



EDITED by critic|all PRESS + Departamento de
Proyectos Arquitectónicos (ETSAM-UPM)
ISBN: 978-84-09-81684-2
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critic|all

VI International Conference
on Architecture Design & Criticism

grapho-logics

DIGITAL PROCEEDINGS
Turin 29-30 January

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01 Presentation

This 6th edition of the Criticjall Conference, titled Grapho-Logics: Deepening into Architecture's Visual Research Methods, consolidates the initiative launched more than a decade ago by the Architectural Design Department of the Madrid School of Architecture at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (ETSAM–UPM) to provide an international forum for architectural criticism.

The conference expands its scope as a site of knowledge production, from which relevant voices are brought together around the topic proposed for each edition. This year, it takes the form of a joint event co-organized with the Department of Architecture and Design of the Politecnico di Torino (DAD–PoliTO), which hosts the conference at its facilities in the Castello del Valentino.

We would like to thank all participants for their work and trust, as well as the members of the Scientific Committee for their effort and commitment. We also wish to reinforce the idea contained in the conference's name: Criticjall is both a call for criticism and a call for all. An appointment that, beyond the scope of each edition, we hope will contribute to strengthening a broader debate on the role of architecture in the present context.

The Organizing Team

02 Call for Papers

grapho-logics *deepening into architecture's visual research methods*

The growing fascination about visuality is a global trend that has no signs of slowing down in a context in which images are consumed and replaced at the same frenetic speed at which they are produced. The recent impact of AI on this continuous flow only reinforces it and, at the same time, presents the phenomenon as an inevitable fact, with hardly any mechanisms for critical evaluation of all this visual material.

The general shift from text to images could be read as withdrawal from criticality towards sheer visuality, contributing to generate an implied context of unspoken words and concepts that nevertheless determines research agendas.

Almost forty years have passed since Robin Evans' revindication of the distinctive power of drawings as a 'medium'. According to Evans, drawings work as translators between architectural ideas and their built result, even at the price of needing to be considered as an autonomous and sometimes contradictory outcome of the architect's work. The problems of translation multiply when the visual and other sensorial information embedded in drawing and architecture are processed by language, the primal critical tool. The image that opened Evans' famous 1986 article, a photograph of Jasper Jones' sculpture *The Critic Sees* (1961), stresses such problems by suggesting the ironical distortion of vision produced by linguistic anxiety. Critical vision, represented by plastic glasses, is ultimately blinded by words: two gesticulating mouths replace the eyes behind the glasses, the critic's speech replaces observation.

Observation together with the possibility of evaluating and processing visual information, are frequently inhibited by the need to verbalize, and thus to define, classify, categorize, also in architecture. The tendency, accelerated by communication technology and media since the 1960s, can be exemplified by the compulsive tagging of architectural forms, graphics and images in social media and the consequent abortion of critical analysis. In this context, it is urgent to put the visual-graphical information back at the core of architectural criticism, either as a source, as a tool or as a result of critical research.

Grapho-logics claims the power of graphical, and more generally visual materials to embed and unveil not only the hidden subjectivities and tacit features of architecture (similar to the ones the science of graphology investigates) but also the logics of design, its rational split into parts and processes, the kind of objectivation that allows explicit communication and the advancement of collective knowledge.

The recognition of the potential of any graphic document as beholder of a specific knowledge can be addressed

in different ways. One of them leads to fetishization of the original and reinforcement of authorship, therefore aligning architecture with artistic activity. This could be exemplified by what happened in the late 1970's with the so called "paper architecture", that ended up entering the very circuits of the art market. Another completely different approach would be to confront these documents with the physical objects they supposedly represent, evaluating their efficiency as tools to envision realities that did not exist prior to them, what in Evan's terms would be labelled as the "principle of reversed directionality" of the architectural drawing. Of course, if we admit that the graphic condition is intrinsically more open to interpretation than language, we should also be prepared to accept some amount of fidelity loss. Such capacity to leave traces of hidden intentions, uncompleted hopes or simple mistakes is far more easily recognized in handmade drawings. Therefore, in a context where architecture's disciplinary toolbox is more and more digitalized, any of these two alternatives will need to deal with the role of archives as the privileged custodians of an almost closed set of research materials.

Finally, a third, perhaps more coherent, way of claiming the potentialities of drawing as a primary source of inquiry might be to recognize that visual research methods can generate evidence that other methods cannot. Critical evaluation of any architectural concern can involve genuine graphic results produced by the research itself, bringing new inquiries into the conversation. But is it possible to overcome the fever of the diagram, the routine of the genealogical scheme, or the uniform display for comparative purposes?

The 6th edition of the Critic|all Conference welcomes contributions that critically address the logics underlying the graphic material that revolves around architecture, either through the study of original drawings or the production of new ones that shed light on a work, specific project, building or author.

The most basic structure should present the document under scrutiny, explain the reasons that justify the choice, formulate new interpretations or perspectives stemming from it, support these with arguments or new graphic content and bring the paper to a conclusion.

03

Conference Program

THURSDAY 29-01-2026		
All schedule indicates local time in Turin, IT (UTC/GMT +1 hour)		
Registration	08:30 - 09:00	Room 4V
Introduction	09:00 - 09:10	
panel #1 Beyond the Diagram	09:10 - 10:35	Room 4V
Mariapaola Michelotto Università Iuav di Venezia, Venice, Italy	09:15	Electric Dreams Rethinking wiring diagrams and their affordances
Joseph Smithard Anhalt University of Applied Sciences, Dessau, Germany	09:30	All Scales Considered How Solar Infrastructure Reorganises Space from German Fields to Global Networks
Zeila Tesoriere Università degli Studi di Palermo, Palermo, Italy	09:45	The Operative Atlas in Architecture An inchoative medium to elicit graphical forms of knowledge
Tomás Rodríguez Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Madrid, Spain	10:00	Drawing on the Evolutionary Tree. The currency of the architectural chronogram today
Session Chair: Alessandro Armando Politecnico di Torino, Italy	10:15 - 10:35	Discussion
Coffee Break	10:35 - 11:00	Bar Valentino (included)
panel #2 Underneath the Urban	11:00 - 13:10	Room 4V
Filippo Cattapan EPFL, Lausanne, Switzerland	11:05	Interwoven Economies between Visible and Verbal. The role of Urban Collages in Post-War Transatlantic Discourse
Valerio Della Scala Politecnico di Torino, Turin, Italy	11:20	The search for a <i>weak</i> legacy. Drawing as a tool to reorient readings of urban space in Tirana
Deborah Giunta & Gianluca Burgio Università Kore di Enna, Enna, Italy	11:35	Mapping as Inquiry: On Cartography, Data, and the Lives of Urban Lines
Aikaterini (Katerina) Antonopoulou (1) & Sebastián Aedo (2) (1) University of Liverpool, UK (2) University of Portsmouth, UK	11:50	Re-Writing the Ground through Environmental Collective Action: Glasgow and the COP26
Fernando Altozano García & Carmen Espejel Alonso Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Madrid, Spain	12:05	Diagrams across the depth scale in urban housing
Cecilia Rosa, Flavio Graviglia & Flavia Sinibaldi Roma Tre University, Rome, Italy	12:20	Urban morpho-graphy. A methodology for interpreting and transforming collective spaces
Session Chair: Antonio Di Campli Politecnico di Torino, Italy	12:35 - 13:00	Discussion
Lunch Break	13:00 - 14:30	Free time for lunch
panel #3 Around the Digital	14:30 - 16:20	Room 4V
Alberto Álvarez-Agea Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid, Spain	14:35	The Digital Image in Architecture as an Autonomous Reality. A Comparative Reading of Dionisio González and Filip Dujardin
Franziska Kopf Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Karlsruhe, Germany	14:50	Photorealistic Imagery in Architecture: Toward a Critical Vocabulary
Emma Larcelet EPFL, Lausanne, Switzerland	15:05	Lines in Dimensions. Models, Displays and Wireframe Visualizations

