5 It is the Viadotto dell'industria over the Basento river (, also known as Ponte sul Basento), and is located in Southern Italy, in the city of Potenza.
- 6 Zaha Hadid designed the Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo in 2010.
- 7 Jeffrey Schnapp is professor at Harvard University and granted an interview to Marco Scotti at the Cirulli Foundation in Bologna on December 19th, 2019.



Form As Thought

Éric Lapierre

Keywords:

Architecture exhibition, Triennial, Lisbon

ABSTRACT:

As former chief curator of the fifth Lisbon Triennial of architecture in 2019, I will first discuss about utility of such events to allow architecture to meet a wider audience as the academic or professional ones. This issue is also about form of such events in terms of overall organizations: didactic exhibitions conceived by curators vs. conceptual installations made by architects. I will explain why I chose the first option in Lisbon, and how this choice influenced the form of the exhibitions. Additionally, I will explore in which way the fact that I was an “intellectual practitioner” allowed me to give specific answers to a series of questions regarding architecture itself but as well the art of exhibition: in which way form can improve thought.

In qualità di chief curator della quinta Triennale di architettura di Lisbona nel 2019, discuterò innanzitutto dell'utilità di tali eventi per consentire all'architettura di incontrare un pubblico più ampio rispetto a quello accademico o professionale. La questione riguarda anche la forma di tali eventi in termini di organizzazione generale: mostre didattiche concepite dai curatori vs. installazioni concettuali realizzate dagli architetti. Spiegherò perché ho scelto la prima opzione a Lisbona e come questa scelta ha influenzato la forma delle mostre. Inoltre, esplorerò in che modo il fatto di essere un “intellectual practitioner” mi abbia permesso di dare risposte specifiche a una serie di domande riguardanti sia l'architettura stessa sia l'arte della mostra: in che modo la forma può migliorare il pensiero.

Éric Lapierre

(b. Tarbes, 1966) is architect, teacher, theoretician, writer, and curator. He is founder and principal of the office Experience, based in Paris, with his partners Tristan Chadney and Laurent Esmilaire. This award-winning firm has been recognized nationally and internationally for the quality of the tectonic objects it builds, but as well for the theoretical dimension of its production. Experience builds in France and Europe. The last buildings are Chris Marker student residence and buses amenity in Paris, urban logistics amenity in Toulouse, and an office building in Paris. Éric Lapierre is professor in École Polytechnique Fédérale in Lausanne (ÉPFL), in École d'architecture de la ville et des territoires Paris-Est, and guest professor at Harvard GSD. He teaches both project design and theory. He regularly publishes articles and books about the contemporary condition of architecture.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 01: Economy of Means - How Architecture Works, 2019, Lisbon, Fifth Lisbon Architecture Triennale, installation view.

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<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.3034-9699/19303>



02

Through its social dimension which consists in constructing the buildings and structures necessary to the correct functioning of communal life, the ultimate object of architecture is the definition of space. Whether this is achieved through construction in the broadest sense of the term, through signs written on facades, or even through the transformation of entire buildings into immense signs, it is always present in one way or another. At a moment in time where the historical conditions for the emergence and continuity of a common architectural language have disappeared since almost two centuries and where architecture, like all of reality, has entered into a world strongly shaped by digital media, our practice is interested in how architecture can continue to be the culturally sophisticated medium which it has always been. This work depends upon an in-depth study of the characteristics of space which

we attempt to put into practice by seeking to produce objects in which it does not appear constrained, where the projects depend upon a poetics born of simplicity from which paradoxically a form of resultant complexity emerges, from a rationality which produces projects whose inexplicability is proportionate to their intelligibility.

The scenography of an exhibition is a pure spatial exercise, freed from many of the heavy technical constraints associated with the realization of buildings. Seen in this way it represents, for us architects, a laboratory in which to carry out very direct experiments on space.

Furthermore, everyone will have noticed that the scenography of an exhibition can often be in contradiction with its content, and this because scenography is often consi-

Fig. 02
Economy of Means - How Architecture Works, 2019, Lisbon, Fifth Lisbon Architecture Triennale, installation view.

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dered as a simple and somewhat decorative way of arranging things. In fact, in the scenographies which we have devised we have always sought to consider scenography not as the cherry on the cake but as an integral part of the cake itself. The act of showing things - objects, ideas - in space is not separate from what those objects or ideas are or represent. So we always consider scenography itself, the spatial realization of an exhibition, as a distinct medium and not as a simple neutral technique, which is to suppose that technique can ever be truly neutral. As a medium it influences the meaning of what is shown. Indeed, scenography considered in this way is also on display, in a certain sense, just as much as the contents of the exhibition in as much as it is an integral part of it. And if the spatial lay-out is not neutral, if it influences meaning, or at any rate if it can, this is because space itself is, of course,

not neutral. It has its own language, its own specific way of functioning, and will not allow itself to be manipulated with impunity. In as much as our work is directly based on an exploration of these ways of functioning in order to uncover them but also to exploit them for the execution of our projects, one understands why we consider scenography as an entirely separate architectural act.

Exhibiting architecture despite the impossibility of doing so

Here I would like to make reference to the exhibition *Economy of Means - How Architecture Works* of which I was the curator and the scenographer and which formed part of the 2019 Lisbon Triennial. As always with an exhibition dedicated to architecture I found myself



Fig. 03
Economy of Means - How Architecture Works, 2019, Lisbon, Fifth Lisbon Architecture Triennale, installation view.

confronted with the impossibility of exposing architecture itself. An exhibition of painting shows the painting themselves. Indeed, the immediacy of the presence of the medium is one of the primary interests and pleasures that the visitors experience. Architecture, however, is considered to be impossible to represent owing to the fact that it is embodied in buildings which are impossible to move. Hence it must always be mediatized in the form of different documents - drawings, photographs, models, collages, texts etc. An exhibition of architecture is thus an exhibition of the representation of architecture but not directly an exhibition of architecture itself: an exhibition *about* architecture but not *of* architecture. The primary object of an exhibition of architecture is hence always at one remove.

Despite these difficulties I opted for a strategy that refused to accept this form of pre-announced defeat and tried to find a way to make an exhibition *of* architecture. And this exhibition was an exhibition of architecture in two different senses. On the one hand because it proposed a real architectural experience in as much as it was working on and from space. On the other because, in its essence, it was indirectly proposing a definition of architecture which does not limit itself solely to the built world but also includes, on separate and equal terms, that of ideas. Which is to say that this exhibition corresponded to the definition of architecture which I put into practice with my colleagues in my office or when teaching, writing or designing exhibitions: as soon as one talks about architectural forms

and their reasons for existing one is doing architecture. It does not manifest itself solely in constructions but also in projects or in discussions or representations on and about form. It is in the field of theory that all these ways of operating meet because it constitutes the gravitational centre of architecture considered as an operational concept. And within this conceptual space there are a good number of projects that were never built that are of far greater importance than finished ones, certain images and texts that carry more weight than the majority of constructed buildings.

The exhibition *Economy of Means - How Architecture Works* was first and foremost an exhibition of architecture since it was consecrated to its theory, and more precisely to the economy of means considered as the condition for the possibility of an architecture that is at the same time signifying, rational and poetic. But it was also an exhibition of architecture in the sense that I attempted, via its lay-out, to offer the spectators "real life" spatial experiences which truly belong to the field of architecture. But a simple spatial demonstration whose only purpose was its own existence would not have constituted an authentic architectural experience. So space was actively used in order to reinforce the meaning of what was shown, as a specific medium for the display and explanation of the contents of the exhibition. It is in this sense that the exhibition was a real architectural project since the form of space was used to serve meaning and to reinforce understanding.

Showing books

Architectural theory is found, for the most part, in books. We are thus obliged to exhibit books. But how? Often one shows the cover or a two-page spread. But this is hardly sufficient. The need to explain the notion of typology in the first of the six rooms that made up the exhibition was the occasion for us to lay down certain principles about exhibiting books which we have also made use of elsewhere. Firstly, in order to understand our choices, it is important to understand that typology depends upon the notion of repetition since an architectural typology can be defined as a family of elements possessing common formal characteristics. Next one needs to know that the budget for this exhibition was very limited and only allowed us to exhibit a small number of original documents. In accordance with the theme of the exhibition this limitation of our means was very welcome in pushing us to find more efficient solutions; we came to the decision that we would not expose any original works and instead use either reproductions or original documents that we ourselves had produced. In the end we showed three books, one from the 17th and two from the 19th Centuries. One was consecrated to typology in general, the two others to two specific types. They all utilized a repetitive page lay-out which allowed us to draw attention to the necessarily repetitive and comparative nature of any typological proposal. There is not much text in these books, since typology manifests itself through formal comparison, and they are primarily composed of images. Ex-

hibiting one double-page spread from such a book would be of no interest beyond the purely fetishist. So we decided to scan the entirety of all three books and to reprint them at the same scale as the originals. We then glued hundreds of images directly onto the wall in the shape of three series of six meter high grills. In this way, as soon as one entered the room, one experienced a feeling of mass. With one glimpse of the

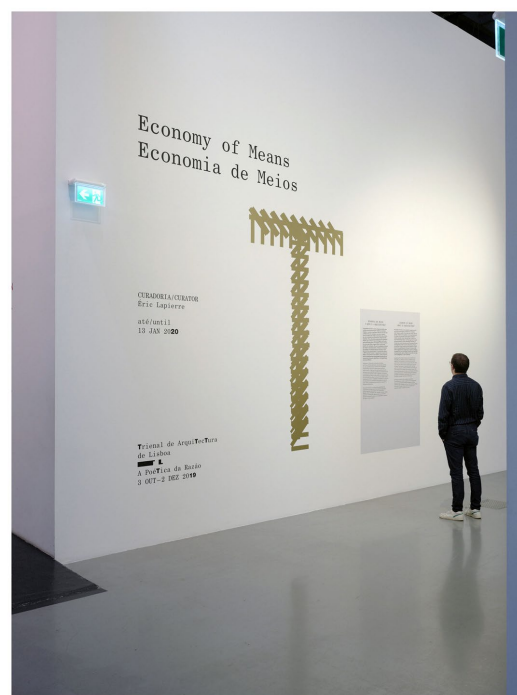


Fig. 04
Economy of Means - How Architecture Works, 2019, Lisbon, Fifth Lisbon Architecture Triennale, installation view.

eye one took in a large amount of information and one grasped the typological resemblance between the elements in each of the three series. So, before even having time to look at things in detail, one had already grasped the essential. This also gave the impression of physically entering into books which, through this lay-out, suddenly became much bigger than us. And in addition, the use of regular grids evoked the whole serial aesthetic developed over the course of the 20th Century, from Steve Reich to Sol LeWitt or to Bernd and Hilla Becher, and suggested

that these works from the Classical era carried within them the seed of these future developments. And all this without explaining anything explicitly, beyond the fact that physical books were made available to visitors on a bookshelf occupying the entire length of the opposite wall of this same room. Finally, this total saturation of a wall six meters high and over ten meters long also evoked the typical way in which works were exhibited in the 19th Century, without becoming a mere post-modern reference to this form of display, since its principal meaning was to be found elsewhere.



