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The power of collective imagination: A methodological opportunity for reading the presence of architecture's hidden explanatory potential.

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Abstract

The cultural contamination in the transcription of the World Heritage architectural projects are described by means of narrative fictions, which activate body extrasensory perception and mechanisms of simulation incarnate, reflecting on the formulation of a judgment or a project.

The living body of architecture is a continuous transmigration of tradition into the new, in a circular process that, in architecture, involves a composite set of elements.

An analytical and reinterpretation system, a method by which to write, overwrite, rewrite the project, a real instrument of the architectural design process.

This design process does not propose a work of expressiveness, but attempts to carry out a spatial, conceptual, historical analysis and to present itself as a methodological opportunity for reading the building, its documents, materials, transcriptions and contaminations as an indissoluble unity, that could show the process of the construction and the power of the collective imagination on the architecture, revealing a hidden explanatory potential created just by the collective imaginary on architecture.

Keywords: Contamination, Transcription, reinterpretation, design process, imagination, collective imaginary

1. Cultural contamination, transcription and narrative fiction.

One of the main topics of the history of architecture is the way the architecture is connected to its own representation, which can be, both through its conventions, and through our modalities not strictly related to this scientific discipline.

It is not only necessary to rethink the relationship between architecture and representation, words and images, but also to possible definitions of this transmission: both a design and an interpretative methodology of architectural works.

The inability of contemporary architectural culture to distinguish architectures from their transcription, often burdened by the cultural heritage of the modern movement, made the architectural artifact secondary to the idea of what it could portray. Architectural projects are thus described through their transcription, which sometimes turns into fiction or verisimilitude.

The philosopher Paul Ricoeur in *Architettura e narrazione* [1] explains, in a very clearly way, the original relationship between building and storytelling.

Ricoeur refers to an interpretative narrative in which the project vision, after the fall of the dogmas of the Modern Movement, establishes a parallel between building and storytelling.

This parallel moved, on the architectural level, all the categories already exposed in *Tempo e racconto* [2] and already applied to the art of storytelling: prefiguration, configuration and re-figurations.

Freeing the architectural works from their transcriptions, and from the domination of the image-signifier respect to its original meaning is an activity that paradoxically gives it a great explanatory potential. This can often reveal surprises: it is possible to read the identity of the architectural structure.

Starting from the observation of the architecture, it is possible work with the imaginary and fiction to create new process and new typology of architecture.

Essential in this process is the research about the manufacture: it is necessary an investigation about the building's history is therefore needed in the form of a collection of documents, historical materials and critical productions. This allows to enlighten the shadow areas and read through the folds of those events that have long been in the spotlight. The demolition of transcription like fiction can only and solely take place through a serious scientific research that overcomes the collective imagination, canonization, crystallization through a historical, iconographic, contextual indepth analysis that investigates the interrelation between public and private, the relationships between the actors in scene, digging into all those "extra-enigmas" that make up the status symbol. The investigation is thus an x-ray reading of the work that the more is deepened, the more will reveal secrets obscured by the transcription.

It is curious like some architects accept as a common practice, and with a certain lightness, to browse the pages of a manual as a pro-inspiration mechanism, without suspecting that it is also a clash-encounter with those who preceded them.

For a real knowledge there is only a patient research that is carried out for tests and errors, removing, reconstructing and imagining, the living body of architecture, a continuous transmigration of tradition in the new, in a circular process that, in architecture, involves a composite set of elements.

Desert the freezing of masterpieces going beyond the transcriptions and the previous authorial quotations, that produce only similar copies, to get to the essence of our architectural heritage, also, through the criticism of the architectural form.

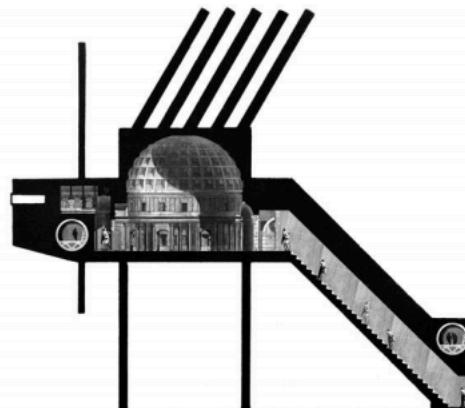


Fig. 1: Piranesian Security Collage based on John Hejduk's 'Security' project and interior illustrations by Piranesi. Student: Matthew Darmour-Paul, Iowa State University - Department of Architecture.