Maya Alam (1) & Daniele Profeta (2) (1) Bergische University Wuppertal, Wuppertal, Germany (2) Syracuse University, Florence, Italy	15:20	Il Disegno dei Punti
Miloš Kostić Independent researcher, Munich, Germany	15:35	Drawing the Erased. Speculative Detailing in Modernist Heritage Interpretation
Session Chair: Milena Farina Università di Roma Tre, Italy	15:50 - 16:10	Discussion
Coffee Break	16:10 - 17:00	Bar Valentino (included)
Key-note Lecture Helen Thomas	17:00 - 19:00	Room 1V The Dance of the Machine
Cocktail	19:00 - 21:00	Al Pero Imbarco sul Po (included) Viale Virgilio, 53 - 10126 Torino

FRIDAY 30-01-2026

All schedule indicates local time in Turin, IT (UTC/GMT +1 hour)

panel #4 Into the Archive	09:00 - 10:40	Room 4V
Caterina Padoa Schioppa Sapienza University of Roma, Rome, Italy	09:05	Operative visual practices. Chronicle of an experiment in critical thinking
Vincenzo Moschetti Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy	09:20	Peter Märkli: Aphasia Error as a Method, Drawing as a Sentence
J. Igor Fardin (1) & Richard Lee Peragine (2) (1) Woolf, Philosophy, GCAS, Dublin, Ireland (2) Università degli Studi di Ferrara, Ferrara, Italy	09:35	An Architecture of Loss. Life, Nature and Politics in Giancarlo De Carlo's drawings
Gabriel Hernández Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Madrid, Spain	09:50	From Research to Design: Analysis of Team 4 Architects' data visualisation strategies through Reports, Charts and Diagrams (1963-1967)
Alessandro Brunelli Università degli Studi di Ferrara, Ferrara, Italy	10:05	Redrawing Giotto's ambiguity. Luigi Moretti, other practices and the formative process
Session Chair: Edoardo Piccoli Politecnico di Torino, Italy	10:20 - 10:40	Discussion
Coffee Break	10:40 - 11:10	Bar Valentino (included)
panel #5 Behind Graphic Codes	11:10 - 13:10	Room 4V
Oscar Andrade Castro & Raul Castro Vásquez Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Valparaíso, Chile	11:15	Cutting and Fitting: Architectural Thinking through Photomontage at the UCV Institute of Architecture, Chile
Javier De Andrés Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Madrid, Spain	11:30	Drawing as a Design and Research Tool from Energy and Environmental Perspectives
Juan José David Vásquez & Haitam Daoudi Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Madrid, Spain	11:45	The Ideologies of Representation Cosmopolitical Assemblages and Absolute Forms in Architectural Drawing
Laura Mucciolo University of Ferrara, Department of Architecture, Ferrara, Italy	12:00	Drawing the Last Island. Unbuilt Architecture in Cedric Price's Two Tree Island
Emanuela Vassallo Università degli Studi di Palermo, Palermo, Italy	12:15	Drawing as an act of knowledge. The exploration of MAAM in Flores and Prats' Workshop
Nerma Cridge (1) & Peter Šenk (2) (1) Architectural Association School of Architecture, London, UK (2) University of Maribor, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Transportation Engineering and Architecture, Department of Architecture, Maribor, Slovenia; University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Architecture, Slovenia	12:30	Counter Representation Imageability in the age of representational turns
Session Chair: Francesca Frassoldati Politecnico di Torino, Italy	12:45 - 13:10	Discussion
Lunch Break	13:10 - 14:30	Free time for lunch
Round Table	14:30 - 16:00	Room 4V
Coffee Break	16:00 - 17:00	Bar Valentino (included)
Key-note Lecture Pippo Ciorra	17:00 - 19:00	Salone d'Onore Iconophobia. Architecture and the Politics of Representation

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Biography

Ana Patricia Minguito is an architectural researcher at the Polytechnic University of Madrid. Doble MArch in Architecture, she has received the First National End-of-Degree Award by the Ministry of Spain, in addition to the First UPM 2018 Award, the Second PFC-COAM 2019 Award and a nomination for the “Mies Van der Rohe YTAA Awards 2020”. From 2019 to 2022, she served as an Architectural-Projects-Fellow in undergraduate and MArch's programs, while holding the position of Head of the Architectural-Design-Research Department at SUMA Architecture's professional office. Since then, she has been an Assistant-Research-Professor at ETSAM. In 2023, she was invited by Tulane University in New Orleans as a Research-Teaching-Fellow. She has published in *Vitruvio* (2025), *PpA* (2025), *AhAU* (City and Nature 2024), *ZARCH* (2024), *Constelaciones* (2024), *REIA* (2023), *JIDA* (2021, 2024), and *INCUNA* (2019). She has also organized the “SIHMA”-“SIHA” Seminars (2023-2025) and the lecture series “What is History for?” (2022-2025).

Peter Märkli: Aphasia
Error as a Method, Drawing as a Sentence

Moschetti, Vincenzo

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Abstract

In 2023, part of the archive of drawings by Swiss architect Peter Märkli (1953) was once again made publicly accessible (Mion; Don, 2023). Nearly a decade after the first English edition of his work (2015), the author's graphic corpus has returned to address certain questions concerning architectural design, clarifying how drawings possess their own autonomy with respect to issues of construction. Far from attempting to verify the technical realities of the project, the drawings reveal the possibilities of a territory that extends beyond the limits of the sheet, introducing “inaccurate” inscriptions in which error itself establishes the field of theory.

The absence of titles in many of them underscores the character of an author who leaves little room for words. It is the drawing itself that constructs the sentence of a theory oscillating between the autonomy of construction and that of drawing. Theory thus appears displaced, repositioned from the written to the represented.

A dense corpus of exercises engages with the discipline by interrogating colors, proportions, knots, and therefore elements—such as the *Knots*—which in 2011 became points of resolution in the Synthes Headquarters (Johnston, 2017). These aim to clarify postures, but above all, the conditions dictated by the absence of a verbalization capable of expanding critical analysis beyond the purely technical logics of the project.

