

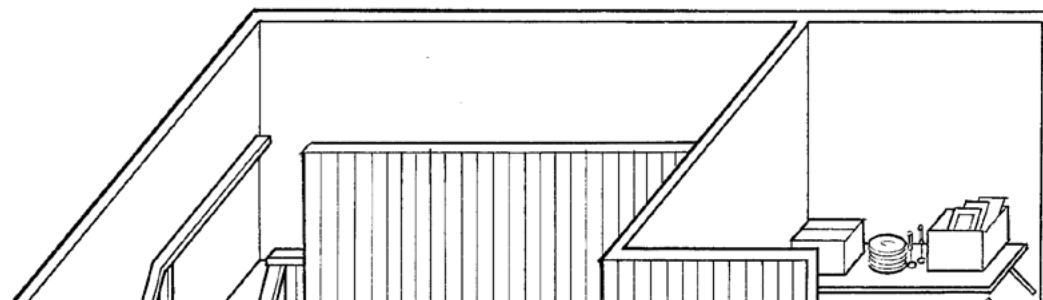
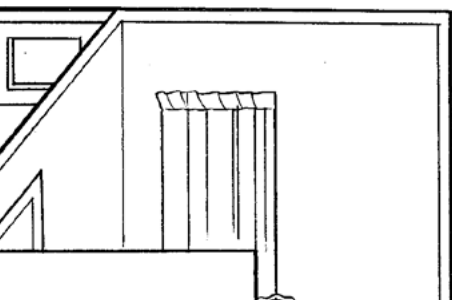
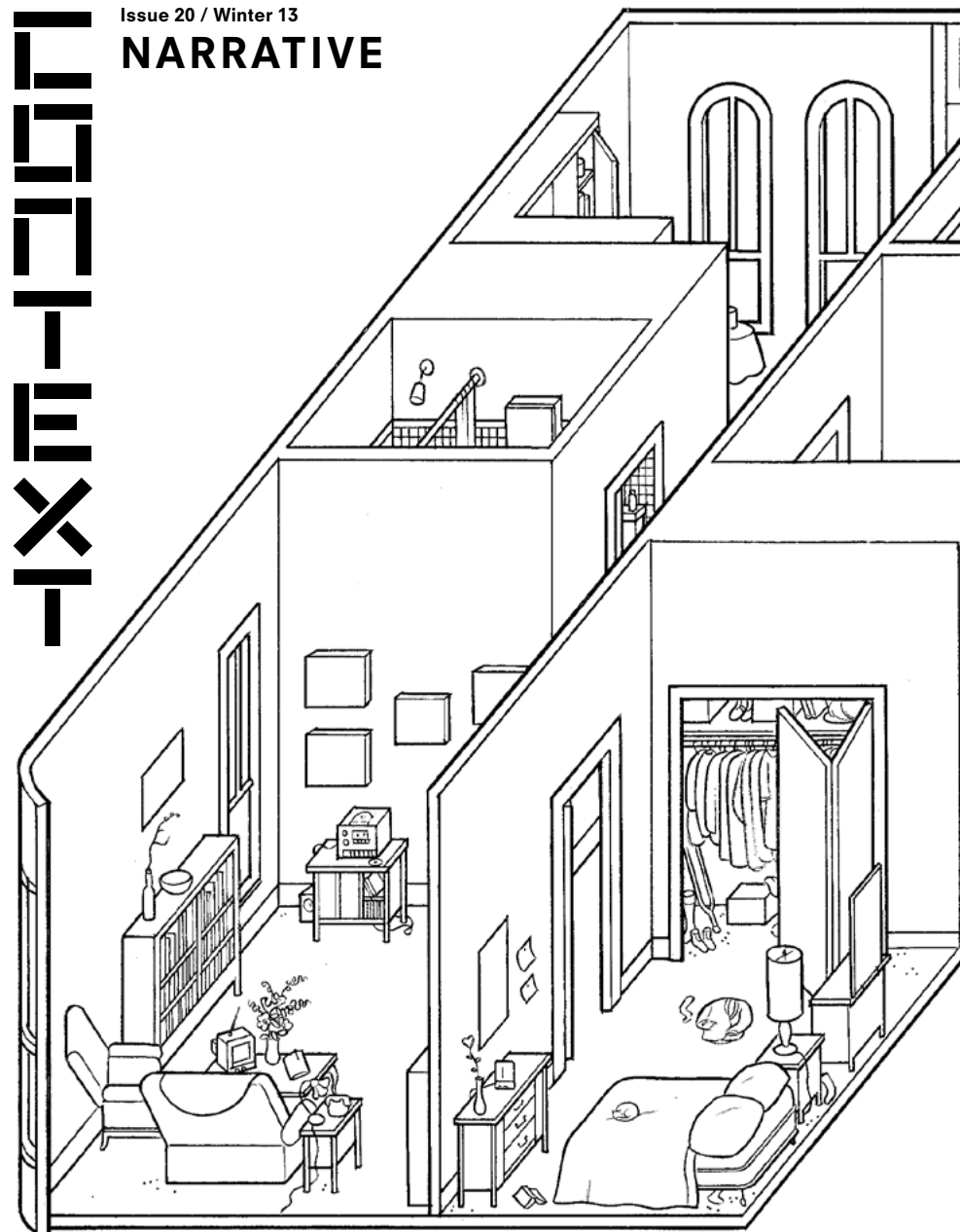


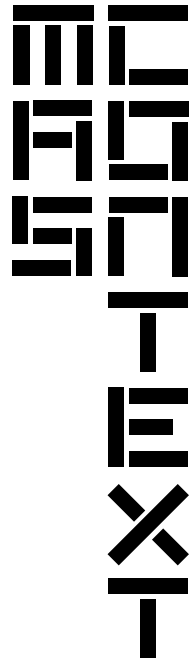
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 Chris Ware

FACTORY FIFTEEN

Issue 20 / Winter 13
 NARRATIVE





Issue 20 / Winter 13

NARRATIVE

Architecture and narrative, as Victor Hugo nostalgically pointed out in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* in 1831, have walked hand in hand through history, crossing paths without really risking the extinction that the archdeacon of Notre-Dame gloomily predicted. Today, in a moment where the conjunction of the crisis and the entrance into a new stage in the communication era impulse the discipline into new, multiple directions, the narrative aspects of architecture come to the front. This issue, guest edited by architectural scholar Koldo Lus Arana and architect-cartoonist Klaus, tackles the intersections between architectural practices and different forms of visual narrative. Within this overall theme, our NARRATIVE issue moves on both sides of the line that separates these two disciplines, presenting three different perspectives, organized in three consecutive parts. The first section of the issue deals with the presence of graphic narrative in disciplinary architecture, both past and present while the second one discusses the crossing of borders portrayed by comics artists who also make forays into the built world. Finally, the third one moves towards both sides of the spectrum, briefly covering the tangents with (implied) written narratives and emerging animation practices in architecture.

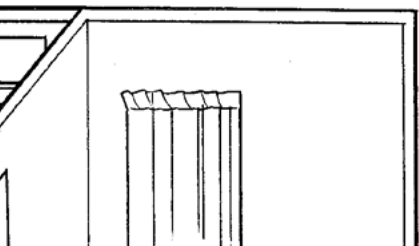
Cover

Chris Ware

MAS Context is a quarterly journal that addresses issues that affect the urban context. Each issue delivers a comprehensive view of a single topic through the active participation of people from different fields and different perspectives who, together, instigate the debate.

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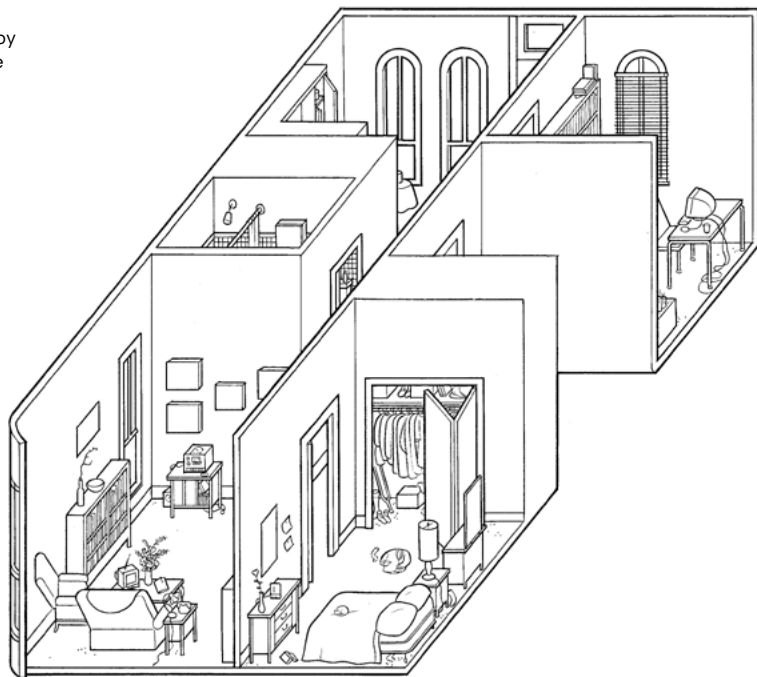


Sectioned axonometrics of different parts of the eponymous, building in each of the four seasons, from the "accordion, section" in *Building Stories*. © Chris Ware

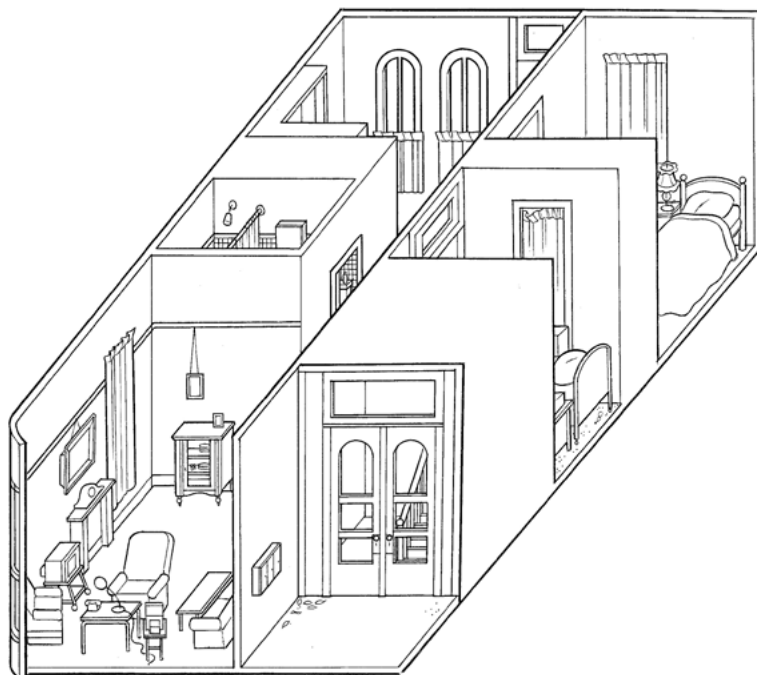
Published by Pantheon in 2012 after a decade in the making, *Building Stories* is a technical tour de force both in terms of narrative and in the use of format where Ware (unintended cacophony) challenges the reader with a non-linear, multi-faceted narrative, told from multiple points of view via a variety of different vehicles. The final object, which includes parts previously published in *Acme Novelty Library #18* (2007), *The New Yorker*, *Nest magazine*, *Kramers Ergot*, *The Chicago Reader*, *Hangar 21 Magazine*, *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*, *McSweeney's iPad app* and *The New York Times Magazine*, comes in the form of a box (itself a readable surface) containing fourteen other pieces. Among them, the reader/bricoleur can find cloth-bound books, newspapers, broadsheets and flip-books (in all, four broadsheets, three magazines, two strips, two pamphlets, a four-panel storyboard, a hardcover book, and a book mimicking a *Little Golden Book*), which he is challenged to piece together with the disputable help of the diagrams printed in the inside of the box. *Building Stories* has been named one of the best books of the year by *New York Times Book Review*, *Time Magazine*, *Publisher's Weekly*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *Washington Post*, and *Entertainment Weekly*, a deserved recognition that is also somewhat of a misfire, for a piece that is less of a book than a work located in a vague terrain somewhere between the experiments of OuBaPo, Joseph Cornell's boxes and Marcel Duchamp's *Box in a Valise*.

Klaus

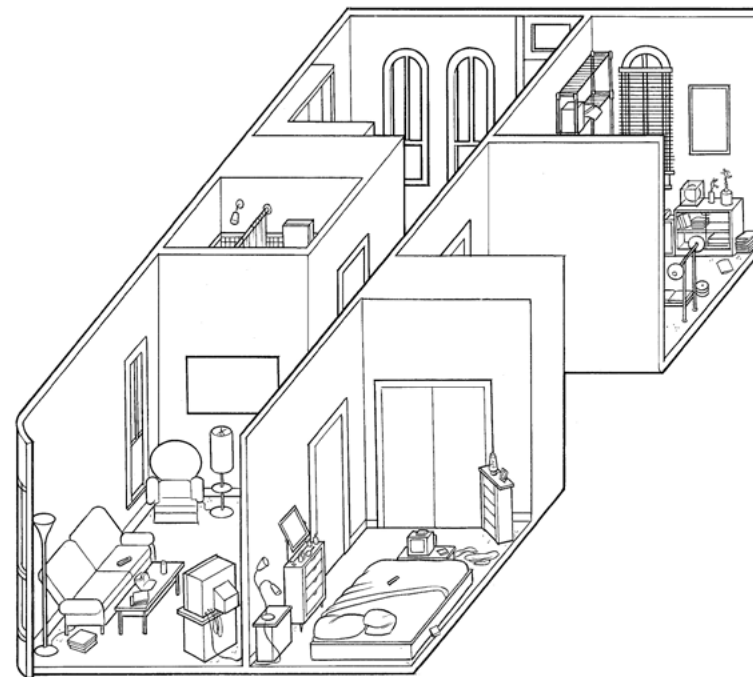
Drawings by
Chris Ware



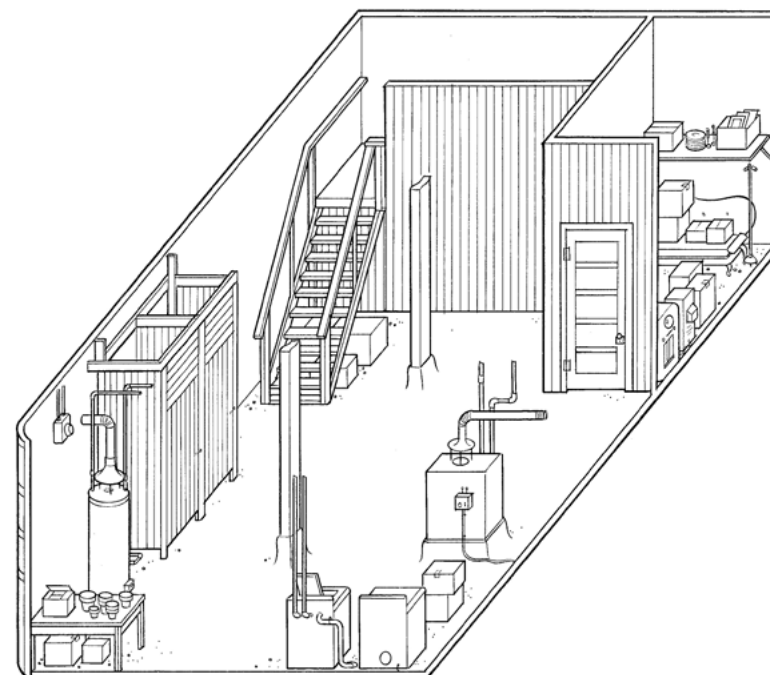
Winter



Autumn



Summer



Spring

Issue statement by
IKER GIL

Editor in chief
MAS CONTEXT

Architectural Narratives

In October of last year, we organized our second *MAS Context : Analog* event in Chicago. A one-day event that combined twelve presentations, an on-site bookstore by Temporary Services and an exhibition, it featured the work of architect-graphic novelist Jimenez Lai and architect-cartoonist Klaus. Both had been part of MAS Context before, appearing as contributors to our “LIVING” issue in the case of the former and the “OWNERSHIP” and “COMMUNICATION” issues in the case of the latter. This was the first time, however, that their work had been displayed in the same room, showing the different ways in which they use narrative and drawing either as a way to conceptualize architectural form and space, or as a tool to reflect on/criticize/satirize the profession and the discipline. Jimenez Lai, who last year published a compilation of his comics stories in the graphic novel *Citizens of No Place* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2012), possibly embodies the use of comics as an architectural research tool. Thus, Lai plays in his stories with the ambiguous spatiality



produced in the conflation of flat, linear drawing, and the *espace multcadre* (multi-frame space) of the comic book page in order to explore notions of interiority and exteriority. And, even more interestingly, he integrates his production of sequential stories—drawn with a style located somewhere between the stylized dynamics of Japanese manga and Chris Ware’s diagrammatic abstraction—seamlessly within his architectural practice, where we can find different transubstantiations of his image world. Klaus, on the other hand, stands closer to the tradition of antique editorial cartoons, rejoicing in the anachronistic utilization of an old Franco-Belgian-school style (most notably, the *École de Marcinelle* style epitomized by André Franquin) that somehow corresponds with the elusive nature of his vignettes. Often in the form of in-jokes, they play satire both on architecture’s latest news and on the most remote corners of the history of the discipline. Thus, Klaus’ work belongs in the new rise of architectural satire, illustrating the power of humor as a tool for more complex thinking on

reality, and, therefore, architecture. Both Klaus and Jimenez Lai portray, in the end, the fruitful products of architectural narrative, fiction and caricature, elements located in the periphery of a discipline that is reinventing itself.

During the process of organizing the *Architectural Narratives* exhibition, the possibilities of continuing the exploration of the relationship between narrative and architecture as a full issue immediately sprang to mind, and our annual collaboration with a guest editor for our winter issue presented itself as a perfect fit.

Thus, encouraged by our successful previous collaborations and his ubiquitous presence as an architectural cartoonist, we approached Klaus, who accepted the role of guest editor, along with architect and scholar Koldo Lus Arana, who added his knowledge of the medium and his extensive academic research on the topic.

The result of this collaboration is *NARRATIVE*, an issue developed during the last twelve months in a long and laborious process. Divided in three parts, *NARRATIVE*—whose title refers both to the topic it covers and to the way the issue itself has been produced—explores the overlaps, parallels and interactions between graphic narrative and architecture, looking at them from both sides of the spectrum. Through a series of articles and interviews, the issue offers a look at the different ways in which architecture has used and uses today graphic narrative and comics at the work of book artists who either have an architectural background, or make forays into the construction of architectural space (or both), and, finally, offers a glimpse at the architectural use of other forms of visual narrative, such as animation. There is, of course, no intention to cover the whole extension of the topic—even if some of the authors of the essays have built some rather encyclopedic works on it themselves, but rather of giving a taste of something that we believe, is a fascinating phenomenon, which is bound to keep grabbing the attention of

the discipline, no matter its demodé nature. That said, we would like to express our gratitude to Koldo Lus Arana and Klaus, and the rest of the contributors, for making it possible to continue the path opened by last year's exhibition in this issue, which may still continue its evolution in the future.

Besides our collaboration with Koldo Lus Arana and Klaus, this is also a special issue for all of us at *MAS Context* as it marks the end of our first five years: twenty quarterly issues, one special University issue, over two hundred articles, more than two hundred and fifty contributors, and the organization and participation in several events in Chicago and beyond. Not a small feat for a small independent publication like this one.

Thanks to Michelle Benoit, Andrew Clark, André Corrêa, Andrew Dribin, Renata Graw, Julie Michiels, and Paul Mougey for being part of the team at different stages of these five years. To Ethel Baraona Pohl, Alberto Campo Baeza, Pedro Gadanho, Jason Pickleman, Zoë Ryan, and Rick Valicenti for your insightful advice. To the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation and the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts for your continuing and invaluable support. To all the contributors that have shared their ideas, work, and stories from close and afar. And to all of you for being a critical part of this platform of exchange of ideas. Your comments, debates, suggestions and criticisms have helped *MAS Context* grow. You make working on *MAS Context* worthwhile.

16

Comics and Architecture, Comics in Architecture

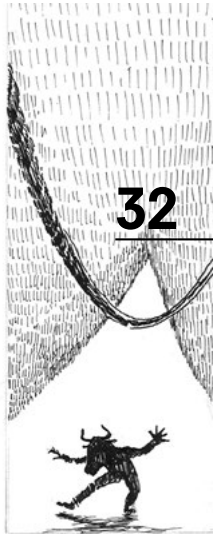
Essay by Koldo Lus Arana



32

Buildings and Their Representations Collapsing Upon One Another

Essay by Mélanie van der Hoorn



48

Amazing Archigram!

Clara Olóriz and Koldo Lus Arana

interview Sir Peter Cook

62

Lost in the Line

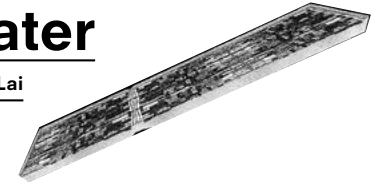
Graphic Novel by Léopold Lambert



88

Out of Water

Graphic Novel by Jimenez Lai



104

Kartum the View!

Graphic Novel by Jones, Partners:

Architecture, Mark Simmons, and the Southern

California Institute of Architecture

116

Cartooning Architecture and Other Issues

Iker Gil interviews graphic artist Klaus

124

Tracing Intentions

Cartoons by Klaus



132

Sensing the Comic's DNA

Mélanie van der Hoorn in

conversation with François Schuiten



144 Swarte's Mystery Theater

Koldo Lus Arana in conversation
with Joost Swarte



158 Labyrinths and Metaphysical Constructions

Léopold Lambert interviews
graphic novelist Marc-Antoine Mathieu



170 Images Come First

Andrea Alberghini interviews Manuele Fior

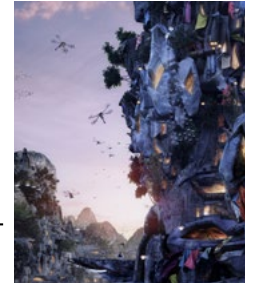
188 Beta Testing Architecture

Koldo Lus Arana interviews Tom Kaczynski



200 Archiporn or Storylines?

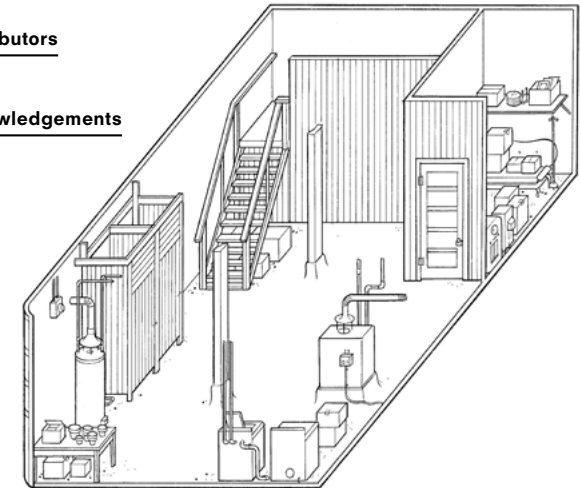
Essay by Mélanie van der Hoorn



214 Beyond Built Architecture

Ethel Baraona Pohl and César Reyes from
dpr-barcelona interview Jonathan
Gales founding member of Factory Fifteen

222	<u>Contributors</u>
228	<u>Team</u>
228	<u>Acknowledgements</u>



Essay by
KOLDO LUS ARANA

Comics and Architecture,

Comics in Architecture:

A (not so) short recount
of the interactions
between architecture
and graphic narrative¹

Nemo's trip through a hyperbolic
Manhattan in Little Nemo in Slumbeland
(Detail), 1907 © Winsor McCay

"It is true that mass media propose in a massive amount and without previous discrimination several elements of information where valid data cannot be told from the pure entertainment. But denying that this accumulation of information can become formation equals to having a clearly pessimistic opinion of human nature, and to not believing that an accumulation of quantitative data, bombing with stimuli the intelligences of a great amount of people can become, in some, a qualitative mutation."

Umberto Eco²

"Why do you want to drag me here and there, you illiterates? I did not write for you, but for those who can understand me. One person to me is worth a hundred thousand; and the mob, nothing."

Heraclitus

Academic disdain notwithstanding, the exploration of the relationships between comics and architecture has been a not quite visible yet recurring phenomenon throughout the history of the medium. Beyond its low key appearance, it has fascinated architects with its unique capacity to gather together communication, space and movement. A look at the architectural publications of the last thirty years points in that direction, showing a discrete but steady flow of articles, as well as an increasing number of exhibitions covering the different overlaps between architecture and graphic narrative. It is unquestionable that this growing interest takes place in the context of a general rediscovery of comics in cinema and other media, paralleled by the increasing appropriation of the products of (mass) visual culture by architecture, a discipline always hungry for new images and concepts. New representation modes have rapidly been absorbed within the mechanics of a discipline where, since the last decades of the last century, there's been a growing tendency to understand projects as (inter)active processes rather than as objects.

From Peter Eisenman and his autonomous evolutions to Bernard Tschumi's sequential designs or Zaha Hadid's kinetic morphings, architecture has kept moving (pun intended) towards the capture of that object-movement that Peter Cook and Warren Chalk felt common practice was unable to grasp. The introduction of time as a constituent part of the architectural artifact has reinforced the narrative dimension of designs, which, via a functional prosopopoeia, are now treated as living organisms subject to different metamorphoses. In our design narratives, projects and buildings often become characters of their own stories (buildings *move, bend, tilt, touch, cling...*) because, in its ideal state, architecture is, let us not forget, the result of *fiction*. We, as architects, need to create—from the outlining of the program to the shaping processes—*fictions*: narratives that guide our designs, tell us what our buildings are and aren't, and help us outline the itinerary the shaping process has to follow. All this makes it less surprising that, along with the drift towards virtual scenarios and animation, today's architecture, still primarily represented as lines and colors on printed paper, shows a renewed *interest in*, and a particular *affinity toward*, the techniques, strategies and aesthetics of graphic narrative.

I. La Ligne Claire de le Corbusier and the beginning of Amazing.

The overlaps between comics and architecture are not a recent phenomenon. Today's renewed interest in graphic narrative can actually be traced as far back as Le Corbusier and his storyboarded *Lettre a Madame Meyer*³ (1925), wherein the Swiss architect introduced the client to his design concepts for the never-built Ville Meyer through a series of footnoted sequential vistas of the house. It can actually, though, be traced even further, back to his first renderings of the Ville Contemporaine in *L'Esprit Nouveau* (1922), where he presented the in a few panels with captions in the tradition of the pictorial stories that had been published in European humor magazines for the better part of the XIX century. In both cases Le Corbusier drew his sequences with austere lines and dots, a trademark style very close to the sensibility of the *ligne claire* that would characterize French *bande dessinée* after Hergé, on the one hand, and the synthetic spirit of American

cartoons, whose resemblance to other illustrations he drew for *L'Esprit Nouveau* is even more remarkable.

Both of those apparently surprising connections—the use of a graphic sequence and the synthetic style of the representation—can easily be explained by Le Corbusier's early and well-documented infatuation with the figure of Rodolphe Töpffer, an artist, pedagogue and scholar better known for being one of the Swiss fathers of modern comics. Töpffer was the subject of one of the first articles on a comic strip artist to be found in an academic magazine (not to say an architectural magazine): “Toepffer, précurseur du cinema”, written by Le Corbusier himself in issue 11-12 of *L'Esprit Nouveau* (1921). In it, *De Fayet* (a pseudonym he shared with Ozenfant) enthusiastically vindicated Töpffer's role as a precursor of cinematographic montage and published excerpts from some of his proto-comics, including *Monsieur Pencil* (1831/1840) and *Le Docteur Festus* (1831/1846), whose clean, linear drawings were certainly akin to the graphic simplicity Jeanneret would adopt decades later as an identity trait. Töpffer was, in fact, a main agent in the definition of some of Le Corbusier's trademark obsessions, shaping the imaginary of a young Jeanneret who, among his childhood readings, reserved a privileged position for *Voyages en Zigzag* (1846), a book written by Töpffer that aroused his passion for traveling and drawing, as well as his obsession for its author, which would lead him to toy with the idea of writing a doctoral dissertation on the Swiss artist.

Le Corbusier's early interest in a medium still in the making⁴ had a definitive comeback in the 60s, a moment whereat the convulsive cultural scene would rediscover comics as a cultural interlocutor. Either through pop art banalization in the Anglo-Saxon world, or by trying to bring them into the academia, in the case of the Francophone scene, which saw the creation of the first institutions dedicated to the study and preservation of *bande dessinée*, comics steadily made their way into high culture. Architecture was not alien to this cultural revitalization, and in 1964, at the same time Umberto Eco was discovering comics as an object for academic study in *Apocalittici e integrati* and the situationists used the decontextualization of these very comics as a tool for subversion, Archigram filled their own claim for the medium by drawing attention to their capacity for image production.

They were not alone in this claim. Comics and pulp culture had broken into the hi-cult British scene via the likes of Reyner Banham and the Independent Group, and certainly, science fiction comics such as *Dan Dare* had a prominent role in shaping the architectural imaginary and the intellectual interests of a whole generation that included figures such as Norman Foster, a main actor in the creation of that “Hi Tech Britain”⁵ Stephen Hawking, and Arthur C. Clarke. Science-fiction obsessions aside, Archigram stood out among this general enthusiastic embrace of the future by taking a surprising stand for comics that certainly shocked the architectural scene and helped launch the group into the international scene. If “Amazing Archigram 4: Zoom Issue,” the science fiction-related issue, became to a great extent the epitome of what the group represented, “Space Probe!”, the collage of comic book panels pasted together by Warren Chalk indisputably provided the images that came to define the magazine, group, and common agenda, to a great extent.

“Amazing Archigram” signaled the moment when comics finally entered mainstream architectural imaginary, spawning the interest of the discipline in the medium, as Paul Virilio's 1968 article “L'Architettura dans la bande dessinée” (*Art et création* n° 1, January-February) came to confirm. Comics, graphic narratives, sequential drawings became, in a way, a schtick of the visionary scene, a sort of default mode of representation. Scanning through the issues of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *AD*, or *Casabella* of those years, we find a continuous flux of “architectures en vignettes”, such as Rudolph Doernach's *Provolution* (1969), Archigram-offspring Mark Fisher's *dynamat* adventures, or Archizoom Associati's and Superstudio's transcriptions of their own narratives (most notably Superstudio's storyboards for *Viaggio nelle regioni della ragione*, or the advertisements for the AEO chair Archizoom Associati did in collaboration with Cassina in 1975). The postmodern revision of the modern dream and its legacy was particularly akin to the fluid, uncompromising aesthetics of architects such as Piers Gough, who effortlessly turned his funny cartoons into ironic building designs, which stand now as a vivid portrayal of it. No surprise, then, that the period also saw the start of a migration towards comics of professionals with an architectural background, such as Guido Crepax and Milo Manara, Joost Swarte, Spanish authors Daniel Torres and Miguelanxo Prado in the 80s, or, more recently, Japanese *mangaka* Tsutomu Nihei.

II. Words and Pictures. Drawing and Diagramming

Deep into the communication era, comics have become an increasingly valuable asset, and a desired “other” for architectural representation. In terms of drawing, the strong iconicity of the cartoon style has been used by postmodernists such as Robert Venturi or neo-moderns such as Neutelings & Riedijk, whose diagrammatic caricatures, appropriating the graphic and design patterns of the artists of the *Style Atome* (most notably Joost Swarte, but also Eddy Vermeulen and Yves Chaland), showed the potentialities of synthetic caricature as a vehicle to capture and transmit the very essence of the design, to grasp the ideal dimension of architecture thanks to their conceptual transparency. A similar spirit lies behind Mikkel Frost's *CEBRA* toons: one-page colorful vignettes, drawn after a project has been completed that try to distill the ideas within the design in a sort of “wordless manifesto.”⁶

These are not the only cases, or the only aesthetic mode of comics' drawing that has made it into architectural representation. In 1983, Norman Foster, whose hi-tech persona had been developed in *Dan Dare* stories, *Eagle* covers and the cutaway drawings of technological inventions drawn by John Batchelor in the centerfold pages of the magazine, tracked down the legendary *Eagle* artist in order to draw a sectioned axonometric of the Renault Distribution Centre resembling those for its publication in *The Architectural Review*.⁷ This is not the only time Foster hired a professional coming from the comics' world to illustrate one of his buildings. In 1975, Foster hired Franck Dickens, author of the popular comic strip *Bristow*, to draw several cartoons on the Willis Faber & Dumas headquarters in Ipswich, in order to show the workers, who would have to leave their offices in the City of London, “the spirit of the building and why it might be different from the



3.

"Space Probe!," the montage of American pulp-comic book panels Warren Chalk put together for "Amazing Archigram 4: Zoom Issue" © Archigram

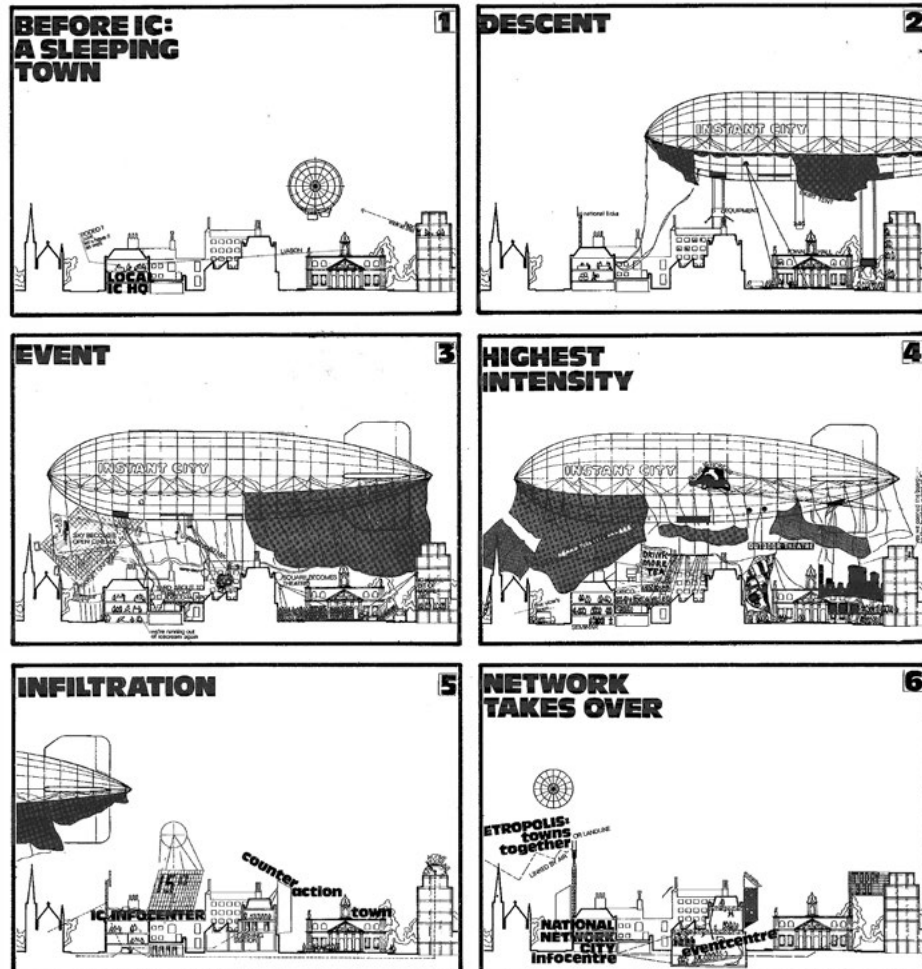
traditional office."⁸ And more recently, Jean Nouvel commissioned different comics artists (legendary *RanXerox*'s creator Tanino Liberatore among them) to illustrate the Dreams for the City section of his Louisiana Manifesto (Louisiana Museum, Denmark, 2005), where they used comic-book scenarios to recreate urban fantasies dealing with different non-built designs of the office and/or Nouvel's world in general.