1.1. The condensation of historical critical meanings

The practice of claiming in advance the interest of the buildings is common, and it is interesting to note that, historically, it is not unusual that the condensation of the various "connotations" of the buildings is a result of an initial public opposition.

This tendency can be explained in terms of marketing imperative inherent in the culture-ideology of consumption.

Through the controversies in the public debate about architecture give the possibility of no longer dealing with a static object, but with an object on which a variety of instances start working.

One of the most famous, we cannot fail to mention the legal and media debates about of the Farnsworth house [3]. Often the public and critical debate about this controversy have bordered on gossip: a clash with a wide following in newspapers and magazines of the era. Consequently, symbols and meanings begin to condense on the house even before the completion of the building.

This practice involves in several cases a kind of construction of an imaginary, that is not purely architectural, but almost social and media, that create a second narrative voice of the manufacture.

A parallel architectural project that tells the background of the buildings, independent of the architect, this project includes a new or different content-meaning of the architectural work.

1.2. Transcription and Persuasion

The current knowledge of modern architecture has been influenced by the way it has been transmitted through new instruments. The icons of the modern movement have spread and become such not through a direct knowledge of the works, but mainly through the transmission of their images. The diffusion of the image of architecture had never occurred before the nineteenth century, the consequences of the diffusion still determine, a century later, our way of "observing" the images of architecture.

Through it, the architectural space manifests itself exactly as it is intended to be transmitted. The images of architecture in themselves are plausible because they try to reproduce the perfection of space through alterations of reality, accentuating the iconic elements. The interferences that the figurative images produce with respect to the real vision are different.

The first alteration of reality happens at the moment of the choice of the image to be transmitted. Whoever chooses how to "frame" a scene, establishing the "frame" of the image, makes a quantitative selection of the elements to be portrayed. At the moment when some choices alter the description of the space elements, the image assumes a strong power towards the observer, precisely by virtue of its persuasive character.

1.3. The predominance of the image-signifier over its original content-meaning.

The image becomes in the history of architecture the main way by an architect to influence to the general thought regardless of the real work, reaching an importance comparable to the built work.

The great diffusion of images produced by the new technological instruments of the beginning of the century, such as photography, has inevitably contributed to building and consolidating the iconic status of certain modern architectures, creating a repertory of image-signifier that over its original content-meaning.

You might think about a relationship between the process of diffusion of an architecture and its iconization, both for commercial that for scientific purposes, like a result of a celebrity in popular culture. It is interesting to note the quote of Vittorio Gregotti in *Casabella, Rivista Internazionale di Architettura*: "The combination of the image-??? (mercato), replacing reality end up being the first source of experience, the main matter of reflection and comparison with the same artistic practice". [4]

In fact it could be said that it is no longer the architectural content that is famous but its image.

The relationship between image and reality can be complex. Many architects report that the idea they had of iconic buildings and spaces resulting by the images that they had seen, did not prepare them for the real emotional and spiritual experience.

This process also works in the opposite direction, the real experiences of buildings and spaces do not correspond to iconic images. "Each image tells a story and each story has an image". [5]

Images play a fundamental role in the production and iteration of iconicity: they have the power of building meanings, representing contents by selecting visuals and points of view, choosing the information to be transmitted and eventually omitting if needed



Fig. 2: Villa Malaparte, by Italian architect Adalberto Libera, is featured as the backdrop in Saint Laurent's Spring 2018 campaign starring English Kate Moss. The video is directed by Nathalie Canguilhem. showing us Moss on the dramatic and monumental staircase of the villa, in Capri Island, in an incredible Mediterranean landscape.

2. A hidden explanatory potential by the collective imaginary

From the transcription and architectural narration springs an explanatory potential of architectural icons, the construction of an imaginary powered by tools not strictly related to the architectural framework: a process of narration/ iconization in progress, comparable to a narrative second voice by architecture. The collective imagination can give body to the most subjective sensations or visualize the most fantastic motives of the compositional work, researching the limit towards which the conjunction between the image and the representation of new architectural realities.