This is a shift in which the graphic mark—“primitive” and handmade—welcomes erasures, hesitations, in other words, uncertain thoughts, translating error into a methodological device intended to search for answers and languages (Azzariti, 2019).

The loss of fidelity between what is drawn and what is built defines the concrete trace of theory and, above all, the approaches to an authorship that seeks to imagine non-existent realities, often not fully translatable into buildable terms. The renunciation of precision, as well as the absence of structural or executive anxieties, renders theory almost unspeakable in words. This opens the discussion toward modes of traversing the drawn space by means of the very tools of *adventure* (Agamben, 2015)—the same that transformed Pinocchio from puppet into living body and that, therefore, amidst thicknesses and depths, can be discerned in Märkli's “script,” whose reference is life.

Key words: error as method, graphic autonomy, non-verbal thought, Peter Märkli.

1. Between the Rooms: A Method

Before venturing into the territories drawn by Peter Märkli, the Swiss architect, who from 2002 to 2015, held the Chair of Architecture at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETH), it is appropriate to proceed gradually, entering—accompanied by a text—into the world, and, above all, the thought of the author. *Peter Märkli's Approximations*, a book edited by Moshen Mostafavi, begins with the image of a room: the architect's studio in Zurich¹. It is here, with an evocation of Paul Cézanne, that one realizes how "one says more and perhaps better things about painting when facing the motif than when discussing purely speculative theories in which, as often as not, one loses oneself"². To stand before the subject means to verify, without further mental constructions, the interaction with a field of action that is precisely that of a silent studio—devoid of human bodies yet filled with others, which are objects, thoughts, and drawings piled together. In order to avoid a loss of premises, Mostafavi's text is accompanied by a horizontally framed photograph in which certain objects emerge to outline the world in which Märkli operates. The image seeks to provide the words that are missing, or even those that remain unspoken, unsayable; it is the objects—other bodies—that enter this conversation, substituting for terms which, taken together, tend to compose communicative phrases.

"For Märkli, the idea of working alone, at least during the pre-construction phase of a project, has a special significance. One can imagine that for most people, working alone day after day would lead to utter boredom. But for Märkli, this is the only way to come upon unforeseen ideas or to have the chance to re-work others. Märkli's working procedures, however, are self-induced and are in part a deliberate reaction to the prevalent notion of the architect's studio as an office machine. [...] One imagines that, working alone in his studio, Märkli too comes to pay closer attention to things—to the proportions of his houses, to the texture of their surfaces, to the materials of their construction"³.

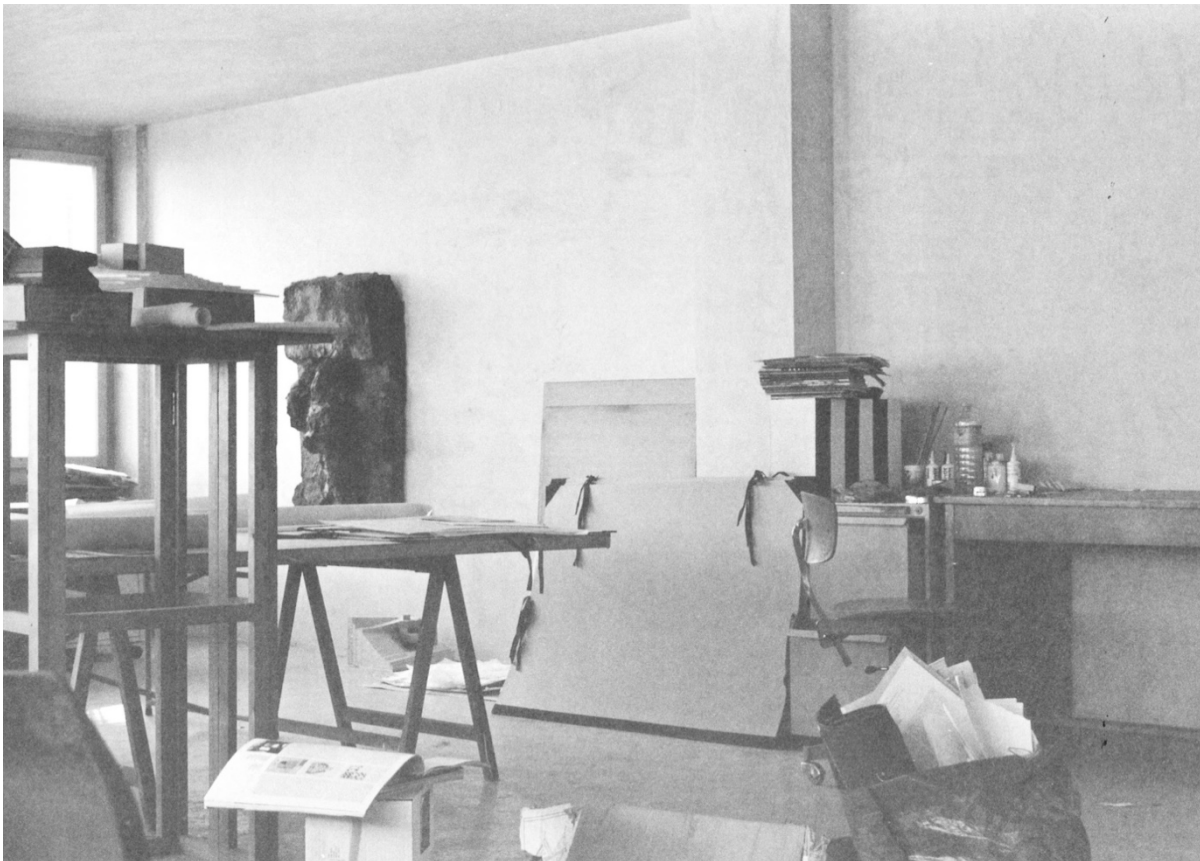


Fig. 1

Märkli's world is one constructed through the superimposition of objects, layered one upon another. On the one hand, easels, canvases, and sculptures emerge—elements to which we shall later return—while on the other, one cannot fail to notice the absence of human bodies: the room is empty. Indeed, many years after the photograph was taken in 2002, David Chipperfield would once again observe how "this private working space appears at first to be that of an artist. On closer inspection, they are in fact cluttered with the creative mess of an architect who has no time for the superficial vanities of a normal architecture practice. They are a haven from distraction, a place to focus. His modus operandi is made explicit by the drawing board with Mayline parallel motion, familiar to my

generation but banished from most architects' offices many years ago. Books lie open on the floor, sketches and drawings are pinned to the walls. [...] Märkli's studio flaunts the idea of isolation and the need to detach from realities to deal with them. Being in such a space provokes discussion about the idea of the artistic autonomy of the architect"⁴.

Returning to Mostafavi's perspective, what becomes central in the subsequent passages is the introduction of *boredom* as a mode of reading the author's thought. Boredom emerges as a methodological presence at the foundation of design practice: a necessary tool for testing the possibilities of architecture, for examining the phases of construction which are not only those of the building site but are composed, through *Märkli's eye*⁵ of pre-texts, experimentations, inscriptions, and languages.