The mechanics of graphic narrative have also been a common subject of experimentation in the different ways of telling the characteristics of architectures with an intrinsic narrative quality. This was most notably used by Archigram's members themselves in Archigram/Cook's successive *Instant City* (1968), *Metamorphosis of an English Town* (1970), or *Addox Strip* (1971), project-events whose narrative aspects were an integral part of their very ethos and, I would add, found in the fictional worlds of graphic narrative the perfect ecosystem to recreate the *realitas ludens* they progressively constructed in their works. Here, Archigram faithfully followed Buckminster Fuller's 1927 mimeo-sketch for his 4-D Tower Apartments, where he presented a 6-panel sequence of a dirigible delivering one of the buildings, which have been echoed in recent practices particularly focused in drawing/representation, such as Morphosis in their sequential 9-panel cross section sequence for their Lawrence Residence (1984), in the construction kit for their 2-4-6-8 house (1978), or, in a less formulaic way, in late Enric Miralles's illustrated, diagrammatic recounts of his design processes.

III. Transgender Transgression

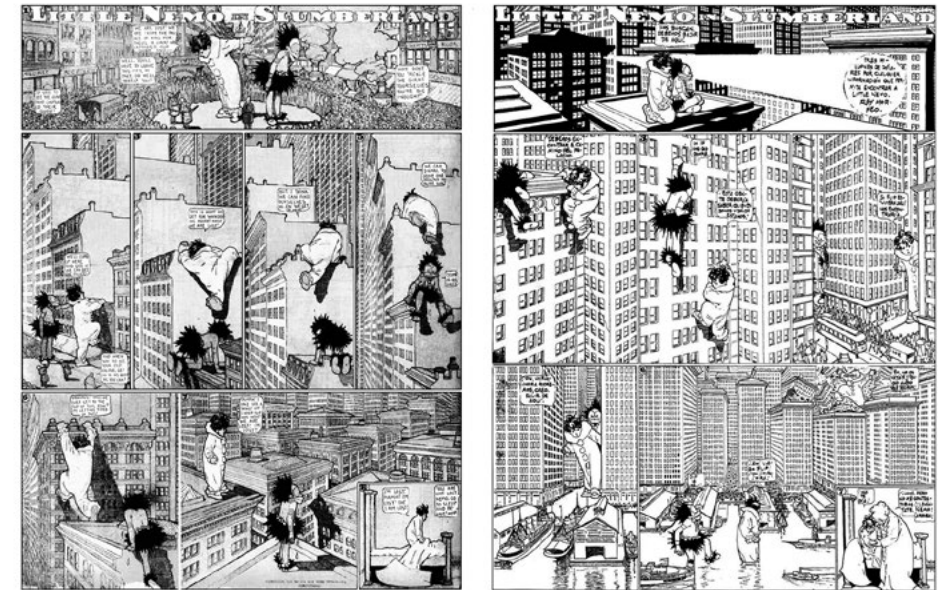
Paired with their new presence as a source of ideas for other, 'higher' media, the reconversion of comics from childish "funny books" into the more intellectually palatable concept/form of graphic novels has paved the way for the use of different conventions of the comics' form for a general architectural audience. Koolhaas himself resorted to comics in several parts of his excessive *S,M,L,XL* (Monacelli Press, 1998), where among images cropped from baseball manga, his son Tomas drew an 8-page comic story, *Byzantium*⁹ that took advantage of its "underground comix" aesthetics to illustrate the difficult negotiations which took place in the making of the eponymous building in Amsterdam (1985-91). Willem Jan Neutelings (also an OMA kid) and Frank Rodbeen used comic-book techniques, even if in a more eye-pleasing *ligne claire* style in their competition for the never built *European Patent Office at Leidschendam* (1991).¹⁰ Wes Jones, who published the comic strip *The Nelsons* in *ANY* from 1994 to 2001, continues producing idiosyncratic short comic stories with a certain regularity (see *Re: Doing Dubai in Beyond: Scenarios and Speculations*, 2009).

A different chapter should be reserved for photo-romans, a genre that is also living an undisputable revival as a marketing tool. Today, digital techniques and digital communication have made photographic images and/or their simulations immediately accessible, ubiquitously available, and extremely easy to manipulate, which has favored a return to collage as a preferred tool, as appealing as it is operative. This is the case with Herzog & de Meuron's *MetroBasel: ein Modell einer europäischen Metropolitan-Region*, Olivier Kugler & Fletcher Priest's children-book-looking *Freethinking* (2009), or BIG's self-proclaimed "archicomic" Yes



A zeppelin activating the life of a small village in *Instant City*, 1968 © Peter Cook

Is More (Taschen, 2004). Put together by today's youngest starchitect, who defines himself, among other things, as a "wannabe comics artist", *Yes Is More* appears as an architectural marketing tool done very much in the fashion of Scott McCloud's visual essay *Understanding Comics*. Here, Ingels became both the narrator and the main character in a sort of conference in visual and printed form, directly addressing the reader and explaining the specifics of a bunch of projects throughout four hundred pages of photographs, diagrams, renderings and other imagery encased in panels and seasoned with captions and balloons. In Ingels' case, the use of graphic narrative works well within the philosophy of the office, which relies less on highly intellectualized discourses than on a proactive, very straightforward approach to design. It also connects with Bjarke's mediatic persona, always eager to explain, communicate and sell his products, an architect whose *enfant terrible* image clearly benefits from the (still) transgressive aura of comic books.

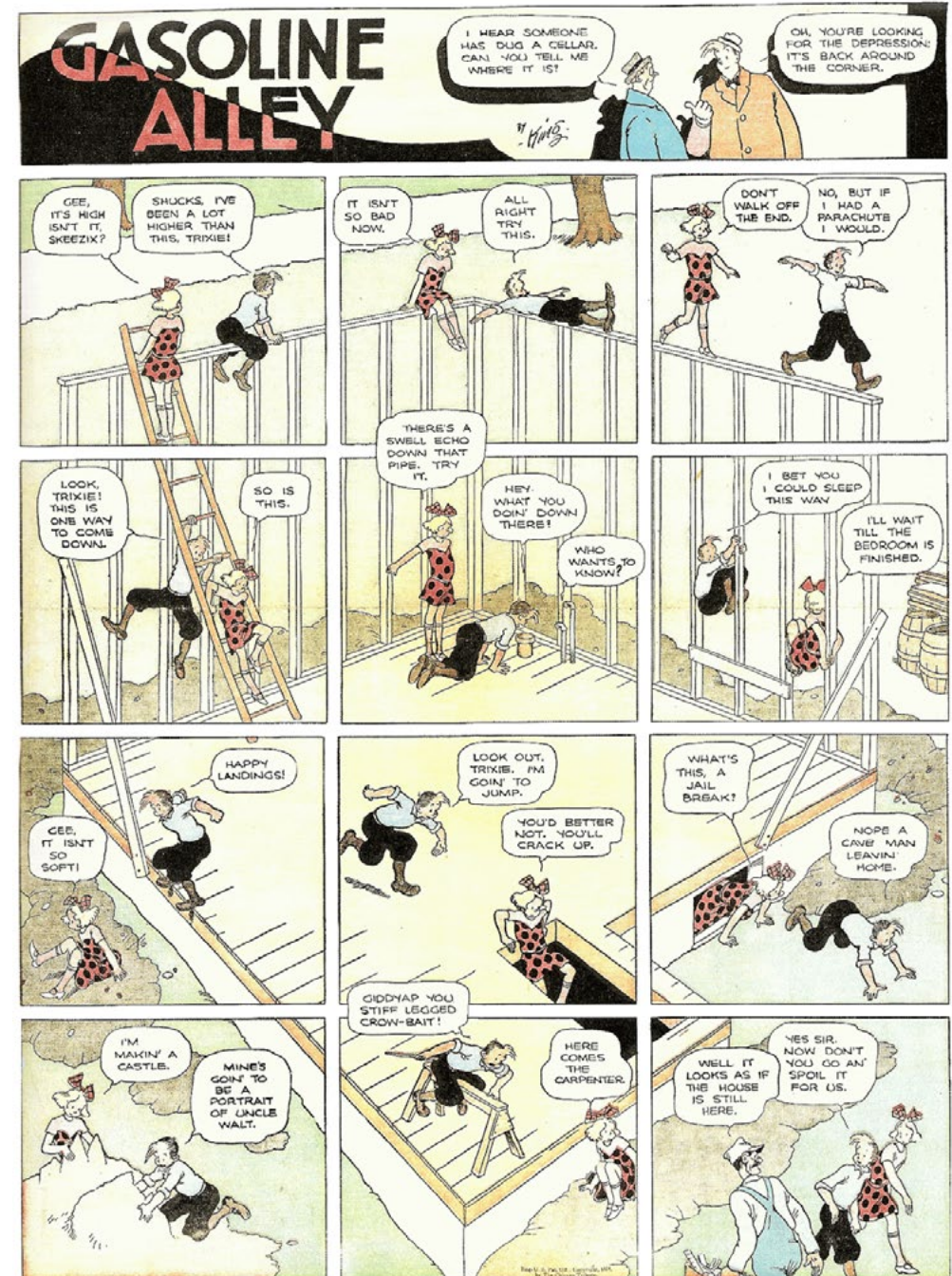
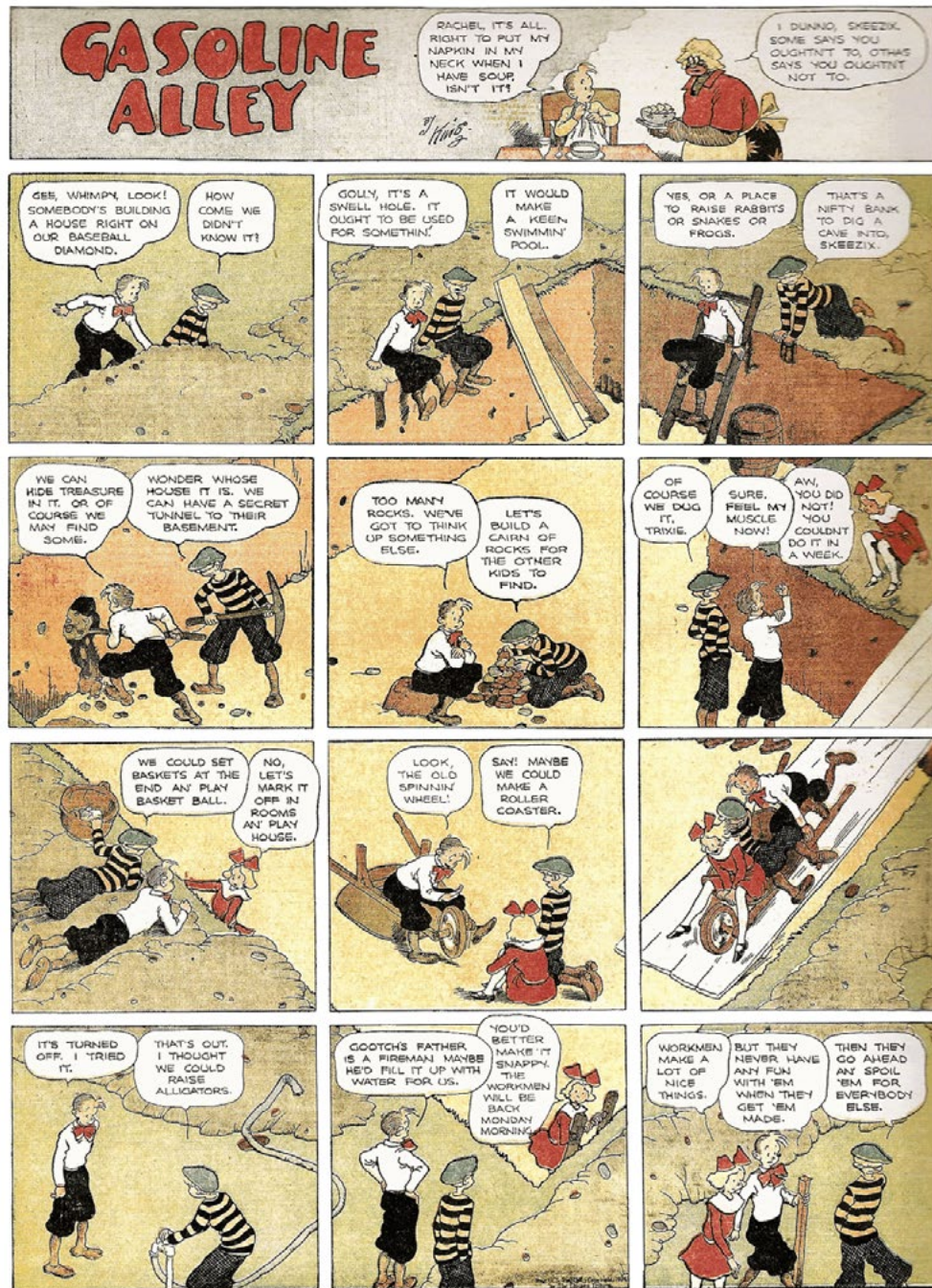


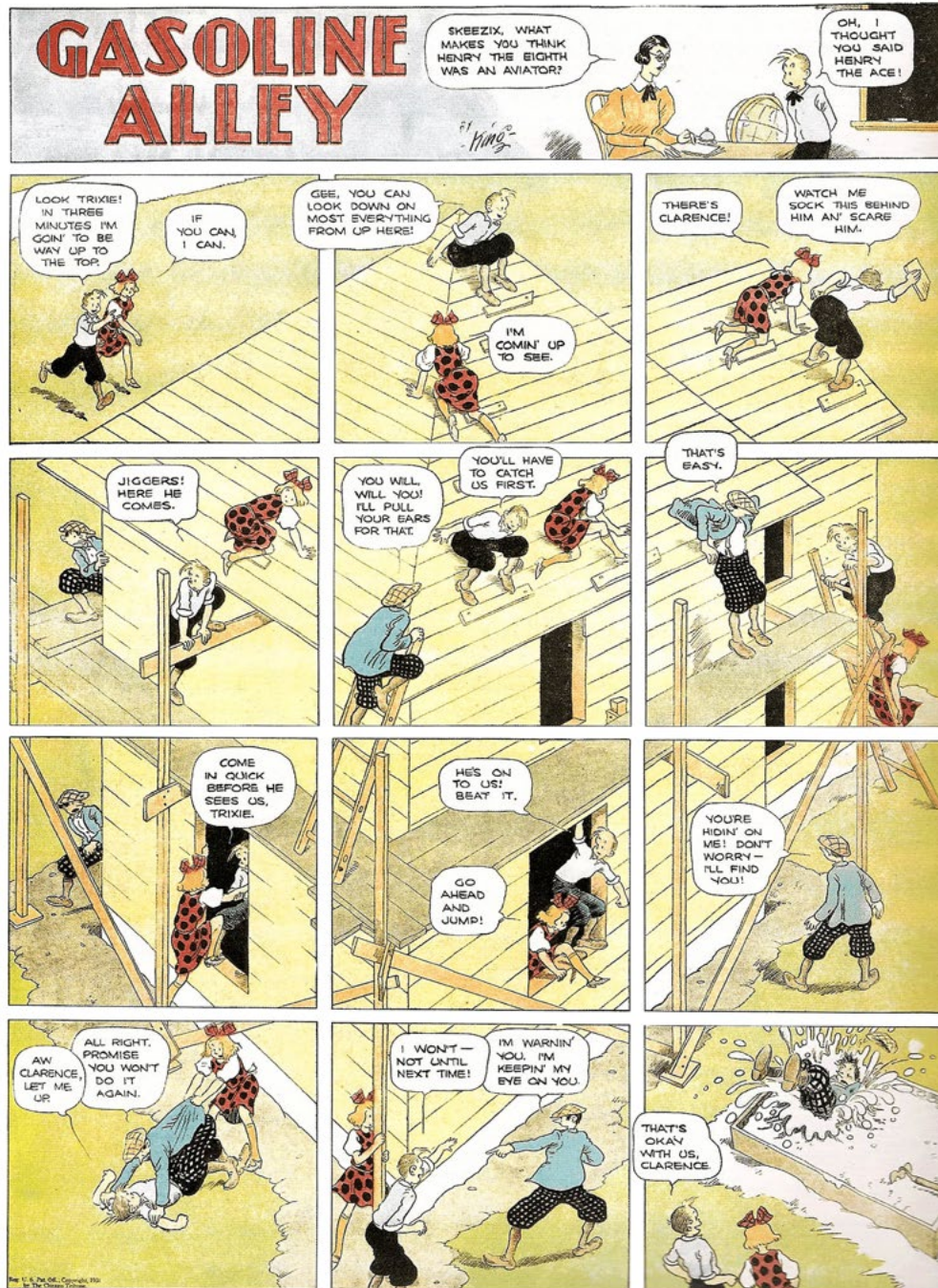
Nemo's trip through a hyperbolic Manhattan in *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. All plates from September 1907 © Winsor McCay

IV. Building Stories

But most interestingly, this interdisciplinary overlap happens in both ways, in an exchange that becomes particularly visible in the Franco-Belgian scene, where finding the participation of comics authors in the design of buildings, set designs, scenographies, or architectural installations has become a rather habitual situation, one that underlines the changing role of the medium in the cultural status quo and as its increasing "design" component. Excursions into architectural grounds are frequent in cases such as Marc-Antoine Mathieu's or especially François Schuiten's, whose designs, bred in the two-dimensional, fictional realm of comic books, have been translated and adapted into exhibition spaces, interior designs, and outdoors architectural ornamentation. The restoration of the *Maison Autrique*, Victor Horta's first Art Nouveau building in Brussels, is a particularly illustrative example. Stemming from François Schuiten & Benoit Peeters's infatuation with the Belgian architect, both comics authors, who enjoy great public recognition within Belgium's cultural scene, became the promoters and main supporters of the project, which they then integrated within the mythology of their series *Les Cités Obscures*, via an inner scenography designed ad-hoc. This same interdisciplinary tack can be found in Joost Swarte's collaboration with Mecanoo on the design of the *De Toneelschuur* theatre in Haarlem (1996), later turned into a book and further architectural works, or in the development of the *Nederlands Stripmuseum* in Groningen (2004), whose exterior redesign was undertaken after proposals by artists such as Schuiten or Henk Kuijpers.¹¹

All these interferences and exchanges underline the particular affinity of comics with the exploration of space, and, more specifically, architectural space, a fondness that was born with the medium itself, as Winsor McCay's work in the medium's first stages, clearly show. The concomitances between the role and





work of the architect and that of the comics artist (narrator, draughtsman and set designer, all at a time), are particularly vivid in *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1905-1911), where McCay vented many of his architectural obsessions, either introducing recurrently detailed architectural ensembles usually designed in a rich art nouveau, or by means of frequent games of distortion of architectural space. The same can be said about the city, a main character all throughout McCay's work, both in the form of detailed perspective representations of real XX Century metropolises, and of complex urban fantasies that rivaled the awe-inducing capacity of the most sophisticated urban imagery produced by the architects of the time. He was not alone in his interference with areas owned by the hi-cult: Cliff Sterrett, creator of the comic family strip *Polly and Her Pals* (1912) toyed frequently in his with experiments on the representation of space similar to those that cubism was unveiling at the time; and Frank O. King, who often played with correlations of time and space created by the comics grid on the comics page. Most notably, in March-April 1934, he published his three consecutive *Gasoline Alley* Sunday pages wherein he documented the fictional construction of a house with the particularity that the nine panels in which the page was divided composed, altogether, an axonometric view of the building. Each panel became, then, an individual timespace, both a fraction of the story and of the whole space, that retained its individuality and at the same time made part of the greater unity of the whole house/story.

Adding to the procedural and idiosyncratic adjacency of the architect's work and the work of the comics artist as a space designer/depicter, there is also a deeper structural synergy between architectural space and the comics page as a system for the articulation of time and space (of spaces-moments). In comics, time perception is intimately linked to space. Time is literally *kept within* the space of the panel and in the space between, while panels represent different spaces which add to make a *superspace* in the context of the whole page, making the comics' page an interesting alternative to the representation of timespace provided by cinematographic sequence. In the comics sequence, each consecutive moment does not disappear, nor substitutes for the next one; on the contrary, it stays as long as the page is not turned, cohabitating with the preceding and the next ones as part of the architecture of the page. Thus, it constitutes a topology of time (a Bergsonian "architecture of time") that allows for a total visual encasing/perception of the time lapse that escapes the directionality of sequential-only narratives.

This singular imbrication of time and space that makes topological, non-linear sequencing, or intersecting narratives, possible, has been a source of inspiration for comics artists that operated out of the juvenile, low-cult encoding of the medium, fostering experiments that play with the architecture and the spatiality of the page. This is the case with Lewis Trondheim's experiments on multireadability, Patrice Killoffer's 3D narratives, and, above all, of Chris Ware's, diagrammatic comics stories, composed of pages where each panel-moment is surrounded by a panel matrix that portray in-between moments, alternative ex-courses, or complementary points of view. Here, the complete experience of the narrative requires combining the itinerary outlined by the main sequence (if there is one) with other

excursions where the reading eye explores the page in successive drifts. The flip-side of this timespace conflation is that comics introduce into the perception of space a temporal dimension that comes closer to the spatial experience of architecture. And this extent, along with the ambiguities and paradoxes that arise in the two-dimensional recreation of three-dimensional space, notably present in M.C. Escher's spatial ambiguities or John Hejduk and Peter Eisenman's figure-ground blurring in their respective *Houses*, acquire a new dimension with the addition of time and the multi-spatial nature of the comics page. A quick look at Victor Moscoso's works for Robert Crumb's *Zap Comix* in the 1960s-70s, or the more sophisticated and bloodcurdling works by *ero-guro* artist Shintaro Kago, shows both authors toying with the disruption of space that arises when making explicit the concomitances between the grid of the comics page and the structural frame of a building.

Noting the relationship between the cadence and rhythms of music and those of architecture has been a long-time tradition in the history of architectural criticism, often qualifying architecture (Le Corbusier, Xenakis) as "frozen music." It is difficult, however, from a non-dogmatic position, to fail to note the parallelism that exists between the techniques of architectural composition, along with their spatial syntaxes, and the very architecture of graphic narrative, an arthrologic system¹² which, through its games of alteration, deformation and evolution and its establishment of connections between chronospatial units, often appear to the viewer as the diagrammatic representation of an architectural process. The work of a new generation of architects, such as Mathias Gnehm, who combines his work as an architect with the publication of traditional graphic novels, and particularly Jimenez Lai, who uses the ambiguous spatiality of comics to conduct explorations he seamlessly integrates in his architectural practice, underline the renewed position that such a demodé medium is gaining in the architectural scene. In a moment when the crisis on the concept of the profession that architecture has been avoiding for thirty years has finally struck us (by way of the general Economic Crisis), storytelling, satire, humor and cartooning are finding an expanding venue. And newer generations, bred in the communication era are eager to explore the products of architectural narrative, terrain vagues located in the periphery of a discipline that now, more than ever, faces the urgent need to reinvent itself.

Because, in the end, architecture is fiction.

ENDNOTES

- 1 An earlier version of this text was used in the exhibition "Architectural Narratives," held in the gallery New Projects in Chicago in October-November 2012. A different take, with a greater focus on Le Corbusier's use of graphic narrative can be found (in Spanish) in Jorge Tárrago Mingo, compiler, *RA 15* (Pamplona: Universidad de Navarra, 2013).
- 2 Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati* (Milano: Bompiani, 1964), 53-54.
- 3 For other comments on the *Lettre a Madame Meyer*, see Judy Loach's "De nouvelles formes naissent: Le Corbusier and the bande dessinée" in *The Francophone Bande Dessinée*, eds. Charles Forsdick, Laurence Grove, and Libbie McQuillan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), and Bruno Reichlin's "Jeanneret-Le Corbusier, Painter-Architect" in *Architecture And Cubism*, eds. Eve Blau and Nancy J. Troy (Montreal: CCA; Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1997).
- 4 Töpffer's early influence in a young Jeanneret is explicated in several documents: a personal communication by his brother Albert (Le Lac, Corseaux, 1968) mentioned by Stanislaus Von Moos in *Le Corbusier, Elemente einer Synthese*. Frauenfeld (Stuttgart: Huber, 1968; 13), or in an undated letter from 1911 to August Klipstein, where Le Corbusier asserts that he "would love to write a doctoral dissertation on Töpffer" (FLC E 26-145). See: Stanislaus Von Moos: "Voyages en Zigzag" in *Le Corbusier Before Le Corbusier*, eds. Arthur Rüegg and Stanislaus Von Moos (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).
- 5 As was shown in the exhibition *Dan Dare and the Birth of Hi-Tech Britain*, Science Museum, London SW7, 2008.
- 6 Mikkel Frost, partner at Danish architectural office CEBRA comments on his website, "I usually say that if you can't tell the story in an A4 sheet (21 by 29.7 cm) you are either doing too much or too complicated stuff. So the 'Toons' as I call them are not sketches. They are done after the sketches when most of the architectural decisions are made. In this sense they serve as reminders of what the project is all about. ...I believe that they quite clearly communicate the spirit of the office and our work..."
- 7 *The Architectural Review* (July 1983).
- 8 Quoted in Mark Pimlott, *Without And Within: Essays on Territory and the Interior* (Episode Publishers, 2007).
- 9 *The Architectural Review* (July 1983).
- 10 Neutelings & Roobdeen, *European Patent Office* (010 Publishers, 1991).
- 11 See Hans Ibelings, "Opengeslagen stripboeken: voorstellen voor het Nederlands Stripmuseum in Groningen," *Archis* (Deventer) 6 (1997): 24-25.
- 12 Thierry Groensteen uses the term "arthrologic system" in his book *The System of Comics* (University Press of Mississippi, 2009) to define the internal relationships of the comic page.

Essay by
MÉLANIE VAN DER HOORN

Building

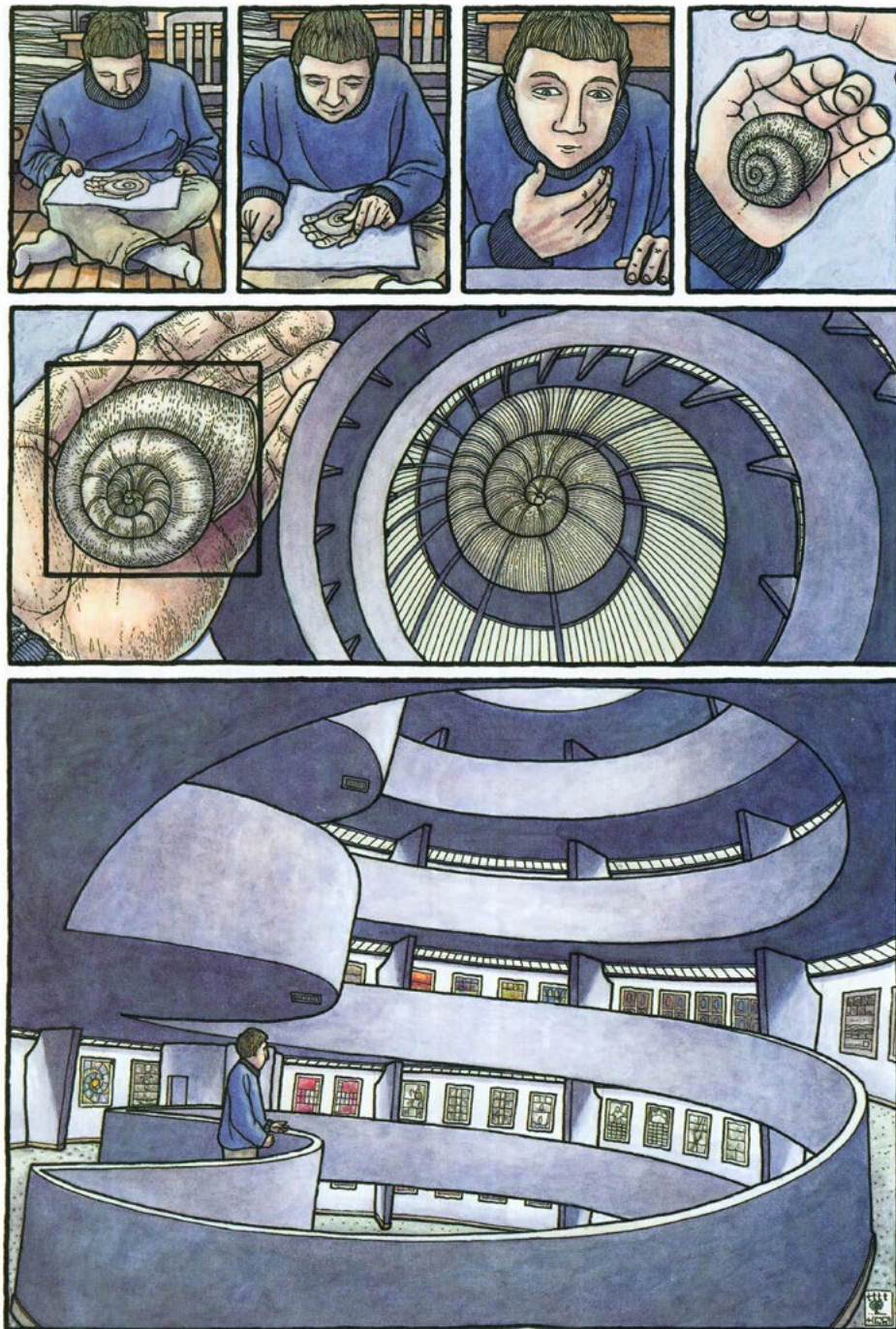
representations
and
their

collapsing

upon
one
another

Architecture
in Comic Strip Form

Maison de vair, 2012. One plate from the book, showing a bird's-eye view of the space (Detail) © Alexandre Doucin



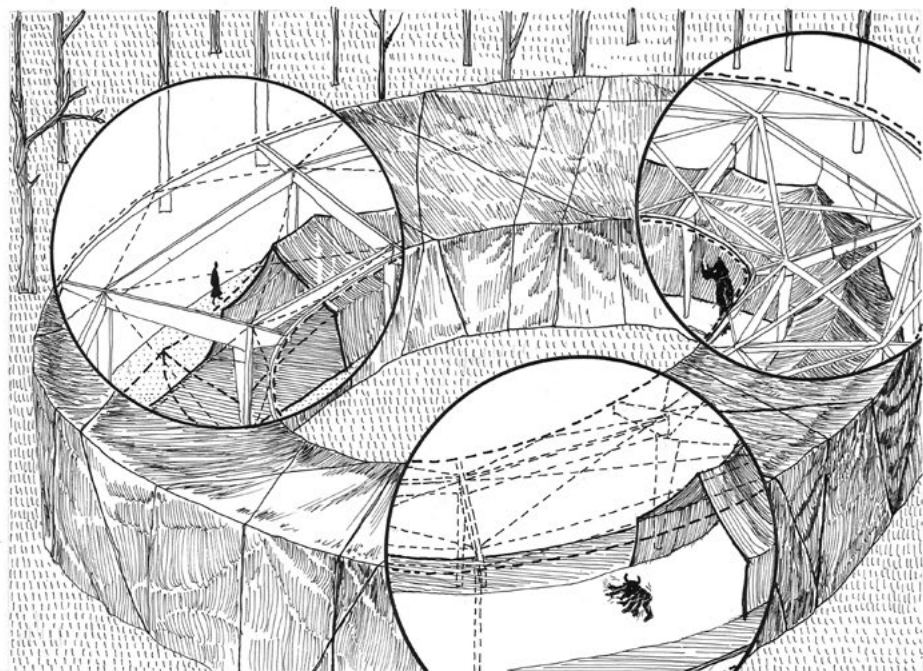
Geteilter Traum (Edition Moderne, 2000). One page from the award-winning comic strip (Max und Moritz Preis 2000 for the best comic strip in German). 2013 © Daniel Bosshart

Conducting research on “architecture comics” is a very enjoyable activity. First, because the richness and diversity of such comics is amazing; and second, because their authors are generally very willing and happy to tell extensively about their realization. The term “architecture comics,” here, refers to comic strip stories in which architecture plays a leading part, most of which have been made or commissioned by architects. In terms of content, the comic strip enables architects to present a project or concept or to express a critical standpoint. In terms of size, the comics vary from a single picture in which a complete story is told, to whole books of 300 pages or more. Some appear as web publications, others as “real” books or as part of an exhibition. Stylistically, they can be hand drawn, computer-rendered, compiled from a series of photographs, watercolour artworks, or various other documents. To most architects who dared to try an experience with comic strips, such an excursion outside their own discipline meant a lot.

As argued and illustrated in this issue of *MAS Context*, architects have, again and again, displayed an obvious interest for the construction of fictive and documentary narratives. Nonetheless, moving off the beaten track of standard visualizations is no self-evident course. Even for the most passionate comic strip fans, this kind of experiment contains the danger of not being taken seriously. This has much to do with the fact that the comic strip has long been regarded as a bit of an outsider among the other art forms, or has even been dismissed as an ephemeral and superficial form of popular culture. It is true that since the end of the previous century, with the opening of comic strip museums, the recent popularity of graphic novels, the founding of several academic journals and research groups, and the organization of conferences, the comic strip idiom has gradually gained more recognition. Nonetheless, architects who create comic strips are aware that the genre still suffers from all kinds of prejudices.

Architects have various reasons to build bridges to the world of comic strips, most of them related to a dissatisfaction with more conventional modes of representation and communication. Many mention the wish to reach a wider or different target group. Also, most of them want to position and distinguish themselves in their comic strips. To them, the comic strip is not merely a sequential form of representation that they apply to depict their work; it is also a mode of thought with which they have come to identify, and it concerns the propagation of a certain architecture, or an attempt to realize specific principles or standpoints. The comic strip, more than a means of communication, literally contributes to the production of architecture.