05

The opposite wall, other than the shelf of books, was used to present a mixture of typological series and reproductions of historical documents which also engaged with the question of typology. The series were made up of plans - latin crosses, courtyards etc. - which we had redrawn at identical scale and using identical graphic design so as to highlight their pure characteristics

without disturbing this perception with varied graphic design. Here too, the documents saturated the wall, once again bringing to the fore the abundant character of the very notion of typology.

On one of the two smaller screens that separated this room from the next one in the order of the visit we reproduced a 30x enlargement of a sketch by the German architect Schinkel relating to the question of type. This total lack of scale was the first thing one noticed when entering the room but also took positive advantage of the fact that we were unable to exhibit any originals. That is to say that if one reproduces documents on the same scale as the originals this tends to draw attention to the fact that one was unable to procure them for one reason or another. But if one manipulates the scale one can render them more meaningful and draw attention, as in this case, to the importance one accords them. Moreover, such an enlargement allows for the production of a drawing which tends towards abstraction when it is seen up close and which presents, in and of itself, an unusual form of perception which creates a small shock and keeps the spectator alert.

Experiencing scale through the body

Keeping the spectator alert is of capital importance, since their attention will absorb information better that way, and since they have presumably not come along in order to be bored. So they must be surprised. In

Fig. 05
Economy of Means - How Architecture Works, 2019, Lisbon, Fifth Lisbon Architecture Triennale, installation view.

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our case, this surprise was based, in large part, on the fact that the way in which we presented our discourse varied considerably from one room to the next. Indeed, since each room was dedicated to a theme we always sought the most appropriate way in which to expose this theme, by putting into play a specific spatial relation, as we have just seen with the first room.

The second room was consecrated to the fact that, over the course of history, one can trace a tendency to try and cover the largest stretch of space without intermediary load-bearing structures, that is to say without columns or posts, and the impact this has had and may have had on the definition of architecture. This was therefore a question of very large scale. We opted for a spatialization that reproduced, to a certain degree, the kinesthesia of a real architectural experience. On the floor we printed plans of the dozen buildings from all different eras that constituted the body of this section, all redrawn by us on an identical scale which enabled comparison between them. Above these plans, at a height of approximately 3.5 meters which allowed for a sufficiently good view of the details, we redrew in perspective seen from below the systems for covering these various different buildings. These ceiling perspectives were, of course, aligned above their respective plans with the result that one had to lift one's head, as in a real building, in order to establish the relationship between the plan and the view from below. Thus the way of perceiving the content of the room was analogous to real perception and to the

movements one must make to perceive the covering system of a real building.



06

Fig. 06
Economy of Means - How Architecture Works, 2019, Lisbon, Fifth Lisbon Architecture Triennale, installation view.

Combined with this analogous experience, we introduced another theme. As architects our primary work tool consists of plans which are generally printed in black on white paper. The plans on the floor and the ceiling perspectives were also printed in black on a white background, in conformity with the conventions of architectural representation. This meant that the room was entirely white, as if the public was moving through the space of the paper that forms the day-to-day business of an architects' practice, but suddenly enlarged. Which meant that the public tended to appear as somehow shrunken in this space of abstracted images and profoundly altered scale. The surrealist nature of this manipulation of space was underscored by the fact that the apple from René Magritte's painting *The Son of Man*, which represents

an apple enlarged until it occupies all the available space, was reproduced by a computerized procedure on one of the walls of the room. In itself, it formed a riddle whose answer would only become clear in the following room, but it already participated in this generalized disordering of scale in a room dedicated to systems for covering buildings of very large scale.

Experiencing scale through space

The next room, the smallest in the exhibition and also the only one situated on the upper floor, was dedicated to the interest that architects have always had for the study of very small buildings, and to the influence that thinking about very small scale has had on architecture and its theory. In some senses a diametrically opposite question to the one posed in the previous room. After having climbed a staircase the visitors arrived in a room whose dimensions were small compared to the previous ones. First their attention was drawn to a series of white maquettes, all of the same scale, of a series of a dozen projects which composed the body of this theme: buildings from all times and of all different purposes united by the fact that their small dimensions constituted a determining element of their form and meaning. The maquettes were shown side by side on a shelf so as to aid with comparison. To each of them corresponded a plan which was stuck on the wall above the shelf. In order to draw attention as clearly as possible to the small dimensions of these buildings, a plan of the space of the room it-

self, on the same scale as the others, was presented on an adjacent wall; its positioning drew one's attention and showed that it was different from the others. One could thus see, and above all perceive in a very immediate fashion, that all the buildings presented could fit completely in the room in which one was standing, and this despite its relatively modest proportions. Thus the very simple way in which things were shown allowed, via the traditional tools for the representation of architecture, for the creation of a direct and perceptual link - as opposed to a purely intellectual one - between real space and its representation.

The spectator's attention was then drawn to the other walls where, as in the first room, the entire contents of a book were displayed along with various other classical elements, all of which were of a small size. But among these different elements arranged like so many windows on the wall there was also a real one, a physical opening in the screen separating this room from the previous one. And from there one could see, on the opposite wall, Magritte's giant apple. And since the opening had the same proportions as the reproduction of the apple, the latter appeared, when one was at a suitable distance from the screen, as if it were a small painting, providing both a connection between the two rooms and also encouraging a reflection on the fundamentally relative and ambiguous nature of space in architecture.

Finally, in a tiny room next-door the spectator can see a box-in-a-valise by Marcel Duchamp, this trans-

portable museum which the artist made by reducing all of his works and which constitutes a new art work purely because of this reduction in scale. A way of showing that working with small scale produces such changes that the nature of the objects themselves is altered. Within this same order of ideas, opposite this installation was a screen pierced with holes a couple of centimeters in diameter. Placing their eye over the hole like a voyeur the spectator discovered a reproduction of the Co-op Interieur, this minimal space imagined by the functionalist architect, Hannes Meyer, in 1926. Only two black and white photos exist. The original was not a real space but rather an installation composed of two angled walls and a highly austere and minimal ensemble of the elements Meyer considered indispensable to modern life: a bed, two folding chairs, a phonograph, a small shelf. The whole was very

scrupulously reconstituted here, for the first time. Since the room was not whole but rather, as in the photos, only had two walls we could not allow spectators to enter the interior. It was a question of constructing an image in the real world. But it was also a question of reconstituting time, as if in some way we were unfolding the time contained in these mythical black and white photos in this space. Looking in this hole was like plunging one's gaze directly into the past; we had built a machine for traveling back in time. Kurt Schwitters' *Ursonate*, which featured on a playlist Hannes Meyer drew up to describe his favorite music, was played in the room to add an experimental and retro-futurist touch to the ensemble. Also a way to use yet one more medium, music, to keep the spectators' attention alert. The aim of the hole in the screen was to direct the spectators' gaze, much like the hole in the gate



Fig. 07
Economy of Means
- How Architecture
Works, 2019,
Lisbon, Fifth Lis-
bon Architecture
Triennale, instal-
lation view.



08

of the garden of the Knights of Malta in Rome which enables one to see St Peter's Basilica at the end of an alley of trees. But it was also an evocation of the hole in the door of Marcel Duchamp's posthumous installation at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, *Étant donnés*, which would have been obvious to those in the know because of the proximity to the box-in-a-valise. A way of densifying signification and overlapping levels of reading, which makes the thesis multidimensional. And this connection was deliberately not explained. It was kept "secret", an enigma to be solved by attentive and informed spectators. The central thesis must obviously be made explicit, it is the object of the exhibition, but one can also superimpose another discourse on top of it, less central and more allusive, but nevertheless meaningful, in order to increase the depth of meaning of the whole. And all this because space when it is attended

to with care becomes meaningful in and of itself.

A spatio-temporal shortcut

The next room was given over to the presentation of buildings that cover a large area but with relatively small spans based on repetitive structures. As with all of the sections of the exhibition this covered a very large period of time so as to demonstrate the permanence, through constantly renewed forms, of the great architectural questions over time. This desire to situate the presentation within a long time frame was at the heart of the scenography here.

The dimension of buildings obtained in this way can be very large, as in the case of Crystal Pal-

Fig. 08
Economy of Means - How Architecture Works, 2019, Lisbon, Fifth Lisbon Architecture Triennale, installation view.

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ace or certain airports. So as to give an idea of size, the buildings were represented using axonometry and on the same scale. The drawings were done directly on the walls of the room using a system of transfers which, as well as allowing us to vary the media, also allowed us to sidestep questions such as the maximum size of paper which we would have been confronted with given the size of these images. Some of them did not totally fit on the height of the walls which were over six meters high. This impossibility to contain, this contradiction between the size of the room and the size of the drawings was used deliberately to underline with intensity the great dimensions of such buildings. In addition, a photo of each building, small so as not to compete with the drawings, was hung at eye-level and showed the concrete appearance of the buildings.

Fig. 09
Economy of Means - How Architecture Works, 2019, Lisbon, Fifth Lisbon Architecture Triennale, installation view.

The presentation was arranged over two facing walls, moving from the smallest to the largest of the buildings. Since size was the theme of the room a chronological presentation would not have made sense, thus demonstrating that in the field of theory ideas and principles tend to matter more than chronology.

Le Corbusier's famous drawing of the Dom-ino framework, created in 1914 to rebuild France using reinforced concrete structures, was exhibited on the third wall. It was presented in a very large format both as a primordial space and constructive system of the 20th Century, and also as a modernist avatar of the principles presented in this room. The fourth wall was pierced by an arch which formed the exit from this first series of four rooms. This arch reproduced the geometry of the wooden arch in the centre of

the room which was built using the principles of carpentry referred to as being in the style of Philibert de l'Orme, from the name of the 17th Century architect who invented a method for constructing large spans using only small pieces of wood. This historical structure served as an exit tunnel from the room. Inside, one found oneself in a perspective with a central convergence point which culminated in a view, also in perceptible, of a life-size enlargement of the utopian project, No Stop City, by the Italian architects Archizoom, an attempt from the end of the 1960s to cover very large areas with a continuous roofing and infrastructure which would allow one to live potentially anywhere. In this way it was implied that one Philibert de l'Orme could be considered as the father of prefabrication, something one tends to associate with modernity, and the initiator of the convergence line which would lead to No Stop City. The convergence lines of the real-life arch and the photo were aligned and gave the impression of walking across five centuries of time and space. The phrase "The precision of your means diminishes when their number increases", taken from Robert Bresson's *Notes on Cinematography*, was inscribed on the lower surface of the arch.

In this way, through spatial lay-out, a sort of meta-discourse was suggested which, rather than a scientific discourse, formed an interpretation of history that was at once theoretical and light-hearted, a sort of opening up of the meaning commonly given to these questions. An assemblage between a French architect and theoretician from the 16th Century,

a group of radical post-war Italian architects and a film-maker who defined a language specific to cinema which produced, like an appendix to this first series of four rooms, a form of diffuse and open knowledge through the exhibiting of multiple media - three-dimensional objects, life-scale photographs, texts. This was one of the most powerful scenographic moments.