This measurable exercise finds its critical terrain precisely in the literature of Alberto Moravia, in a boredom that "is not the contrary of amusement; [...] indeed, in certain respects, it resembles amusement in that, precisely, it provokes distraction and forgetfulness"⁶.

Boredom—like that of Dino, the protagonist of the Italian novel—when applied to Märkli's design experience, presupposes the existence of a relationship between the body, that of the architect, and things, which may be material (objects) or immaterial (events, narratives).

"It must be stated clearly: boredom exists only where there is consciousness. A plant does not grow bored. Nor does a coral. Like the disposition to suffer, the faculty of experiencing boredom is therefore, to some extent, a symptom of vitality: not everything is lost [...]. To be bored, in short, is still a way of reacting, albeit a sad, sterile, and drowsy one; boredom requires nerves, and the foundation must in any case have remained intact"⁷.

In the attempt to construct a theory of design grounded in techniques of observation⁸, boredom thus presents itself as speculative material for narrating spaces and dimensions, so that it may become a substance of construction. What is at stake is fixing within the analysis of the work the presence of a consciousness, which in turn admits an authorship capable of introducing into the design process even intangible conditions.

Within the professional studio, the sentiment of boredom—of becoming bored—hovers, transforming into a *Good practice* for interrogating, prior to any verification, the statutes of the architectural discipline. A first detachment from reality allows the architect to establish a new order, an elsewhere, through a different attitude toward the space surrounding him. It is precisely in the groove of isolation that the necessity emerges for such boredom to become an "electric current," establishing the field of intervention and of the construction of a theory orchestrated through the accumulation of references.

These references, in the time of the project and even before drawing, will dissolve or crystallize in relation to their origin, transforming into new articulations and figures—that is, into new rooms, refuges, which are worlds. Boredom thus becomes the litmus test for structuring itineraries, elements of a foundational theory for traversing data of reality: "above all, it is a matter of making time compelling, so that consciousness may once again find within its intensity and fullness"⁹.

In the workrooms, in the absence of words and sounds, lines of tension are activated within which Peter Märkli experiments with the search for a language—that of architecture—moving across the times of the project, as well as its functions and objects. It is a matter of "a rigour to attain a goal to be reached gradually, not settling for what is or what has been and not settling for apparent reality, but searching for a hidden reality, an absurd reality; one that stands before us, but that we have not yet been able to grasp and that only a persistent effort of reflection and thought can allow us to see. This continuous search is never content with what has already been done and/or achieved and can be exhausting, even boring. But this is a necessary boredom"¹⁰.



Fig. 2. In this sequence, the method and process through which Märkli trains his thinking are visible, also based on the repetition of slightly varied or overlaid elements.

The lens thus proposed, even if never directly declared by Peter Märkli, structures a collective memory that transcends geographical distances in order to explore territories—above all, those of paper—and to define points of a logical syntax capable of updating or reaffirming design notions through the construction of archives. The archive, in fact, where part of these drawings are “preserved,” is articulated across the spaces of work—that is, the atelier and the studio—becoming almost a third, ephemeral space in which the intensification of the relationship between reasoning and references creates a catalogue from which to draw during the operative phases.

Studio, office, and archive thus discuss the existence of an authorial geography, according to an autonomous and ever-updatable order, in which multiple environments of different purposes gather the outcomes of a work grounded in thought and drawing, and very little in words, though nonetheless exercised in long dialogues. The composition of spaces, like islands, defines the presence of an archipelago of rooms suited to explaining a method that later re-enters the design process.

The space is therefore destined to identify and collect, in a kind of uninterrupted yet promise-filled collection, the evidence of an authorial strategy that the drawings—both as fact and as testimony—may document.

2. Error Generates Design

“The point for me, when I started making these drawings, was to try to develop a grammar of architecture – to try to grasp the basic elements for myself, so that I could use them again and again in different situations without having a predetermined image in mind”¹¹.

“I do two different types of drawing. The ones that relate directly to a project are always small—necessarily so, because they express only what is essential, the details are not yet clear. They’re never two-dimensional, but always bird’s-eye views that include the surroundings. I’m trying to capture the overall idea. If I can do this in a three-dimensional drawing, then I know what kind of space I’d like to build. Before that, I can hardly begin. Along with these sketches, I make very small models.

Again, they’re small because they’re ideas and not yet finished projects. I develop the interior and exterior in parallel, but I tend to have a better idea of how the interior will look. The external expression is not so easy to picture. The other kind are the two-dimensional drawings that I use continually to explore certain themes—like the forms of buildings and certain orders, the relation of a single element to the whole, or color. These are A4—my preferred format for more than ten years—and they’re never done in isolation but are always part of a series. This work is not tied to a specific brief but may be inspired by something I’ve seen in a book, for example. And while the first sketches are still close to the original motif, the more I draw, the freer the drawing becomes”¹².

Within the field left open by the approximations anticipated by Mostafavi, it is crucial to specify a passage that in Märkli’s work becomes a construct: one based on the concrete observation of basic rules, a veritable grammar whose reference is space.

The mechanisms under discussion mark the existence of lists that the architect makes available to practice, where the elements of architecture—assumed as letters capable of forming words—constitute the fundamental vocabulary of the design action, in which drawing plays a central role. This is a grammatical syntax in constant evolution: things—objects represented through lines, knots, colors, intensities—shift reality by a few degrees, interrogating it.

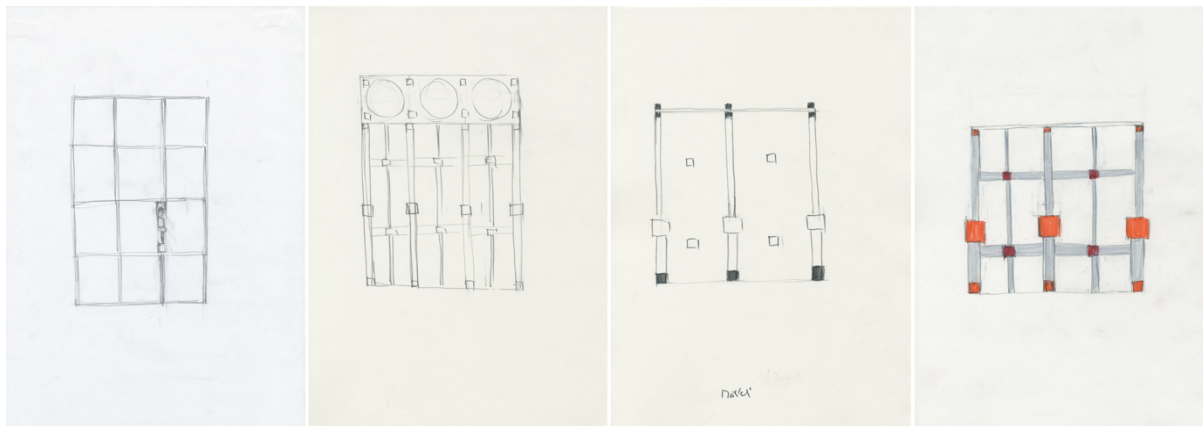


Fig. 3.