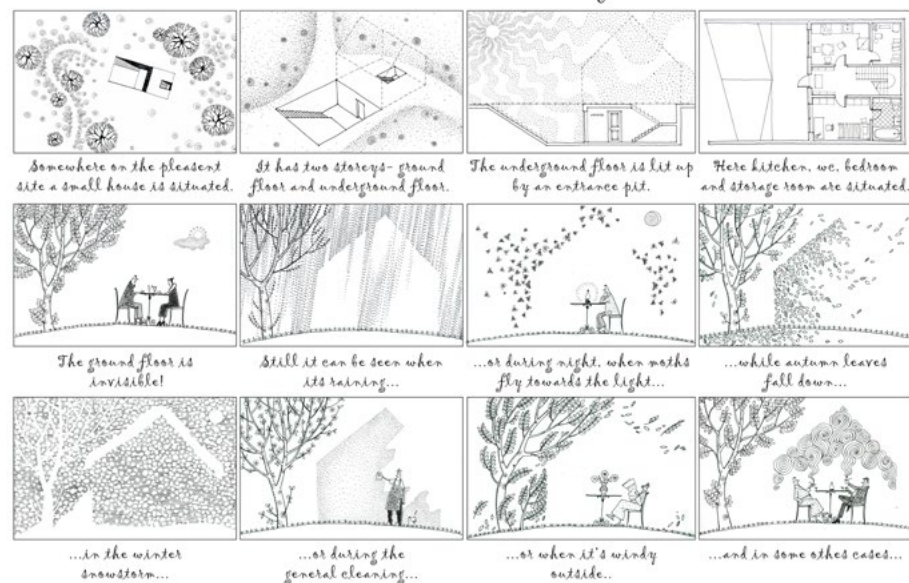
A few examples of “architecture comics” are relatively well-known, and have appeared again and again in publications dealing with the subject: Willem Jan Neutelings’ winning entry for the European Patent Office in Leidschendam (1989) and the strip-like logos with which he summarized the essence of his design concepts all through the 1990s, Schuiten and Peeters’ *Cities of the Fantastic* series (started in 1983) and their scenographic realizations for Parisian and Brussels metro stations, Joost Swarte’s sketches for the Theatre Hall in Haarlem (opened in 2003), and Bjarke Ingels’ bestseller *Yes Is More* (2009), to name a few. People interested in the subject will probably soon find themselves immersed in the fascinating world of Jimenez Lai’s largely autobiographic *Citizens of No Place*



Maison de vair, 2012. One plate from the book, showing a bird's-eye view of the space. © Alexandre Doucin

(2012), which will be featured in this issue of *MAS Context* and was previously presented in the "Living" issue (2009); they will be surprised to find out that Herzog and De Meuron's Studio Basel realized the 300-page comic strip *Metrobasel: A Model of a European Metropolitan Region* (2009), and that Jean Nouvel asked three comic artists to animate some of his (as-yet) unrealized designs at his retrospective exhibition in 2005. Yet, apart from these recurring examples, there are a number of lesser-known architects and offices that have integrated their interest for comics into their daily practice, and can be said to be permanently reflecting on the medium's potential. It would be difficult to underpin the idea of a coherent "strip movement" within architecture, since the vast majority of the authors are scarcely aware of one another's comic strips. Also, beyond a concise, communal frame of reference, there are too few correspondences to be able to talk of shared origins. However, there does appear to be a coherent whole when regarded from a thematic viewpoint: the discussions held with all the authors indicate that they have similar motivations and approaches and are engaged with communal issues, although they use diverse angles of approach.

The Parisian Alexandre Doucin, the Swiss Daniel Bosshart, the Russian collective Quiet Time—these architects are passionate strip cartoonists, but they consider their activities as cartoonists as a release mechanism, or as an experimental garden that remains independent of their daily architectural practice. For various reasons, their comics have either not yet reached the notoriety they would deserve or, as for Bosshart, who is an architect and an award-winning cartoonist, they lead a kind of schizophrenic life in two entirely disconnected worlds. Bosshart, literally, is a cartoonist in the early morning (and during occasional unpaid leaves) and an architect during office hours. The same holds true for Doucin, who makes a living as an independent architect in several firms but "offstage" regularly draws inspiration from the comic strip for the presentation of his own work and has even realized an entire (as yet unpublished) strip album. His work, and that of several others, illustrates how the comic strip can give access and insight into the interaction between a building and its occupants. Buildings are not simple ornamental elements but characters, sometimes even protagonists, in a story. According to Doucin, this is one of the aspects that make a comic strip a far more suitable medium than conventional architectural presentations to express the complexity of space and the concurrence of different views and lines of conduct. In his album *Maison de Vair* (2012) for instance, he wondered which situations could occur in an atypical space almost entirely made up of textile. The three central figures in the story each experience, use, and interpret the space in their own manner. Their three narrative styles may be seen as three approaches to space that are also found side by side in architecture (emphasizing either matter, surface, or structure). Similarly to Doucin, Bosshart shows in his comic strips how people make themselves familiar with buildings, bring them to life and, vice versa, he also demonstrates the impact architecture has on people. To do so, he takes more liberties as a strip cartoonist than he would as an architect. He does not limit himself to perspectives at eye level, but chooses uncommon, slightly confusing angles, or even rigs the perspective and introduces minor elements that are not quite correct in architectural terms. "Drawing is looking," Bosshart further emphasizes. That



Invisible House, 2009. Competition entry (honourable mention) for the Shinkenchiku Residential Design Competition in the form of a hand-drawn comic strip, presenting an invisible house that can only take on a certain shape as a result of the weather conditions and the activities of its occupants. © Quiet Time



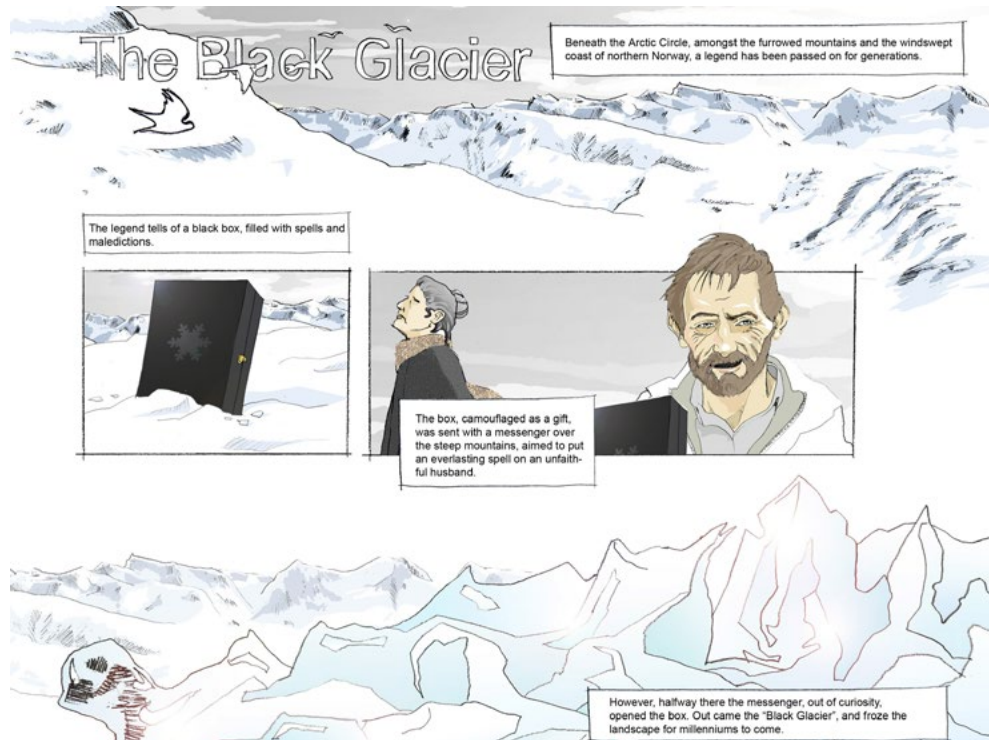
Hollywool, 2010. A combination of model and comic strip, to explain step by step how an abandoned factory building can be transformed into an autarkic wool production firm. © Alexandre Doucin and Felix Wetzstein

careful, critical way of observing produces a revealing wealth of detail. Yet that very richness can sometimes also make comic strips unsuitable for architecture: “The problem is that there is far too much in them. That makes them unbusinesslike.”

The six young Russian architects who joined forces under the name of Quiet Time have not yet agreed on the extent to which their artistic and narrative work might be substantiated in concrete architectural practice. On weekdays they all work for medium-sized architecture firms; in the evenings and at weekends, Quiet Time offers them a refuge where they can work on architectural competitions without any restrictions, can debate on architecture and give shape to their ideas. A few years ago, they became acquainted with the Japanese Central Glass International Architectural Design Competition and the Shinkenchiku Residential Design Competition that, unlike the majority of architectural competitions, do not encourage participants to design “real” buildings. Quiet Time seized the opportunity to develop a series of very poetic competition entries. It is often the extreme restraint, the minimalism of the designs, combined with the subtle humor of the sophisticated drawings that constitutes the strength of Quiet Time’s concepts.

Unlike the previous examples, there are also some other architects, such as the Americans Jimenez Lai and Wes Jones or the Norwegian firm Fantastic Norway, who have made it their business to interweave the two disciplines as much as possible. At Fantastic Norway, subjective approaches and attempts to achieve a more equal form of communication between architects and users have always been of the order of the day—for instance, through the realization of comic strips. Fantastic Norway not only seeks to emphasize the highly individual quality in the observations and experiences of other people, they also feel it is of great importance to maintain sight of the degree of subjectivity in their own reactions to different places. After receiving their degree in Architecture, the two partners travelled all over Norway for three years, to speak to people about their living environment and their corresponding ideals, about buildings and events that give a location its specific identity. The comic strip *Black Glacier* arose in 2007, out of their fieldwork. A local entrepreneur asked them to develop a concept for a hotel that would entice visitors to stay for at least one night near the North-Norwegian *Svartisen* (Black Glacier), which up to then was not much more than an intermediate stop where they could park their cars and take a few photos. The architects used the myth of the genesis of the glacier, about an adulterous husband who is enchanted by a mysterious black box, and tried to charm people by firing their imagination and curiosity.

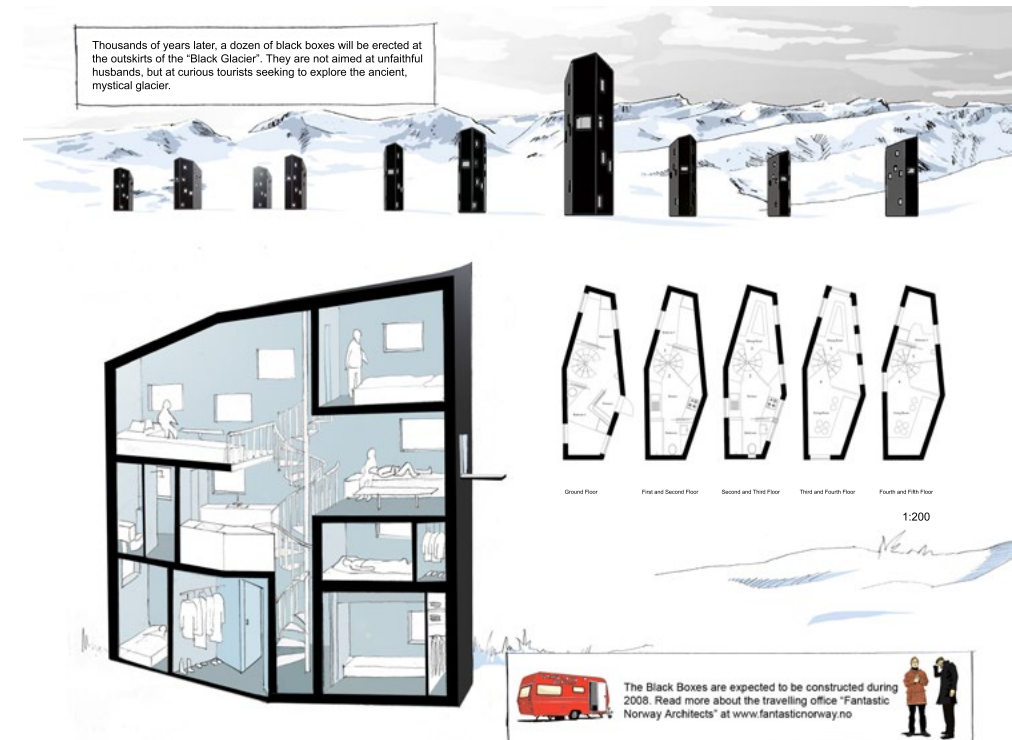
The American architect Wes Jones, for his part, has regularly used the comic strip in a more self-critical way. Humor and self-mockery, indeed, are a common component of the comic strip genre—architecture comics specifically underline the personal view of the author in a jocular way. The creation of characters enables the author to comment caustically on matters that he otherwise might not have dared to raise, without actually being personally associated with such observations. Instead of inflicting the author’s personal views on the readers, it stimulates them to partake in critical reflection. To Jones, reflecting on and designing architecture can scarcely be distinguished from one another. All his designs have a



The Black Glacier, 2007. A mythological narrative as an attraction to entice tourists to spend at least one night in a hotel at the Black Glacier in the north of Norway. © Fantastic Norway

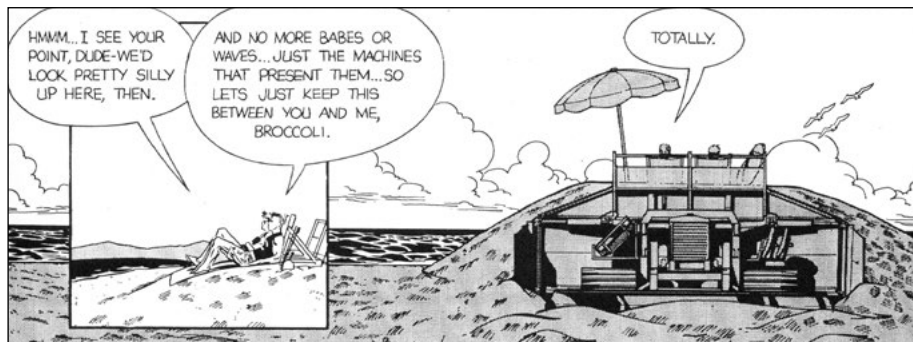
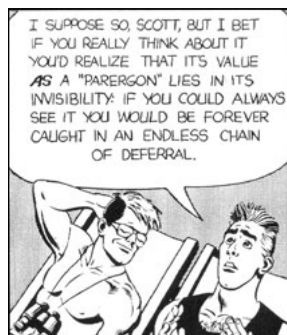
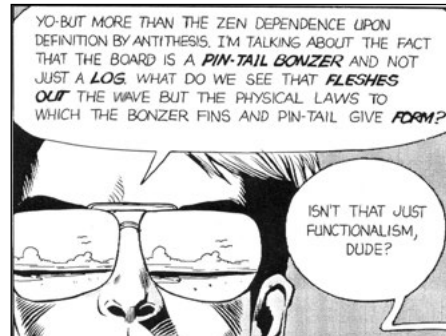
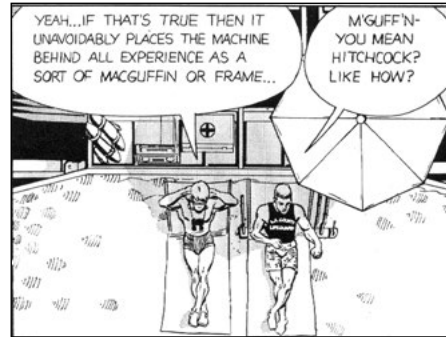
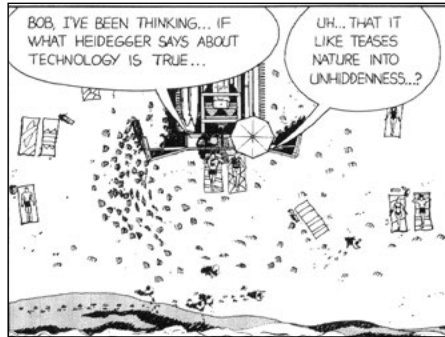
critical component, while humor forms an indispensable ingredient in his entire oeuvre, regardless of whether he is active in the role of designer or critic: "Part of the comic's attraction is that it has an inherently self-deprecating quality. It basically says, 'We are not taking this so seriously, we aren't Frank Lloyd Wright, we are trying to do important things but it doesn't hurt to smile, step back and look at ourselves, take the cape off and have a little bit more fun.'"

Jones has been very successful in his use of the comic strip, not only in order to express a critical standpoint, but also for design presentations. In 1988, then-still partner of the office Holt Hinshaw Pfau Jones, he even won first prize for the Astronauts Memorial at the John F. Kennedy Space Center with a comic strip. Other offices, such as the Berliner Peanutz Architekten, the Parisian Périphériques Architectes, or the Rotterdam-based Urbanisten, have made innovative attempts to use the comic strip for design presentations or the explanation of their concepts. Peanutz, for instance, wished to poke fun at the conventions in their professional field and felt that they could say more in comic strip form than they ever could by means of photographs. In their nine strips for the travelling exhibition *Wonderland* in 2004, the medium enabled them, in an exceptionally quick and efficient way, without much text, to link designs or realized projects with their



The Black Boxes, 2007. A mythological narrative as an attraction to entice tourists to spend at least one night in a hotel at the Black Glacier in the north of Norway. © Fantastic Norway

underlying narrative: the concept, the process from which each project arose. Several other offices opted for comic books, but maintained photographs instead of drawings. The office De Urbanisten, for instance, inspired by Bjarke Ingels' bestseller, were enthralled by the accessibility and sequentiality of comic strips and by the possibility of combining various media (diagrams, sketches, renderings, photos of scale models, the surroundings, and portraits) within this style. Their book *De Urbanisten and the Wondrous Water Square* (2010) unleashed great enthusiasm and gave their water square project a new impulse. For Périphériques Architectes, who realized several photo comic books, this was a means to add personal comments to the photographic documentation of their projects and distinguish themselves from architectural presentations that are generally strongly anonymized. Charmed by facets of popular culture, they rejected traditional, slick architecture photos and replaced them by photos with a deliberately impure and fragmentary character. Further, they wished to have a text—preferably a dialogue—in which the lightness and vitality of the spoken word would not be lost; they embraced the image-text synthesis so characteristic of comics. Their book *News: 25 Projects by Périphériques Architects* (2003), for instance, was typical for Périphériques' quest for innovative architecture publications in the hope of



California Lifeguard Tower, 1988. Elucidation along with a scale model for a lifeguard watchtower, in which two lifeguards are chatting about technology, functionalism and perception. © Holt Hinshaw Pfau Jones

reaching a wider target group. It became a 'fast' product for both the makers and the readers: efficiently produced and low-threshold, ideal for rapid reading, it included some projects that had actually just been completed.

Architects who seek refuge in the comic strip often do so as a result of disenchantment with common forms of presentation. Notably, they regret the lack of vitality in "sterile," computer-generated images that have no connection with reality and miss the "pulsating emotion" (atmosphere, motion) of pictorial representation. They also mention the meaningless silhouettes that are later added to such renderings as scale indicators without further depth or significance. The role of the characters constitutes one of the greatest differences between comics and architectural visualizations. In a comic, they are literally and figuratively at the forefront. They fill the image and determine the storyline. Their environment (including architecture) gives further indication of the situation in which they are involved and



Loft Rio, 2004. The alter egos of the two architects give a joint explanation of a design for a loft in an old factory building. © Peanutz Architekten



The Carré Sénart is a generic city implanted in the midst of fields 50 km from Paris.



Building in such a context involves making a "parked" object in a general plan.

News: 25 Projects by Périphériques Architects, 2003. Two pages on which the two architects give spontaneous and personal commentary on two of their projects. © Périphériques Architects

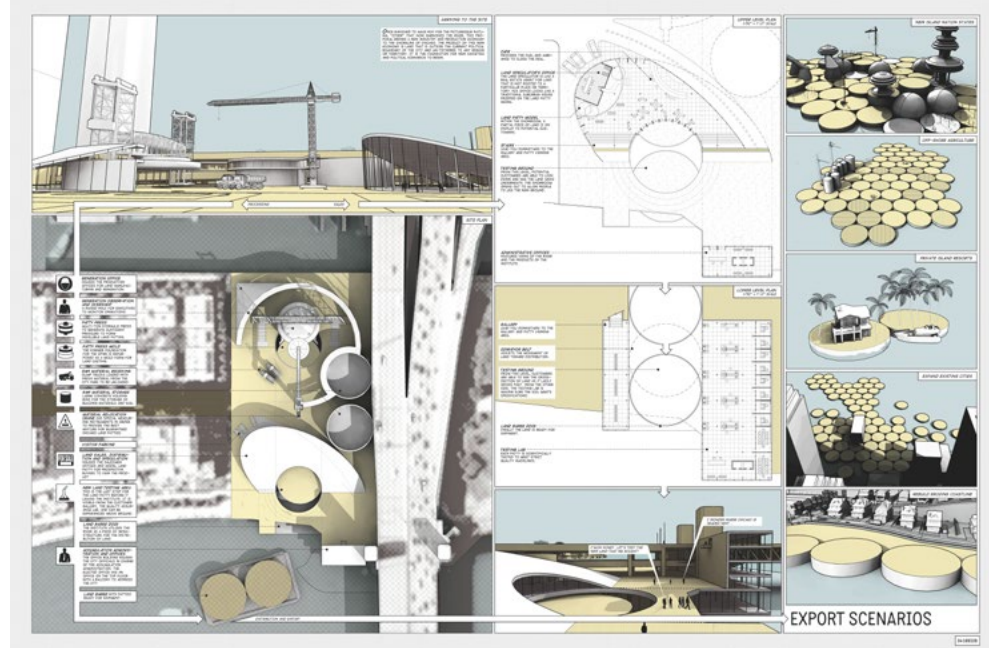
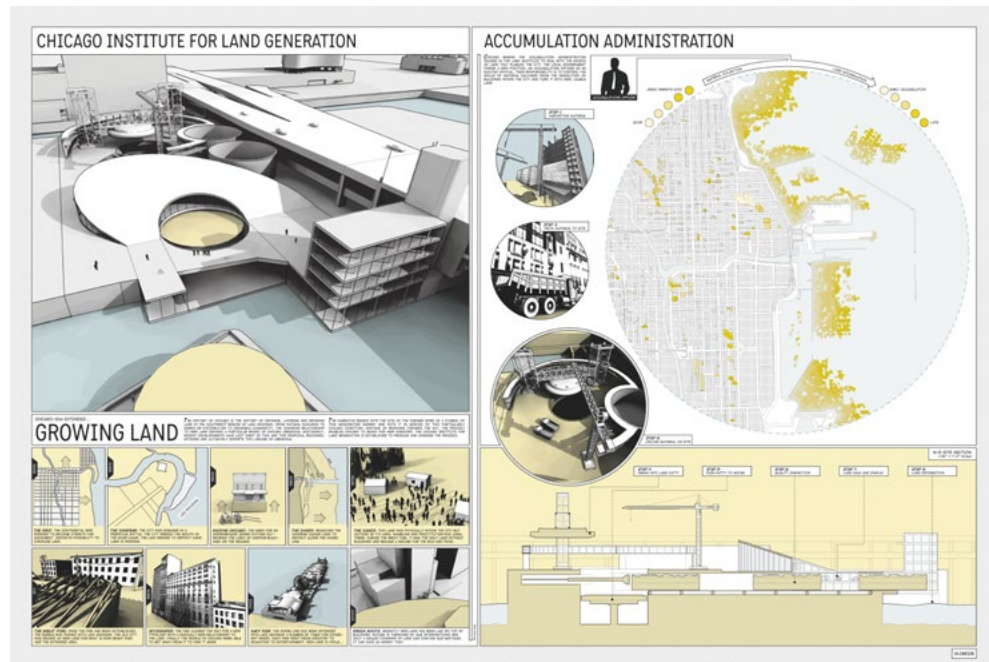
the state of mind in which they are. Architecture is subordinate to the story and to what happens to the characters. Exactly the opposite happens in architectural visualizations. Some architects even fear that characters distract from the design.

The use of the comic strip in design presentations can, at times, present some difficulties. This complex art form might lose an important part of its value if implemented in a way that is simply too didactic. Also, the workload associated with its realization is frequently underestimated. Often considered as a fast medium, the comic generally saves time in explaining various things, but it can take a huge amount of time to produce it. Besides that, the medium is not suitable for all target groups under all circumstances. Some architects have posed the question as to "how much" of a building you can or should actually show without impeding the imagination of the reader. Finally, some people question the extent to which comic strips are capable of depicting contemporary architecture, if at all. This may be traced back to the fact that professional cartoonists themselves are rather reticent about this, so that the architects perhaps lack convincing examples.

Despite these recurring issues, various architects have managed to demonstrate the enormous potential of the comic strip as a design presentation form. Some others have even indicated that it has an influence on the architecture that arises. They pushed their use of the comic strip beyond the limits of the genre, in that the strip was no end in itself but a means to initiate something else. The comic strip *Tod eines Bankiers* (Death of a Banker) (2004-2005) by Swiss architect and cartoonist Matthias Gnehm, for example, functioned as a catalyst for ultra-realistic discussions at the highest levels: among architects, politicians, and investors in architectural Zurich. Gnehm found exactly the right balance between fiction and reality, thus efficiently stirring debates on topical issues between various parties concerned.

In a slightly different way, the Chicago-based firm Design With Company has created, in the last few years, various "engaged" comics—"engaged" in the sense that the two partners are exceptionally interested in the *mutual* influence of architectural visualizations and their content. Similarly to Gnehm for the Bürkli Platz on Lake Zurich, they imagined a "what if" scenario for the building site of the Chicago Spire, in order to articulate the political, temporary, and narrative aspects lurking in the wings of architecture, and to encourage readers to come up with an alternative train of thought about their living environment and its future. Comic strips, according to the two partners, stimulate the representation of alternatives, particularly by the fact that fiction and reality are placed on equal footing so that they can blend with one another more fluently. Comics always comprise a form of constructive social criticism: "A willingness to accept speculation and other components of architectural narrative that are traditionally thought of as non-real. It's about projecting new realities and possibilities into the world."

For the *Make Believe* exhibition in Chicago in 2010, Design With Company realized a "real-life comic." Not only would their installation become more comprehensible by means of a comic strip and subsequently be immortalized in another strip, the installation itself would also take on the form of a three-dimensional strip: a built meta-comic. They wanted to keep visitors guessing as to which elements



Chicago Institute for Land Generation, 2010. Fiction and reality on an equal footing in a submission to an architectural competition concerning the building site of the Chicago Spire. © Design With Company

were real and which were not, and give them the feeling that they themselves were in a comic strip. The two partners see great potential in the relationship between a concept and its representation: "There is a lot of creative territory by not thinking of images or print media as sub-architecture or as not being part of the building itself." Form and content, in their projects, are always closely interwoven: "We are looking for ways that the representation of buildings and the buildings themselves start to collapse upon one another." Their projects give an impression of the extent to which using the comic strip in architecture can become part of the design process—not solely as a mode of presentation enabling architects to visualize elaborate ideas in retrospect, but as something that is part of a project from the start, helps to generate concepts in the first place and has great influence on the shape and realization of three-dimensional objects.

NOTE

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Daniel Bosshart

danielbosshart.blogspot.com

Design With Company

www.designwith.co

Alexandre Doucin

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Fantastic Norway

www.fantasticnorway.no

Matthias Gnehm

www.editionmoderne.ch/autoren.php?vl=0&va=11

Wes Jones

www.jonespartners.com

Peanutz Architekten

www.peanutz-architekten.de/en

Périphériques Architectes

www.peripheriques-architectes.com

Quiet Time

www.quiet-time.ru

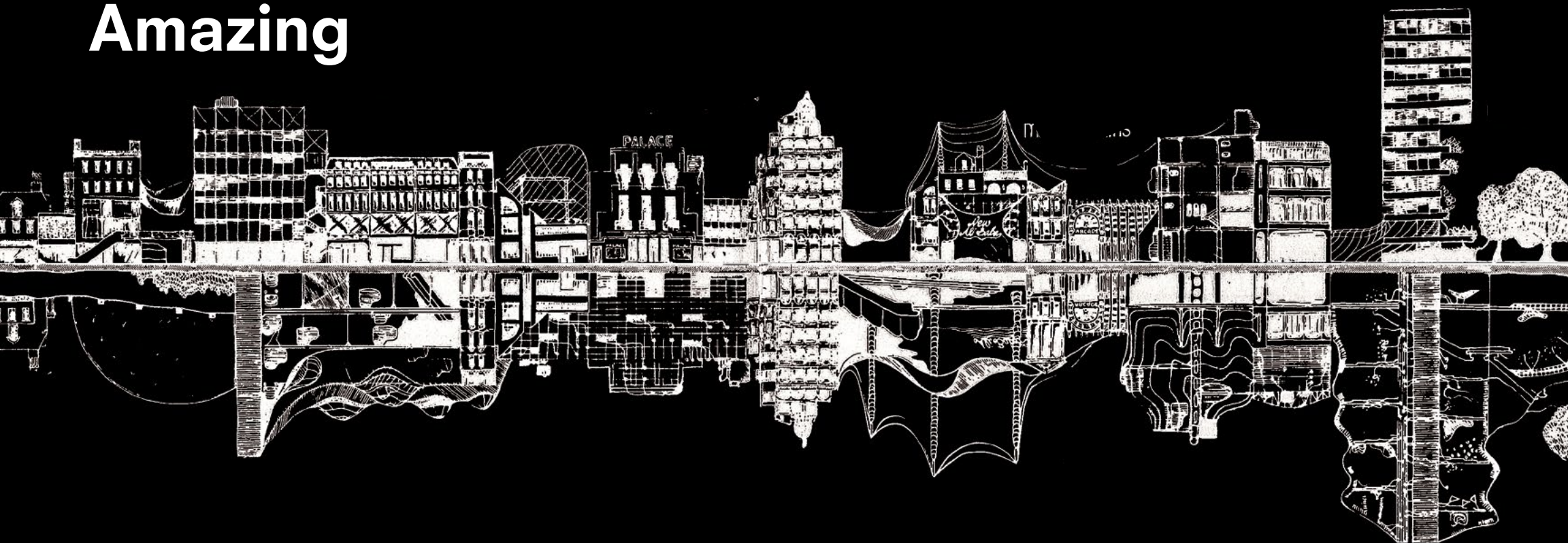
De Urbanisten

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CLARA OLÓRIZ
and
KOLDO LUS ARANA

interview
SIR PETER COOK

Amazing



Archigram!

"The Metamorphosis of an English Town...
It Happened Cheek-By-Jowl,"
Peter Cook, 1970 (Detail) © Peter Cook

When, in May 1964, the fourth issue of *Archigram*, (also known as “Amazing Archigram / Zoom”) came out, it signalled the final boost of *Archigram* magazine. Thanks to the intervention of both Peters (Banham and Blake), the “Zoom” issue propped *Archigram* into an international context, helping create the public perception of *Archigram* not only as a magazine, but also as an architectural team with a certain conceptual and aesthetic agenda. With its bold use of comic book and general science fiction imagery, it also became an inevitable presence in any recount of the occasionally close encounters of architecture and the graphic narrative, as well as a stimulus for the use of the latter in the 1960s and 70s visionary architectural scene. Additionally, it marked the beginning of *Archigram*’s (especially Peter Cook’s) romance with the mechanics of sequential imaging, which would be used to present subsequent projects.

In the following conversation, we talk with Peter Cook about comics, his use of narrative, the role of humour and cartooning in architecture’s storytelling, and why the heck there’s a lot of Jack Kirby but no Dan Dare in Warren Chalk’s “Space Probe.”¹



Sir Peter Cook in conversation with Clara Olóriz and Koldo Lus Arana © Koldo Lus Arana

I. Amazing Archigram (...Zoom!)

K: Hi, Peter, thanks for having us. First of all, we’d like to ask you to talk a little bit about the way in which the issue came to be. Up to that point, you had done a four-page leaflet with Mike Webb and David Greene; by the second issue, Ron Herron, Warren Chalk, and Dennis Crompton joined the team; and the third one was a themed one, “Expendability.” “Amazing Archigram/ Zoom” seemed, however, much more ambitious, with its complex conjunction of topics, techniques and hands at work.

From my memory, the first *Archigram* was really done by myself, David, and Mike, and then we got to know the other slightly older group: Warren, Crompton, and so on, who were in the second one. By the third one, “Expendability,” we more or less all came together. The fourth one was the first one that really hit the international market. Suddenly, from selling two hundred copies, [the magazine] went up to selling more than a thousand copies almost instantly, and we had people from Milan, Florence, and other cities, knowing about it. It happened that Reyner Banham saw the third one, and he took [*Archigram*] 4 with him to America. It went to Philip Johnson and others. I must have given him a pile of them, and he wrote about it in articles. It was a key one for taking up. It was also an elaborated one, because of the pop-up book!

C: Where did the concept come from? Was it a gathering of ideas that the different members shared, or did it spring from one person? You always seem to be the driving force in the magazine, but that notwithstanding, the issue seems to revolve around the issue of comics, with Warren Chalk’s “Space Probe!” at the center.

I probably chatter more [*laughs*]. It might also have to do with the AA training as well. I think people from the AA are trained to talk. They are allowed, mandated to talk. I was always born to be an organiser, doer, get around that... some people are.

I would say it was broken into two or three conditions: one, we could say was the fun part with the comic papers, and that's drawing attention to the fact that even some of the specific drawings in the comics were like German drawings from some of the *Frülicht* people—one person in particular, Carl Krayl. If you look at Carl Krayl's [drawings] they are almost identical with the Chicago comics. He was always a secondary figure, but nonetheless the actual mannerism of his drawings are so, so close, it is almost as if the guy who is sitting in America somewhere drawing these things was familiar with it, or they were brought up with a certain way of drawing.

Warren Chalk and I, by this time, were all working for Ted Woodrow. We spent a lot of office time actually producing the magazine. He and I would go out at lunchtime to those various market stools around King's Cross, Euston... looking to see if there was any of this stuff. He knew a bit more than I did about what to look for. It was mostly from one company that did these comics, but there were others. Largely his initiative, he gathered all these comics together. He zipped through them, and he and Ron Herron did some collages. I really handled the rest of the magazine, including the pop-up and whatever else is in there, and that included the first thing we had "Plug-in City" in, and so on and so forth.

K: So, how was everything put together? Did Warren produce the collage on his own, and then brought it to the office?

No, I think he did it in the office actually.

C: Was Warren the member most interested in comics?

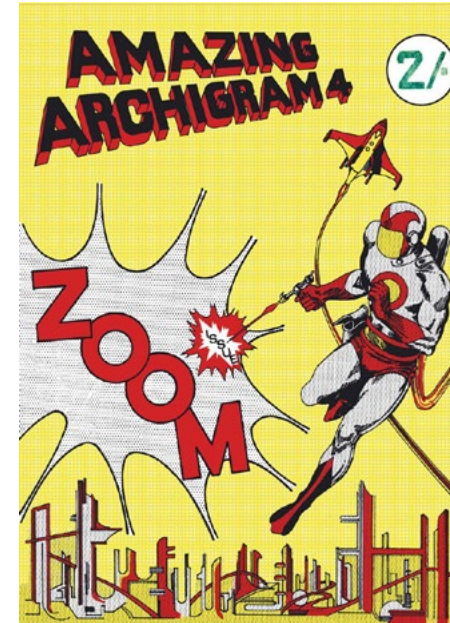
He was, probably. Ron Herron also, to one extent. Ron and Warren were very into Americana. They used to buy Ivy League type suits and smoke American cigarettes... before they went to America. Then, when they went to America, they reverted to drinking beer, wearing denim, and smoking French cigarettes.