Expressing a multitude of attitudes

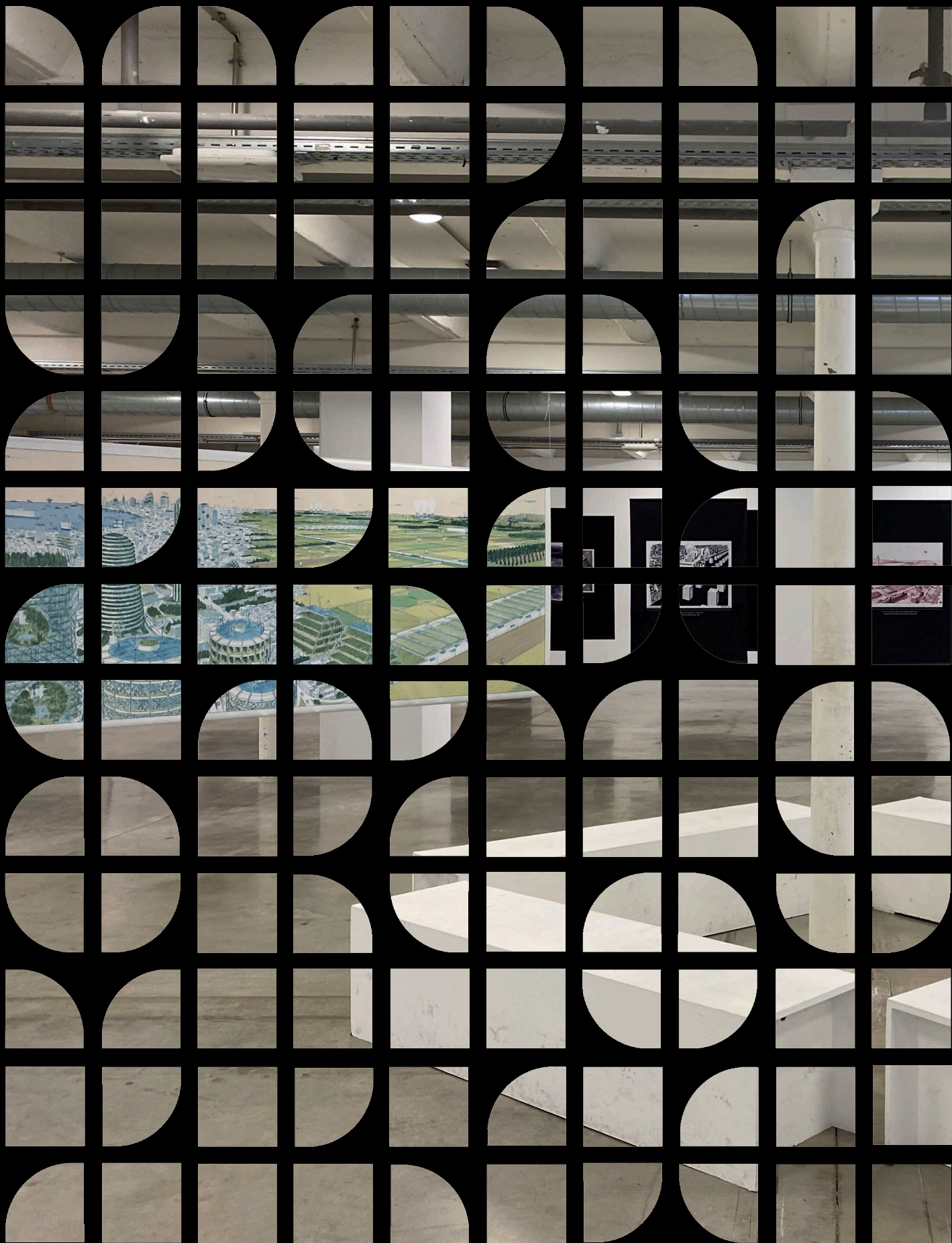
On passing through the arch one arrived in a second gallery of the museum containing two rooms, respectively the biggest and the smallest of the exhibition. The biggest room contained approximately thirty maquettes of all sizes, scales and materials. They were made by contemporary architectural agencies from around the world whose work is founded, in one way or another, on the economy of means. While the bulk of the exhibition was given over to representations of buildings from all times and places which had been redrawn in a homogenous manner to render them comparable and at the same time unify them, this final room, on the contrary, showed products from one single epoch through the tools of representation used by these different architects with no attempt at homogenization of the contents but, on the contrary, a deliberately emphasis on the multiplicity of attitudes which characterizes this epoch. In order to ensure continuity with the rest of the exhibition and to avoid an impression of mere disorder, the maquettes were exposed on rectangular pedestals arranged

in a grid. The rectangle's proportions were determined by the isolating panels of which they were composed using a simple stacking process: a material and geometric economy of means. All of identical height, the pedestals could not fail to evoke, for those in the know, Rem Koolhaas' famous project from the 1970s known as the City of the Captive Globe. More prosaically they allowed for the creation of an urban ambience which unified the multiplicity of different attitudes and scales while at the same time not erasing them. The whole was bathed in the voices of the architects themselves who had filmed selfies with their iPhones where, in a maximum of two minutes, they gave their definition of the economy of means and explained how this was put into practice in their work. A large plasma screen in the centre of the room diffused these images.

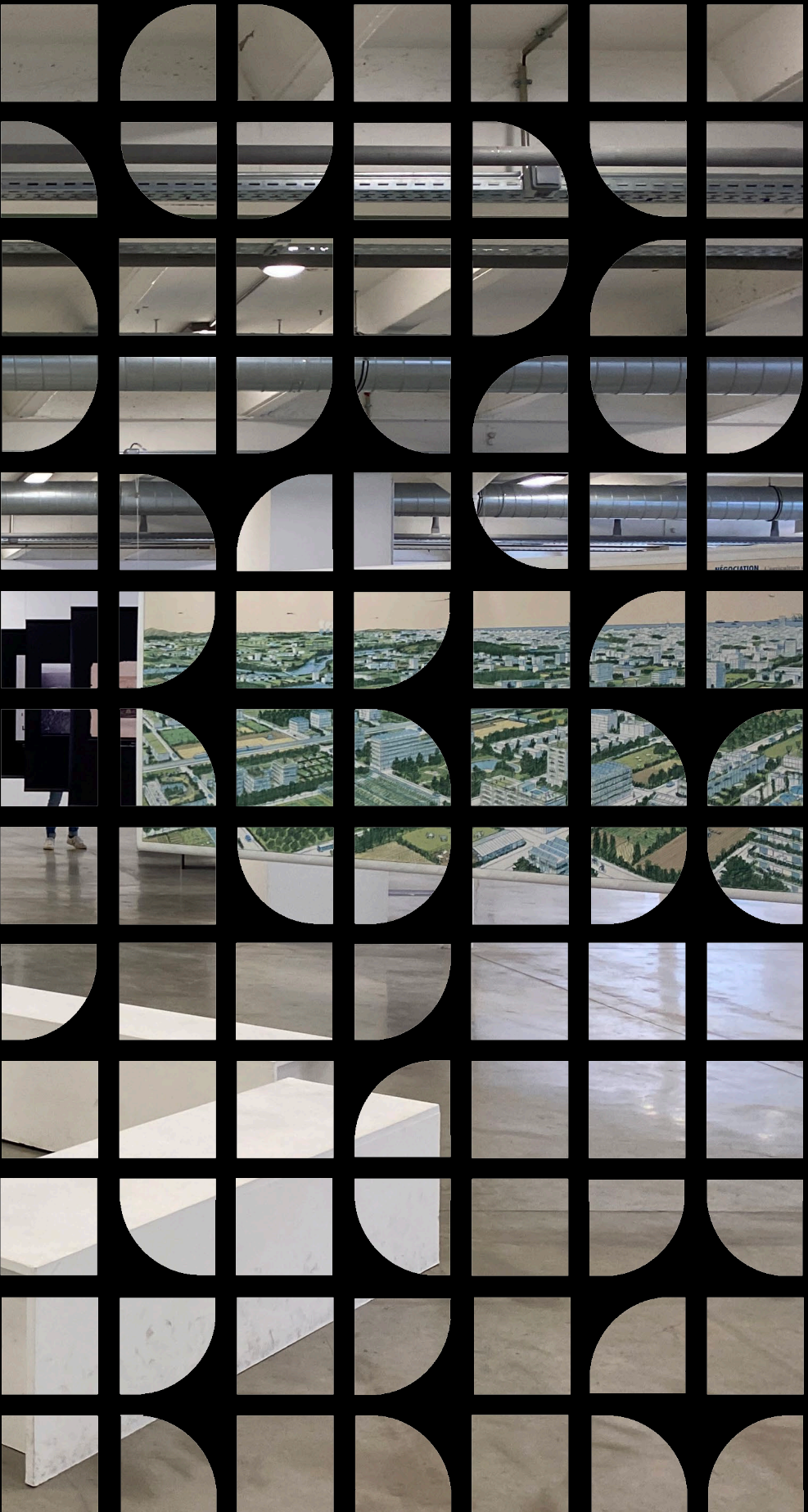
A cabinet of curiosities

Finally, the smallest room of the exhibition was covered from floor to ceiling with plans of buildings from all times and places, represented in a homogenous manner but not all at the same scale, unlike in the rest of the exhibition. Indeed, the idea here was not to make all these plans comparable but rather to appreciate them in themselves and for themselves as pure graphic artefacts in order to show the concept of an ontological plan, by which I mean the act of producing plans which go beyond their status as simple tools of communication or representation and attain instead the status of meaningful elements of a project.

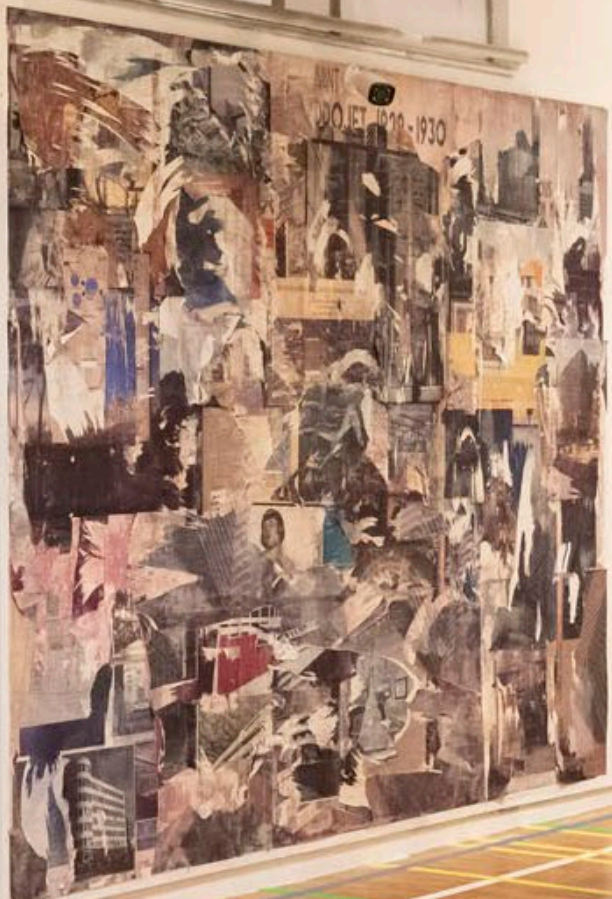
For instance, the fact that the plan of a church takes the form of a Latin cross gives it a singular meaning which goes beyond the simple spatial effect of this form. Before leaving the exhibition the public was thus invited to enjoy a series of plans that saturated the space with abstract, but figuratively analogous, drawings which floated on the white surface of the paper, like a two-dimensional cabinet of curiosities, a way of suggesting that the whole exhibition was itself a large cabinet of curiosities.



materials.