The field of exploration, materially composed of a series of handmade drawings—what today we might call analogue, to distinguish them from digital ones—establishes a “craft-based,” but above all haptic, methodology (*Craft of Architecture*¹³), made precisely with the hands, composed of small displacements that become more precise as the number of tests on paper increases.

In this sense, the open system presented in Mostafavi’s text finds its own resolution, a summary, through the calibration of a few marks repositioned within the framework of small sheets of paper. The necessity of producing small drawings—most often on A4 sheets (ISO 216)—thus lies in the fact that they are not meant to define an executive detail or a technical solution, but rather to debate principles. Lines, as well as color fields, serve to capture the essence of things without fixing a final solution, which in fact, through the few represented elements, tends to suggest multiple possibilities rather than a single one¹⁴.

The sheets become the true territory of construction, the space in which to experiment with error—an acceptable expression in Peter Märkli’s work during the phase of formulating questions, even if never explicitly mentioned¹⁵. Contrary to the executive precision of the building project, the drawings demonstrate how it is nonetheless possible to deepen architectural themes “without being dominated by the building”¹⁶.

This establishes a pivotal point within the process, highlighting the autonomy of drawing and of its inscriptions with respect to the themes specific to construction and the building site. It is therefore in the loss of fidelity between what is drawn and what is built that theoretical tension takes root, presupposing on the part of the author deliberately elusive strategies regarding completeness, where even indecision finds expression within drawing.

If built figures are verified through the construction site, drawn ones do not need to be completed or obligatorily constructed. The absence of a client—no direct commission traceable within the drawings—further intensifies the methodological process and the foundation of a thought that seeks to explore, through the operative deployment of error—for instance, concerns of structure or statics are almost absent from the drawings—the forms and expressions of architecture.

“When I had the good luck to get a commission, I was able to refer back to some of these things. Without this work, I would not have been able to build – to realise – the buildings”¹⁷.

The drawings thus come to construct an armamentarium of logics and functions, as well as of forms and proportions, shifting theory from the written to the drawn. The absence of a personal, that is, verbal, writing is, therefore, returned not through words but through signs. These, thus determined, constitute the catalogue of the real, where abstraction—understood as a return to an elementary origin—grounds the true degree of novelty.

Likewise, the absence of domination by the realized work does not imply a methodology that evades the rules of architecture but rather foregrounds an exercise intended to test, through questions—as already anticipated—the construction of an a priori grammar. In this regard, it is appropriate to recall the thought of Raymond Queneau, who maintained that:

“Another very wrong idea that is also going the rounds at the moment is the equivalence that has been established between inspiration, exploration of the subconscious and liberation, between chance, automatism, and freedom. Now this sort of inspiration, which consists in blindly obeying every impulse, is in fact slavery. The classical author who wrote his tragedy observing a certain number of known rules is freer than the poet who writes down whatever comes into his head and is a slave to other rules of which he knows nothing”¹⁸.

Thus, in the work of the Swiss author, we find a form of reduction derived from a programmatic approach, which allows him to state that “to be able to communicate, we have to know the rules of language”¹⁹. In this sense, he acknowledges having realized “that not only could these words be used to describe things, like describing a particular loaf of bread to the baker, but also that it had, in literature, the power to describe feelings and world views. [...] I looked to the profane and the visual arts and started to observe and slowly learn the language. I simply began by observing the grammar of our discipline. I mean I had to learn French, German, and English. I was taught those languages, but no one taught me how to understand architecture. So, I had to do it myself. [...] Now I can describe everything, but that still doesn’t necessarily produce a good building—you just understand the language”²⁰.

In constructing a precise language in which drawing forms the core of a non-verbal (aphasic) discussion, Märkli employs the paradigm of letters to define an organizational structure—a syntax—so that the process may acquire meaning by generating knowledge. The sentences that emerge from his script, highly complex despite the simplicity of their marks, are directed toward describing multiple focal points to move beyond the merely technical datum and clarify, above all, the meaning of spatial and/or compositional relationships expressed.

This consideration finds its foundation—particularly in our own time, as will be further developed in the conclusions—in the figure of the author, where “Author instantiates creation, the expansion of the pre-existing”²¹. In this role as an *augmentor*, drawing becomes the instrument, while the perimeter of the sheet presents itself as the territory in which to describe the designing matter.

Presented in temporal strata (1980–1999; 2000–2015; 2016–2023), despite their continuous narrative structure, the drawings represent a world, a reality that should never be regarded as isolated. Indeed, they cannot be understood in their singularity but rather as belonging to a sequence of questions that are articulated through the act of making. Just as they resist the appearance of completed objects, the images resist any attempt at historical cataloguing or at classification within cultural or geographical categories. They are the offspring of a genealogy whose primary fundamentals lie in architecture. From this arises the importance of sources—that is, all those materials that inform the inscriptions and, even prior to them, the author who produces them—oscillating between individual experience and universal experience. The first is rooted in an intense relationship, above all, with the sculptural work of the artist Hans Josephsohn, for whom the architect designed and built an archive-museum in Giornico, in the Grisons, known as *La Congiunta*²². The second source, instead, is grounded in the history of architecture, within which Märkli identifies clear elements, atmospheres, relations, and solutions that he copies, reuses, joins, juxtaposes, and overlaps. History thus becomes operative, not didactic or chronologically sequential, conceiving of historical time as circular rather than linear.

This is therefore not a mere reproduction of fragments from the past, but an interpretation made necessary by the syntactic construction elaborated and made explicit in *Zur Grammatik der Architektursprache*²³. Here, in a lecture booklet prepared for the autumn semester of 2014, the image of the Acropolis of Athens placed at the beginning clarifies the point of departure, specifying the frame of reference in which data—again, images rather than words—are sought and re-proposed according to other sequences that, over time and through practice, generate new figures of design.

It was in 2015, however, that the first rigorous attempt to collect the drawings was presented in the publication edited by Claudia Mion and Fabio Don, *Peter Märkli. Zeichnungen | Drawings*. Following an approach in which the temporal sequence of production itself forms the narrative matrix, it becomes possible to grasp the discourse undertaken. The drawings reveal the absence of continuity in the conventional sense, an autonomy that grants to the two-dimensionality of the sheet a privileged territory of communication. The white of the paper enables the author to amplify the resonance of the single elements invoked, which together compose the project: the drawing thus becomes a sentence. The ways in which the space of the sheet is traversed describe an intense activity in which oscillation between doubt and invention is sustained by the possibility of error: in drawing, it is possible to err. Error thus becomes a pivotal element of thought, expressed voluntarily through the use of small pieces of tape, erasures, jagged lines, or abundant hatching that testify to reconsideration or correction, which nevertheless leave behind their own trace. Although error might be considered “unnatural” in the field of (built) architecture, in this process, it is not concealed but rather becomes an integral part of the reflection that the drawing retains, foregrounding the uncertainty of thought and the inexactness of its execution within the graphic field.