K: Yes, one thing that struck me was the notorious absence of English comic books in the magazine. Sci-fi had a great development in British comics in the 1950s and early 1960s. However, at some point I spent a nice amount of time tracking down the comics Warren used in his collage and all come from American pulps, such as *Mystery in Space* or *Out of This World*. People such as Norman Foster and Stephen Hawking have mentioned how much Dan Dare and *The Eagle* helped shape their interests—Arthur C. Clarke even worked as an assistant for the strip. However, there's no Dan Dare inside the "Zoom" issue.

I know, I know, that was probably partly why. I never read Dan Dare much, not at all actually. I was not interested in it. I've never been interested in science fiction. I don't believe in science fiction. I just thought that the projects that we did were possible. You may think that's naïve, but I always saw them as connected to the world I knew. I never thought of them as utopian, we thought of them as an extension of the known territory.

K: Speculative, but not fantastic.

Hmmm...! Yeah, you could say that.



Left: Amazing Archigram 4: Zoom Issue. Cover by Warren Chalk, May 1964.

Right: Cover of Mystery in Space #86 (DC Comics, September 1963), drawn by Carmine Infantino.

(Diagram extracted from "Futuropolis: Comics and the Transmediatic Construction of the City of the Future", by Koldo Lus).



Left: First page of Warren Chalk's "Space Probe!"

Right: Page 5 of Magnus Robot Fighter 4000 AD #4 (Gold Key, November 1963), by Russ Manning.

(Diagram extracted from "Futuropolis: Comics and the Transmediatic Construction of the City of the Future", by Koldo Lus).

II. (Zoom...)

K: There's also a privileged presence of Jack Kirby, who drew some of the most impressive pulps in those years, and, if we speak of "cross-pollination," using Warren's claim, one could see some transplantation of Kirby's mechanical details in the graphic construction of Herron's "Walking City." I would say—speaking of mannerisms—that the machinery that appeared in these comic books looks a little bit like the graphic clichés.

I think Ron would have been looking at them as well. Ron and Warren had been working together for a long time before I came for the London County Council LCC. They had spent a lot of time on projects together and probably they talked about [Kirby's drawings]. But this one was done by Warren, and then Ron came in to do some of the collages and drawings. Ron was a more fluent drawer.

C: And then, you christened the "Walking City."

Ah, it might be, because it was called "Cities Moving" and for me, that is an easier concept. It is always me who has to end up writing, talking... I write very easily, like a journalist.

K: So it is not casual that you included lots of American referents. Actually, you already used some of these characters in the "Living City" exhibition. You had Superman... who also shows up in page 8—an image, mind you, that can be found in a crossword called "Supergram" from 1955.² Serendipity...

Hah, that is interesting! We liked Americana... it went with the movies. We were into Americana even though at that point none of us had been to America.

C: Dennis Crompton has been very vocal about the fact that the issue was about architecture and science fiction, not specifically about comics. However, both your editorial and Chalk's collage seem to strongly advocate the interest of the medium. Both your texts have this manifesto-like feel.

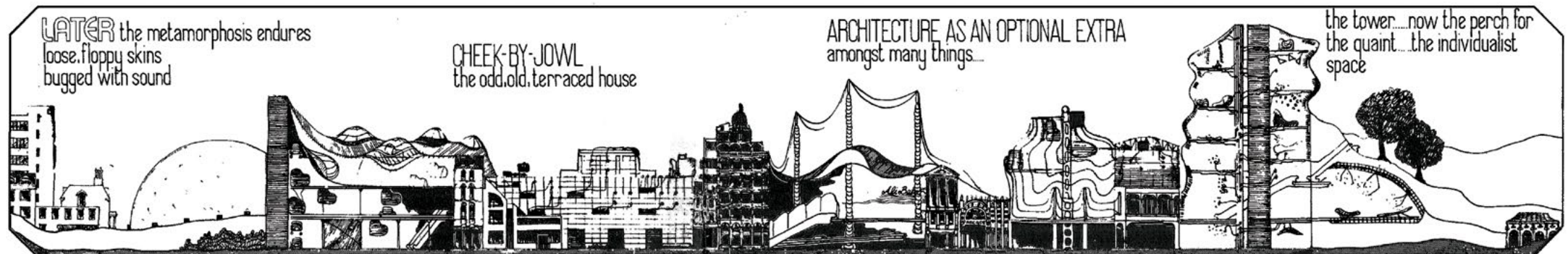
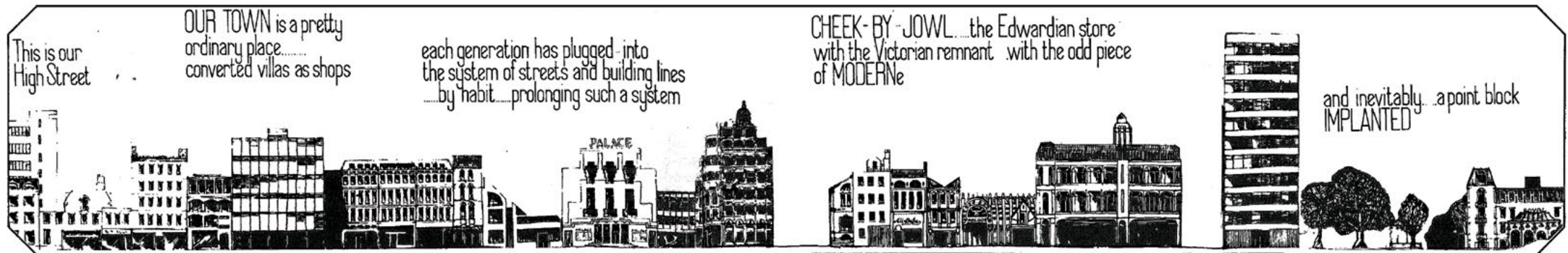
They always had the manifesto thing. Ron, Warren, and I in particular were very conscious of things like the magazines of the 1920s, of Taut's *Frülicht*, and the various manifestos that came out around at that time. There was always a statement; you were always saying, "This is what is going to happen and what this should look like." We called it the "Zoom" issue because it was about the comic paper relationship and the towers, and that then carried the other things that we had in there. I don't think it was just divided into science fiction.

C: And then, there's always the shock value of comics as a provocation tool...

I think there is a certain wing of English thinking, English creative art, whatever you may call it, which enjoys being naughty. It gave us great pleasure that the borrowing from comics would upset the normal architect. "You should be correct, you should be politically correct in a certain way, you should draw in a certain way." We found that stultifying! And we used to say very often, "This will upset them!"



Archigram, The True Story Told by Peter Cook. Image courtesy of Peter Cook.



Revised from earlier version in Archigram Nine

©Peter Cook (P)Archigram

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF OUR TOWN IT HAPPENED CHEEK-BY-JOWL

III. Going International

[*Archigram*] involved more than one person doing the research and more than one person doing the cutting. I remember we used a whole office to cut pop-ups... cut, and cut, and cut, and cut, and cut, and cut... like our designs. Dennis Crompton was the person who knew how to do silk print, so that is when we introduced color from the silk print. I think it was the first one that used the resources of quite a lot of people. [It] was a whole lot of bother, but we knew that it was the special one, even at that time. I think we printed a thousand [copies of the first issue] but we had difficulty in selling more than a hundred, and that was mostly to friends. We managed to get a bookshop to have it, and then we sold a few more. The second one maybe sold three hundred and the third one—people started to know about it—maybe sold four hundred. But it was really the “Zoom” issue that could have sold many more than what we printed.

I think that a few months before the release of the “Zoom” issue, “Plug-in City” was published in *The Sunday Times* color supplement; that was also another very key breakthrough. Even though *The Sunday Times* only reaches the British public, it was read by a minimum of probably three million people—the paper was selling a million copies—who got to see the actual pictures, which is a lot of people for that sort of material. I know by the time I started teaching at the AA in 1964, the students had all seen this project. I remember talking to Nick Grimshaw, who was one of my students at that time, afterwards, and he told me, “We all saw this thing in the paper and we thought ‘What the hell is this lunatic teaching us?’” He said, “Some of us came around to it and started doing that sort of thing ourselves.”

C: “Amazing Archigram / Zoom” became, in a way, the birth of Archigram as a group.

It was a sort of watershed point within the history of Archigram. Before that, Archigram was a formation of two sub-groups getting together to talk to each other. We had done the *Living City* exhibition the year before, which was really the first manifestation, and the “Zoom” issue must have come a matter of months after. We had built up a certain head of esteem, so the difference between the third issue and the fourth is the difference between us wanting anybody out there and knowing that people had taken an interest. So you might say it has the confidence of self. We were self-aware in a different way.

At that point we also started illustrating our own projects. Taylor Woodrow had this little internal competition for the tower. Because I won the competition, that was the one that led the more elaborate model and drawings. The pop-up one included Ron Herron’s tower and Woodrow’s tower, and there must have been a fourth one. As one did in that moment, you put together everything you were doing and then turn it into this.

K: It always seemed to me, however, that none of these designs were intended as sci-fi architecture, but serious architectural research that happened to need to be conducted in another medium.

It’s very funny that I liked rockets and those sort of things, but if you take the Montreal tower, it was not a science fiction thing. It was a way of arranging domes and tubes. It had maybe borrowed iconography, but the proposition is totally architectural, totally organizational.

K: Funny it ended up becoming a cargo spaceship in Douglas Trumbull’s film “Silent Running,” via Kikutake’s Osaka Tower.³ Changing the topic, you yourself have used the mechanics of graphic narrative in some of your projects, such as “Addox Strip” or “The Metamorphosis of an English Town.”

Yes, and in recent times, I have been using cartoons to describe what I was trying to do with the project. In fact, we just completed Bond University’s new School of Architecture building in Queensland where I included these cartoons in the original presentation. The building is an architectural school, and I ran architectural schools for a very long time, so I was drawing these cartoons from anecdotes of architectural school life. We’ve just done another competition from which we have not heard the result of yet, but I have taken cartoon characters to describe certain features of the project. We completed another building, which is also a competition we won in Austria, where I just began with a series of cartoons in the presentation to describe what I thought a university ought to be. At a very early stage, during the competition stage, I introduced cartoons of people doing things in the internal spaces, and then, in the Australian project, I did many more cartoons. There are even some spaces that were in the cartoons.

C: Yesterday we were chatting with Brett Steele about how important the storytelling behind the projects have become.

Almost too much I would say. I think sometimes you can have a very boring project that has a wonderful story, and you see the drawing and you go, “Hmm...” And you can have a wonderful project, in which the person who has done it is relatively inarticulate. I think of myself in a sort of middle ground; I like to develop the story while the project is developing.

IV. Beyond Archigram

C: It’s also interesting to observe how Archigram, as epitomized by *Archigram 4*, has permeated the architectural status quo, and how it gets recovered/updated today, even by yourselves.

That is a difficult one, isn’t it?

It becomes a little bit of a game. I mean, it obviously has had an effect, but the effect is felt in funny places. Sometimes I see the styling of packaging, for example, and I am like, “My God that’s an Archigram!—round at the corners and so on... did it come from that period?” Other times you feel bored by certain things you went through many years ago. I think that is a very long and tricky territory. I don’t think one can wrap it up. I went enthusiastically, and continue to go enthusiastically to Japan, because I think it is the most “Archigramic” place: it’s hard and slim with its technology and the jokey things.

K: There are many places where you can find Archigram, even today. Of course, images migrate and it is impossible to establish what influenced what, or arrived at the same conclusion through a different path. Would you say that the Graz building relates to that spirit?

Well, everybody says it does, because I think that is the easy thing to say. I am very cynical about my public reputation. I was famous when I was young, and I think some of the most interesting work I've done it's been done in that period. But then, suddenly Graz happens just about the time you are going to become a footnote in history. The funky aspect of it, the naughty nose that looks at the castle... that's sort of Archigram. There are few tricks that one learnt earlier. What it did prove to me at the end is: if we could have built Graz ten years ago, then we could have built quite a lot of the other bits of Archigram. I remember having a conversation with Rem [Koolhaas] on this subject, to what extent those things were abstract. It is in the interest of those philistines to keep you off the game. I get annoyed about utopianism—that way they put you in a nice sort of box saying “utopic.” But then you build something down the street, and what do you say then?

When the Westminster archive was finished, there was an event. Lots of people came, and they asked me to give a speech. I said, “If Archigram was happening now, if its equivalent was happening now, I wonder how many people in this room would actually like it.” I don't think they would. Now it's history. That's why Graz was shocking, because it was there, and it's big, and it works. If you are pushed into a historical box, it is safe; you are not going to threaten the real world. Once you come out of the box and start to do stuff... maybe it doesn't do it as outrageously as the upstream point of Archigram, but...

K: I think there is a tendency to say, “Okay, Peter's ‘Walking City.’”

But I didn't even do “Walking City”!

K: I know, but I think people tend to look at it as a modern rehash of this architectural imagery. I would say that there are recurrent themes that link it to Archigram, but also to your metamorphosis drawings and all the work in the middle. I wouldn't say it is directly imported from that era.

I notice it, and I've drawn attention to this—there is a feature which is common to the Graz building, the Vienna building, and to the Australian building that has a sort of nose that pops up in the front. Now I see it done, and I do this as a maneuver that in a funny way comes from Archigram, and now I do self-consciously introduce it in the project.

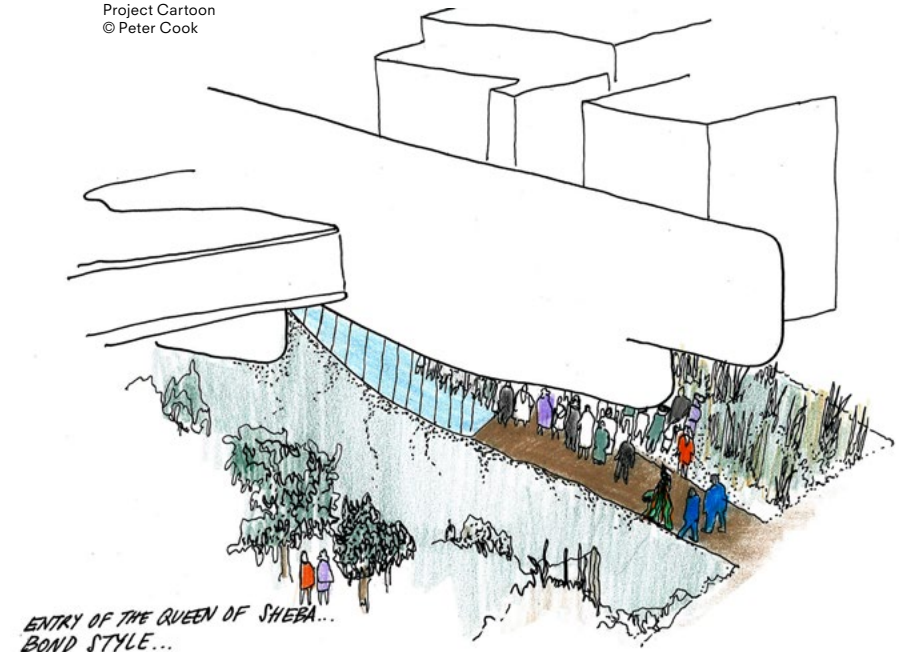
K: It has become a motif.

It has become a motif! Maybe that's dangerous. I am conscious of the nose motif.

K: I think you can perfectly afford it.

[laughter]

Project Cartoon
© Peter Cook



ENDNOTES

- 1 “Space Probe!” in *Archigram 4 “Amazing Archigram / Zoom”* (1964): 1-4.
- 2 “Supergram: The Superman Puzzle Game,” *Action Comics* 203 (1955). The drawing was a stat DC used for different purposes, so Chalk might have cropped it from a different comic book. The coincidence is rather funny, though.
- 3 See Peter Blake, “Expo70: Images of the Future,” *Architectural Forum* 39 (1970).

Graphic Novel
by
LÉOPOLD LAMBERT

Lost in the Line

PART OF THE BOOK

Weaponized Architecture: The Impossibility of Innocence
(dpr-barcelona, 2012)

Lost in the Line graphic novel (Detail)
© Léopold Lambert



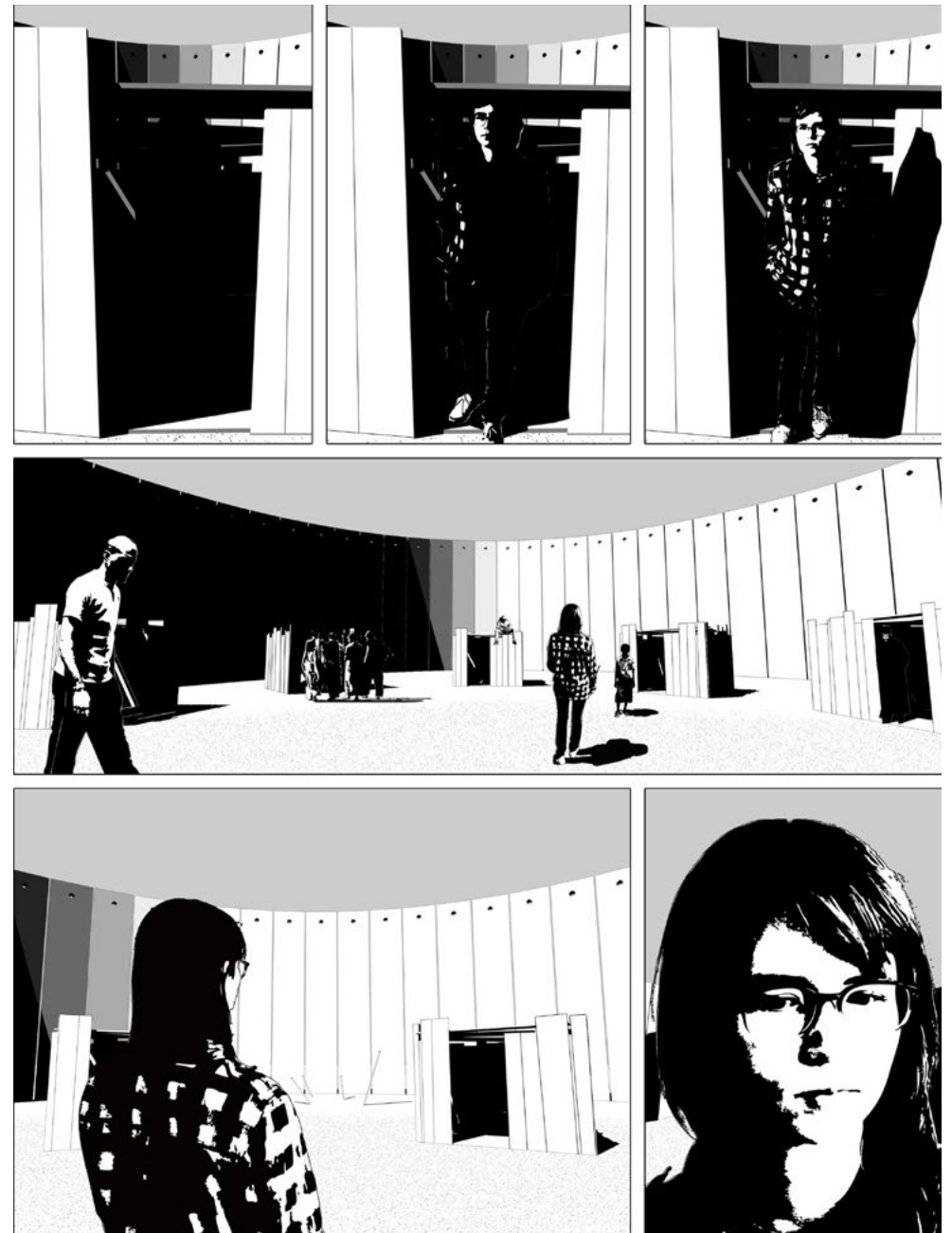
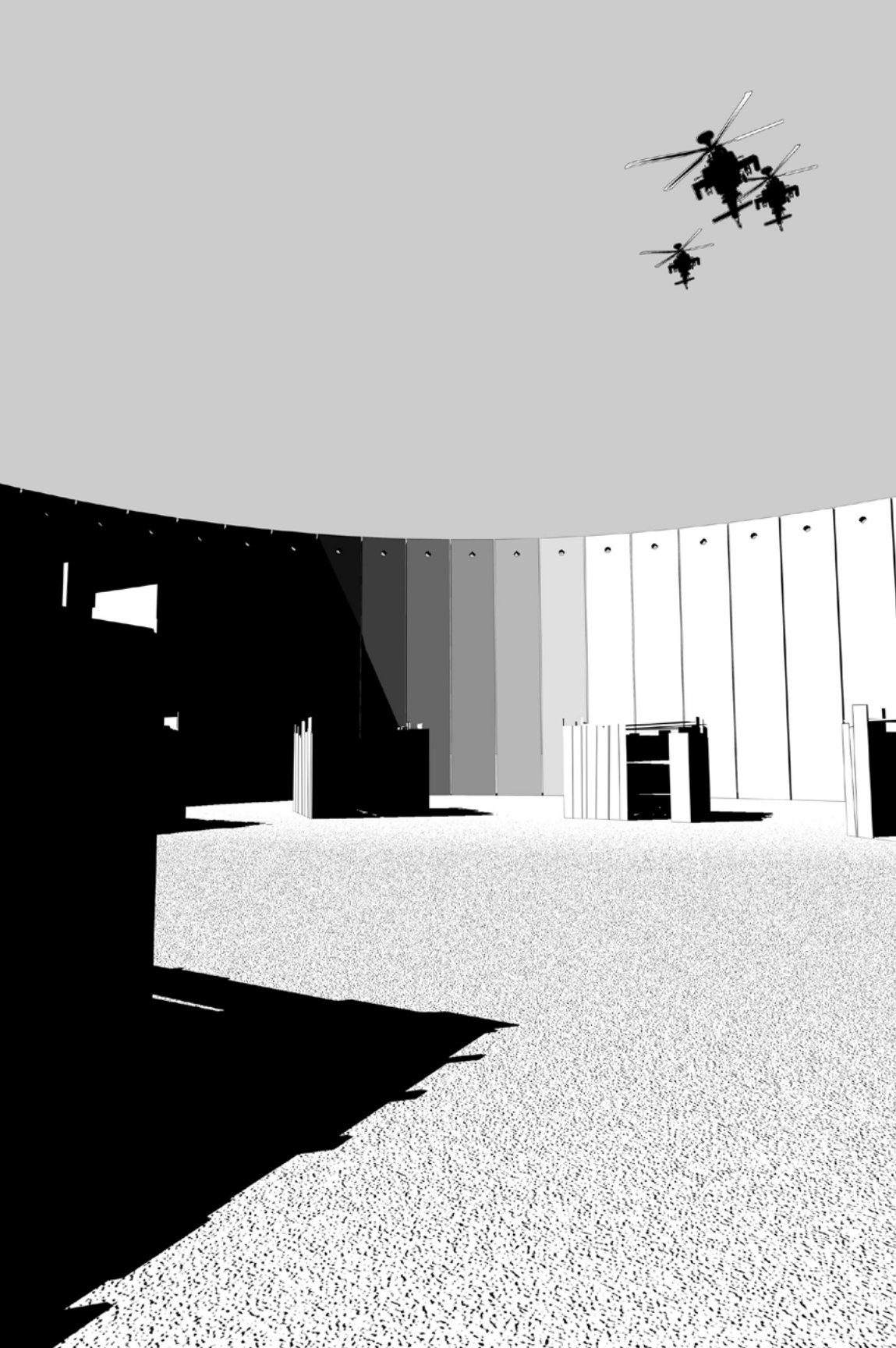
The graphic novel *Lost in the Line* somehow materializes an allegory of what I could call my architectural manifesto. The line constitutes the medium used by each architect as a tool and representation code. Geometrically speaking, it does not have any thickness, which makes it hard to imagine the idea of somebody getting lost in it. When it is drawn by the architect, however, the line is susceptible to acquire a consequent thickness when it is transposed to reality. In fact, a line that becomes a wall not only acquires a height in the transposition of a piece of paper to a tridimensional milieu but, more importantly, it includes in its oxymoronic thickness, a violence towards the territory that it splits and the bodies that it irresistibly controls. Architecture is therefore inherently violent, and any attempt to diffuse this power on the body is pointless. Perhaps can we, on the contrary, accept this violence and integrate it within our manifestos. *Lost in the Line* is therefore a narrative allegory of such a position. Within it, the line is both this geometrical figure traced on a piece of paper and that splits the desert into two parts, but also a fractal and quasi-molecular component contained within the dark matter of the pencil's graphite left on the paper. The bodies in this story are veritably submitted to the violence of the lines that divide space all around them. Nevertheless, they appropriate the interstices triggered by those same lines to move in all directions, build new forms on dwellings and eventually cross the original line (the one that contains all the others) that used to constitute an impenetrable border at the macroscopic level.

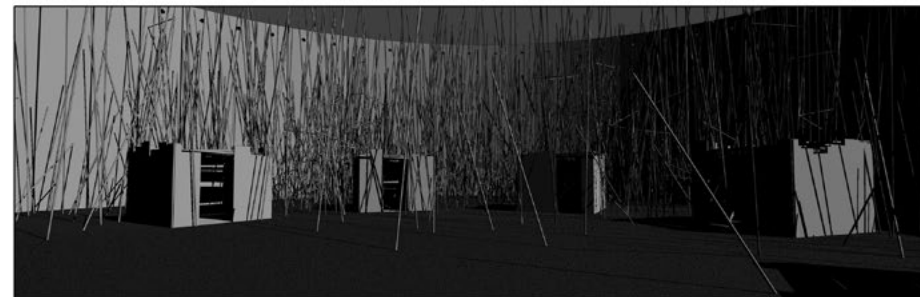
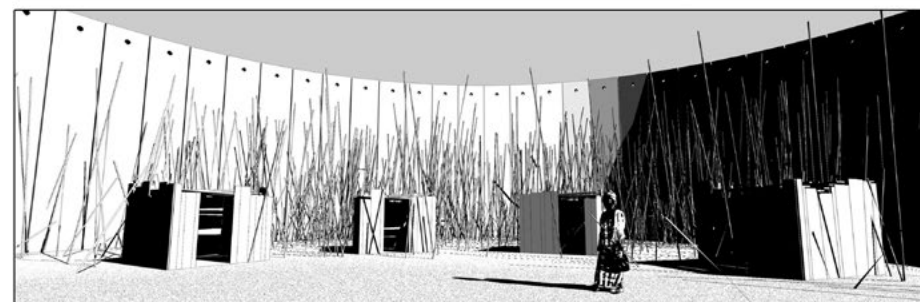
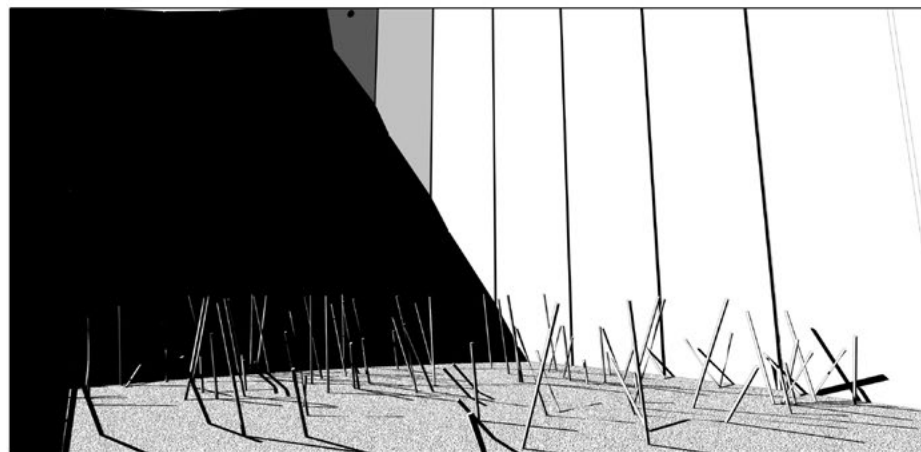
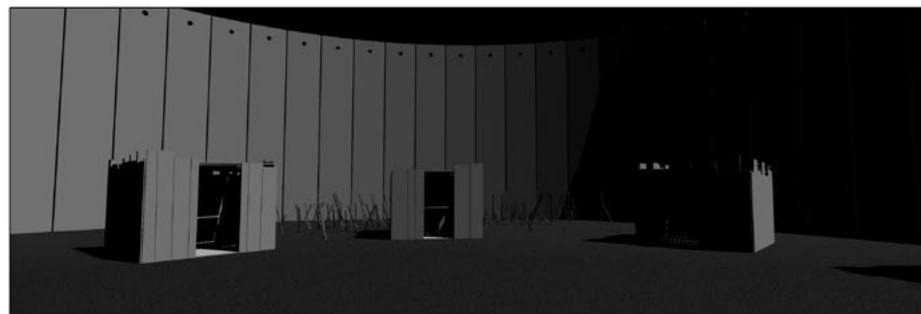
This story also questions the control that the architect exercises on his design, and thus exercises on the bodies that are subjected to the design's materialized version that we commonly call architecture. The notion of labyrinth is interesting here. Indeed, the labyrinth, in its bi-dimensional classical form constitutes the absolute paradigm of the transcendental architecture that exercise control on its "subjects." The latter are getting lost in it until exhaustion under the mocking supervision of the demiurge architect who observes this game from above. However, the literature of Franz Kafka invented a new form of

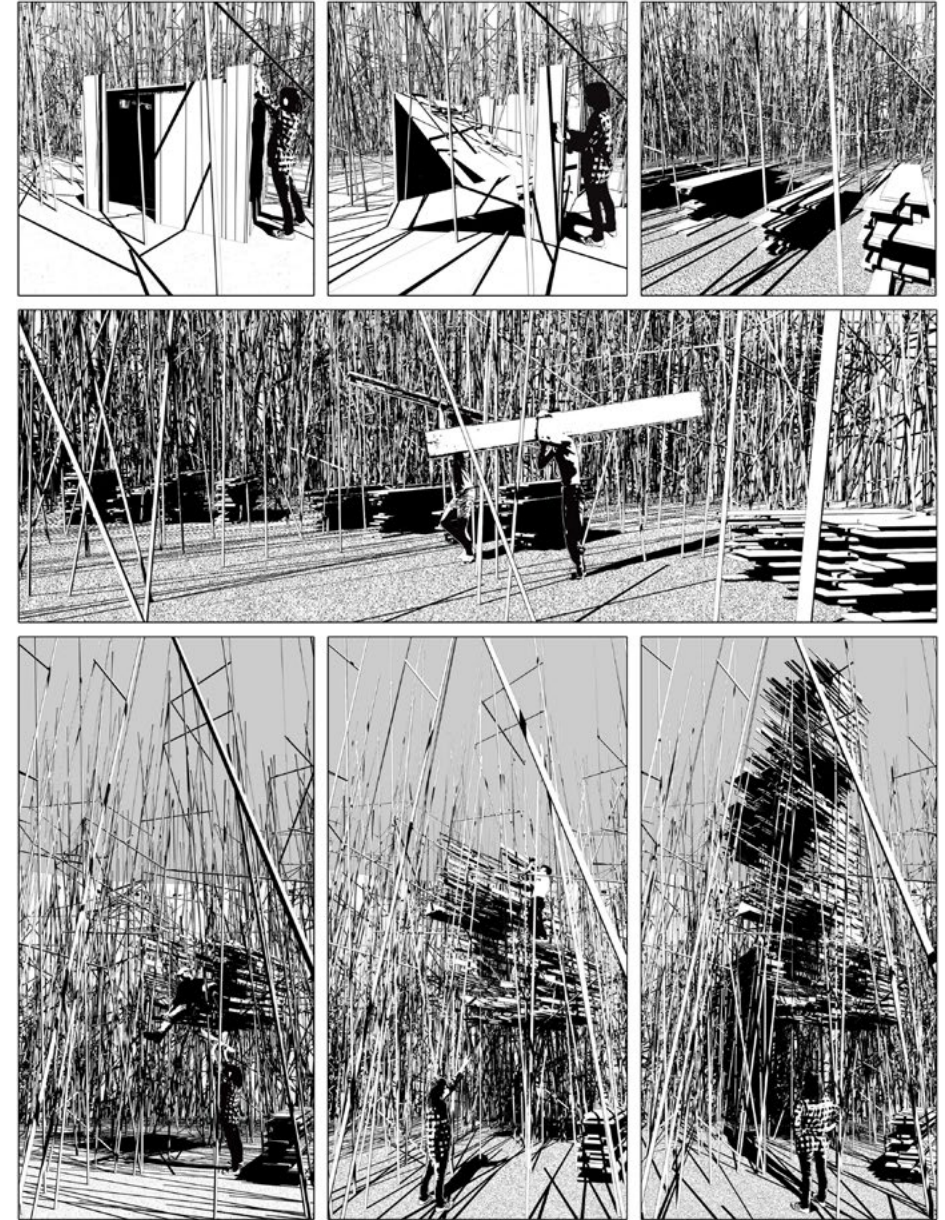
labyrinth, one in which the author does not escape from the complexity of his production. Let's recall here that beyond the bureaucratic labyrinths described in *The Trial* (1925) and *The Castle* (1926), Kafka did not seem to have determined a chapter order for the former nor an end to the latter. *Lost in the Line* thus introduces a level of complexity over which the author of the line has no control. The ambiguity between the graphic novel author and the one of the line described here is useful as it reinforces the "lines" of subjectivity that "enjoy" such loss of control. This loss, when it is well thought through, allows the bodies to appropriate, to conquer the built matter.