SCÉNARIOS FUTURE



MUSEE
CHERCHE
ŒUVRES

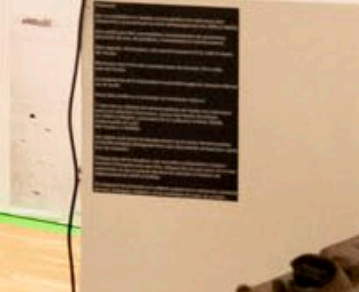
- 1. Man... Meloni
- 2. Antoine Esposito, 2016)
- 3. Lino Vaccini, Palestra, Losone (CHI), 1995-1997
- Cosa Mentale n°2, *Penser la structure*, 2010)



- 4. Sverre Fehn, Pavillon des Pays Nordiques, Venise, dans la revue *Cosa Mentale* n°2, *Penser la structure*
- 5. Oscar Jespers, *Le Fardeau*, vers 1920
- 6. Akarova (Marguerite Acarin) dansant la Sicilienne et réalisé par l'artiste, 1932 (photographie de Rob D...)
- 7. Marie Sétte, épouse de Henry Van de Velde, dansant portant une robe dessinée par l'architecte, vers 189...



- 8. Samuel Gratacap, *Empire*, 2012-2014 (Classeur C... 2017)
- 9. Marcel-Louis Baugriet, *Kaloprosopie*, ca. 1925, co... d'Akarova en 1926
- 10. Elisabetta Prins, *Projet de chambre d'enfant*, vers...
- 11. Atlantropa, *Union Afrique-Europe*, 1932 (Classeur... 2017)



B

“Institution Building” at CIVA: Experimenting with Institutional Critique Through Architectural Exhibition

Arianna Casarini

Keywords:

Institutional criticism, Architecture exhibition, Architecture museum, Architecture institution, Architecture curation

ABSTRACT:

Despite the rising interest in the production of institutional histories, the field of institutional critique applied to the contemporary architectural institution is still an emerging framework of research and debate, both inside and outside this specific category of cultural institution. Due to the dominantly projective nature of the architectural institution, its critique tends to associate with and translate into proactive attempts at reimagining and rebuilding the institution. Institutional critique thus merges in the architectural context with the idea of the blueprint and the manifesto, and it is articulated in often collaborative and experimental formats. Through the exploration of the architectural exhibition “Institution Building” organized by the CIVA of Bruxelles in 2021, this article aims to analyze the use of the exhibition as a methodology for proposing a critique of the architectural institution, and to reflect on its effectiveness as a means to produce and mediate a critical discourse around the organization, functioning, and operations of the architectural institution.

Nonostante l'interesse crescente per la produzione di storie istituzionali, il campo della critica applicato all'istituzione museale contemporanea dedicata all'architettura è ancora un ambito emergente di ricerca e dibattito, sia all'interno sia che all'esterno di questa specifica categoria di istituzione culturale. A causa della natura prevalentemente proiettiva dell'istituzione museale dedicata all'architettura, la sua critica tende ad associarsi e tradursi in tentativi proattivi di re-immaginazione e ricostruzione dell'istituzione. La critica istituzionale si fonde così, in questo contesto, con l'idea del “progetto” e del “manifesto”, ed è articolata in formati spesso collaborativi e sperimentali. Attraverso l'esplorazione della mostra d'architettura “Institution Building” organizzata dal CIVA di Bruxelles nel 2021, questo articolo mira ad analizzare l'utilizzo della mostra come metodologia per proporre una critica dell'istituzione museale dedicata all'architettura, e a riflettere sulla sua efficacia come mezzo per produrre e mediare un discorso critico intorno all'organizzazione, al funzionamento e alle operazioni di questa tipologia istituzionale.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 01: Display organization of the exhibition “Institution Building.” (Courtesy of Sepideh Farvardin).

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<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.3034-9699/19304>

In its official, specialized, and, above all, *institutionalized* configuration as a specific organization of ‘museological persuasion’ primarily dedicated to the collection, exhibition, and mediation of architectural culture, the architectural institution can be considered a relatively new addition to the panorama of cultural bodies.¹ Despite its relative youth and the specificity of its program and operations, the idea of the architectural institution is enjoying persistent popularity on the horizon of potential and attractive contributions to the cultural *milieu* of the 21st century.² Today, the current and seemingly unfaltering proliferation of multiple and diverse (para-)institutional spaces dedicated to the preservation and display of architectural materials and ideas testifies to a phase of enthusiasm that manifests simultaneous attitudes of ‘performative’ confidence and anxiety. On the one hand, the ongoing success of the architectural institution experiment shows the resolute interest in and conviction of the valuable contribution that this type of institution can bring to the contemporary cultural discourse. On the other hand, the continuous foundation of new institutions and the frequent restructuring and rethinking of relatively recent ones also present the image of an institution that is still challenging and debating its role, relevance, and purpose in the current global cultural panorama.

Given these premises, the architectural institution is thus not an undemanding subject to frame for analysis: both for the multiplicity of forms and missions it could express, and for its enthusiastic mutability

of organization, structure, and objectives.³ Examined from the perspective of its structural configuration, the contemporary architectural institution emerges as peculiarly permeable to change and revision. In this behaving as a typical post-cultural industry institution, the architectural institution appears as a usually flexible entity that might undergo a repeated cycle of reflection, rethought, and renewal in its lifespan, often even in a peculiarly accelerated way.⁴

Almost to counterbalance this expeditious variability and preserve and track these rapid changes, current research scenarios around the architectural institution see the flourishing of several institutional histories produced not only around the most traditionally historical examples of the architectural institution⁵, but also on the youngest representatives of the category.⁶ This interest in exploring the origins and the historical development of architectural institutions does not only reveal a recent recognition of this typology as a relevant object of study but, more importantly, the increasing need to establish the present and the future of these institutions, as well as their missions and operations, on the basis of a solid understanding not only of their ideological foundation and context of origin but also of the cultural, political, social, and economic conditions that generated them. Whether born out of an architectural institution’s internal need for meta-reflection or out of an autonomous research interest in exploring the origin of the architectural institution as a cultural phenomenon, these histories simultaneously aim at different

objectives. These aspirations are not exclusively limited to the interest in the historical record of the specific moment and context of an institution's foundation in order to preserve its memory in the general fluidity of architectural institutions. The histories of such institutions also pursue more praxis-oriented ambitions. On the one hand, they are instrumental to highlight the institutions' specificities in autonomously interpreting the idea of an architecture 'museum' in relation to the history of their conception, and in evaluating and analyzing their mission from this perspective. On the other hand, they try to assess the institutions' impact and their instrumentality on the development of architectural culture, by overviewing how they evolved to contribute with their projects or program goals

to the production and mediation of architectural knowledge. In addition, exploring the history of the architectural institution also means observing and assessing their behavior in structuring and implementing their missions and programs across mutated cultural environments. Evaluated from this perspective, the current production of institutional histories overtly declares the achievement of an appropriate level of ideological awareness of the architectural institution and its researchers regarding the interpretation and understanding of its form, function, and actions.

From Institutional History to Institutional Critique

The fact that the architectural

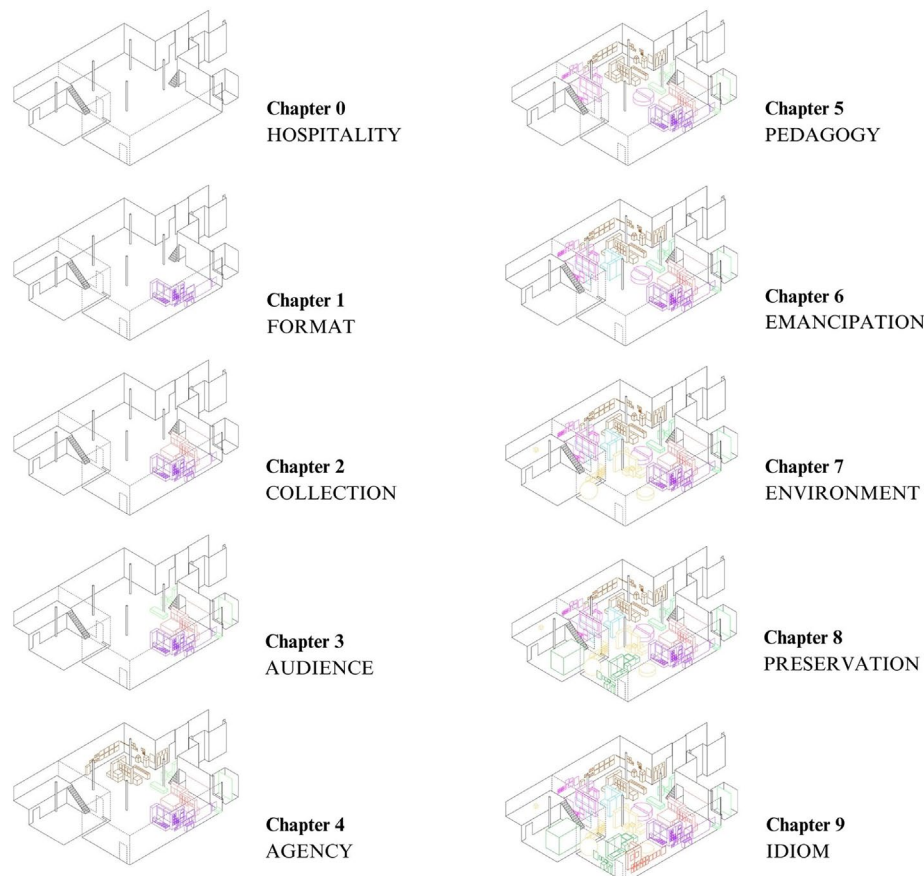


Fig. 02
Temporal and spatial evolution of the exhibition chapters of "Institution Building."
Courtesy of CIVA, Centre International pour la Ville, l'Architecture et le Paysage.

institution reached the point where it can be meticulously investigated in its own foundational history and historical development is the necessary precondition for the manifestation of further levels of inquiry regarding its role, conduct, and intention as a producer of (architectural) knowledge and culture. After the historical investigation, and precisely *through* it and its results, the institution could face a new set of deconstructive research questions that challenge and problematize its status and behavior in the general panorama of institutional culture. However, in the architectural context, the impact and diffusion of the practice of institutional critique is a considerably recent phenomenon⁷, which has been interpreted and assimilated distinctively when applied to the case of the architectural institution.