“There are, of course, many ways of deviating from a norm besides committing an error—flouting, resisting, subverting, perverting, mocking, exaggerating, etc. Speaking strictly, we would have to say that error denotes only unintentional deviation. This presents serious difficulties for any attempt to use error programmatically as a stimulus in architectural practice. [...] As a matter of architectural practice, the issue will be how to intentionally construct situations and ways of working that encourage errant acts—often through the use of some form of automatism that, in part, neutralizes the original intentionality.

Thinking of error as straying highlights another peculiarity of error in architecture. As much as it is an art, architecture itself often has been defined as straying, as deviation, from the normal expectations of building [...]. This suggests that, in some sense, architecture is not something that we err from but something that we err into. Yet in this view, based ultimately on a romantic notion of artistic genius, not all straying leads to architecture, but only straying that discovers something, that comes to be recognized as significant, and that succeeds in establishing new norms (here is one definition of the avant-garde)”²⁴.

Sean Keller’s words can, therefore, provide an interpretative key also for the drawn work of the Swiss architect, where the adopted handwriting, built upon a solid interpretative methodology of architecture, indeed tends to discover something new through drawing. Taken together, the sheets compose a text in which the search for the “new” is not developed through the obsessive pursuit of something that has never existed before, but rather through the reappearance of forgotten questions that, for the author, as in the use of the column, become something significantly capable of establishing ancient norms through new relations.

The attempts are numerous and prevent forms from crystallizing thanks to the differing scales, atmospheres, and thus the degree of openness that each single image—produced by hand—carries with it: its irreproducibility. The hand seeks clues, leaving a field that remains open until the construction site: “But they also seem ready, finished: He sometimes draws a line around them, framing them on the paper. Their asserted presence penetrates through the imperfection, and the incompleteness defines them, like the complexity of a personality you can never entirely nail down. Their incertitude is reassuring, as they are akin to life and its frailty, its continuity of un-finishedness. Things may aspire towards ideal states and forms, but a sleepless night, a deviated road, come in the way of the ideal and alter conditions to accommodate, negotiate, and improvise. This way, the sketches seem to reconcile model and interpretation, rational and irrational, the deliberate and the accidental”²⁵.

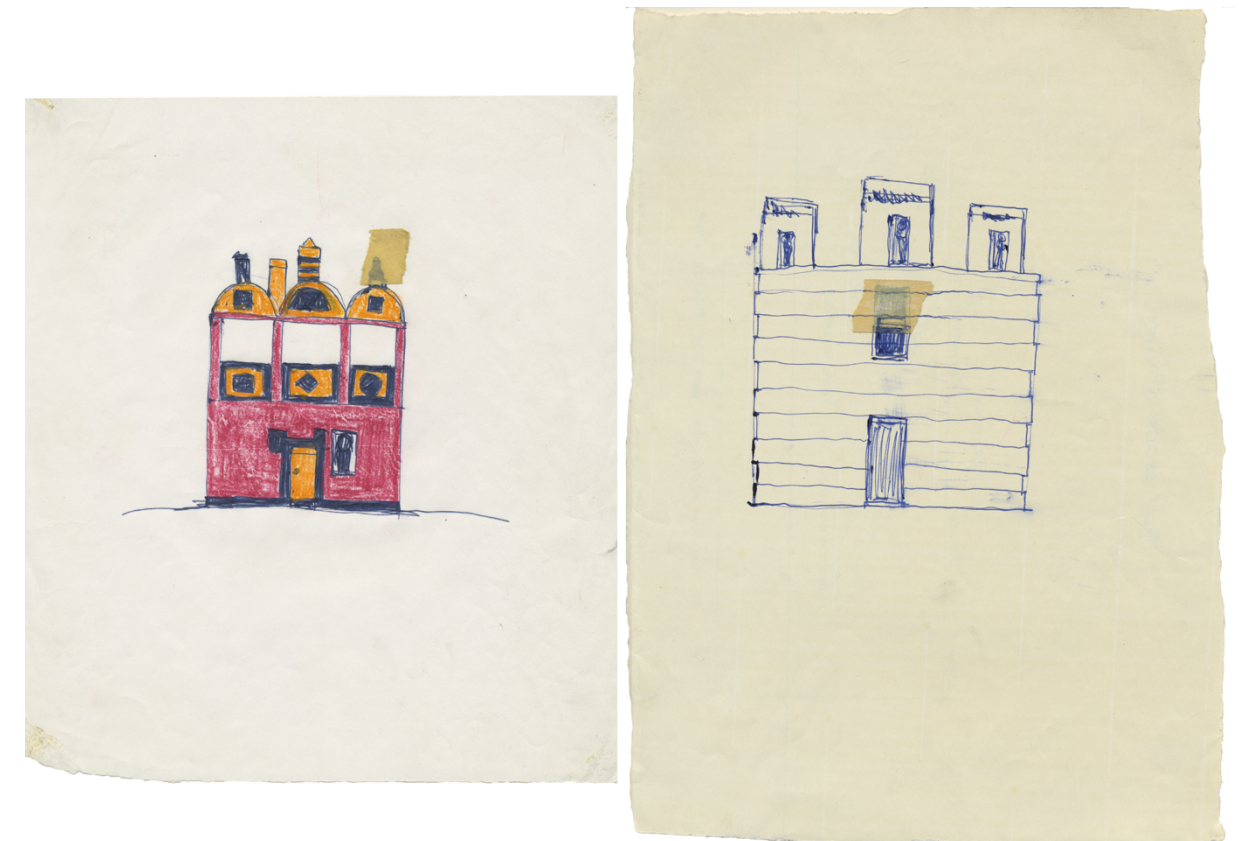


Fig. 4. The error corrected with adhesive tape remains within the sheet and becomes an integral part of the composition. The piece of tape represents the author’s open-ended thinking.

A further element to consider regards the partial or total absence of context. With few exceptions—in particular, in the drawings made and archived between 1980 and 1999—the connection to place appears absent. Landscape elements such as hills, roads, and trees merely provide a generic indication of an “open” environment, without a precise location or recognizable references. This reveals how architecture itself constitutes the parameter of reference, only rarely establishing a relation with a hypothetical context and ultimately confirming the primacy of a design-oriented thought. Recovering the well-known Latin expression *Ars gratia artis* (Art for art’s sake), the drawn architecture seems to refuse adherence to a specific place (even when at times one is specified), perhaps awaiting the moment to become a “real” project.

Rather, it seems to aim at being interpreted according to its own internal rules, or at most within the codes of art. In this sense, it configures a search for identity that concerns not so much places as the disciplinary dimension itself, observed through differences that may at times appear imperceptible but are nonetheless essential in the work of Peter Märkli. It is in this self-regarding attitude—like a play of mirrors—that the Swiss author’s total project emerges, where architecture, particularly in its drawings, becomes place according to a clear intention: that of a return to life.