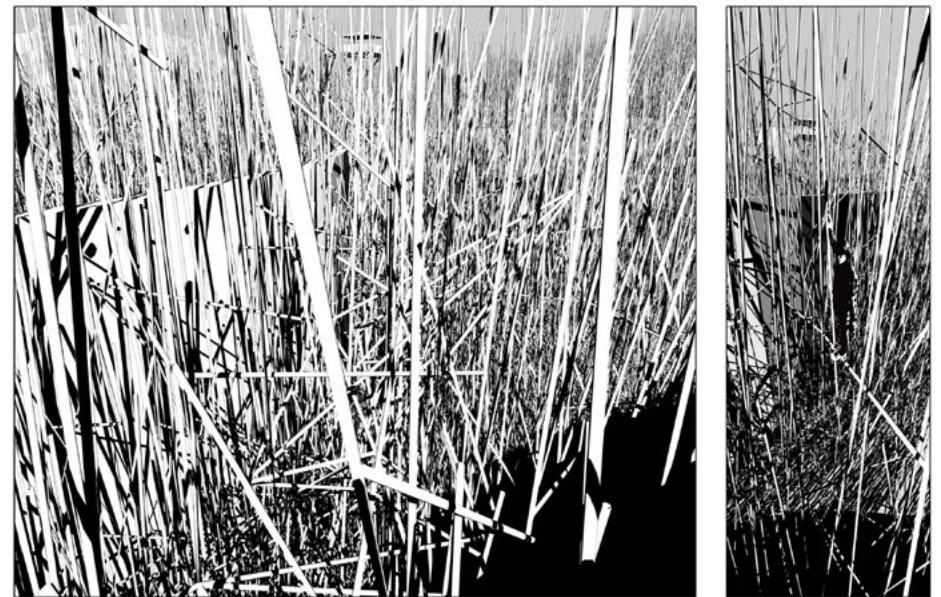
The character of the funambulist who walks on the line in a refusal to be subject to their splitting effect also has something to do in this allegorical manifesto. Of course, this character is not liberated from the line, but (s)he plays enough with the line's power to subvert its primary intention. On November 9th 1989, Berliners did not express the nullness of the wall by crossing it in both directions, but rather in climbing up it and set them up on its edge, thus occupying this six-inch wide world that used to surround the West part of the city. The example of the wall has been proclaimed as paradigmatic of political architecture due to the simplicity of its line and its filiation in Palestine, Cyprus and between the United States and Mexico. The power of their line is indeed optimal, but we would be wrong to distinguish a political architecture from one that would not be. All architecture, and therefore all traced line, is a political weapon whether it is thought and drawn as such or not. To attempt to escape from this affirmation constitutes a risk to reinforce the dominant ideology.

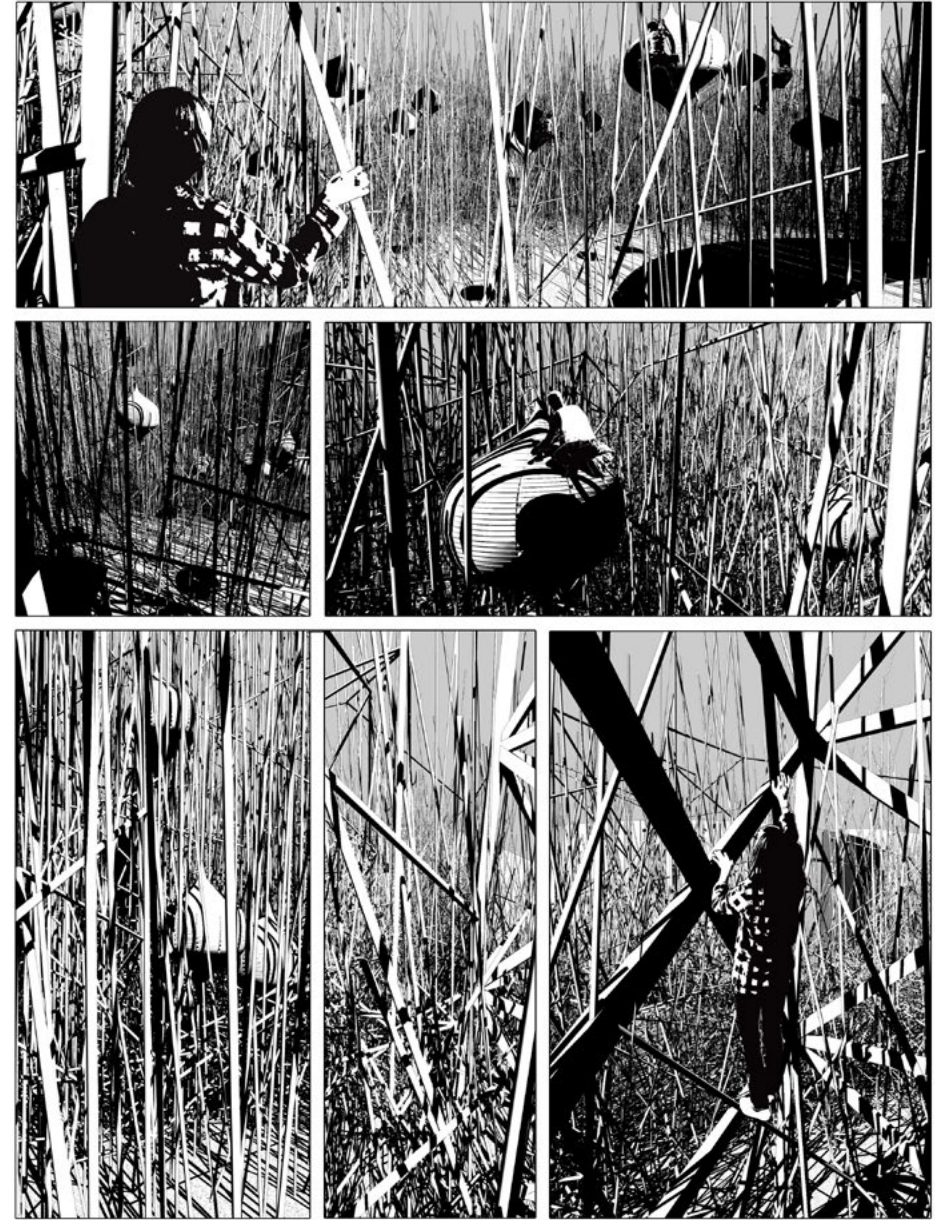
Our lines can therefore not be innocent. They carry in each of them the power of subjectivization of the bodies. What we can do is to try to make this subjectivization escaping as much as possible from a transcendental control so that it can allow a potential of appropriation and emancipation, which is the base of any conscious political act.

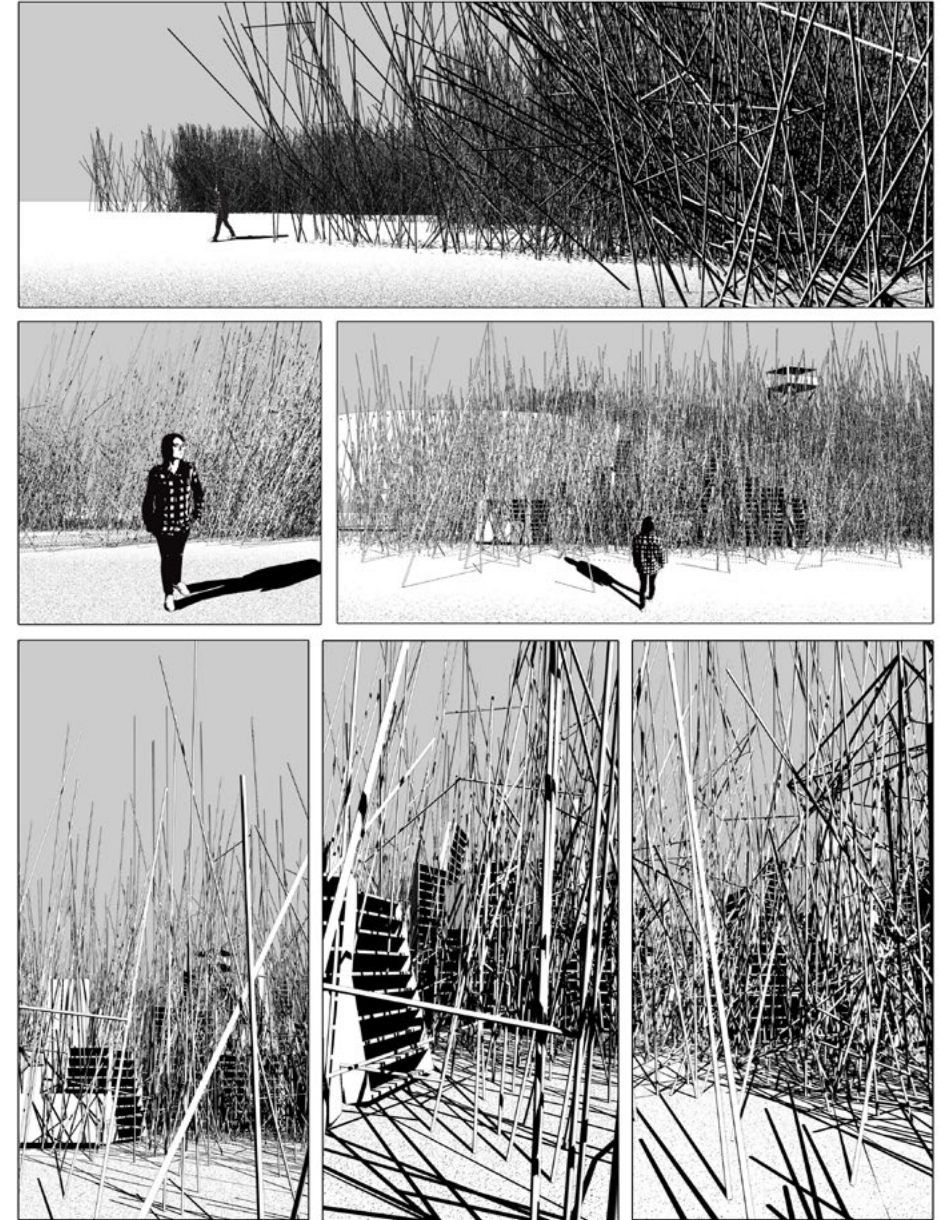
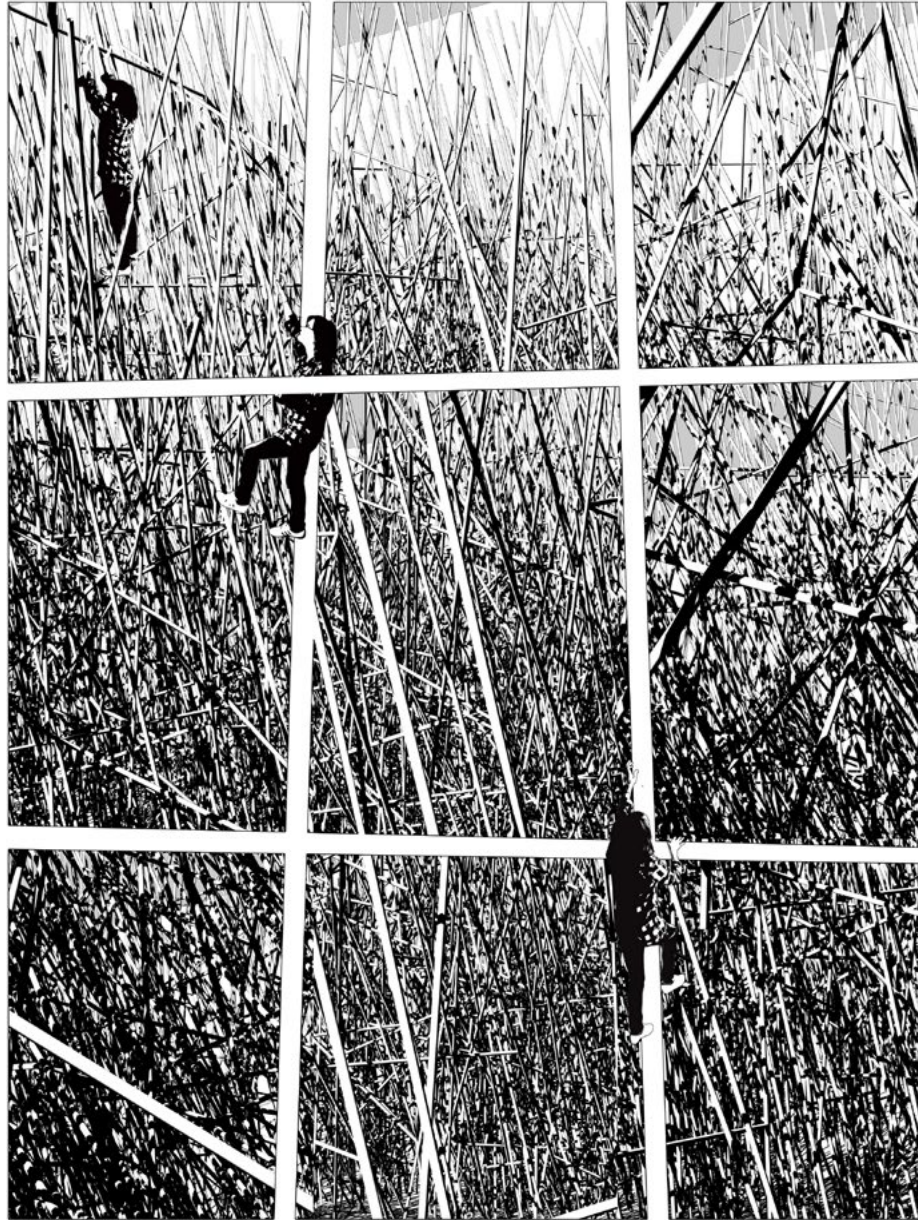




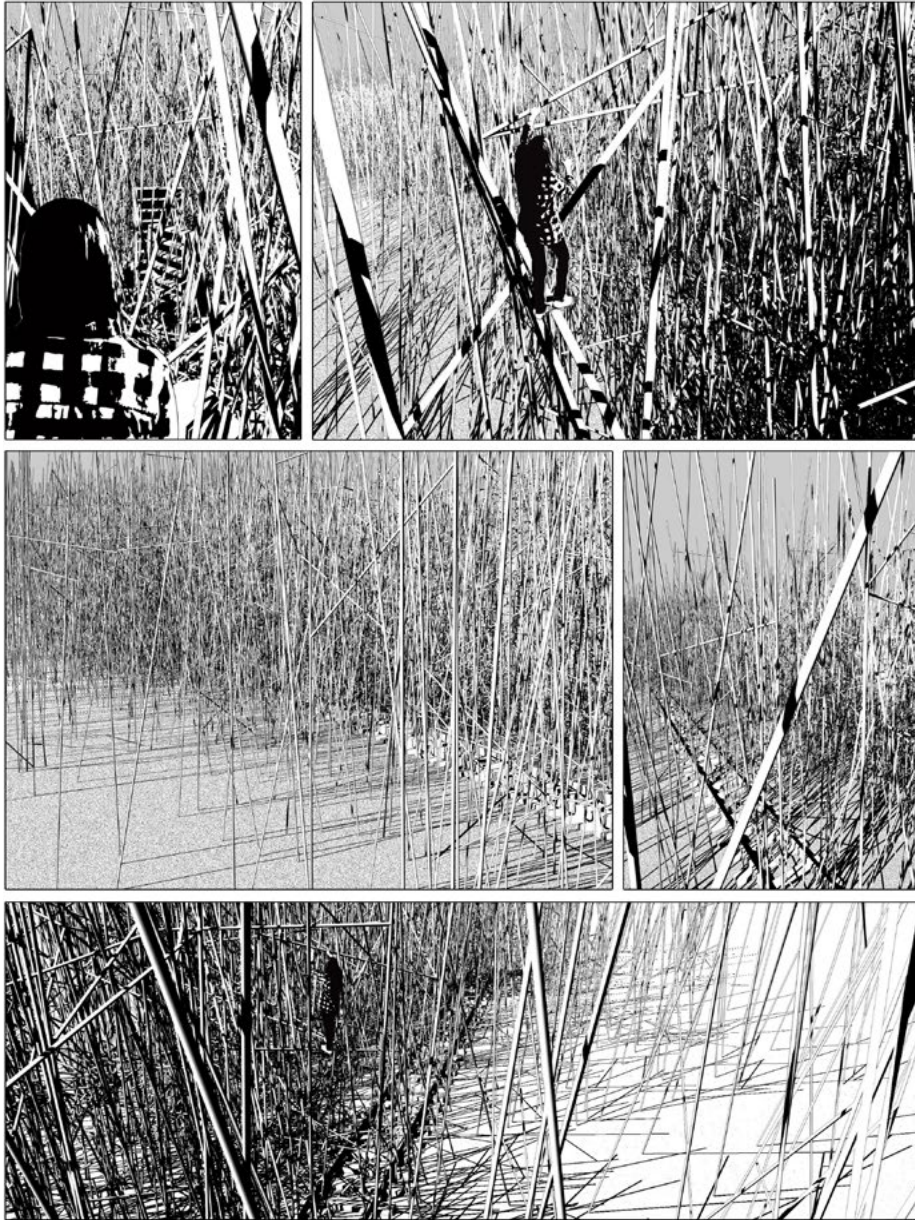


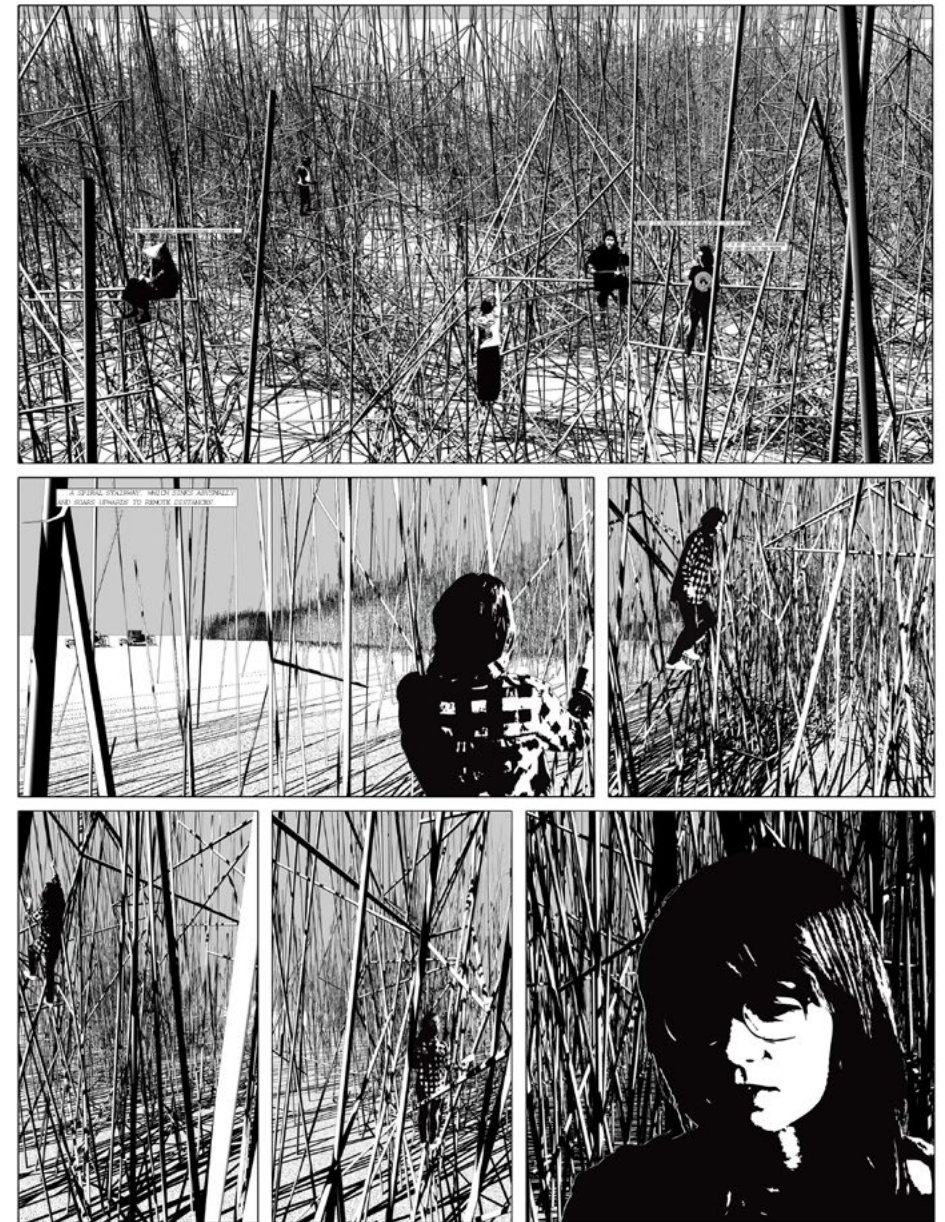


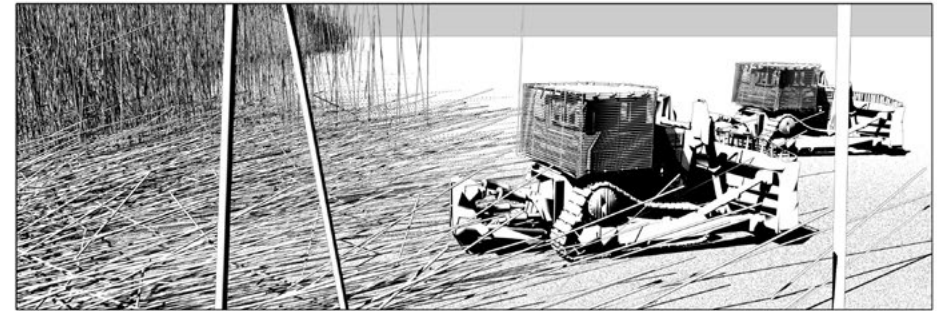
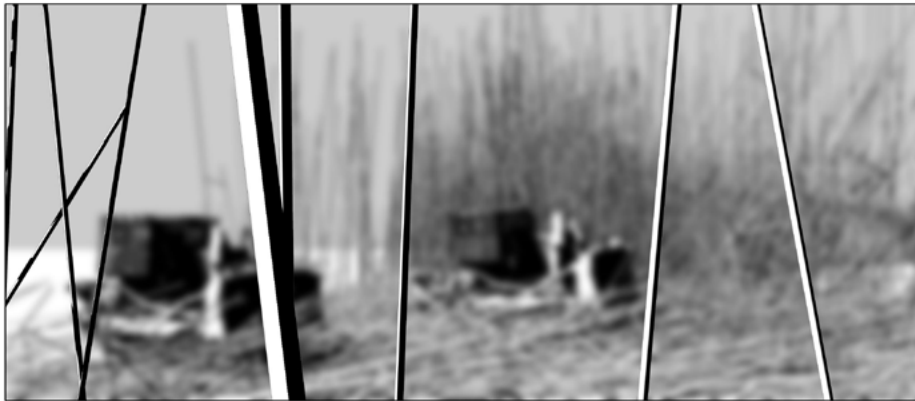
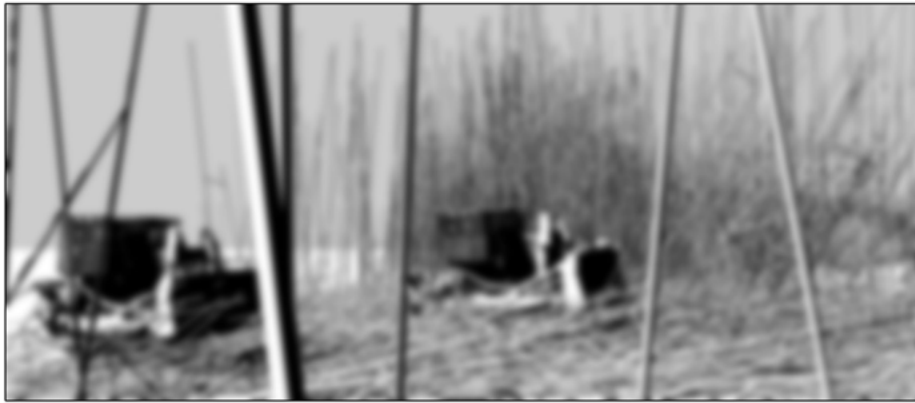


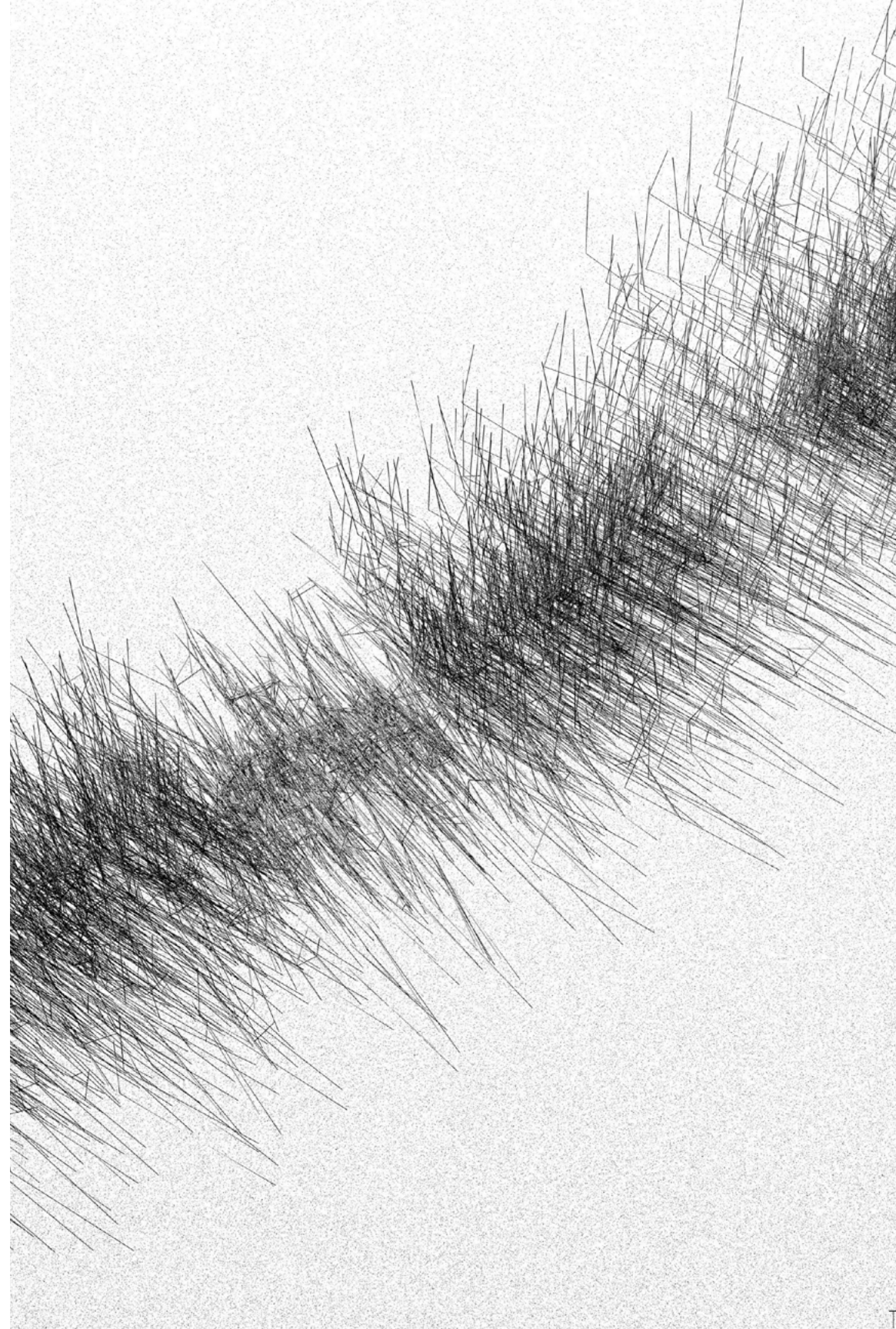






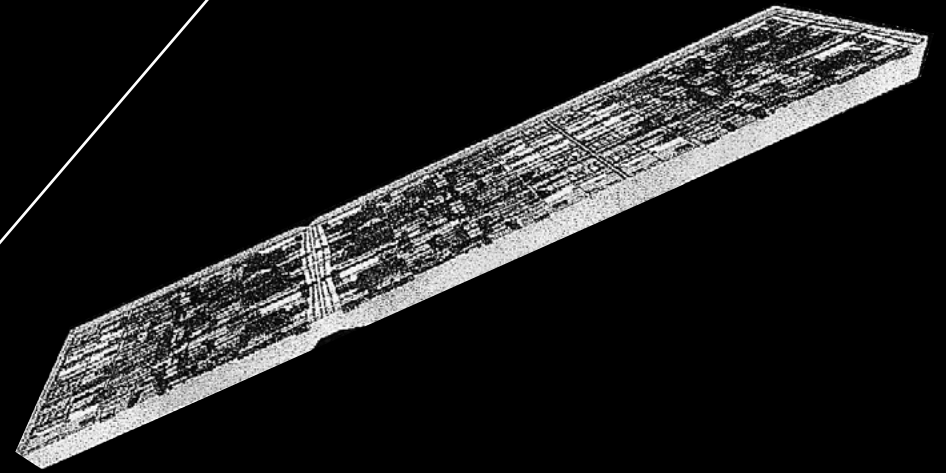






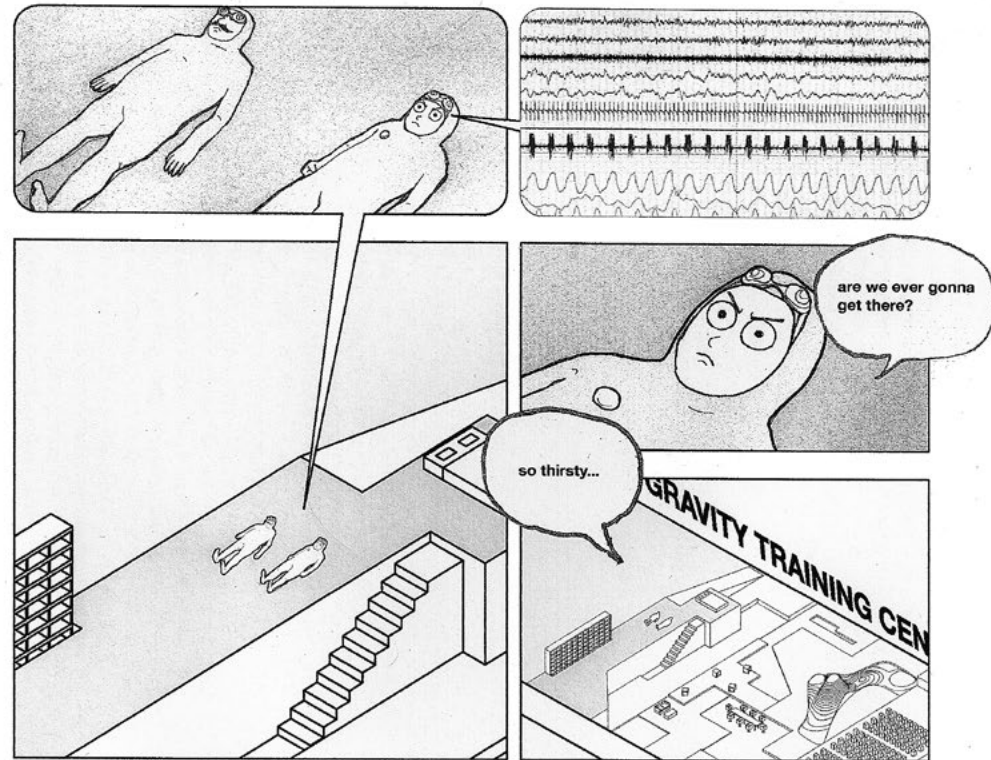
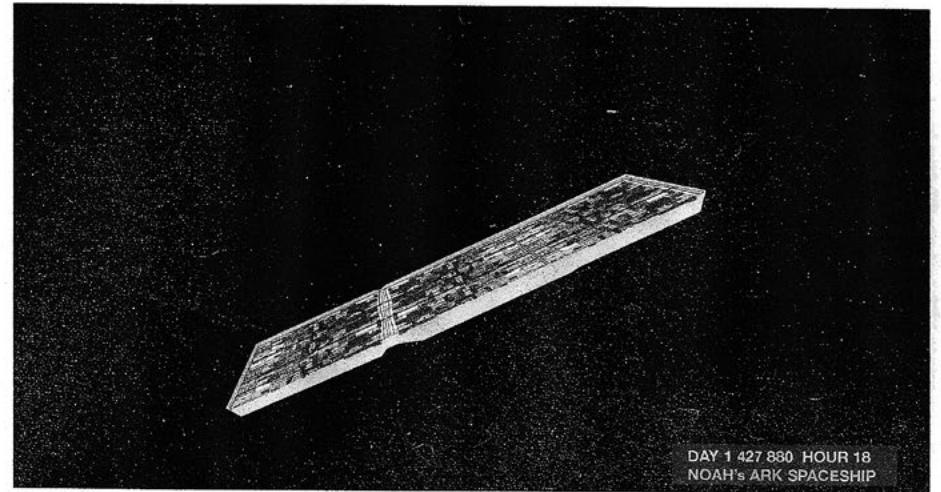
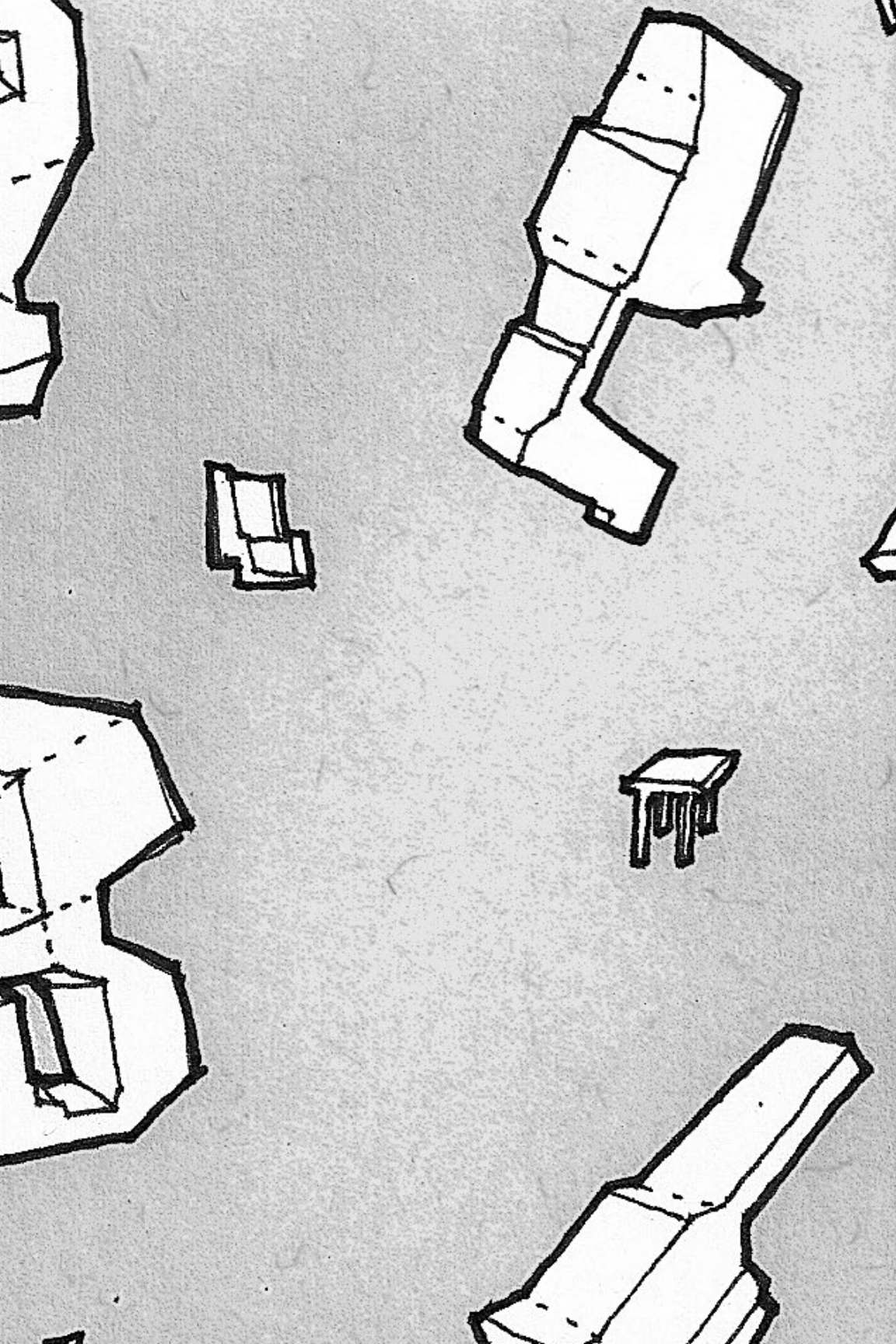
Graphic Novel
by
JIMENEZ LAI