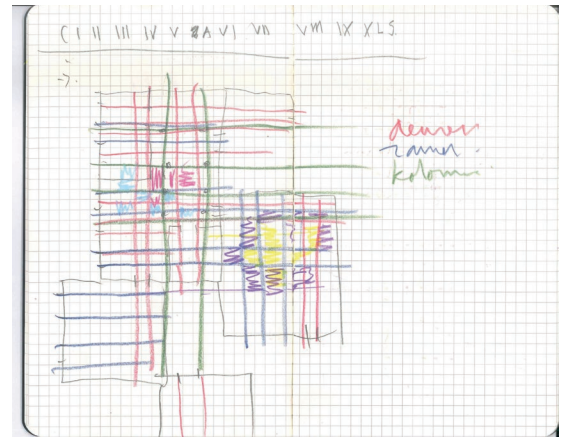
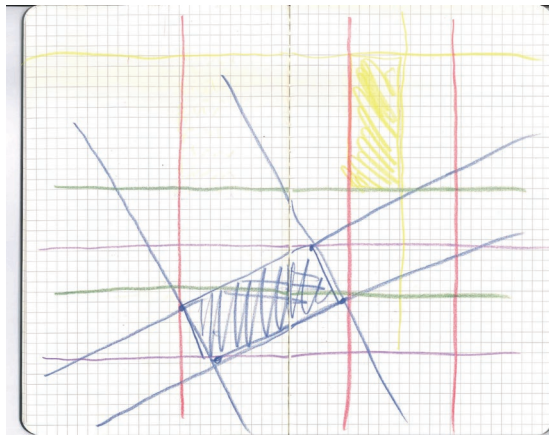
In this germinal panorama, it is consequential to highlight how the more structured examples

of architectural institutions critique are often produced and developed from within—so they are researched, manufactured, and disseminated *from* and *by* the institution itself.⁸ This form of autarchic control and production of critique appears to be a specific prerogative of the architectural institution since in other cultural fields institutional critique traditionally tends to be predominantly produced from the outside.⁹

Possibly, this spontaneous and voluntary investment of the architectural institution on its deconstruction and ideological assessment is connected with the double essence of the architectural institution as both a reflective and projective body.¹⁰ The architectural institution has always historically strived to orient its operations toward generating a proactive and direct impact on the discipline of architecture, not only in terms of fostering intellectual architectural



Fig. 03
Display organization of the exhibition “Institution Building.”
Courtesy of Sepideh Farvardin.



04-05

discourse but also influencing the functional aspects of architectural *praxis*. Thus, the necessity to verify if the behavior, mission, and program of the institution are up-to-date in response to the premises upon which architecture currently has to operate appears as a natural, if not required, integration to the institution's *ethos*. In this perspective, the architectural institution's inner re-examination of its ideological functioning appears to be its most immediate, available methodology to verify how relevant, instrumental, and effective its role still is in its service towards the discipline of architecture.

As a result of this engaged relationship with architecture and its developments, the critique of architectural bodies pairs deconstruction with construction: the ideological inquiry is accompanied by a programmatic blueprint for reimagining and rebuilding the institution, reimagining its contents, and actions.¹¹ Against this background, any theoretical attempt at institutional critique generated by the architectural institution is imperatively translated into a *manifesto* of intent rather than a simple deconstruction of functioning: the auto-analysis

merges into a proclamation of objectives and strategies, a design for a plan to prefigure, orient, and redraft the future of the institution.¹²

Nevertheless, it is possible to observe that, despite the sophisticated tendency of the architectural institution for self-assessment, its critique still primarily focuses on content rather than structure. The impact of this type of critique undoubtedly sees the architectural institution responding to the pressure and the demand of contemporaneity with a revision and expansion of collecting methods, preservation policies, and exhibition and research programs. Nevertheless, animated by a predominantly pragmatic and functional attitude, this institutional critique rarely questions the ideological essence and the legitimacy of the architectural institution and its operation.

Re-think to Re-Build: the Case of "Institution Building" at CIVA

Analyzed from the perspective of publicizing proactive investigation, the idea of presenting a critical programmatic manifesto in the format of an architectural exhibition appears to be an interesting attempt

Figs. 04-05
Architectenjdviv,
Preliminary
sketches for the
Scenography of
the Exhibition
"Institution
Building" by CIVA
Bruxelles, 2021.
Courtesy of
architectenjdviv.



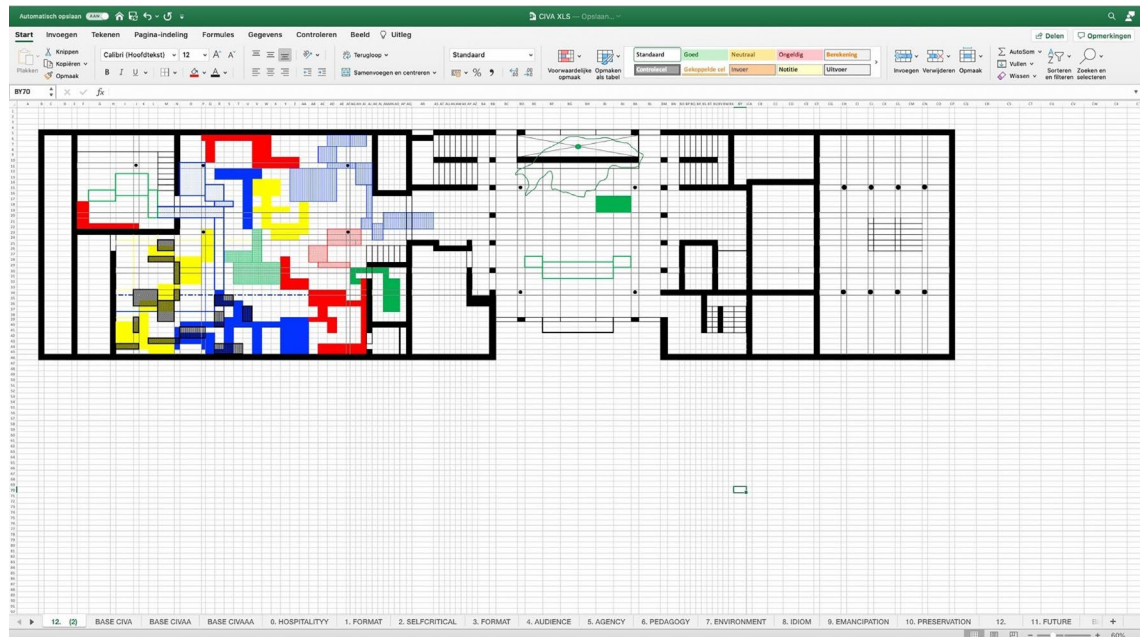
06

by the architectural institution to use a methodology familiar to contemporary architecture culture to reflect, research, and expose its self-exploration. This operation seems remarkably coherent with the observed aims of the architectural institution critique. Displaying criticism can be read as a practice that exposes and proposes: exhibiting institutional critique is factually constructing a material platform for discourse around the institution and its methods. In addition, using the exhibition as a means of critique also contributes, from the perspective of the meta-reflection of the institution, to the idea of producing concrete actions that go beyond the critique. Reflecting on exhibitions as institutional apparatus, the architectural institution can use

the exhibition as a space where to openly manifest how it addresses its audiences, how it makes and manages knowledge circulation, and what methodologies it uses to mediate ideas. In this perspective, the institution exposes itself through its operations, concretizing the results of its self-analysis. Exposing the critique of an architectural institution represents a stimulating node for research. On the one hand, it allows the study of the methodologies exposed by the architectural institution for its self-investigation. On the other hand, it allows the exploration of its strategies for rethinking its form, structure, and mission.

Starting from this conceptual background, the organization of the architectural exhibition “Institution Building,” presented by CIVA, the

Figs. 06-07
Architectenjddiv,
Excel Drawings
for the Scenogra-
phy of the Exhibi-
tion “Institution
Building” by CIVA
Bruxelles, 2021.
Courtesy of archi-
tectenjddiv.



International Center for the City, the Architecture and the Landscape of Bruxelles,¹³ thus appears to be a notable case study to explore the possibilities, opportunities, and limitations of embodying critique through exhibition.

The exhibition experiment of “Institution Building,” which lasted from August 27 to November 7, 2021, represented a pivotal moment for the Centre and its development. It symbolically highlights several crucial milestones for the CIVA: it marks the beginning of a new chapter, being the first exhibition organized under the newly appointed director Nikolaus Hirsch, but it also marks the end of an era, foreshadowing a new one for CIVA, officializing its upcoming transfer to the new cultural hub of the KANAL Centre Pompidou, expected for 2025.¹⁴ It is no coincidence that, in a moment of transition—especially such a controversial and problematic one—,¹⁵ an institution feels compelled to look inward and rethink its essence and activities in view of its new form. Stemming from these premises, “Institution

Building” wanted to be both a moment of meta-reflection for the institution and the presentation of a possible, potential path for the future of CIVA: a future inspired by a diverse set of questions and an array of competing possible answers. Ideas of transition and transformation animated the intention beyond the critical curatorial efforts behind the exhibition; in particular, the intention to merge a process of rethinking into a plan for reinvention, initiating a process of meaningful re-imagination for the Centre.¹⁶ From an operational point of view, the exhibition was thus imagined to fulfill two parallel sets of actions: “Institution Building” had to encompass both the questioning and the answering, the inquiry and the hypothesis in the scenography of its display. It needed to ask but also to explain, to state but also to imagine. In order to curate and manifest these intentions, the exhibition developed an experimental methodology that coherently articulated three parallel, interconnected dimensions (thematic, temporal, and spatial):

this strategy represents an interesting contribution to the materialization of critique through the exhibition.

Performing Critique through Exposed Methodology

The “Institution Building” design functions as the materialization of an institutional image through a pervasive visualization of a curatorial methodology. Through the display of the curatorial strategy, which is made evident and manifested in the exhibition, the institution’s (aspirational) functioning is presented, critiqued and challenged.

The curatorial intention is primarily organized around the identification of significant institutional elements around which to orchestrate and congregate the simultaneous operations of questioning and re-imagining the architectural institution: a skeleton of subjects to structure the proactive critical discourse into objects, projects, and ideas. The constitutive institutional elements identified were translated into ten different thematic clusters: *Hospitality, Format, Collection, Audience, Agency, Pedagogy, Emancipation, Environment, Preservation, and Idiom*. Intentionally, the elements are left conceptually and functionally porous, so they can serve different operative objectives simultaneously, performing as objects of inquiry and agents of proposal at the same time. The clusters indicate both the aspects and activities of the institution that the exhibition wants to challenge and reinvent, as well as the thematic

operational framework for CIVA’s priority future field of action. The ten elements thus ideally resume the institution in its most visible and ‘exoteric’ parts,¹⁷ alluding to its function and structure, as well as the reasons and ideologies behind it. The very choice of the clusters is thus an operation that intends to reveal and unveil the institution in its essence and aims: it not only displays the founding principles and components of the institution, but also reveals its ideological orientation at the moment of defining its program and mission.¹⁸ The clusters are, essentially, the critique that is verbalized in themes. They function as conceptual islands, each manifesting an institutional component and positioning it in the vocabulary of the display. Together, they represent the semantic archipelago that captures the essence and behavior of the institution, but also its operational thesaurus for question and action.

The diverse conceptual clusters are transposed in the exhibition as sequential, additive chapters articulating through a temporal progression.¹⁹ [Fig. 02] Week after week, the exhibition grows with a new addition, following an idea of process and work-in-progress that expands with new contributions for the entire lifespan of the exhibition.

From this perspective:

CIVA is not only a space of representation but a place of production. The exhibition is a visible process for visitors: from mounting to maintenance and the spectrum in between.²⁰



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In fact, following this procedure, the exhibition builds itself, block by block, progressing through time under the gaze of its public. At the same time, through the progressive aggregation of the element, it constructs the image and the concretization of the potential architectural institution in the making. In the curatorial choice of its sequential articulation, “Institution Building” also materially manifests criticism in the exhibition as inquiry turning into production in the exhibition space, making its inquisitive and constructive progress tangible. Not only does the idea of sequential chapters challenge the idea of stability and permanence of the institution, questioning the solidity of its foundational ideologies and intentions, but also suggests the alternative idea of an unstable configuration that repeatedly redesigns itself: a structure that allows for progressive variations in an ever-expanding form.²¹

Therefore, the exhibition and, reflexively, the re-imagined institution function as a research process: they are a laboratory, a testing ground, and also a conceptual worksite. The exhibition-institution is not a static, finalized, immutable, self-contained statement: it changes over time and constantly enriches and problematizes the discourse, hypothesis, and proposals it produces. The exhibition as “a growing organism, constantly questioning and legitimizing its *raison d’être*”,²² is thus a concept coherently translated into the operational dialogue produced by the process of additional and mutual re-organization of the sequence of elements.