3. A Return to Life

“The small rooms of Märkli’s studio are not meant for the visitor. They are cluttered, filled with books, drawings, photographs, and samples of paints, pigments, and other building materials. A pile of carefully drawn sketches for a façade lies on the floor next to a black refuse bag of

rejected drawings and sketches. But it is hard to tell when the plastic bag might have been replaced last. There is such stillness about the place”²⁶.

This text opened with the image of Peter Märkli's studio, and it is within it that we now return. The silence and solitude that Mohsen Mostafavi identified as the author's *modus operandi* aim to construct an atmosphere composed of many terms, as well as conversations and operative modes, in which architecture is central. A discipline informed by other materials, sometimes apparently “off-field,” moving between literature and art, finding in invention²⁷ not only a response but above all a *raison d'être*.

In addressing the questions of a grammar—which implies a language, a syntax, and therefore the presence of rules—Märkli, through his drawings, reaffirms the existence of the “real” rather than of mere “reality.”

“Reality is the actual reality whose existence no one [...] can doubt. [...] Reality has the characteristics of permanence, independent of my will. This reality obviously also involves my person. [...] But reality, precisely because of these attributes of permanence and independence from my will – Lacan would insinuate – is asleep. In the sense that in our habitual frequentation of reality – my image in the mirror, the slipper in the room – we tend to fall asleep, that is, we assume that reality responds to a certain naturally evident order. [...] And the real? When do we encounter the real? For Freud, in nightmares. That is, in something that awakens us and prevents us from continuing to sleep [...]. The encounter with the real is always the encounter with a limit that shakes us, with something that prevents us from continuing to sleep. [...] Everything that awakens us from the sleep of reality is real, including the nightmare Freud speaks of. [...] The real is that from which one cannot escape. In this sense, for Lacan, the real is associated with a trauma that introduces into our life a discontinuity that breaks the routine sleep of the normality of reality. [...] The real, if we were to give a dry definition, never coincides with reality, but is that which unsettles it”²⁸.



Fig. 5

If construction is reality—something “whose existence no one can doubt”—drawing, on the other hand, belongs to a thought and a graphic expression that sets itself up as a discontinuous moment, a wakefulness against normality, unsettling it. Within this dimension, the question of error—practically excluded in the executive phase of realization—is fully accepted, assuming the terms of “doubt” and “uncertainty.”

On the one hand, this reflects the modalities proper to the author, understood etymologically as an “enlarger”; on the other, the open structure of drawing presents itself as an uninterrupted construction site, in which the margins expand and the perimeter of action no longer coincides, or not only, with that of the sheet of paper. It follows that in drawing the rule may be altered, disregarded, or replaced without losing the logic of a language that here operates without sounds (words).

The apparent aphasia—in any case mitigated by the author through constant dialogue and teaching activity—is the result of a position that recognizes in drawing, before anything else, the manifestation of a discipline in continuous evolution. It is the sense of the operation that guides the process: the

value of drawing lies in its ability to describe specific behaviors within a univocal language, that of architecture and its projective capacity. In this framework, the relationship between rule and experience generates a tension within which architecture becomes life, not merely “alive.”

Fundamentally, the graphic experience, which is also expression (a way of expressing oneself), allows the author to pose questions and find answers, constructing an archive of the real without specifying the place that would be reality. The drawings thus become parts of a design discourse, projective devices where—though far from the theoretical posture discussed here—they may recall certain positions of Giuseppe Perugini concerning the existence of a *new dimension*:

“... the world of the aesthetic object therefore has one of the essential properties of the world, that of being open. But more than in extension, it is such in intention, or, as we shall say, in depth. It is not indefinite as space and time are indefinite [...] but rather as a potential is indefinite, one that no use can ever exhaust. It is an indefinite possibility of connected objects, tuned by a common quality, as a sound is laden with harmonics, strictly speaking, innumerable. And in this precisely it has the dimensions of a world, dimensions that defy any measurement, not because there is always more to measure, but because there is not yet anything to measure: that world is not populated by objects; it precedes them, it is like a dawn in which they are revealed, in which all those who are sensitive to that light will be revealed, or, if one prefers, all those that can unfold within that atmosphere. Therefore, this world is not yet structured according to space and time; it is rather the potential of space and time, just as it is of objects”²⁹.

This premise, which *has the dimensions of a world, dimensions that defy any measurement*, seems to find a counterpart even in the drawn work — however different — of Peter Märkli. Architecture presents as a discipline in which the forces of object and form at times exceed the relations they maintain with context, clarifying the overcoming of mere technicality in favor of a life of things.

In this fissure, deliberately left open and unresolved, lies a parallel with the story of *Pinocchio* and his adventures: in Carlo Collodi's famous Italian tale, it is precisely through mistakes that the protagonist — a puppet, thus a product of technique — discovers the world, inhabits space, and ultimately transforms into a body, that is, into life.

“By connecting the regular and irregular, Peter Märkli could create order, organized forms, and immersive space. Inside the work, through Peter Märkli's eye, I could move around and feel my presence in the world, either in silence or with a pleasant whisper. Peter Märkli's ‘eye’ is ‘I’”³⁰.

The metaphor of the character from the Italian novel can, in conclusion, clarify the role of an author and, above all, an authorship that finds its place in the contemporaneity of the project, departing from exactness in drawing, to tell us something more about the world of design, or simply to signal that the latter requires new tools.

Acknowledgments. I wish to thank Peter Märkli and Theresa Hecker for their availability in sharing with me parts of the archive held at the Studio now located in Mühlezelgstrasse 15, 8047 Zürich.