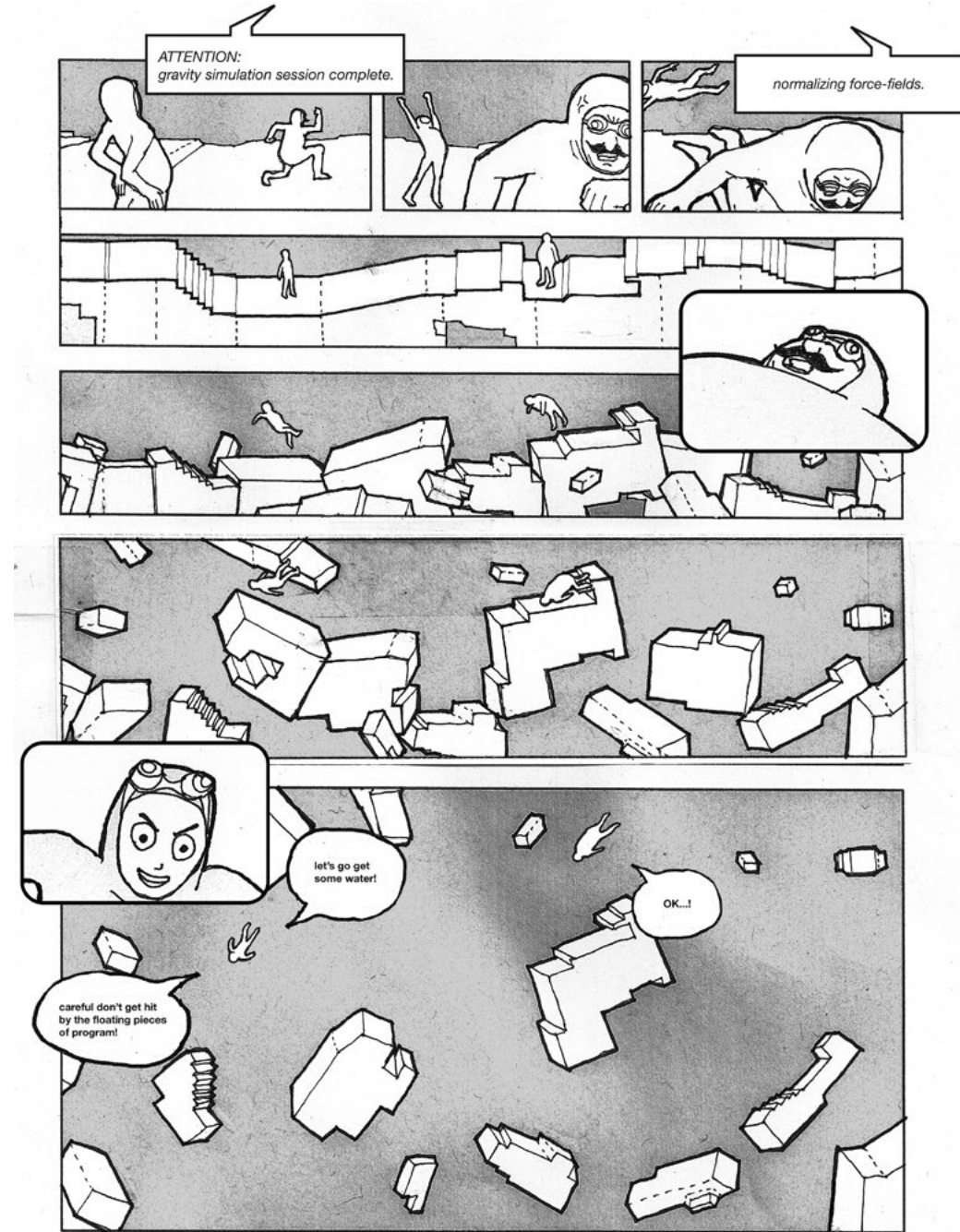
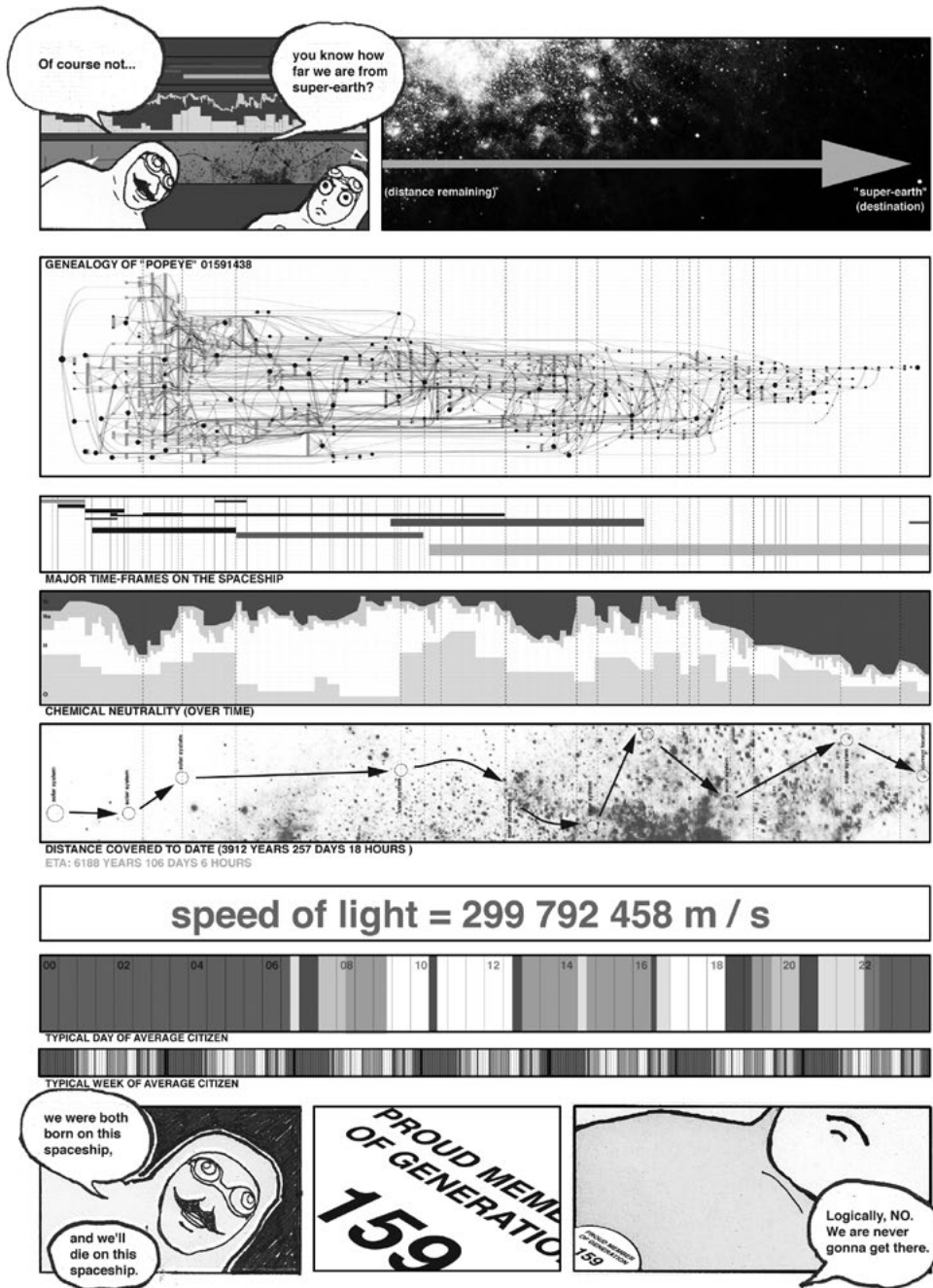
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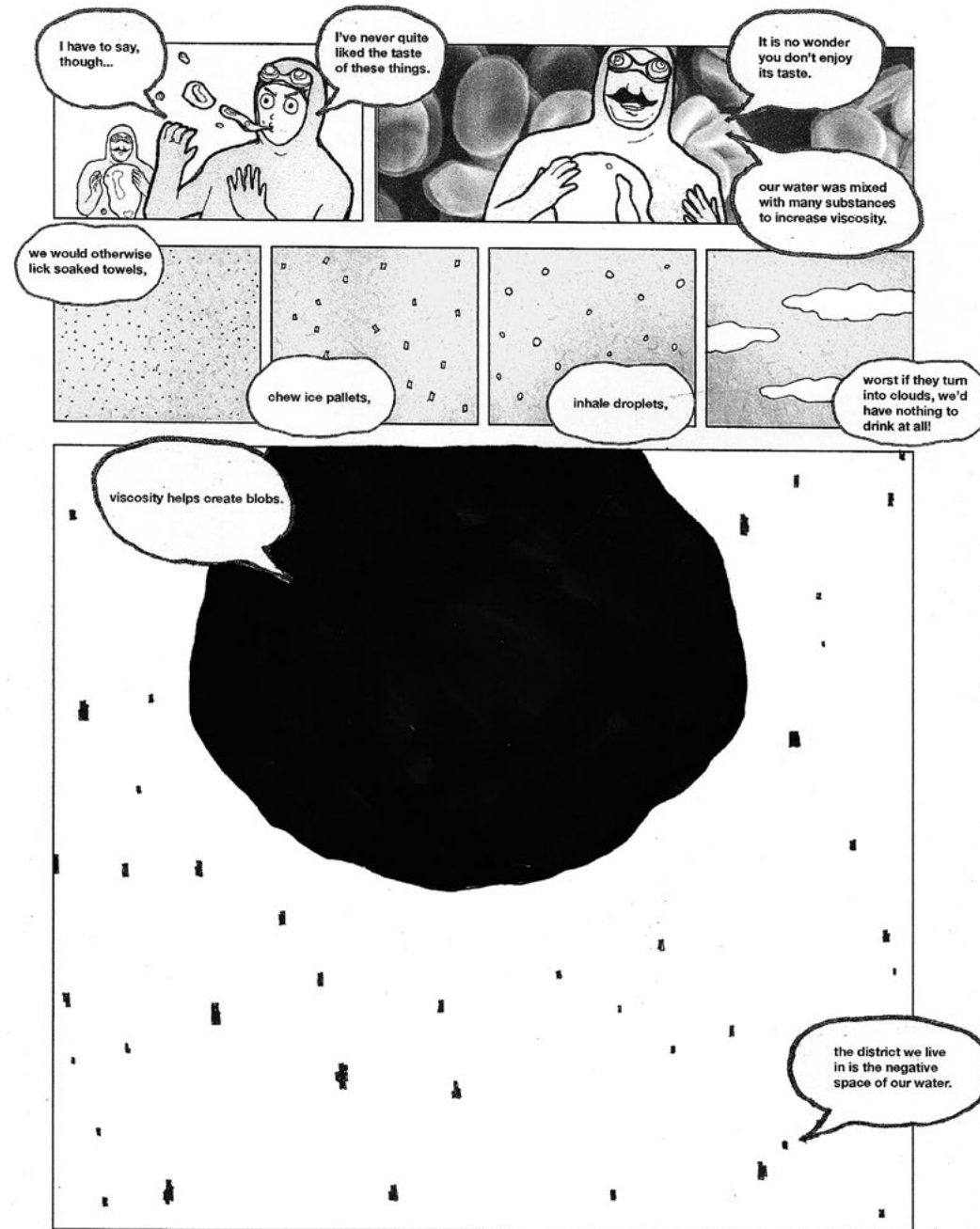
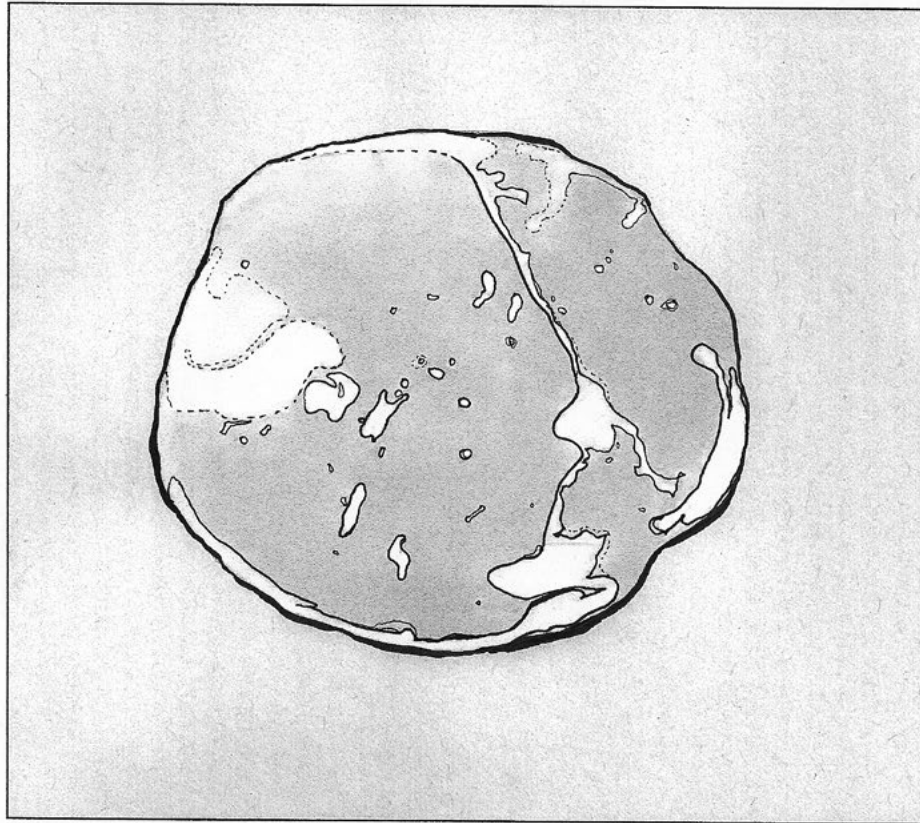
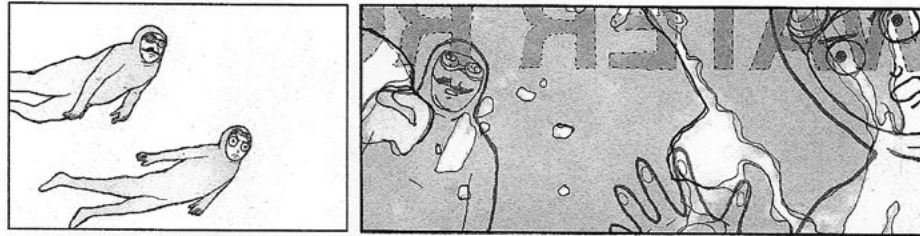


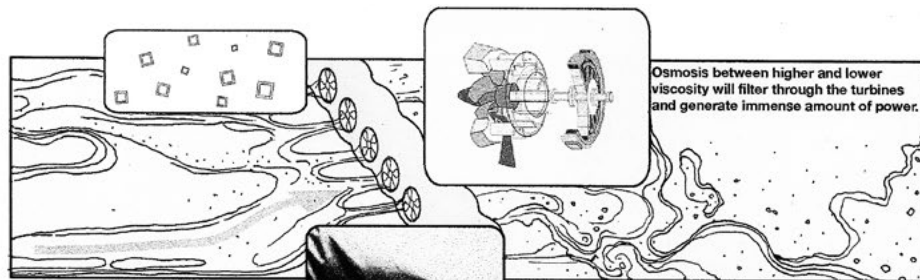
Out of Water graphic novel (Detail)
© Jimenez Lai

of water



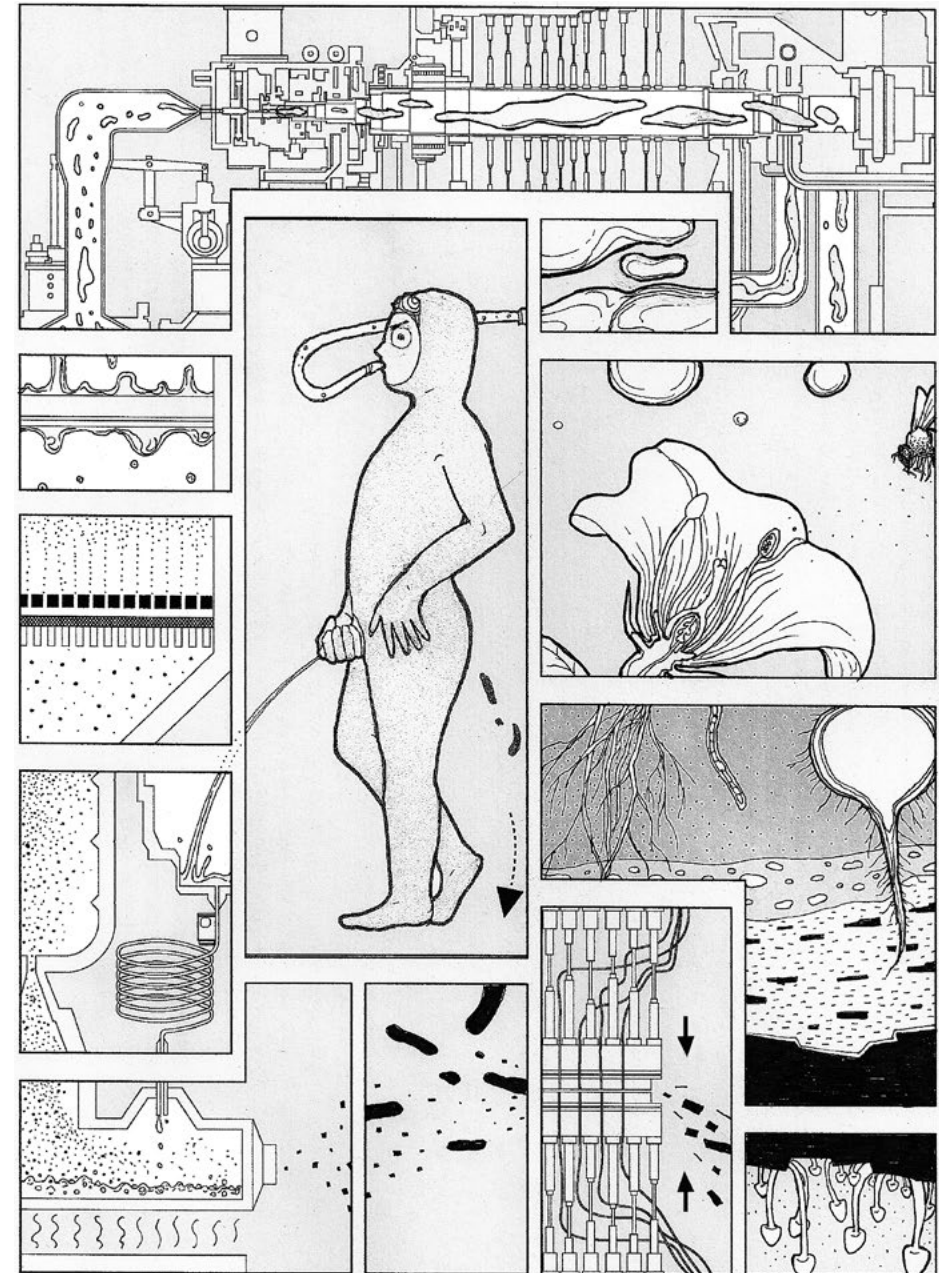
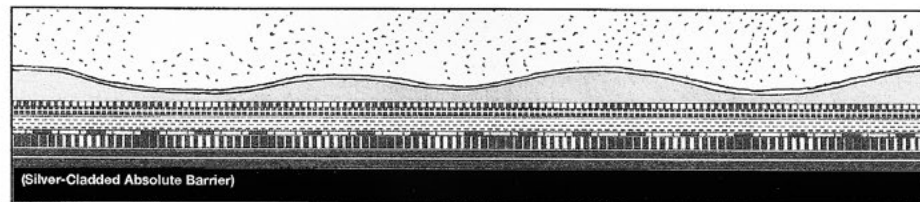
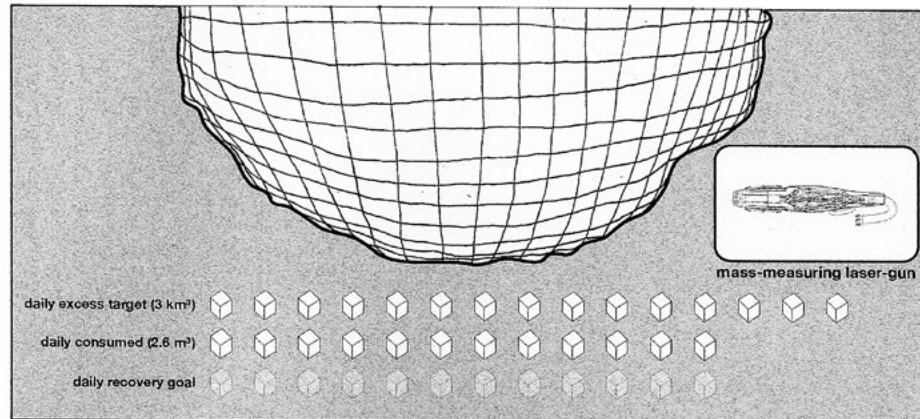


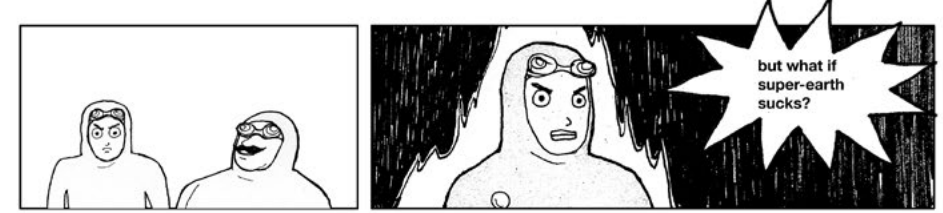
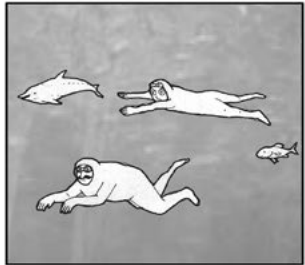
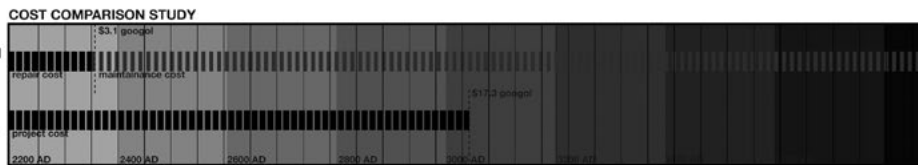
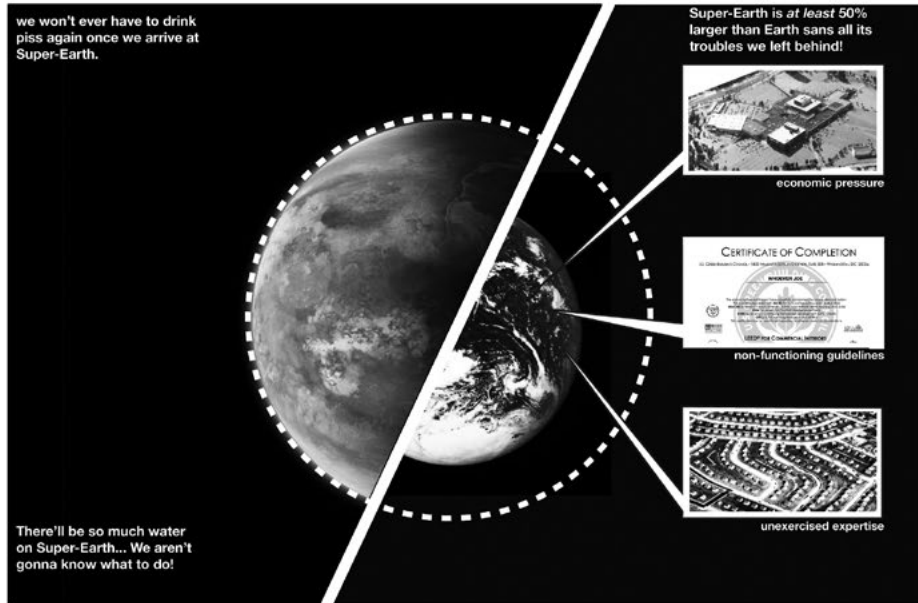




An entire room made of Silver because it is the best conductor. When turbines generate, this Silver Wall becomes a white hot source of light energy.

Algae benefits from the light source and performs photosynthesis. Providing oxygen, glucose and water retention. It is also the base of our food-chain.

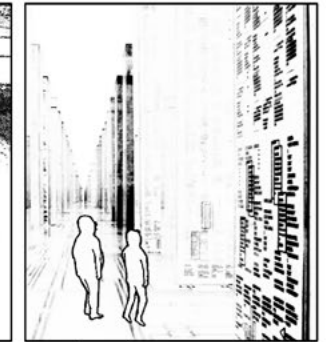




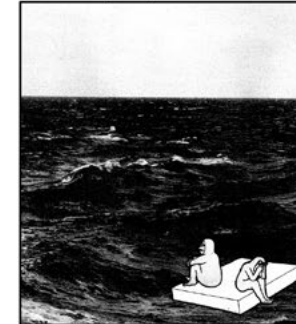
too much gravity



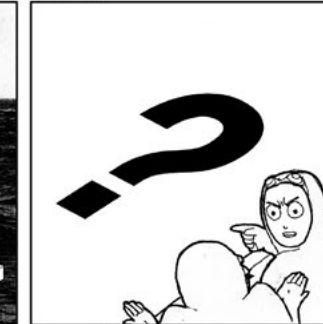
freezing



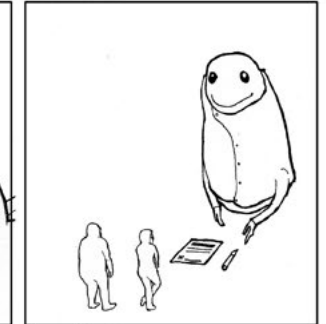
too advanced



too wet



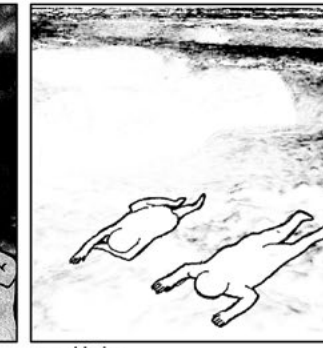
does not exist



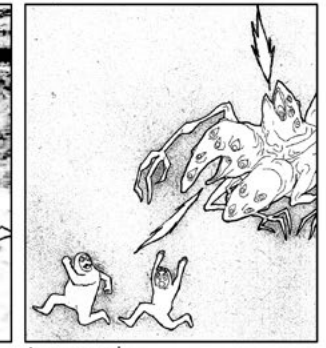
too political



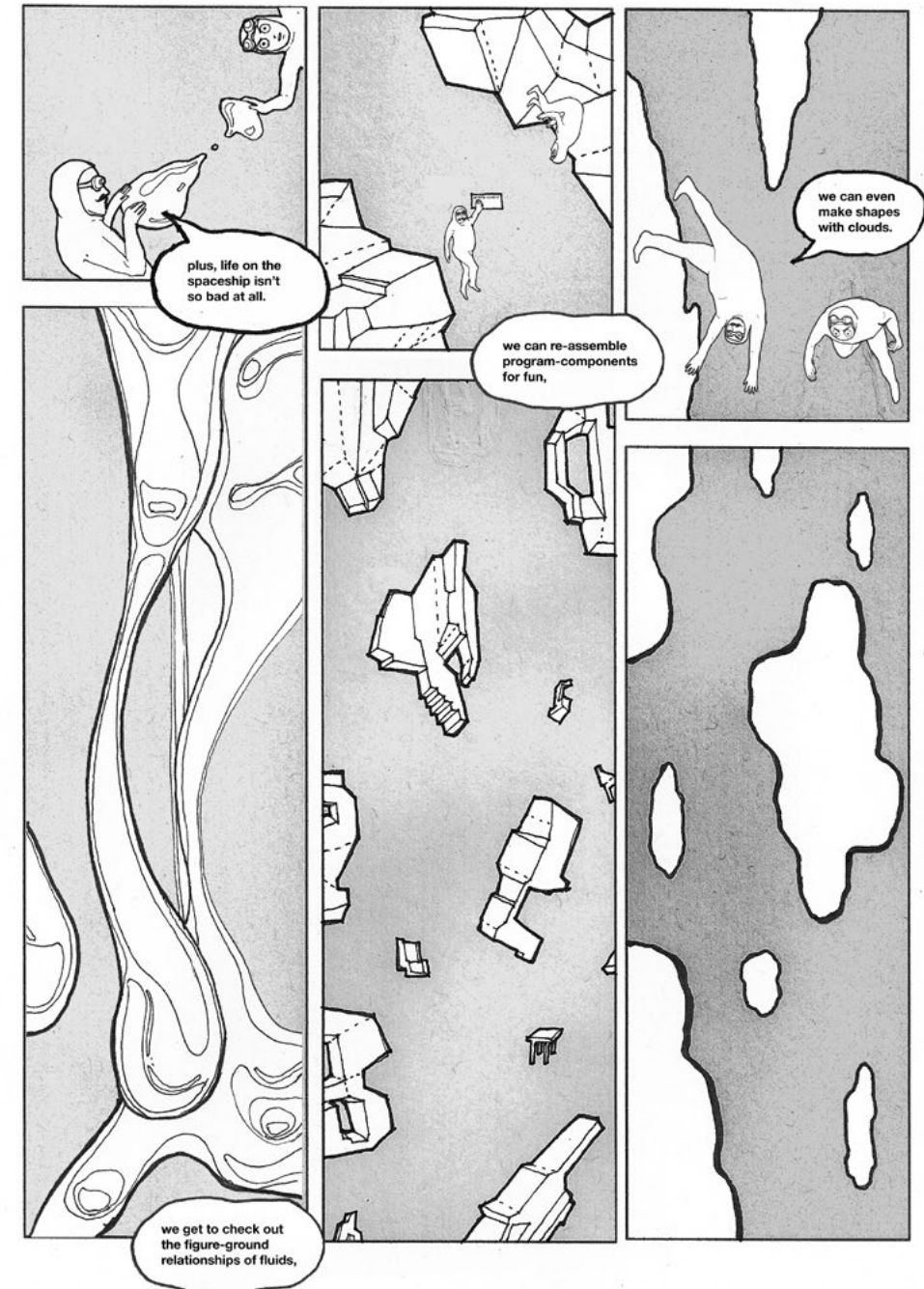
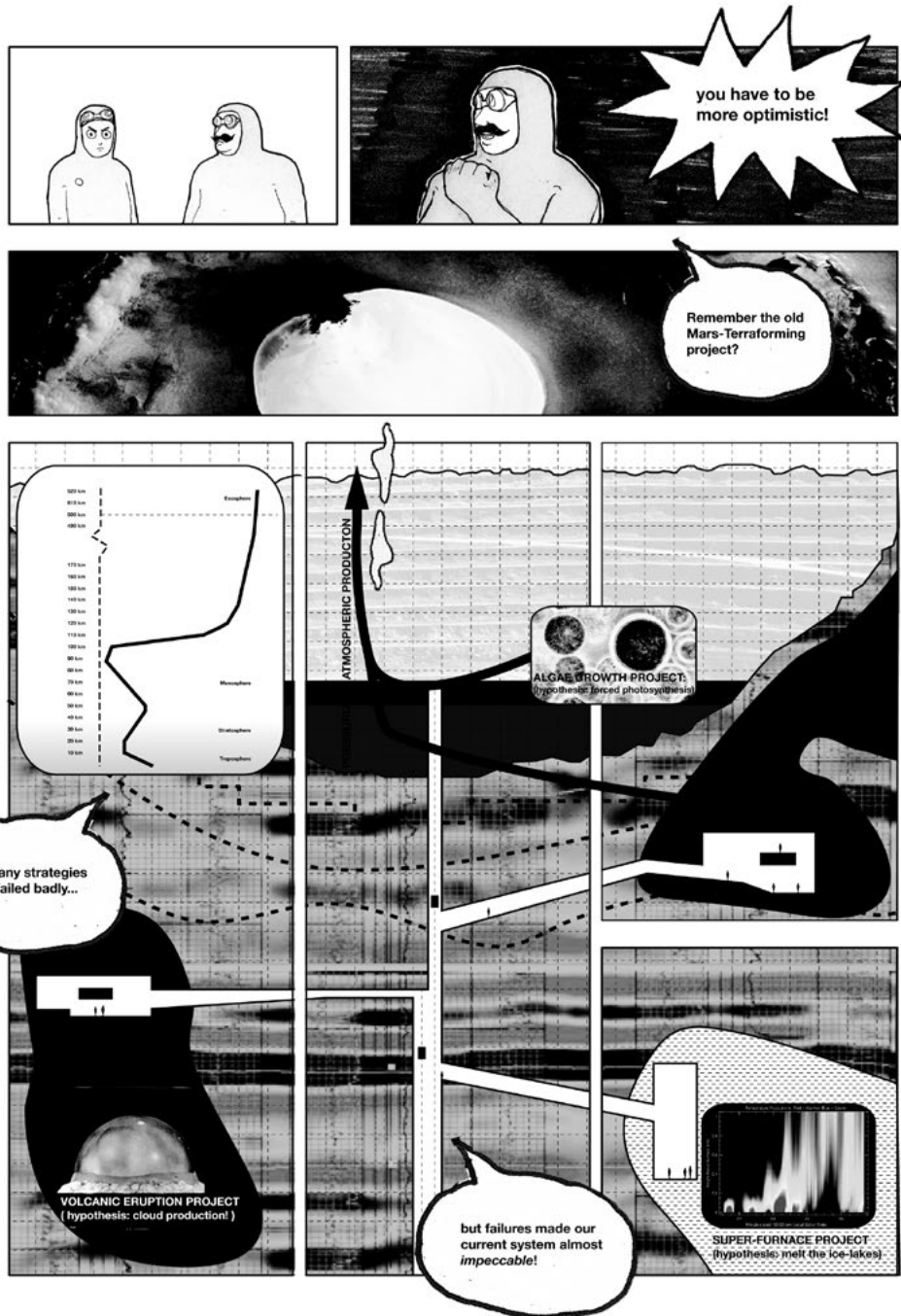
too toxic