The principle of temporal progression punctuates the rhythm for the gradual introduction of the diverse materials and contributions that compose each chapter and progressively populate the exhibition space. The multifaceted work of architects, artists, historians,

Fig. 08
Architectenjdvviv,
Scenography of
the Exhibition
“Institution
Building” by CIVA
Bruxelles, 2021.
Credit photo:
Thomas Ost.

writers, theorists, and activists, in an impressive lineup of more than 150 participants,²³ sequentially inhabits the exhibition space, crowding every available floor and wall.²⁴

[Fig. 01 and 03] The curatorial emphasis granted to this image of a cooperative approach to knowledge production can also be interpreted as a curatorial method to display critique. The institution's objectives, form, and operations are presented as a collective, interdependent, interactive, and collaborative cosmos of contributions, works, perspectives, and ideas. From this angle, the exhibition and its idea of the architectural institution become a literal building inhabited by different actors, methodologies, and approaches, all contributing to its functioning. The exhibition reveals (and advocates for) the institution as a network of people, expertise, and ideas. In addition, the multiple contributions also build (or re-build) the institution: they inspire it to renew itself with their perspectives and fuel its reimagination process with their participation. Furthermore, through this additive process, the exhibition functions as an institution. The progression of the institutional chapters, as well as the organization of their collateral events, can be read as the macro-institution of "Institution Building" producing ten different thematic exhibitions, all distinguished by their own vernissage and program.

To coordinate and, in a certain sense, choreograph this impressive amount of materials and events, the curators requested architectural studio architectenjdviv (inge vinck jan de vylder architecten, here in collaboration with additional designers Pierre Labergue and

Shervin Sheikh Rezaei) to create an evolving scenography capable of containing and articulating the sequential logic of the ten institutional components. Imagining the exhibition space as the encounter between the surreal, correlative collaboration of a *cadavre exquis* and an Excel sheet's formatting and organizing capability,²⁵ **[Fig. 04-07]** architectenjdviv designed an associative exhibition display of areas of materials connected by colored lines drawn on the floor—an intricate system of organization and, above all, connection. **[Fig. 08]** The subtle presence of the colored line scheme on the floor highlights the transience of the display organization but also the spontaneity of the connections, suggesting their potential manipulability and re-arrangement. The scenography is thus an instrument for both reading and reconfiguring, allowing not only the public to interpret the exhibition, but above all the materials to acquire new meanings by following the ephemeric connection sketched by the architects and curators. In addition, following the principles of materializing critique, the organizing element also becomes part of the display on multiple levels. In fact, the participation of the scenography is not limited to making the organizational criterium perceptible and thus explainable and transparent. The line set design is considered an exhibition object in itself,²⁶ it is exposed, and it outgrows its serving function to become an actual symbolic and conceptual tool, a working hypothesis. It is not only a 'work' in itself, the visualization of an architectural and design plan to organize space, materials, and ideas, but also the image of how an

institution could potentially work and organize itself. In this way, the institution shows its functioning in the most literal terms, exhibiting its organizational criteria.

The experimental attempt of “Institution Building” to produce proactive critique through display thus goes beyond the mere visualization of theory or the presentation of a critical perspective to a curated narration of materials and documents. Through the explication and exposure of its curatorial strategy, “Institution Building” creates an identity between the exhibition display and the architectural institution. The exhibition not only represents and makes visible the institutional structure: it works, functions, and produces as an authentic architectural institution. The equivalence between exhibition and institution is achieved essentially by the incorporation of methodology into the display: the proactive action of the critique is to make the functioning of the institution visible and experienceable, so that the public can not only perceive it, but also understand, and participate in it. The critical curatorial strategy operated by “Institution Building” thus represents an engaging contribution to the idea of translating critique into display: the possibility of constructing, through the visualization of a methodology, an image of an institution that simultaneously questions and rebuilds its premises for existence and action.

Endnotes

- 1 The formal foundation of the architectural institution in its contemporary declination is widely recognized as a production of the postmodernist, post-Beaubourg period and culture: both ICAM, the International Confederation of Architectural Museums, and a massive proliferation in the foundation of architecture museums, centers, and institution occurred in the decade between 1979 and 1988. For an overview of the architectural institutions' development phases, see Dietmar 2009, pp. 56-59.
- 2 This popularity is fueled and supported by the equally promiscuous development of short-lived events, festivals, fairs, and programs (but also journals and publications) dedicated to architecture and its related disciplinary production.
- 3 An example of this variegation can be observed in the inner diversity, as well as in the ambiguity, of the several member institutions included in the International Confederation of Architectural Museums (ICAM). Currently, ICAM's membership encompasses over 90 architecture institutions from more than 30 countries, without limiting their profiles to the architecture museum. ICAM accepts in its ranks architecture museums, architectural museum departments, centers, archives, and comparable institutions dedicated to promoting architecture and its history, as well as private collectionists, as long as they grant public access to their collections. The unifying element between these different realities seems to be their mission of disseminating, mediating, and fostering architectural knowledge and culture (the activities of collecting and archiving are relevant, but not ever-spread goals). For an overview of ICAM, its development and organization, see Giral 2009, pp. 7-14. Also, on the "inexistence of a typical architectural institution," see Dietmar 2009, pp. 59-63.
- 4 See, in this regard, the invitation of Mirko Zardini to reject a definition and search for a univocal typology of the architectural museum, as well as the refusal of fixity of plans in Zardini 2017, pp. 85-96.
- 5 The most exhaustive and structured examples can be summarized in the research on the three historically recognized postmodern architectural institutions: the DAM, the CCA, and the NAI. These types of publications include, for example: the study around the figure of Heinrich Klotz as the founder and inspirer of the early history and program of the *Deutsche Architekturmuseum* (DAM) in Frankfurt (see, Elser 2014); the several internal reports on the activities and one global monography produced by the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montréal (see, Canadian Centre for Architecture 1988; Richards, 1989); and the institutional history and exhibition history overview published around the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAI) and its updated version of *Het Nieuwe Instituut* (HNI) in Rotterdam (see, Figueiredo 2016; Cormier 2021).
- 6 This approach generally concerns brief monographic or cataloging summaries and overviews of the exhibition history of the institutions. In particular, this latest example is gaining remarkable popularity, probably in response to the rising demand for meta-archival practices intended to preserve the memory of the activity organized by the institution and the increasing research attention dedicated to architectural exhibitions and their history. For examples produced by a different and diverse array of architectural institutions, see Grima et al. 2009 (Storefront for Art and Architecture, New York); Zimm 2012 (Swedish Centre for Architecture); Cohen, Eveno 2001 (*Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine*).
- 7 An early example of this approach is *A Very Special Museum* (Damisch 2001, pp. 49-67). seminal essay, in which the author highlighted perplexities and criticality regarding the intention and consequences behind the operation of museifying architecture.
- 8 In this regard, it is also significant to highlight that the actors currently involved in the critique of the architectural institutions mostly come from professions other than that of the architect (and if they are or used to be, they preeminently work as directors or curator in architectural institutions in the current context).
- 9 For an updated overview of institutional critique and its field and actors of production, with a particular focus on contemporary art, see Fraser 2005, pp. 278-286.
- 10 The terminology employed here derives from the general observations on the nature of the architectural institution included by Figueiredo in the contextual introduction to his analysis of the historical creation of the NAI, see Figueiredo 2016, pp. 14-18.
- 11 In this, the attitude of the architectural institution can be compared to the third, recent wave of development of institutional criticism, highlighted by Karen Archey as a combination of criticism and care, scrutiny and contribution, in order to propose and generate material changes within the institution. For Archey's theory, sustained with contemporary examples of this attitude, see Archey 2022.

- 12 The most notable example of this approach is the critical manifesto *The Museum Is Not Enough*, (Borasi 2019), produced by the Canadian Centre for Architecture.
- 13 For an essential profile of CIVA and its mission, see Pourtois 2005, pp. 44-47.
- 14 CIVA decided to leave its current location in Ixelles (Bruxelles) after 24 years of activities and to participate in the new plan for the re-employment of the former Citroen Garage along the Brussel Charleroi Canal, which is to be converted into a cultural pole of international level. The ambitious project, supported by the collaboration and support between the KANAL Foundation and the Centre Pompidou, plans to create a multi-purpose cultural hub regrouping several different cultural institutions and activities in its renovated spaces. For further details regarding the project, and contextual information regarding the proposed project elaborated by noAarchitecten, EM2N and Sergison Bates architects, see Block 2018.
- 15 Even if the relocation of CIVA was justified by the need to expand the institution's spaces for storing its collection and archive, the decision of CIVA to be included in the plan for the KANAL Centre Pompidou was met with some perplexities. Primary doubts concern the consequences, for a local reality like CIVA, to subscribe to a project and a program of an external institution infamous for its attempts at 'cultural colonization': a choice that could significantly limit CIVA's autonomy in developing its structure and strategies. In addition, CIVA has not made a clear, official statement, nor expressed its position regarding its participation in a project that is considered part of a controversial operation of urban development, of which the KANAL Centre Pompidou is interpreted as a catalyst for gentrification through cultural operations, questioning the real reasons behind the agenda of the cultural internationalization of Bruxelles. For an overview of the KANAL Centre Pompidou controversy, see Debersaques 2021; Innocenti 2018, pp. 115-118; Seynaeve, Ménard, Rubio, Denys 2021.
- 16 Not coincidentally, this pause of self-reflection also followed the moment of the global pandemic.
- 17 The curators, in their conceptual statement, insisted particularly on the idea of making the institution visible in all its parts; see CIVA 2021, p. 2.
- 18 The 'voice' of the institution, proposing the themes, articulating the questions, and presenting the horizon of action is presented in the explanatory panels that introduce the space of each section. Brief summaries of the ten panels are available on the CIVA website, in the section announcing the opening of each institutional chapter: <https://www.civa.brussels/en/search/content/institution%20building>.
- 19 To refer to the complete temporal articulation of the exhibition, see CIVA 2021, p. 3.
- 20 CIVA 2021, p. 1.
- 21 It is no coincidence that Nikolaus Hirsch is also the editor of *Institution Building: Artists, Curators, Architects in the Struggle for Institutional Space*, published in 2009, which collect a series of reflections and hypothesis for the spatial imagination of a European Kunsthalle. The project sketched in the publication, from the idea of the institution as a space of production to the montage of its structure as an exquisite corpse, is remarkably coherent with the curatorial structure of the exhibition «Institution Building».
- 22 CIVA 2021, p. 1.
- 23 The complete list of participants and contributors can be found on the CIVA website: <https://www.civa.brussels/fr/expos-events/institution-building-0>.
- 24 It is also important to highlight in this context that the contributions were not limited to the materials, artworks, documentation, and physical objects on display in the exhibition, nor was the exhibition the only format for the manifestation of CIVA's operative institutional critique. The extensive program of «Institution Building» included a series of performances, talks, cultural visits inside and outside CIVA, and even the production of a series of dedicated podcasts.
- 25 During the pandemic, architectenjdvv started experimenting with Excel as a design tool for sketching and visualizing the development of their projects.
- 26 The 'Excel sketches' of the exhibition scenography are included in the exhibition under the chapter of Hospitality, as a documentational work titled "Verveling. Vervel(N)ing. Verve(e)ling."