Notes

1. “Märkli’s personal studio sits in a small courtyard close to the historic centre of Zurich (his office is located a ten-minute drive away). Occupying three small rooms, this private working space appears at first to be that of an artist”, David Chipperfield, “La buona pratica | Good Practice. Peter Märkli,” *Domus*, no. 1043 (February 2020): 22.
2. Paul Cézanne to Charles Camoin, Aix, 28 January 1902.
3. Moshen Mostafavi, “Peter Märkli’s Approximations,” in *Approximations. The Architecture of Peter Märkli*, ed. Moshen Mostafavi (London: AA Publications, 2002), 8.
4. David Chipperfield, “La buona pratica | Good Practice. Peter Märkli,” *Domus*, no. 1043 (February 2020): 22.
5. See: Erwin Viray, “Peter Märklis Auge | Peter Märkli’s eye,” in *Peter Märkli. Zeichnungen | Drawings*, ed. Claudia Mion; Fabio Don (Luzern: Quart Verlag, 2015), 113-145.
6. Alberto Moravia, *La noia* (Milan: Bompiani 1960), 7 [TbA].
7. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *L’avventura, la noia, la serietà* (1964) (Turin: Einaudi 2018), 83-84 [TbA]; or. ed. *L’Aventure, l’Ennui, le Sérieux* (Paris: Aubier 1963).
8. See: Adam Jasper, *Drawing upon Painting*, en *Die Liebe zur Architektur | For the Love of Architecture*, a series of five online talks curated by Peter Märkli. In this talk, Adam Jasper, editor of gta papers, investigates the relationship between painting, sculpture and architecture in Peter Märkli’s practice. What is the potential of art for architectural method, and what happens at the crossing of disciplinary boundaries? (2021) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgyDkZG8xcg).
9. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *op. cit.*, 150 [TbA].
10. Giorgio Azzariti, *In Search of a Language – A Journey through Peter Märkli’s Imaginary | À la recherche d’un langage – Voyage dans l’imaginaire de Peter Märkli* (Marseille: Cosamentale, 2019), 61.
11. Peter Märkli, *Mein Stoff für Fassaden | My Facade Material* (2021) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgyDkZG8xcg).
12. Elena Markus, “Peter Märkli in conversation with Elena Markus,” in *Everything one invents is true. The architecture of Peter Märkli*, ed. Pamela Johnston (Luzern: Quart Verlag, 2017), 18.
13. Nobuyuki Yoshida, ed., *Peter Märkli. Craft of Architecture. A+U*, no. 448 (2008).
14. “Märkli’s takes a similar approach in his drawings. He repeats the same motif using minute changes in color and form. But he is not pursuing a single, ideal solution. Instead, Märkli seems to be searching for as many solutions as possible”, Kenjiro Hosaka, “Towards a vital architecture | Auf dem Weg zu einer vitalen Architektur” in *Peter Märkli. Zeichnungen | Drawings*, ed. Fabio Don; Claudia Mion (Luzern: Quart Verlag, 2015), 190-192.
15. “A research process shaped by attempts and uncertainties. As Erwin Viray writes, the drawings — with their hesitant lines, visible traces of revisions and erasures, and the sequences they form — seem to follow the question: what happens if I do this? And then: how do the form and dimension of each element reach my eye? Drawing thus becomes a tool for revealing the mechanics of vision (Viray 2023, 17) and its translation into graphic sign”, Michela Maguolo, “Tracce visive di pensiero. Presentazione di Peter Märkli Dessins/Disegni,” *La rivista di Engramma*, no. 207 (2023): 119-120.
16. Fabio Don; Claudia Mion, “The Heritage of Thoughts | Das Gedankengut,” in *Peter Märkli. Zeichnungen | Drawings*, ed. Fabio Don; Claudia Mion (Luzern: Quart Verlag, 2015), 6.
17. Peter Märkli, *Mein Stoff für Fassaden | My Facade Material* (2021) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgyDkZG8xcg).
18. Raymond Queneau, *Le Voyage en Grèce* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 39 [TbA].
19. Peter Märkli, “On Ancient Architecture. Fragment of a lecture at London Metropolitan University,” *Peter Märkli. Craft of Architecture. A+U*, no. 448 (2008): 10.
20. Peter Märkli, *Interview to Peter Märkli by Samuel Penn for the AE Foundation for Architecture + Education*, 2012 (<https://aefoundation.co.uk/Peter-Markli>).
21. Sara Marini; Angela Mengoni, “Materia-autore | Author-Matter,” *Vesper. Rivista di architettura, arti e teoria | Journal of Architecture, Arts & Theory*, no. 2 (2020): 10.
22. “Märkli’s interest in Josephsohn’s work is rooted in his wide-ranging interest in the fine arts as a whole. [...] Josephsohn summarizes, in a single look and a few well-chosen words, the essential impression of the work and all its components. Märkli’s analysis, by contrast, takes longer: it is seemingly an attempt to understand the aesthetic conditions of his experience. ‘Laws of perception’ is a term used frequently by Märkli, but never by Josephsohn. It may be that the architect’s need to address a range of technical, economic and social problems encourages an analytical approach. [...] With the help of Josephsohn, Märkli has developed his own ‘position in relation to life’ that has allowed him to define a new relation between art and building”, Erich Brändle, “The Architect and the Sculptur. Peter Märkli & Hans Josephsohn” in *Approximations. The Architecture of Peter Märkli*, ed. Moshen Mostafavi (London: AA Publications, 2002), 58.
23. Peter Märkli, *Zur Grammatik der Architektursprache*, course handout for the design studio at the Department of Architecture, ETH Zurich, Autumn Semester, 2014 (Studio Märkli Archive, Zurich).
24. Sean Keller, “Ways About Error,” *Perspecta*, vol. 46 (2013): 32-33.
25. Elizabeth Hatz, “Making a Mark | Zeichen setzen,” in *Peter Märkli. Zeichnungen | Drawings*, ed. Claudia Mion, Fabio Don (Luzern: Quart Verlag, 2015), 146.
26. Moshen Mostafavi, “Peter Märkli’s Approximations,” in *Approximations. The Architecture of Peter Märkli*, ed. Moshen Mostafavi (London: AA Publications, 2002), 8.
27. See: Pamela Johnston, ed., *Everything one invents is true. The architecture of Peter Märkli* (Luzern: Quart Verlag, 2017).
28. Massimo Recalcati, “Quando ‘la realtà’ anestetizza ‘il reale’,” *La Repubblica*, 23 aprile 2012 (<https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2012/04/23/quando-la-realta-anestetizza-il-reale.html>) [TbA].
29. Giuseppe Perugini, *Nuova dimensione: strutture* (s.l. 1969).
30. Erwin Viray, “Peter Märklis Auge | Peter Märkli’s eye,” in *Peter Märkli. Zeichnungen | Drawings*, ed. Claudia Mion; Fabio Don (Luzern: Quart Verlag, 2015), 114.

Image Captions

- Fig. 1. Peter Märkli, Studio, photos from 2002. Ph. Heinrich Helfenstein, © Studio Märkli.
- Fig. 2. Drawings 1034-1036-1038-1040, © Studio Märkli.
- Fig. 3. Drawings 2017-2041-2112-2115, © Studio Märkli.
- Fig. 4. Drawings 1001-1082, © Studio Märkli.
- See the use of tape as a means to reconsider certain parts of the project, to remove specific elements, or to clarify their relationships.
- Fig. 5. Drawings 1178-1258-1292, © Studio Märkli.
- See the erasures, the reconsideration of certain marks, and the addition of pieces of paper.

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Biography

Vincenzo Moschetti, architect and Ph.D., is a Researcher in Architectural and Urban Design at the Department of Architecture and Design, Sapienza University of Rome. He was a Research Fellow (2020–2023) at the Department of Architecture and Arts, Iuav University of Venice, and a Lecturer (2022–2023) in Interior Architecture and Architectural Design at the University of Ferrara.

His research and teaching address the theoretical dimensions of architectural design, focusing on the relationship between design and authorship, and on the intersections among architecture, geography, and “natures.” He takes part in and curates conferences, seminars, and workshops, presenting work on the idea of a “Mediterranean image” as a design framework between architectural and geographical scales; critical readings of figures such as Aldo Rossi and Peter Märkli; and explorations of “natural” systems as sources for design strategies aimed at crossing or coexisting with them in alliance. His publications synthesize these investigations, framing theory as a grounding for architectural action.

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