The transcriptions of architecture in themselves are plausible, because they want to reproduce the perfection of space through alterations of reality: Who chooses as frame a scene, establishing the frame of the image performs a quantitative selection on the elements to transmit for transcription, no matter how sublime the projects appear, they are still linked to architectures that have actually been realized. The intensification of the imaginary potential is due to all the transcripts on it, creating a sort of aura of mystery, an extra factor, an enigma that brings with it a potential that can be used as a design tool. This potential used as a tool for a re-interpretive exercise highlights the *need to recompose forms within new paradigms*.

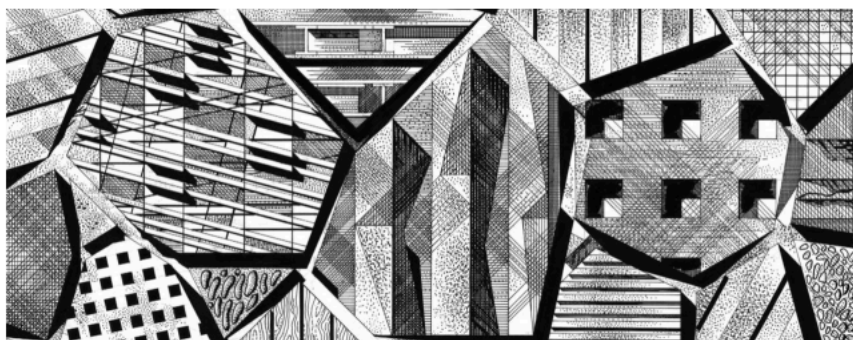


Fig. 3: Cretti 04 / 1998.Franco Purini.

In that method, the manipulated architecture does not undergo the exercise of quotation but rediscovers its usefulness as a tool for better knowledge.

Through like interpretive reading and analytical rewriting, resulted by the modern architecture icon's power imagination, the project may open up to new knowledge and new interpretation both through the design process and demonstrated the icon's stratified values.

Architectural experimentation has always been an element of architecture, until it became predominant in the theoretical debate and in the academic background during the 80's and 90's.

Experimentation has been the subject of controversy, hated and at the same time venerated by institutions and professionals.

The projects were not made to be built, but rather intellectual exercises or speculative *investigations into possible scenarios* probably arising from a need for *architectural criticism* that was not only theoretical but also practical.

By working with explanatory potential and architectural imaginaries, it is possible to manipulate the icon by taking its assumptions to the breaking point, it is possible not only to demolish and reconstruct the pure architectural form but to produce new interpretations of it without prejudice.

The project must be courageous and lack prejudice in order to decipher the reasons that have transformed what could have been a modern ruin into its most representative icon, and then illuminate them and put them in check.

It is possible, therefore, through the design process, discover a different story, tell the stories of the actors who have built it, tell it from new points of view, give new interpretations and different manipulations in order to get to reveal the limits that the process of iconization has built.

3. Transmigration of tradition into the new: an analytic process.

The aspects of the architectural imaginary are important for the discussion on the current situation of the artifacts, this potential in architecture has very often found expression only in posters and programs, without any attempt at constructions-model, remaining, pure utopia, and only as an interpretative factor to highlight a series of analyses.

But we could begin to observe how the involvement of a composite set of elements means to create an analytical and reinterpretation system, that is, a methodology, a method by which to write, overwrite, rewrite the project, a true tool of the architectural design process.

Since the imaginary tends to a higher degree of autonomy, it is necessary trying to find in this "imaginary" those methodologies that can be the analytical and scientific bases to study a process.

The very meaning of traditional architecture must not be denied, but rather other ways must be found to explain the operations of "abstraction" and to interpret the imaginary in its different types of meaning. Restoring order to a work that fragments every possible organic approach, as in a practical and chronological discussion, projectual. [6]

4. Conclusions

However, it is not the specific figurative architect's languages or the social contexts of its design plans: but through the imaginary project, from one architecture icon one thousand other architectures are generated: by demolishing, reconstructing, imagining and manipulating, it reveals a hidden explanatory potential created by extra-enigma and collective imaginary, showing like this process in not only abstract but demonstrated a sort of methodology of design process.

This design method does not propose a work of expressiveness but attempts to carry out a spatial, conceptual, historical analysis and to present itself as a methodological opportunity for reading the building, its documents and materials as an indissoluble unity.

The imaginary project, if we want to define it, becomes a school of the iconic dimension, an analytic process in order to rediscover a hidden explanatory potential of architecture.

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