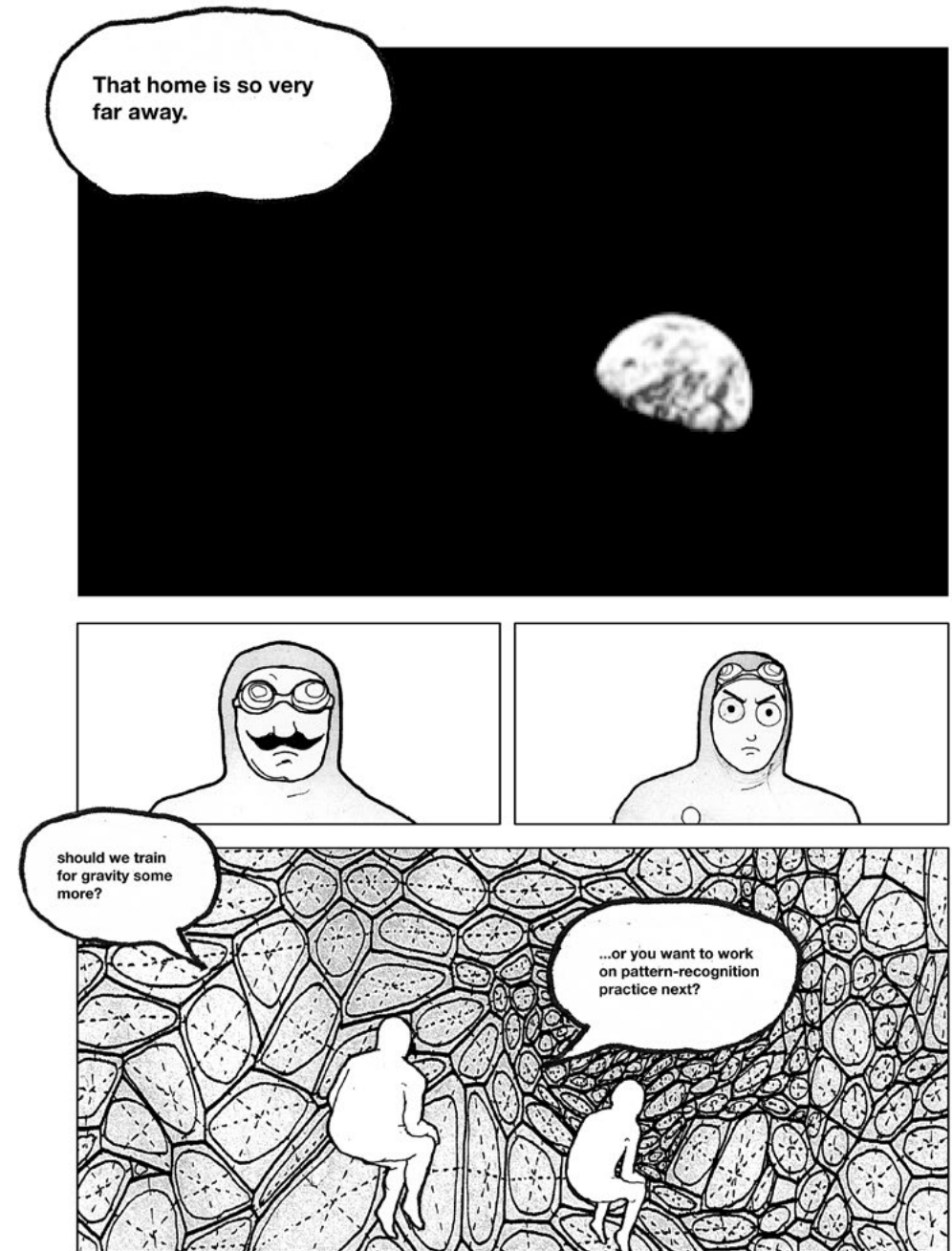
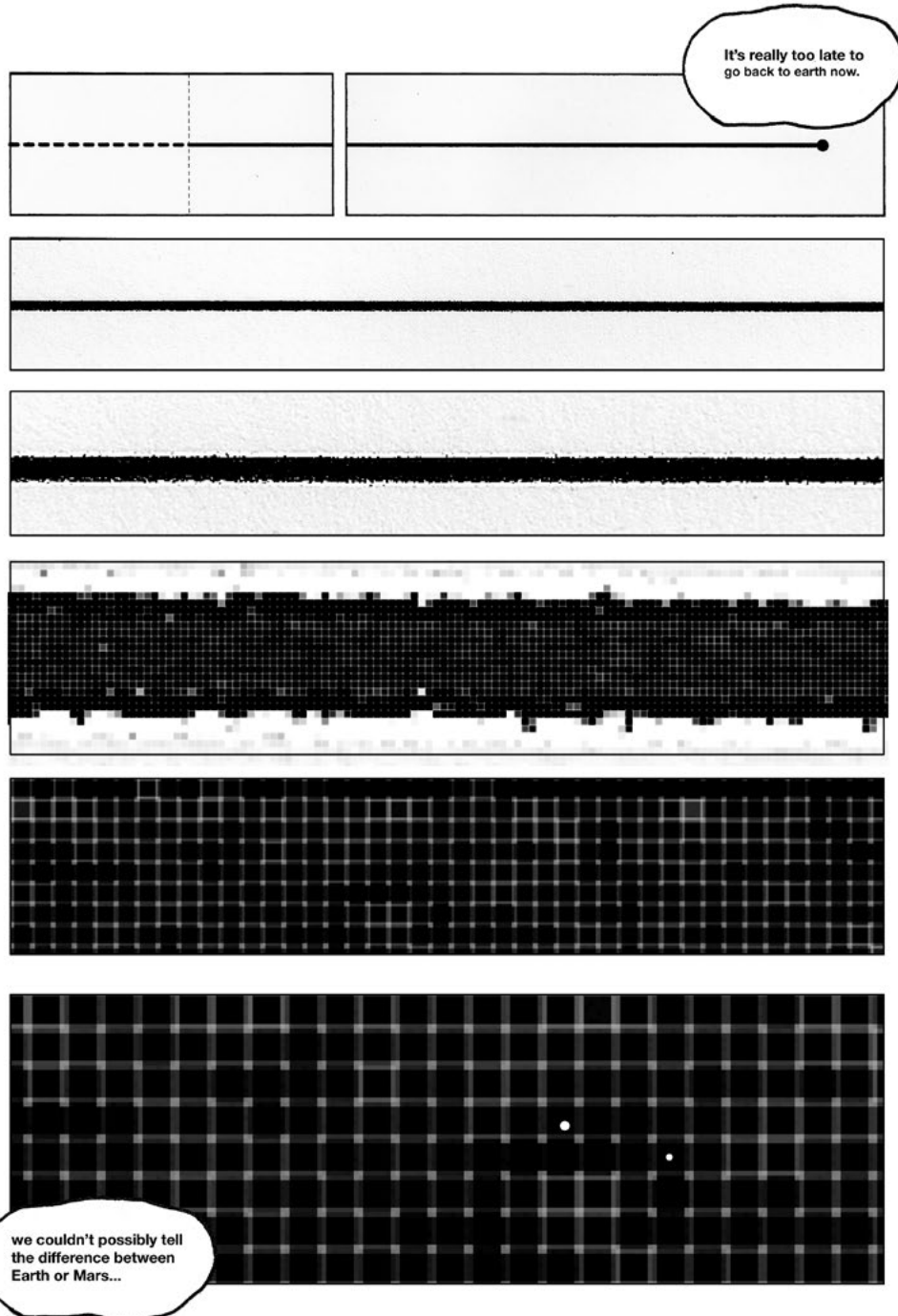


smoldering



too aggressive





Graphic Novel
by

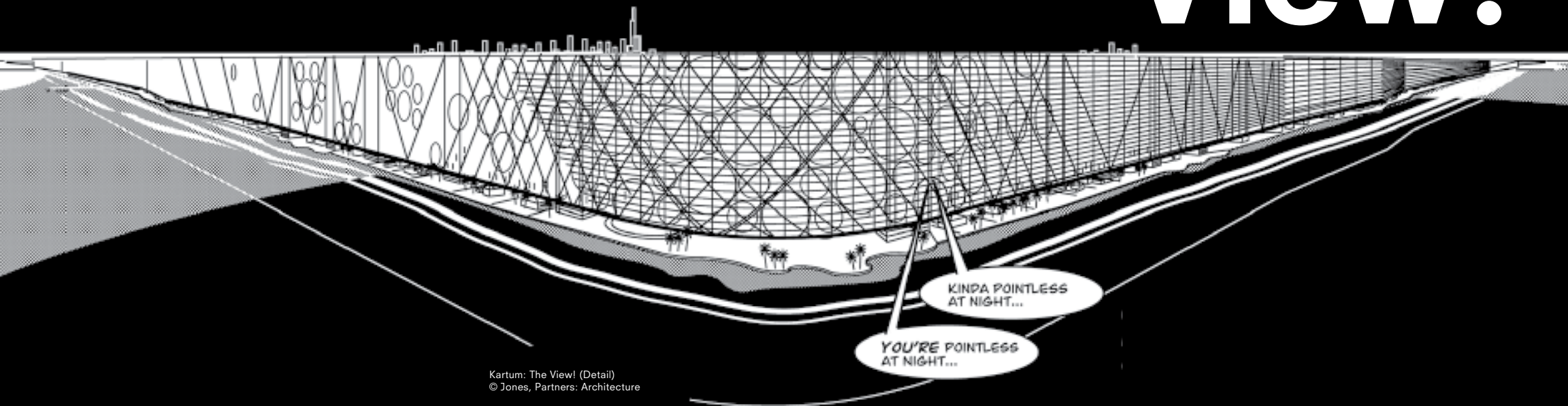
JONES,
PARTNERS: ARCHITECTURE,
MARK SIMMONS,

and
THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTURE

Kartun

the

View!



Dubai's identity is summed up for the world stage by the terra-formed Palms and World Islands reaching out from its shoreline along the Gulf. Initially Sheikh Mohammed's idea for increasing the amount of valuable waterfront property, these projects have expanded the natural 40 km coastline into almost 2,000 km of beachfront. However spectacular the view of these icons are from space, the experience of them at ground does not fulfill the promise of this endless beachfront; it turns out that it is not necessarily beachfront, with its implications of water-oriented activity, that developers are seeking; rather they are interested only in a view of the water.

Yes, if the view is the principal attraction, developers have not done an adequate job of offering high quality views for residents. On Palm Jumeirah, Dubai's first Palm development, for example, large apartment slabs line the palm's trunk, blocking any view of the water for the inward facing units. Even along the fronds, the private villa's view of the narrow waterway between is marred by the immediate presence of their neighbors on the adjacent frond across the way. Even the most expensive sites out at the end of the frond cul-de-sacs look across the lagoon at the circumscribing island, with its hotels and larger developments. There are also limitations on how many more man-made island developments Dubai's territorial waters can manage. Investors in the World Islands are already voicing their unease with the new development of the Universe, which they argue will interfere with the ocean views they were promised.

KDG enters this situation with a project that aims to maximize the aspect of waterfront living that developers have highlighted—water view. Following the logic of the trend to its natural conclusion, a development providing 100% unobstructed water view for every unit is imagined. Since there are no more areas available within the territorial waters of the gulf to terra-form, the aspiration for such universal water view can be realized only in one location: along the existing natural (pre-terra formed) coastline of the emirate. Thus, in the spirit of Sheikh Mohammed's original Palm sketch, a single-loaded, twenty-nine story residential slab is proposed to run most of the length of Dubai's coastline, providing 117,900 units with literally unparalleled views of the Arabian Gulf. Future and existing land developments build up 69 square miles of area in the water, yielding a profit of 83.2 billion dollars. KDG can match this profit with no land reclamation necessary. On the mainland, 83 square miles of land would have to be occupied within the city to match the profit we can achieve. Because all units face the water and the slab is perceptually straight, each unit has a sense of complete isolation from the rest, including its immediately adjacent neighbors. This development will allow the iconic shapes of the Palms and World Islands to be perceived for the first time from earth itself, and in a way that does not compromise the view of the water itself, as it does from ground level in the fronds. Potentially, KDG's proposal, itself only occupying less than half of a square mile, can free up the land behind the shorefront for public use. The width of the proposed building is determined by pursuing

maximum view from interior living spaces, residential and circulatory function, and natural light in each unit.

Paradoxically, the new structure will not actually block any current views of the water, because it will span over the tops of the existing villas presently lining the shore, touching down only on parking garages that fill the remaining void spaces and empty lot along the shore; the views of the existing low-rise construction located behind the proposal is already blocked by the villas on the beachfront. In fact, for those buildings located behind the first rank of waterfront properties, the new structure will actually provide a visible index of the location of the waterfront, previously invisible behind the private development along the beach. Because of the height of the proposed structure, this index will be visible for some distance inland, giving all residents of Dubai a reference line for the presence of the gulf and datum against which to measure their daily travels. In fact, the twenty story inland façade of this project will be animated by a gridded system of half-story, rotating "pixels," comprising what amounts to a 43 miles long public-service information billboard. These pixels will have a black, photovoltaic side and white, phosphorescent side—allowing each to absorb solar energy during the day that can be used at night to continue the display, courtesy of the emitted phosphorescent light, as well as light the single-loaded corridor behind, without any energy cost.

CREDITS

Venice Biennale (2008) / Dubai Stories
Title: 'Kartun: The View!'

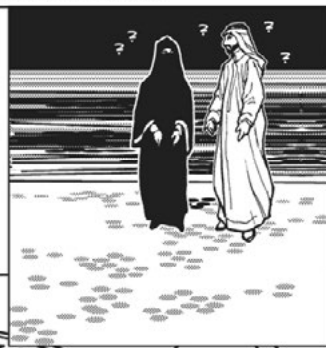
Jones, Partners: Architecture
Wes Jones
Steven Purvis

Figures drawn by
Mark Simmons

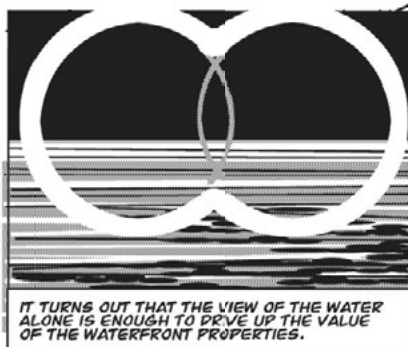
**Southern California Institute
of Architecture**
**Southern California Institute
of Future Initiatives**
Mary Aramian
Jennifer Dinardo
Ming-Chen Chang
Necmi Karaman

DUBAI IS KNOWN THE WORLD OVER FOR ITS TERRA-FORMED PALMS, EXTENDING 8 KILOMETERS OUT INTO THE GULF AND VISIBLE FROM SPACE. THESE ICONIC FIGURES HAVE EXPANDED THE EMIRATE'S NATURAL 43 MILE COASTLINE TO ALMOST 6500 MILES OF DEVELOPABLE BEACHFRONT.

THE PLAN BEHIND SHEIKH MOHAMMED'S BRAINSTORM WAS TO PROVIDE MORE WATERFRONT PROPERTIES. IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME. AS IT HAPPENS, THOUGH, FOR LOTS OF GOOD CULTURAL AND CLIMATIC REASONS, NO ONE ACTUALLY WANTS TO GO IN THE WATER!

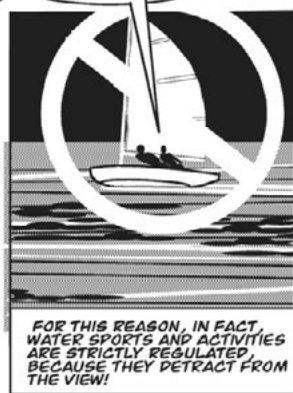


YET THE FIRST PALM WAS SOON FOLLOWED BY PLANS FOR TWO MORE, AND THEN AN EVEN MORE AMBITIOUS DEVELOPMENT, THE WORLD, WAS ANNOUNCED.



IT TURNS OUT THAT THE VIEW OF THE WATER ALONE IS ENOUGH TO DRIVE UP THE VALUE OF THE WATERFRONT PROPERTIES.

WHERE IS EVERYBODY?



FOR THIS REASON, IN FACT, WATER SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES ARE STRICTLY REGULATED, BECAUSE THEY DETRACT FROM THE VIEW!



BUT IT'S MORE THAN JUST THOSE NASTY SAILBOATS THAT SPOIL THE VIEW...THERE'S ALSO THOSE PEEKY NEIGHBORS, ON PALM JUMEIRAH, DUBAI'S FIRST PALM DEVELOPMENT. ALMOST ALL THE VIEWS ARE COMPROMISED IN SOME WAY.

THE TRUNK OF THE PALM IS LINED WITH LARGE APARTMENT BLOCKS, LEAVING ITS MANY INWARD-FACING UNITS INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM ALL THE REST IN THE CITY.



WHO ARE THE NEW PEOPLE?

PROBABLY SOME RUSSIAN EXPATS....



OUT ON THE FRONTS IT ISN'T MUCH BETTER: THE PRIVATE VILLA'S LOOK RIGHT ACROSS THE NARROW WATERWAYS BETWEEN THEIR NEIGHBORS ON THE ADJACENT FRONTS. SO MUCH FOR ALL THAT WATERFRONT!

WE PAID FOR EXCLUSIVITY AND VIEWS OF EMPTY WATER, AND NOW WE WILL BE LOOKING OUT AT THE JOHNNY COME LATELY'S!

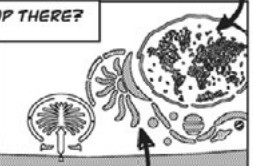
BUT SERIOUSLY, WON'T THE CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT OF THESE OFFSHORE ISLANDS COMPROMISE THE VIEW FROM EXISTING PALM AND ISLAND DEVELOPMENTS? AS THE NEW ISLANDS FILL IN THE SPACES BETWEEN THOSE ALREADY OUT THERE, THE WORLD ISLAND INVESTORS ARE VOICING RESENTMENT WITH THEIR SURPRISE NEW NEIGHBORS.

THE WORLD ISLANDS DEVELOPMENT LEARNED FROM THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE PALMS, OFFERING ENTIRE ISLANDS WITH 3600 PRIVATE VIEWS. EACH ISLAND IS FAR ENOUGH FROM THE OTHERS THAT THEY CAN FEEL ALONE! PEACE AT LAST!

BUT WHY STOP THERE?

MORE ISLAND DEVELOPMENTS ARE NOW PLANNED. NEXT UP: THE UNIVERSE. IN DUBAI THERE IS NO REASON TO EXPECT SUCH TRENDS TO END.

THE UNIVERSE!



IN DUBAI, IT ALWAYS
COMES DOWN TO MONEY,
AND HOW TO MAKE MORE.

SO HOW DOES ALL
THIS TRANSLATE INTO
DOLLARS AND CENTS?
(NOT MANY OF THE
LATTER, THAT'S FOR
SURE!)

THE FINANCIAL VALUE OF THE VIEW DEPENDS ON THE TYPE OF VIEW OFFERED. UNDERSTANDABLY, AN UNOBSTRUCTED OCEAN VIEW GARNERS MORE VALUE THAN A PARTIAL OCEAN VIEW.

NO VIEW OF THE WATER
AT ALL COMES TO A
MERE 280 DOLLARS PER
SQUARE FOOT.

WHILE AN UNOBSTRUCTED OCEAN VIEW CAN
SELL FOR 700 DOLLARS PER SQUARE FOOT,
A PARTIAL OCEAN VIEW IS WORTH ONLY 450
DOLLARS PER SQUARE FOOT.

AS OUR ANALYSIS SHOWS, UNOBSTRUCTED WATER VIEWS ARE CURRENTLY VERY LIMITED IN DUBAI, DESPITE ALL THE EFFORTS TO ADD BEACHFRONT PROPERTY. AN UNOBSTRUCTED WATER VIEW IS EASY TO PROVIDE FOR A LIMITED NUMBER OF OCCUPANTS. BUT AS MORE UNITS ARE ADDED, VIEW-ORIENTED PROFIT BECOMES A CHALLENGE.

A UNIVERSAL UNOBSTRUCTED VIEW OF THE GULF CAN BE REALIZED IN ONLY ONE LOCATION: ALONG THE EXISTING NATURAL COASTLINE OF THE EMIRATE. SO IT IS HERE THAT KDG PROPOSES THE FINAL DEVELOPMENT OF DUBAI'S WATERFRONT.

IN THE SPIRIT OF SHEIK MOHAMMED'S ORIGINAL PALM SKETCH, A SINGLE-LOADED RESIDENTIAL BUILDING IS PROPOSED TO RUN THE LENGTH OF DUBAI'S COASTLINE, PROVIDING 100% UNOBSTRUCTED VIEWS OF THE GULF FOR EVERY UNIT.

WHERE IS EVERYONE?

WHERE IS EVERYONE?

WHERE IS EVERYONE?

WHERE IS EVERYONE?

XXII

WHERE IS EVERYONE?

WHERE IS EVERYONE?

HERE'S THE MATH:

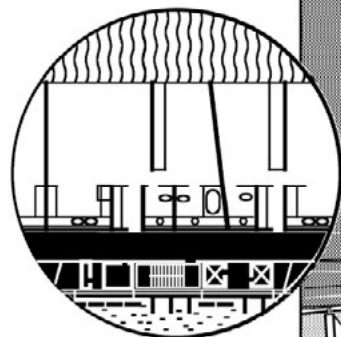
THE EXISTING PALM DEVELOPMENTS AND PLANNED ISLAND DEVELOPMENTS ADD UP TO 69 SQUARE MILES OF NEW TERRA-FORMED LAND OUT IN THE GULF. ALL TOLD, THIS NEW LAND YIELDS A NET PROFIT OF 83.2 BILLION DOLLARS AT THE PRESENT MARKET RATE.

KDG CAN MATCH THIS PROFIT WITH A SINGLE A 29-STORY BUILDING, RUNNING 43 MILES ALONG DUBAI'S COASTLINE!

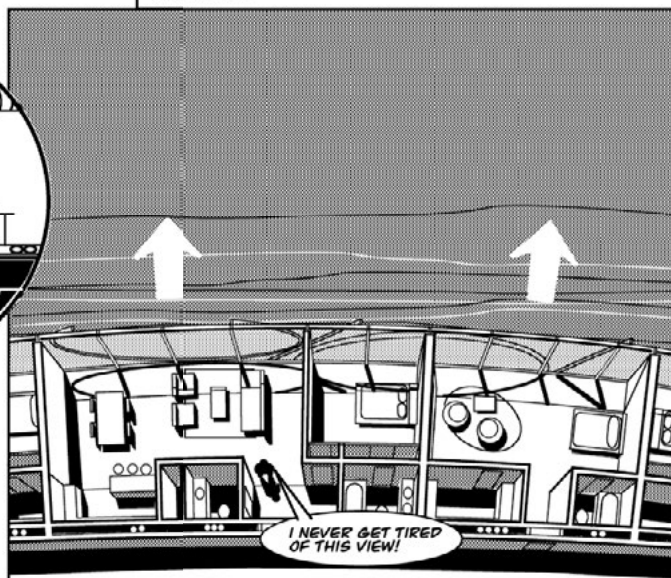
ON THE MAINLAND, IT WOULD TAKE 83 SQUARE MILES OF LAND TO MATCH THE PROFIT WE CAN ACHIEVE IN A SINGLE SLENDER SLAB THAT OCCUPIES LESS THAN HALF A SQUARE MILE ALONG THE COAST. WE COULD FREE UP THE OTHER 82.5 SQUARE MILES OF LAND BEHIND THE SHOREFRONT FOR PUBLIC USE.

OR NOT, AND KEEP THE STATUS QUO--
AND THE MONEY!

HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE? BECAUSE WE PROVIDE SUPERIOR, UNOBSTRUCTED WATER VIEWS FROM EACH UNIT, ALLOWING EACH TO SELL FOR THE HIGHEST PREMIUM, BUT WE INCUR NO EXPENSIVE LAND RECLAMATION COSTS!



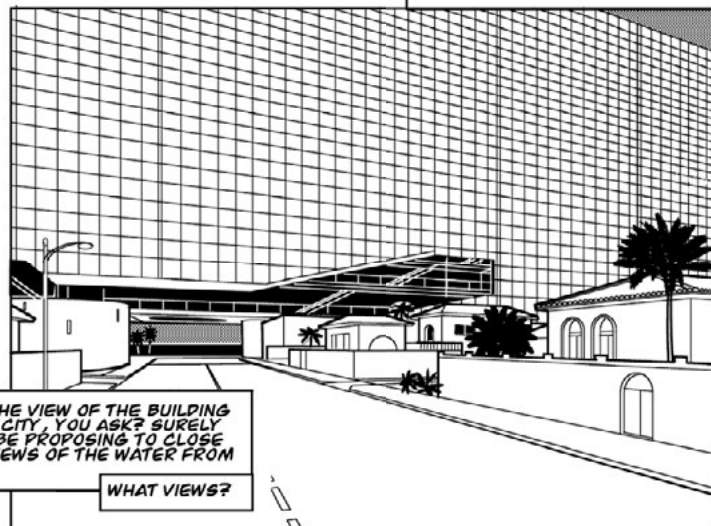
KD&S PROPOSAL WILL PROVIDE 117,900 UNITS WITH THE BEST WATER VIEWS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES!



I NEVER GET TIRED OF THIS VIEW!

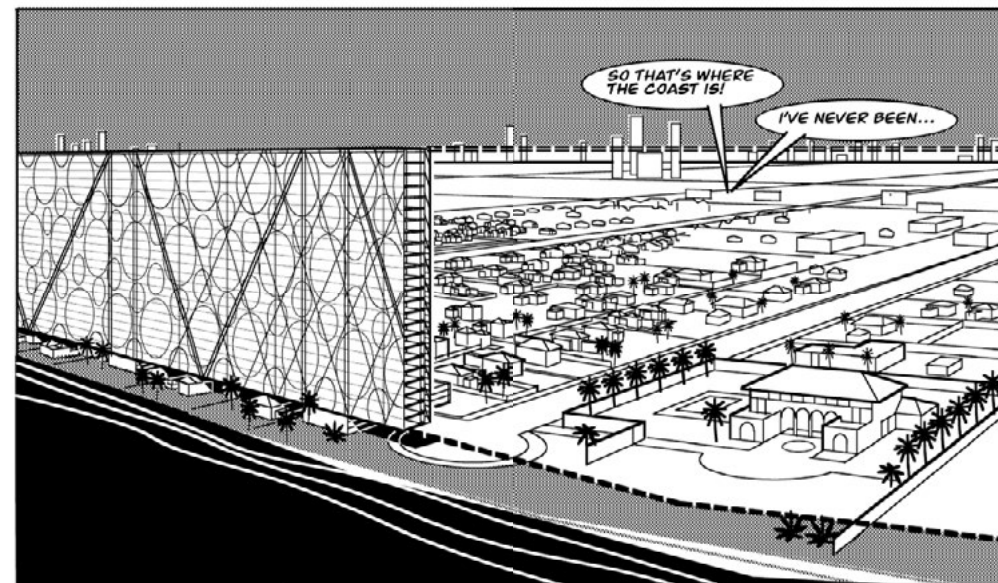
TAKING A LESSON FROM THE FIRST PALM TRUNK, A SINGLE-LOADED CORRIDOR LAYOUT ENSURES THAT EACH UNIT FACES OUT TO THE GULF, ORIENTED SQUARELY TO THE WATER, WITH THEIR NEIGHBORS FOREVER INVISIBLE TO EITHER SIDE AND ABOVE AND BELOW. RESIDENTS CAN APPRECIATE THE PALM AND WORLD ISLANDS AS THEY WERE MEANT TO BE SEEN, FROM ABOVE!

ALONG DUBAI'S NATURAL COAST, ONLY THE FEW RESIDENCES DIRECTLY LINING THE SHORE HAVE A WATER VIEW ANYWAY.



WHAT OF THE VIEW OF THE BUILDING FROM THE CITY, YOU ASK? SURELY WE CAN'T BE PROPOSING TO CLOSE OFF THE VIEWS OF THE WATER FROM INLAND?

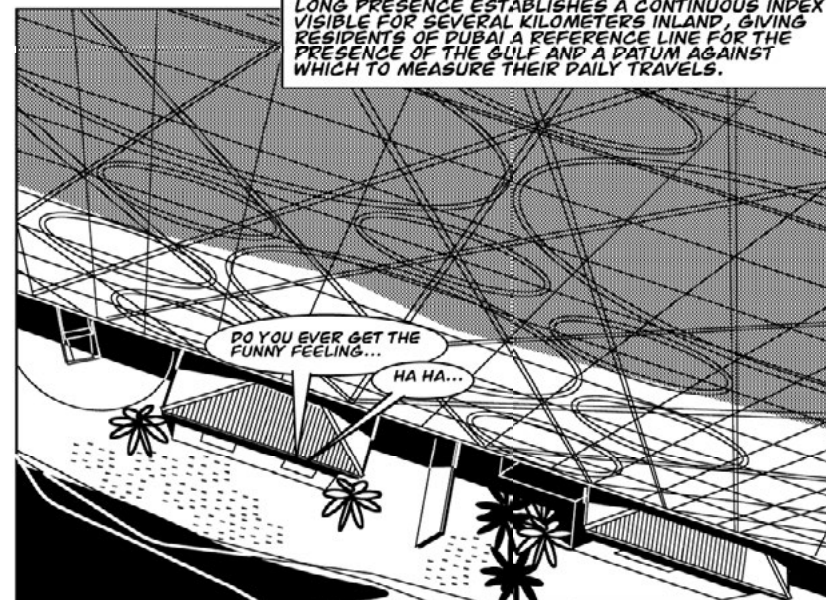
WHAT VIEWS?



SO THAT'S WHERE THE COAST IS!

I'VE NEVER BEEN...

BECAUSE DUBAI IS TOPOGRAPHICALLY FLAT THE GULF IS NOT VISIBLE TO THE CITY AT LARGE. BUT THE NEW STRUCTURE COULD CHANGE THAT! ITS 43 MILE LONG PRESENCE ESTABLISHES A CONTINUOUS INDEX VISIBLE FOR SEVERAL KILOMETERS INLAND, GIVING RESIDENTS OF DUBAI A REFERENCE LINE FOR THE PRESENCE OF THE GULF AND A DATUM AGAINST WHICH TO MEASURE THEIR DAILY TRAVELS.

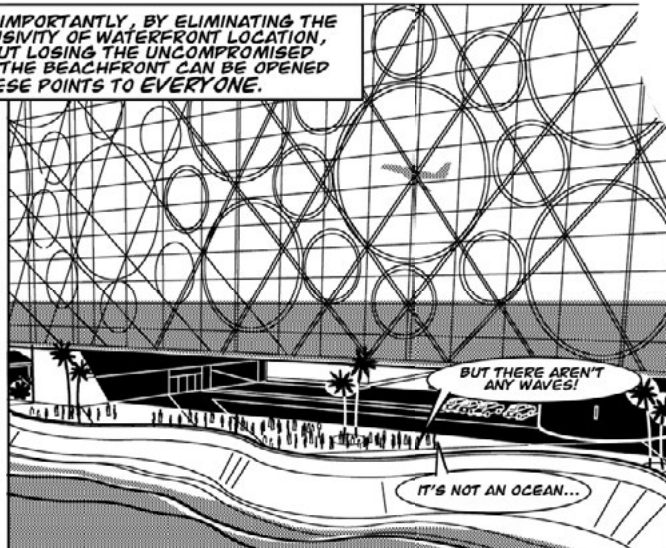


DO YOU EVER GET THE FUNNY FEELING...

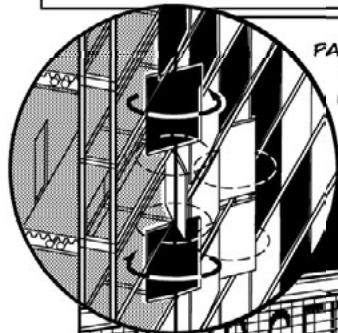
HA HA...

THE NEW STRUCTURE WILL SPAN OVER THE EXISTING WATERFRONT VILLAS, TOUCHING DOWN WITH LOBBIES AND PARKING GARAGES ONLY WHERE THERE ARE PRESENTLY VOID SPACES AND EMPTY LOTS ALONG THE SHORE.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, BY ELIMINATING THE EXCLUSIVITY OF WATERFRONT LOCATION, WITHOUT LOSING THE UNCOMPROMISED VIEW, THE BEACHFRONT CAN BE OPENED AT THESE POINTS TO EVERYONE.



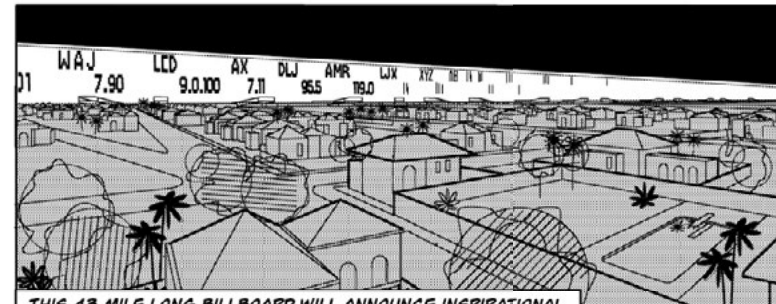
HERE IS THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE A GROUND-SCAPE OF PUBLIC ACTIVITIES BENEATH THE BUILDING, INCLUDING A GULFSIDE PROMENADE--ALL DRAWING PEOPLE TO THE BEACH, WHICH AT PRESENT IS A SUPPRESSED PRACTICE IN DUBAI!



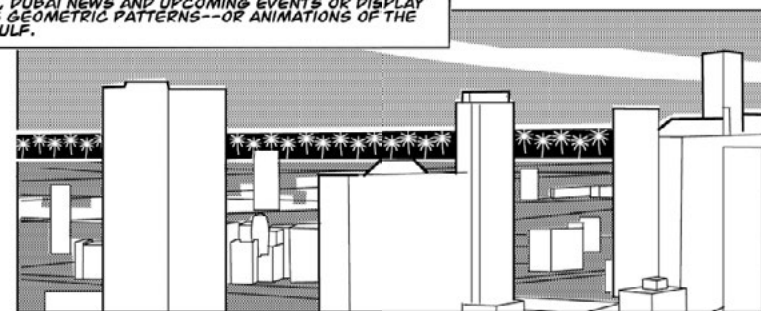
THIS PIXEL STRUCTURE USES TWO-SIDED PANELS--A BLACK, PHOTOVOLTAIC SURFACE ON ONE SIDE AND A WHITE, PHOSPHORESCENT SURFACE ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE. WHICHEVER SIDE IS EXPOSED WILL ABSORB SOLAR ENERGY--EITHER CHEMICAL OR ELECTRICAL--DURING THE DAY.