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Exhibited ecology. On *Taking the country's side*

Jannik Cesare Emiliano Pra Levis

Keywords:

Ecology, Sustainability, Agriculture, Architecture exhibition, Bioregionalism.

ABSTRACT:

To cope with the overwhelming feeling of powerlessness induced by the environmental crisis nowadays, architecture exhibitions dealing with the themes of ecology and sustainability can play a fundamental role in building a collective consciousness that could help people manage or, at least, understand contemporary ecological issues.

Against this background, this article discusses the case of the exhibition *Taking the Country's Side: Agriculture and Architecture* by architecture theorist Sébastien Marot, which is analyzed through the study of its evolution as well as through the reconstruction of the curator's thought.

Per far fronte all'opprimente sensazione di impotenza indotta dall'attuale crisi ambientale, le mostre di architettura che affrontano i temi dell'ecologia e della sostenibilità possono svolgere un ruolo fondamentale nella costruzione di una coscienza collettiva in grado di aiutare le persone a gestire o, almeno, comprendere le attuali problematiche ecologiche. In questo contesto, l'articolo approfondisce il caso della mostra *Taking the Country's Side: Agriculture and Architecture* del teorico dell'architettura Sébastien Marot, che viene analizzata attraverso lo studio della sua evoluzione e attraverso la ricostruzione del pensiero del curatore.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 2: *Taking the Country's Side: Agriculture and Architecture*, 2023, Marseilles, Friche Belle de Mai, installation view, detail with dioramas.

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<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.3034-9699/19305>



In 1999, Jean Louis Cohen attempted to distinguish, on the pages of the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, various types of approaches to the display of architecture, and a simple summary observation emerged: “The functions that architectural exhibition take on are [...] eminently variable”.¹ Among the architecture exhibitions reported in the article, however, a prominent position is held by the exhibition presenting a newly acquired archive that must necessarily go “beyond the simple display of documents, incorporating historical interpretation through curating”.² In these exhibitions of archive material, curatorship becomes not only a taxonomic tool but, more importantly, one able to convey hypotheses.³

Cohen’s reflection essentially involves a thematization that treats exhibits not as individual, independent, and self-explaining objects but rather as elements of a larger narrative that does not end with the confines of the exhibition. Indeed, the question broadens to the field of research: “The exhibition is but one moment in the sequence of events that comprise research, in its trajectory from an initial definition of a problem or issue to the diffusion dissemination of findings. Yet the exhibition is only very rarely the end of the journey”.⁴ From this perspective, therefore, architecture exhibitions do not simply document history; instead, they “construct narratives, and [...] tell them with spatial, visual means”.⁵

Barry Bergdoll provides another fundamental contemporary observation regarding the urge to rethink architecture exhibitions in the

pages of *Log*.⁶ The article starts with an analysis of the exhibition *Rising Currents: Projects for New York’s Waterfront* to propose a working hypothesis for the activist exhibition. Bergdoll’s position can be summarized as a desire to overcome “the reactive mode of exhibition,” an approach derived from the tradition of displaying paintings and sculptures in which “the curator culls from contemporary or recent production what he or she admires and thinks deserves contextualization and wider publicity”.⁷ Bergdoll proposes to implement the classic exhibition scheme, turning the museum space into an incubator for new ideas and launching “[...] through public programs, and through work that others will do [...] a debate that can far outlive the ephemeral event of the exhibition”.⁸ Thus, according to what has been said so far, an architectural exhibition able to convey a message and encourage visitors to reflect must first and foremost be narrative, observatory, and laboratory.

Cohen and Bergdoll’s enlightening considerations provide a starting point for contextualizing and analyzing *Taking the Country’s Side. Agriculture and Architecture*: an exhibition that investigate the theme of ecology observed in the relationship between habitat and species. Sébastien Marot, the chief curator, weaves a narrative plot that is apparently educational or, as he calls it, “ideological in that it is didactic”.⁹ In fact, the exhibition is the result of his decades-long academic career,¹⁰ as well as his countless reflections that have appeared in books and scholarly articles.¹¹ Nevertheless, the exhibition is not limited to a selection of case studies and events

from the history of the agriculture and architecture relationship. *Taking the Country's Side* is a dialogue with cities, an observation on the effects of the climate crisis, and an empowering exhortation to take a personal stand; even so, it is first and foremost an invitation to spectators “to leave their metropolitan comfort zone, and literally ‘take a walk on the wild side’”.¹²

Take a Walk on the Wild Side: Adaptability and Nomadism

Taking the Country's Side is a travelling exhibition consisting of specific sections that evolve over the course of the different editions. The materials on display recurrently consist of six significant images of the themes addressed placed at the beginning of the exhibition itinerary, a continuous chronological line usually positioned on a wall to recall a frieze, a central part hosting forty-two panels (forty-nine from the Marseilles edition) divided into six thematic sections of seven panels each, several screens on which significant experiences related to the events narrated in the central section are projected and, finally, four large dioramas designed by architectural illustrator Martin Etienne. The element-based layout of the exhibition adjusts to its nomadic nature, also contributing to its adaptability to the ecological core of the display operation. When it comes to exhibitions dealing with ecological issues, it is necessary to consider sustainability not only as a theme but also as an approach to the construction of the exhibition itself. *Taking the Country's Side* is a virtuous example of flexibility or,

from the point of view of sustainability, museography resilience, as it manages to adapt to different types of space while guaranteeing the same museum experience.

The exhibition modifies its ranges from the 2200 square meters of the Garagem Sul at the Centro Cultural de Belém for *The Poetics of Reason: Quinta Trienal de Arquitectura* in Lisbon,¹³ to the 400-450 square meters of the Archizoom Gallery at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne,¹⁴ the 220 square meters of the Orangerie pavilion in the Parc de la tête d'Or in Lyon, the two-story space at the Halles St-Géry in Brussels and, again, at the *Friche Belle de Mai* in Marseilles. Marot turns the limits imposed by the built space into the possibility to articulate the exhibition's narrative and imagine exhibition schemes that can help the visitors in their reflection. The space is articulated through metaphors used as “a purely way of helping the visitors to just orient themselves”¹⁵ through the exhibition.

In Lisbon, for example, the exhibition structure “was suggested by the plan of Garagem Sul, which roughly mirrors, with its two long rows of pillars, that of a basilica or cathedral: a nave flanked by two aisles”.¹⁶ The space was divided into three symbolic parts: the nave hosting the panels, the aisles – one of which was divided in niches – displaying the chronological frieze and the videos, and a choir with the four drawings by Martin Etienne. Following the religious metaphor, the six representations at the beginning of the exhibition constituted the *narthex* of the basilica.

At the *Friche Belle de Mai*, the initial six images grouped in diptychs are



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conceived as the revolving doors of the exhibition, leading to the panel section, which evokes the idea of a forest where the visitor is invited to stroll while observing and reflecting on the forty-two original panels and the seven new ones on bioregionalism. The four scenarios that constitute the visitor's compass are instead imagined as a clearing circumscribed on three sides by the 'forest trees' and open on the fourth to the chronological frieze that dominates an entire wall. The exhibition design is completed by a set of film excerpts, documentaries, and interviews displayed along the north wall, which expose significant figures in the field of environment and social ecology.

The exhibits vary considerably from city to city, with some significant modifications in the last edition of Marseilles. Nevertheless, the great capacity of *Taking the Country's Side*

lies above all in its ability to weave ever-new narratives with space understood in its dual form of building and city. It is not so much the materials on display that change, but rather the interactions that are bi-univocally exchanged between visitors (and, by extension, the community of citizens) and the exhibition itself. *Taking the Country's Side* transcends the museum limits and is enriched by public events and lectures¹⁷ with the aim of establishing a dialogue with the plurality of visitors and stimulating their critical sense.

A Game of Cards: how to play *Taking the Country's Side*

The exhibition layout is set up to create multiple paths and points of view. The most substantial section of the exhibition consists of double-

Fig.1
Taking the Country's Side: Agriculture and Architecture, 2023, Marseilles, Friche Belle de Mai, installation view, detail with panels.

sided panels arranged “like a giant deck of cards in which the visitor’s mind is invited to wander as in a game of patience and reflection”,¹⁸ reporting events fundamental for the curator to illustrate the evolution of the relationship between urban and rural space. This part of the exhibition is divided into seven groups of seven panels each, metaphorically referred to as the “Ideological Garden”. Thus, it is a series of gardens of ideas, gardens of events or moments in history that might be relevant for us today to reflect on, to meditate on”,¹⁹ which focus on the following macro-themes: *Agriculture&Architecture*, *Agriculture&Urbanism*, *From Agronomy to Agroecology*, *Exit Urbs: a history of agrarian movements and return to the land*, *Facing the current environmental situation*, *Reframing the Practice&Theory of Design* and *Towards an Archipelago of Bioregions*.

Each *Ideological Garden* is composed of seven double-faced panels. On one side of the panels, a contextualization of the subject is accompanied by an essential bibliography, made available to the visitor for an in-depth exploration [Fig. 01], while, on the other side, excerpts from texts and a series of “famous projects, images and references that speak by themselves and need less explanation” are displayed not according to precise rules [Fig. 02], but following “their counterpoint or resonance with the front panels situated either behind or across them”.²⁰ The stated choice to display the images in a non-predetermined order is a strong museography approach in itself. In fact, the museum route winds simultaneously along the chronological line that governs the structure of the macro-themes

with the help of the large frieze, and along the random line dictated by the presence of the images on the back of the panels. The visitors thus move with a certain experiential freedom in the history of the architecture and agriculture relationship to reach a degree of awareness that allows them to critically analyze the phenomena exposed around them.

At the same time, the ludic dimension expressed through the metaphor of the pack of cards is crucial, especially for the cognitive experience gained through the autonomous reading resulting from the interplay of references between images and texts. Marot refers, in particular, to the game of solitaire and states:

I like that because, in a way, this was part of the pleasure of organizing those different references in the space, like having a game of cards raised in to the space, and it suggests to the visitors that they have to play with them. We could play the arrangement differently. That is up to the visitor to keep them in mind and play with them mentally, like a game of linking concepts.²¹

The importance of this often-emphasized playful aspect should not be forgotten when analyzing the exhibition’s journey. For example, Sebastien Marot suggests considering the Garagem Sul – the larger space in which the exhibition was hosted – and the small Orangerie in Lyon. In the first case, the panels are suspended, hanging from the ceiling. The effect created is that of a series of floating cards among which the visitor can move freely, immediately grasping the entirety of the space and playing a game of

cross-references. The Lyon exhibition appears to work differently; the 200 square meters pose a challenge to such set-up. Thus, the long and narrow space forced to arrange the panels on wooden supports placed on the floor, leaving the main scene to the frieze along the wall. Despite the limited space, the final result is nevertheless achieved thanks to the height of the supports, which, at 110 cm high, still allowed the visitor to grasp the overall view and play this “solitaire of references”.²²

To help understand the many stories exposed on the panels, the exhibition also presents “a timeline synthesizing the parallel evolutions of agriculture and architecture (and, subsequently, urbanism) since their common inception in the Neolithic age”,²³ which is typically presented as a frieze on the wall. This chronological summary serves as “a historical and pedagogical backdrop to the references and projects surveyed in the Ideological Garden”²⁴ and even for the four scenarios. The selection of the events displayed in the frieze was partly based on Marot’s lectures²⁵ and studies undertaken during his years as lecturer, and partly to make the curators’ radical stance of the cultural frame of reference explicit, as can be read in the exhibition. An even greater synthesis is achieved thanks to the reworking of the frieze by architect and illustrator Gaetan Amossé, who participated in the Lyon exhibition. In this context, the timeline is enriched with drawings and quotations from anthropologists, historians, philosophers, and scientists, making the graphic layout more articulate than the previous frieze. According to Marot, the technique of illustration – compared to other

media – helps to present ideas in a more efficient and user-friendly way. The use of illustration also allows the subjects presented to be abstracted from specific contexts. It is no coincidence that Marot opts for drawings even in the most purposeful part of the exhibition.

Exhibition – Exposition

Illustrator Martin Etienne designed the four large dioramas that constitute the last section of the exhibition in collaboration with Sebastien Marot. The use of illustration, in this case, allows images to be abstracted and caricaturized, to make them easier for visitors to understand. At the same time, the message conveyed is privileged over the specific context. Indeed, a Europeanized landscape²⁶ is recognizable in the drawings but, as Marot confesses: “You have to opt for a certain geography, a certain thing, but at least you clarify the ideological component of what you are dealing with”.²⁷ These typological caricatures of possible scenarios are the radical exaggeration of processes that still coexist, compartmentalized by Marot only to allow a clearer reading.

In the Triennale catalog, this section was entitled *Urbi et Orbi*. It showed four competing narratives about the future relationship between city and country and was the section of the exhibition where “the reader, now informed and equipped with a reasonably good rear-view mirror on the parallel histories of agriculture, architecture, and urbanism, is finally introduced to a compass rose representing opposite scenarios in

the type of relationship that city and countryside might develop in the near future, and gently invited to ask themselves which one (or two) they might, in good conscience, actively endorse".²⁸ The "four broad landscape drawings" exhibited in this section summarize "the different and competing directions the dialectic of city and country, as well as agriculture and architecture, might take today and in the near future".²⁹

Incorporation constitutes the first scenario presented. Marot describes it as the approach supported by those who consider the metropolis "not just as the *manifest destiny* of humankind, but also as the ultimate condition of our whole biosphere".³⁰ In this vision of out-of-control growth, technological innovation and the uptake of agriculture into the capitalist process are seen as the only possible solutions to the ecological crisis.

Negotiation and *Infiltration* are two more scenarios that, at first glance, present various points of tangency. The first is "what we might call agricultural urbanism",³¹ an approach that combines agricultural practices with urban planning. The second, conversely, represents a hypothetical landscape, in which agriculture and horticulture are used according to "a logic of self-organization that does not pertain to planning or urbanism but blossoms here and there, like weeds, in the fault and voids of urban territories".³² In an interview by Christophe Catsaros for *Archizoom Papers*, Marot explains that, although the two models seemingly resemble each other, there is a clear difference between the two. *Negotiation* starts from the

consideration that the growth of the metropolis is inevitable and seeks the solution in hybrid models that integrate agriculture, livestock, horticulture, and even the very concept of 'nature'. *Infiltration*, on the other hand, represents a process that starts from agriculture and moves towards the fabric in a relationship of proximity between resources and human beings.³³ Although similar, they derive from tendentially opposite approaches that today might respectively be called *top-down* and *bottom-up*.

The secessionist proposal stands as a separate scenario.³⁴ *Secession* is based on the assumption that the metropolis system is doomed to collapse and the solution to today's environmental problems is to privilege decentralization to achieve a greater degree of local autonomy. Such a viewpoint, which invites the rediscovery of the participatory dimension of rural communities, derives from activist theories and movements, such as bioregionalism and especially permaculture, a concept elaborated by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren³⁵ and developed into a veritable philosophy of life by the latter: a social approach "that would turn territories into confederations of self-managed communes or worlds".³⁶ In describing this latter approach, Marot is well aware of the need to compromise with the existing system but extols the multiple secessionist narratives as "what unites them in their very diversity, is their collective intuition that salvaging the idea of *civitas*, and giving it a new meaning, now badly requires a sub-version of and an exodus from the metropolis".³⁷

These caricatured representations

are certainly not intended to judge the value of one scenario over the other but rather to show four directions that embody as many environmental strategies, each of which holds some truth in its hypothesis. This undefined horizon of evaluation does not mean, however, that the exhibition is neutral and the curator, as well as the visitors, cannot express their position concerning the propositional compass. Marot himself openly expresses his position as “right next to Secession, leaning towards Infiltration, with a modest and conditional tolerance for Negotiation, and an instinctive distrust of Incorporation”³⁸ and adds:

I thought it was my duty, in a way, to say where I tend to place myself within that compass, if only to invite other people to wonder where they would place themselves. And of course, I know that the exhibition is not neutral, that only through the selection of what we put together, we strongly invite people to at least place themselves not in the corporation, in a way. So I know that. But at the same time, I do not think we are forcing or compelling anyone.³⁹

As an example, Marot recalls that, at the 2019 Triennale in Lisbon, many visitors were enthusiastic about the Incorporation scenario.

The evident difficulty of giving physical form to the climate crisis⁴⁰ translates into the challenge of constructing an architectural exhibition around this theme. *Taking the Country's Side* is an exhibition that transcends the boundaries of observation and enters a collective

dimension that dialogues not only with places but, above all, with people. It does not merely inform visitors about ecological theories and approaches but builds a participatory process that aims to stimulate them to think critically about environmental problems. The exhibition fully satisfies the three criteria of narrative, observatory, and laboratory that have been identified: it represents the outcome of decades of research in the field of habitat history, articulated through a narrative framework and open to the workshop dimension in the encounter and debate with citizenships. Through the exhibition, Marot questions the very concept of exhibiting and seems to rather construct an exposition in its meaning of “exposing oneself”, thus showing that someone has taken a stand. Exposing oneself is a radical act that stems from the need to manifest one's choice. The relationship between agriculture and architecture speaks of space, places, and relationships between living and non-living, human and non-human beings but the exhibition is not limited to this. *Taking the Country's Side* brings spectators to the center of the problem and invites them to ask questions and seek answers. Dealing with sustainability and ecology, with his exhibition Sébastien Marot has proposed a new way of displaying architecture in the Anthropocene. By exhibiting his thought, he invites us to expose our own.

Endnotes

- 1 Cohen 1999, p. 317.
- 2 Cohen 1999, p. 320.
- 3 Cohen 1999, p. 320.
- 4 Cohen 1999, p. 324.
- 5 Cohen 2010, p. 49.
- 6 Bergdoll 2010, pp. 159-167.
- 7 Bergdoll 2010, p. 159.
- 8 Bergdoll 2010, p. 166.
- 9 In an interview by Christophe Catsaros for *Archizoom Papers*, Marot states that, in contrast to the exhibition curated by AMO/OMA in 2020 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, “notre exposition, centrée sur les rapports entre agriculture et architecture, est beaucoup plus classiquement didactique, voire idéologique, au sens où elle réunit un corpus d’idées et de références qui vient soutenir un argument” (*Interview with S. Marot*, 2020).
- 10 S. Marot in conversation with the author 2023.
- 11 Marot 1993; Marot 1996; Marot 1999; Marot 2003; Marot 2011; Marot 2011; Marot 2013; Marot 2019.
- 12 Marot 2023, Dossier de Presse
- 13 Éric Lapierre, the chief curator of the edition, invited the curatorial team to think about the different declinations of rationality in architecture. This choice resulted in five major Exhibitions: *Taking the Country’s Side. Agriculture and Architecture* curated by Sébastien Marot, *Inner Space* by Fosco Lucarelli, and Mariabruna Fabrizi, *What is Ornament?* by Ambra Fabi e Giovanni Piovene, *Natural Beauty* by Laurent Esmiliaire e Tristan Chadney e *The Economy of Means* by Éric Lapierre himself (Catalog 5th Trienal de Arquitectura, 2019). Despite the diversity of viewpoints of the five exhibitions, in a 2019 interview with *ArtTribune* Lapierre states “il loro contenuto e la loro presentazione sono stati pensati come un unico gesto”, adding “siamo quasi tutti sia progettisti che teorici: per noi, dunque, forma e contenuto sono un’unica cosa” (Interview with E. Lapierre, 2019). Unfortunately, there is no room here to delve into the different exhibitions, let us just say that the great merit of this edition of the Lisbon Triennial is also due to its variety of declinations, which in itself represents the spectrum of possibilities of architecture exhibitions.
- 14 One cannot fail to mention that in conjunction with the Lausanne edition, a parallel and somewhat complementary exhibition opened in the United States: *Countryside: The Future*, curated by OMA/AMO at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Both exhibitions reflect from different perspectives on the complex relationship between city and country. Although they deserve attention, we do not have the space here to talk about the nexus between the two exhibitions. However, it is crucial to say that they both constitute a fundamental junction in the ecological debate in architectural exhibitions. For further discussion, please see the catalogs of the exhibitions (Marot 2019; RK/OMA 2020).
- 15 S. Marot in conversation with the author 2023.
- 16 Marot 2019, p. 8.
- 17 The purpose of organizing meetings, workshops, guided tours, and debates is made explicit directly in the texts displayed in the exhibition. One example among many is the series of meetings *Terres Communes* of the Marseille edition or, again, the various guided tours and talks organized for other editions.
- 18 Marot 2019, p. 8.
- 19 S. Marot in conversation with the author 2023.
- 20 Marot 2019, p. 9.
- 21 S. Marot in conversation with the author 2023.
- 22 S. Marot in conversation with the author 2023.

- 23 (Marot 2019, 10),
- 24 (Marot 2023, Dossier, 22)
- 25 In his interview with the author (2023), Sébastien Marot describes the timeline as “a kind of visual resume or synthesis of my teachings in schools of architecture. Right. I have been teaching courses on the history of the environment for architects and landscape architects for 20 years now, and that is basically my canvas for that. So it is very helpful. Also for students, I can give them the timeline as a kind of resume of what I do.”
- 26 In the conversation with the author, Marot argues that, since the drawings present an ideology rooted in Europe, the drawn landscapes are necessarily Europeanized.
- 27 S. Marot in conversation with the author 2023.
- 28 Marot 2019, p. 195.
- 29 Marot 2019, p. 9.
- 30 Marot 2019, p. 197.
- 31 Marot 2019, p. 201.
- 32 Marot 2019, p. 205.
- 33 Interview with S. Marot 2020.
- 34 Interview with S. Marot 2020.
- 35 It should be kept in mind that the term *Secession* is coined by Sebastien Marot. Permaculture inspired the development of this scenario; yet, it is not the scenario itself. To elaborate further, see Holmgren David 2023. *Comment s'orienter ? Permaculture et descente énergétique* (translated and curated by Sébastien Marot). Marseille: Wildproject.
- 36 Marot 2019, p. 209.
- 37 Marot 2019, p. 210.
- 38 Marot 2019, p. 10.
- 39 S. Marot in conversation with the author 2023.
- 40 Morton 2013.

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