ON THE INWARD, CITY-FACING SIDE OF THE 29 STORY SLAB--THE CONTINUOUS INDEX MENTIONED BEFORE--THE FACADE IS ANIMATED BY A GRID SYSTEM OF HALF-STORY, ROTATING PIXELS, COMPRISING WHAT AMOUNTS TO A 43 MILE LONG PUBLIC-SERVICE INFORMATION BILLBOARD!



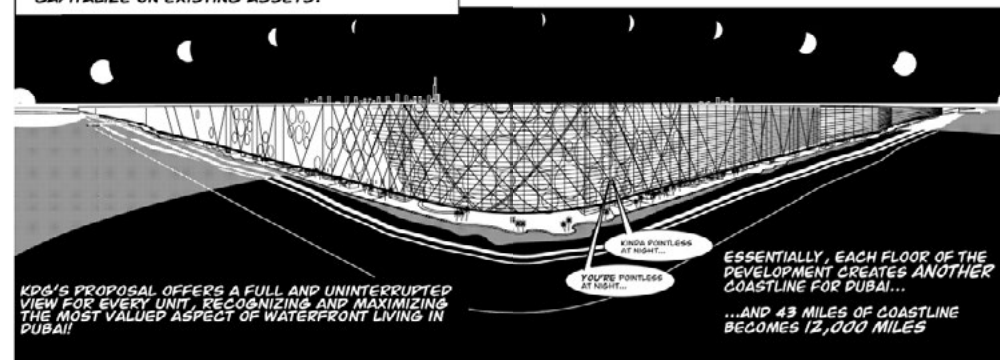
THIS 43 MILE LONG BILLBOARD WILL ANNOUNCE INSPIRATIONAL MESSAGES, DUBAI NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS OR DISPLAY INDIGENOUS GEOMETRIC PATTERNS--OR ANIMATIONS OF THE INVISIBLE GULF.



AT NIGHT, THE PHOSPHOROUS PANELS WILL CONTINUE THE DISPLAY: THOSE TURNED TO FACE INWARD--LEAVING THE OUTWARD-FACING PHOTOVOLTAIC SURFACE AS BLACK SPACES FOR THE CITY DISPLAY--WILL LIGHT THE BUILDING CORRIDORS.

BOTH CONDITIONS ARE ACHIEVED BY THE EMITTED PHOSPHORESCENT GLOW, CONSIDERABLY REDUCING ENERGY COSTS.

IN A PLACE WHERE THE CONCEPT OF TOO MUCH DOESN'T EXIST, IT SEEMS ONLY LOGICAL TO CAPITALIZE ON EXISTING ASSETS.



KIDS PROPOSAL OFFERS A FULL AND UNINTERRUPTED VIEW FOR EVERY UNIT, RECOGNIZING AND MAXIMIZING THE MOST VALUED ASPECT OF WATERFRONT LIVING IN DUBAI!

KNOW FORTLESS AT NIGHT...
YOU'RE POINTLESS AT NIGHT...

ESSENTIALLY, EACH FLOOR OF THE DEVELOPMENT CREATES ANOTHER COASTLINE FOR DUBAI...

...AND 43 MILES OF COASTLINE BECOMES 12,000 MILES

Cartooning

Architecture

other
and
issues

IKER GIL
interviews

graphic artist
KLAUS

Cartoon for Joseph Grima and Kazys
Varnelis' Real Estate issue
(November 2010) of The New City
Reader (Detail) © Klaus

As our guest editor for the issue, I would like to ask you a few questions regarding your work and trajectory.

OK, but I'm always weary of explaining myself, leaving my clown disguise—not to mention my rabbit hole. I'm more comfortable with my usual detached position, leaving my stuff out there for people to discover and/or interpret it. Speaking about it seems too likely to have the effect of needing to explain a joke. It's just not funny anymore. Someone wrote me regarding one of my last cartoons and said, "I don't get it. I love it!" I think the line between elusive (thus interesting) and banal is very easy to cross. Plus, I am also the editor, which makes this slightly confusing.

Well, you're only guest co-editor.

Right! [laughs] That makes it easier, then.

You recently had a rather long chat with Brendan Cormier and Jimenez Lai in the "Ways To Be Critical" issue of *Volume* magazine, where you were quite loquacious.

Yes, that was a most unexpected one, which had to be done pretty fast, and was totally due to Jimenez. He talked to Brendan, then he approached me, and I couldn't say no. I mean, the magazine was co-founded by Koolhaas. Given that he is the focus of many of my cartoons, isn't the irony delicious? It was a nice conversation. I have to thank Brendan and Jim for it. Actually, I have two more pending interviews this month. For some reason, they have all come together at the same time.

Let's talk about how it all started. I guess you have been drawing and doing comics for a long time, but when did the "Klaus" trademark and the architectural theme start?

I've been drawing as far as I can remember, but I first thought of turning to architectural-themed cartoons around a decade ago. At that point, the editor of an architectural journal approached me with the idea of revamping a comic strip about this struggling young architect that he had been publishing intermittently in the journal. He wasn't very sure about where to take it, and I suggested burning any copies that were left, because it was—let's say it wasn't very good. As it usually happens, after I decided there was no hope for the comic strip, the idea started taking shape in the back of my head, and soon it developed into a whole series with its own fleshed-out supporting cast, etc.

Your first architectural cartoons were actually published on paper, in a printed magazine?

Well, yes, but not in that one. When I approached the publisher and he had a look at it, he said, "but... this looks nothing like the old cartoons!" My mental response was, "well, that's the best that could happen to you, right?" [laughs] Still, he wasn't sure, so we put it into a halt while he made up his mind, and in the meanwhile, a new magazine was founded. They called me to contribute with some writing, so I took the character with me, and started publishing this comic strip called "Corb," or "The Adventures of John Corb." Unfortunately, the magazine,

which was a rather ambitious project, died after a few issues, and so did the strip. By that time, I had plotted some two hundred strips, although less than thirty had been published. I may resurrect it at some point. A little later I found out that the other journal had also closed. The reason it was taking them so long to make a decision was that the publisher himself had passed away.

That is a surprisingly "mainstream" start for someone who is better known for such iconoclastic work. When did you decide to make a new start and go digital?

Well, at that point I was moving to the USA, and I thought there were enough corpses on my back, so I put "Klaus" to sleep, just stepping out of the shade for occasional collaborations with small publications, such as *The Harvard Satirical Press*. But Harvard was too interesting of an environment for someone brought up as an architect in a European system. You have all these vedettes from the architectural star system coming in and out to full auditoriums like rock stars, doing their show, and being applauded by the audience—or fighting each other. It was an amusing spectacle to watch, certainly asking to be satirized. The point of no return happened when Preston Scott Cohen, recently appointed as new Chair of Architecture, created these "Discussions in Architecture" series, which basically consisted of him playing *Inside the Actors Studio* with each week's guest. I happened to attend one of the first, which featured Ben Van Berkel lecturing on the BMW museum, which—he defended—was a direct translation of a double helix diagram. Which it is not. You know it, I know it, even he knows it. The problem was that Preston also knew it, and, God forbid, he couldn't miss the opportunity to tell Van Berkel in front of everyone. He had even built a digital recreation of what a real double helix ramp would look like. But, as it often happens, Ben would not step back, and Preston, being like one of those small dogs that bite you and never let go, made everything degenerate into a Monty Python-esque "argument clinic" sketch, with different iterations of "No, you didn't," "Yes I did." So I thought, "That's it. I can't let go this, either." I drew a first cartoon, sent it to someone, and there it all started.



The infamous "argument clinic sketches" played by Preston Scott Cohen and Ben Van Berkel at Harvard, December 2008 © Klaus

Was this the start of *Klaustoon's Blog*? Before the revamping I remember it had a subtitle that read, "Cartooning the GSD and other issues."

No, not yet. This one, as well as other GSD-related strips where first published in the late GSD Online Journal, *Trays*, edited at that point by Quilian Riano [from DSGN AGNC] and some others. However, the pace at which I produced them exceeded the cadence of the journal, and, having no respect whatsoever for institutions, I foresaw I could get them into trouble. Also, I felt I wanted to tackle issues that had more to do with my private obsessions, so I decided to go on sending them the GSD-related strips and open *Klaustoon's Blog* on the side.

Is this the point where the Koolhaas "Hope" cartoons happened? Could you speak a little bit about how this series of cartoons came into being? In a way, they have come to represent your work. People loved them during the *Architectural Narrative* exhibition we organized last year.

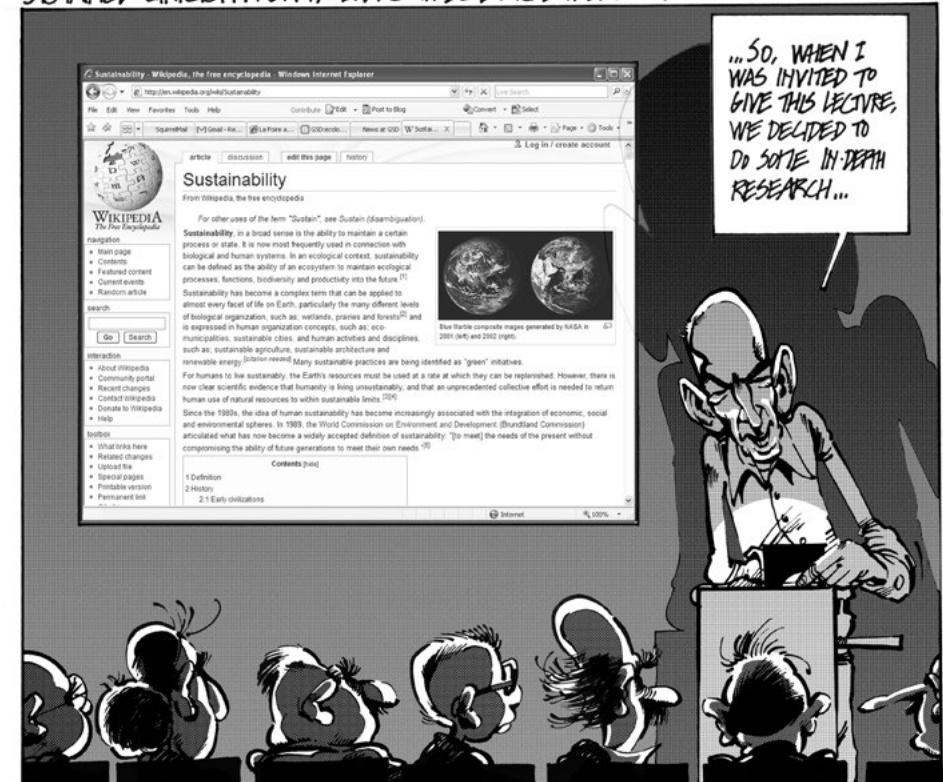
Yes, complete death of success. If I remember correctly, it still took some cartoons to get to that point. Actually, that one sprang from a previous, GSD-related cartoon with Koolhaas in it. In April 2009, the GSD hosted a big conference/exhibition titled *Ecological Urbanism*, curated by Gareth Doherty and Mohsen Mostafavi. And, seemingly with a straight face, they invited Mr. K as a keynote speaker, to lecture about sustainability. He didn't disappoint, and turned it—inadvertently or not—into a big joke, which I am not sure everyone got. There was a common agreement on the banality of it, so I decided to channel that into a cartoon, which soon Kazys [Varnelis, director of the NetLab at Columbia] uploaded to his blog, making it immediately successful. So, I saw some light in that direction. This was only a few months after Obama won the presidential election for the first time, and Shepard Fairey's poster was still everywhere. Exactly one year before that, the April issue of *L'Uomo Vogue* had featured good ol' Remmett both on his cover and in several of his inner pages. It just seemed a natural step forward in this particular ego-trip, both the identification with "the most powerful man in the world", and specially the "Hope" motto. My only quip is: I'm not sure everyone got the obvious irony.

You've kept adding new items to this series, and Koolhaas has been a recurrent topic in your cartoons, usually depicted under a rather sarcastic light. What's your opinion on Rem Koolhaas as the celebrity architect *par excellence*? Do you have an active stand against him?

Well, the Kunst-Haas series is a good example of me milking the cow. Seriously speaking: ideas usually come in clusters, partly because of simple reactive thinking, partly because it is easier to think in terms of narratives. In the case of the "Hope" cartoon, the many iterations and puns of it that you can find throughout the Internet speak tons of how appealing it is. Once I drew the first one, I couldn't stop coming up with new twists. I had planned twelve of them, to make a sort of Warhol-esque composition, but they are rather time-consuming, so only the Hope, Kool, Hush, Evil, and Pope were finished.

As for Koolhaas, I do not have an active stand against him. Obviously, I do think "starchitecture" has played a big part in leading architecture to the point it is

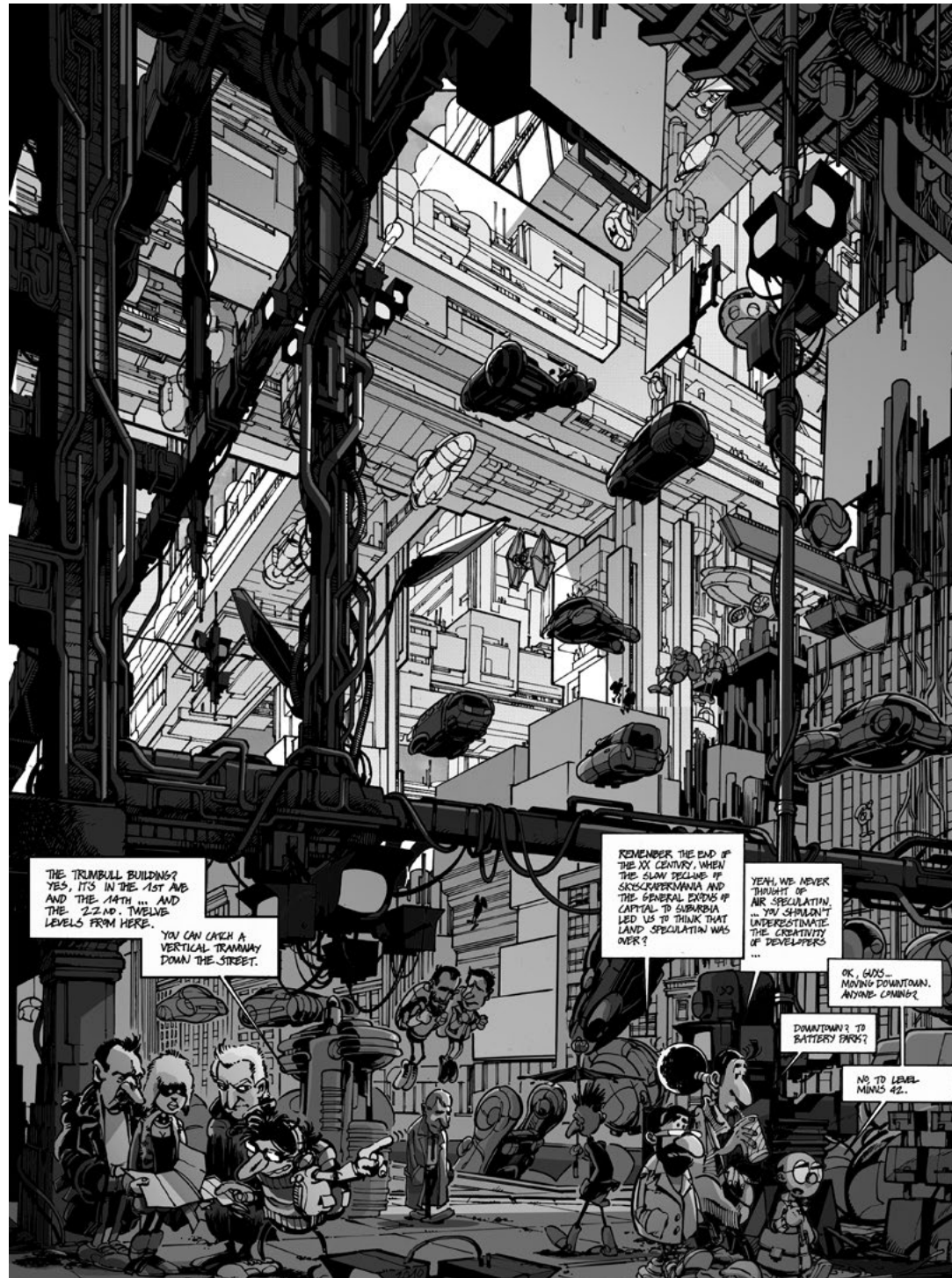
SUSTAINED CINICISM: REM KOOLHAAS IN ECOLOGICAL URBANISM.



now, although it also has to do with architects avoiding for several decades facing an inevitable crisis in the traditional understanding of the discipline/profession—that is, until the general economic crisis made it explode. Very tellingly, "starchitects" are the sector that has been affected the least by the crisis. Koolhaas himself is an interesting figure, one that's difficult not to notice. He has been very carefully constructing his own legend in order to present himself as the new Le Corbusier—to the point of making a revamp of the Ville Savoye in Paris—which makes him eminently cartoonizable. He also plays with his public image as a game, being deliberately ambiguous about the way his words and works are related. He has been very successful in coating himself in an aura of mystery, so that everything he does seems part of an overall strategy. Many of his moves are very calculated, so that one tends to think that everything—even the fortuitous stuff—is, too.

Do you know if he's conscious of your cartoons and his presence on them?

I don't know. I guess so, though. The "Hope" cartoon is all around the Internet, and some weeks after it first appeared, someone sent me a photograph of it hanging on a wall in OMA's canteen in Rotterdam. However, I don't really care that much. To me, all this started as a private joke. Most of the cartoons are designed to entertain myself, thus, they feature my own obsessions, and all those



cross-references that you would need to dwell inside my head in order to get. I work in a niche within a niche: you need to be an architect to get into the game, and even that wouldn't grant you total access; Eisenman, Banham, Kubrick, Gangnam Style... it's all just a big, private joke.

However, your work has broken the borders of the blog very often.

Yes, and it happened very quickly. I think the first thing I did outside the blog was *The New City Reader*, a journal-performance that Joseph Grima and Kazys Varnelis were editing to go along with the Last Newspaper exhibition that the New Museum organized in New York in late 2010, early 2011. They asked me to provide editorial cartoons for that, "Sort of New Yorker cartoons"... Of course, I went wild and what they got was something radically different. At the same time, the Architects Society of South Portugal, via a former colleague, approached me to do an exhibition on my work still not even two years into it. In September of the following year, the exhibition celebrating the first 50 years of the Harvard GSD featured several of my cartoons. I'm still amazed by that. In terms of magazines, I've been here and there, in *Harvard Design Magazine*, *Conditions*, *eVolo*, in the fantastic *MAS Context* [laughs], in the *Russian Journal Project International*... *Praxis* is the last one I've collaborated with. Funnily enough, I created my "Klaus" persona not to contaminate my academic work. Now, it grants me access to places I would not normally be able to go. That's one of the main reasons I keep it alive. That, and the fact that, like Graham Chapman, I haven't had enough fun yet.

Now that you are done guest editing this issue, what are your plans for the future?

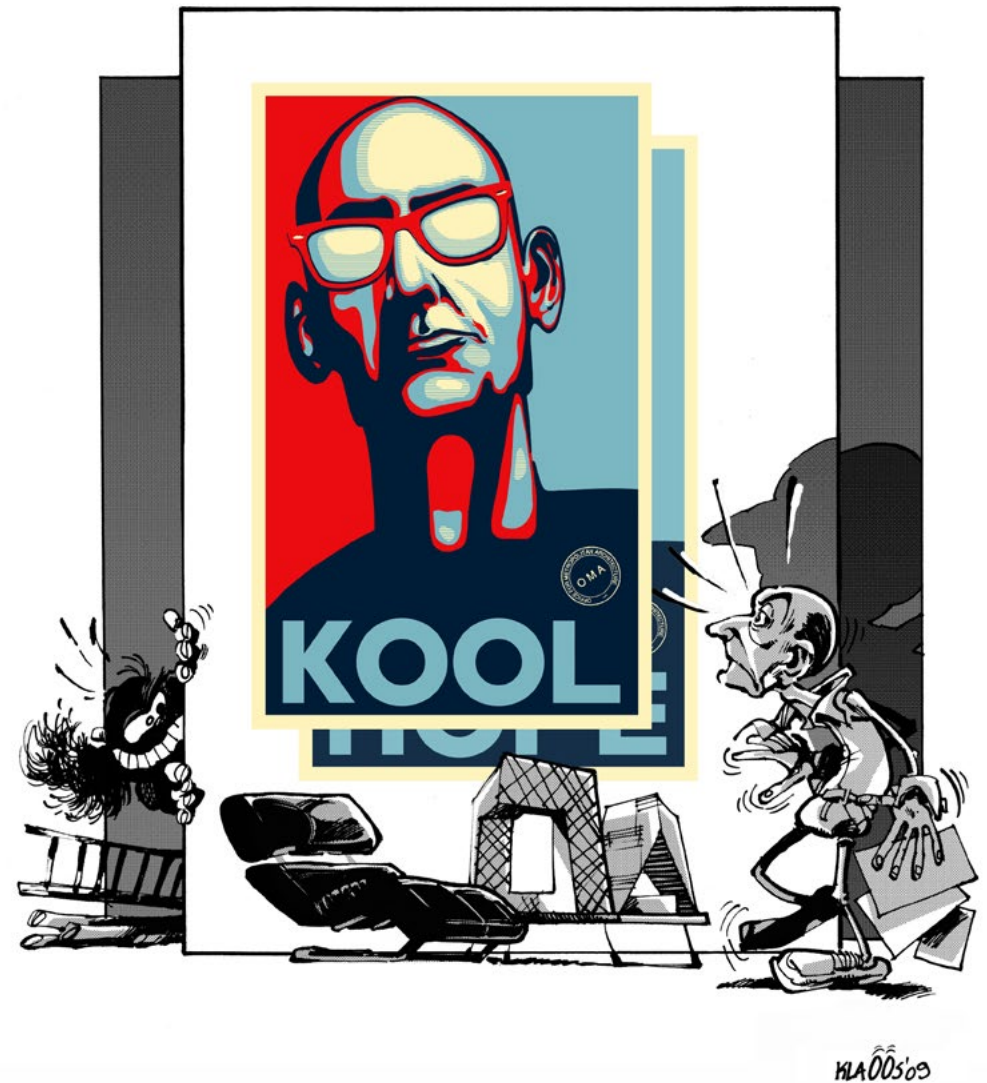
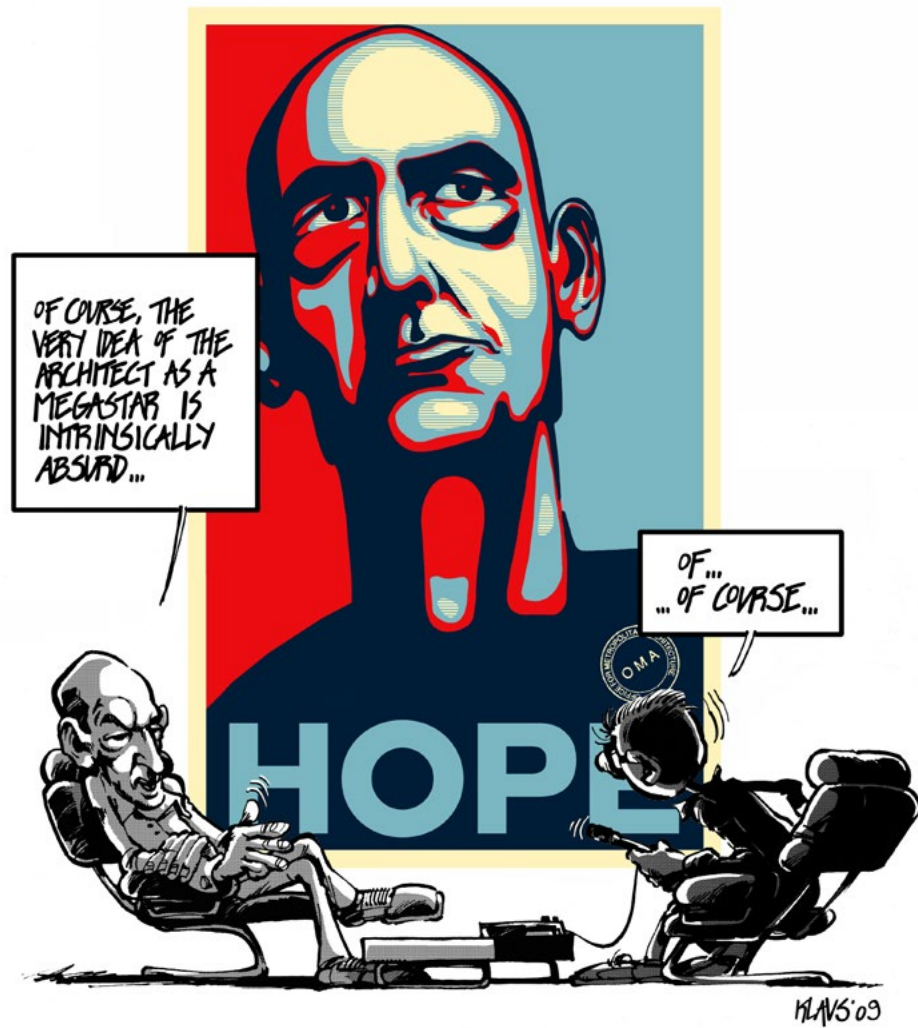
For the time being, I think I have enough with trying to keep pace with my monthly collaboration with *uncube* magazine, and there had been some talking about starting another collaboration with a (very) big magazine, but that's still to be confirmed. Also, I plan to expand my venting of my architectural frustrations via comic books, and design some architectural follies in fiction. There is a big project, "Tales of the Pneumatic Passage," which I have been pulling back for a while, and I will probably have to postpone yet one more time, because of two other things that may or may not happen, involving a couple of editors featured in this very issue. We'll see, fingers crossed.

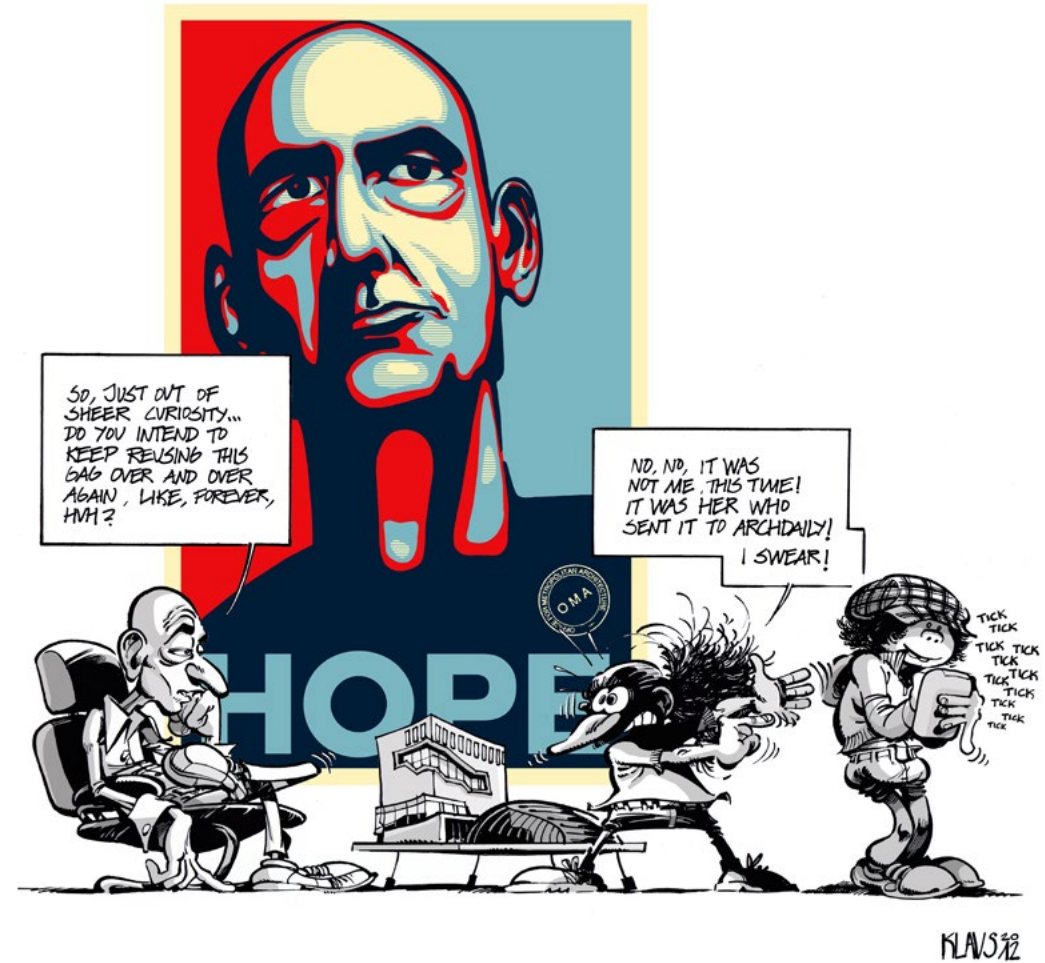
Starchitecture

redux

Cartoons by Klaus

"Hope" poster (Detail) © Klaus







MÉLANIE VAN DER HOORN

in conversation with
FRANÇOIS SCHUITEN

the Sensing

DNA comic's

Brüsel, 1992 (Detail)
© François Schuiten and
Benoît Peeters

The strip cartoonist François Schuiten and scenarist Benoît Peeters are noted for their series *Cities of the Fantastic*, the first album of which was published in 1983. The built environment plays a major role in each of the albums, but it is predominantly their first four—*The Great Walls of Samaris* (1983), *Fever in Urbica* (1985), *The Tower* (1987) and *Brüsel* (1992)—that contain reflections on the effect of architecture.

François Schuiten lives and works in Brussels, in a splendid townhouse in the district of Schaerbeek. Despite his full agenda, he has kindly accepted to receive me for an interview; he takes several hours to tell me extensively about his work. He welcomes me in his atelier, which is situated in the attic, a spacious room with large skylights, original drawings by famous cartoonists, several drawing tables and hundreds of art books. The categories in his library give an impression of the large diversity of his interests: utopias, horses, scenography, travel drawings, world fairs, nature, architecture drawings, architecture, Machine Age, sculpture and gardens, decorative arts (wallpaper, design), Art Nouveau, hotels and decoration, countries, Brussels, photography, drawing, graphics, painting... As I shortly introduce my research to him, which concerns comics drawn or commissioned by architects, either as design presentations or as a form of architecture critique, he initially reacts rather warily. He is not happy about a comic strip occasionally being used as applied art, "manipulated" even, and therefore underestimated in its complexity.

Sometimes it happens that an architect friend or a painter friend shows me a comic he has made. They have thought, "Why not, let's just try it, perhaps it will allow me to reach a larger audience, get some visibility and explain a couple of thoughts that I wouldn't have been able to express in another form." But they often severely underestimate the difficulty of such an assignment and I usually don't find the result particularly convincing. Naturally, I'm happy for them that they tried it and enjoyed it, but they would need to spend much more time practicing. It's like when people want to use comics for teaching because they don't manage with other means. For instance, they say: "French history is boring—so I'm going to use comics". Or when people are using comics while they actually dream of making films. But the comic strip is not a "sub-film." That does not do proper justice to the comic strip. It is a mature art form that is not lacking a component. It has its own rhythm and script, it enables people to laugh and cry, and needs no sound, motion and sometimes even no color. Also, a great deal takes place between the pictures. I call that 'the after-action of the eye,' the notion that an image lodges deep in the eye and leaves a tiny vulnerable trace that is woken up by a later visual emotion. The most wonderful thing that can happen to me is when a reader tells me about a picture that has moved him and then it turns out that it cannot be found anywhere in my book, because he has thought it up himself.

Schuiten stands and starts showing me around his atelier. He is surrounded by original works of art by famous peers that he considers indispensable sources of inspiration.

Look, that's an original *Flash Gordon*, there is a page from *Terry and the Pirates* by Milton Caniff and here are some by Winsor McCay, my absolute master. I also have an original page of *Krazy Kat*. George Herriman, its author, was a genius, a real genius. Every day I see his drawings and each time I think they're fantastic. And when you know these works, it sets you straight about all that has already been created, and with such talent, with such an innate sense for breakdowns, composition, shades of black... I believe that a profound knowledge of the



The Great Walls of Samaris, 1983. The art of drawing as an access to the ideas that underlie buildings; two pages from a thought experiment on the consequences of Art Nouveau as a comprehensive vision. © François Schuiten and Benoît Peeters

comic strip and its history is a must for anyone who wants to create some himself. You have to sense its DNA to understand where it comes from, how it functions, which techniques, newspapers, cultures have contributed to its development. All these influences are already so amazing. So sometimes I'm a little confused when I see that people with a very succinct and superficial idea of the comic art start to make comics themselves, without taking the time to get acquainted with the matter. It's the same as if I would consider myself a painter after visiting one or two exhibitions; I would be a bit of a Sunday painter. It's true, some people have started that way and realized amazing things, but sometimes I think to myself, "every year, 5,000 new comics are published, so why should I add one more?"

We start talking about *Cities of the Fantastic* and the impressive success the series has scored, not least among architects. Yet it seems that Schuiten is a bit tired of the label "architecture" that people, for years, have stuck on Peeters and him on account of their earlier work.

People imply that we are not making real comic strips. Even if I made a story that is set in the desert or in a wood, they would still say that it is architecture. But sometimes our stories are not about architecture at all; they are about space, about the tension between a space and the characters, about the dramaturgy that makes a space work. Sometimes the architecture is central in that context, but we also set great store by the clothing, the shoes, the jewellery and the hairstyle of the characters, as well as plants and animals.

People often mistake Schuiten of being an architect himself, which he isn't. It's true, he comes from an architects' family—his father was an architect, his brother, sister, brother-in-law are all architects—but he isn't. His work distinguishes itself from that of architects both in its narrative and in its graphic aspects.

I feel a close affinity with architects. We have the same roots; we have an identical awareness of space. Architecture feels a bit like family, but a family that I have, to some extent, rejected. I go about with them, I understand them, I love them, but actually I'm not really able to place them. I don't have the same preoccupations. To me, what matters above all is to tell a story. I am much more interested in your emotions than in your living situation and habits. I need to know why you are crying, what makes you laugh and what your dreams are. It's true, basically one can project his or her dreams on comic strips and architectural designs alike, but the problem is that present-day architects hardly tell stories anymore. They are primarily interested in the tension of a space, whereas I am interested in the meaning that is given to the space, what story it can tell us.

Yet the stories of Schuiten and Peeters are not solely based on high-quality scenarios and dialogues. Like architects, the authors are also greatly occupied with composition, framework, and focus. It is of great importance to them to realize a credible environment. Drawings should be correct, even if they represent something fictitious. Schuiten wants to be able to draw the floor plan of every building and know how it was built. When he draws a façade, he



The Great Walls of Samaris, 1983. The art of drawing as an access to the ideas that underlie buildings; two pages from a thought experiment on the consequences of Art Nouveau as a comprehensive vision. © François Schuiten and Benoît Peeters

has to know what is behind it; otherwise it is credible neither to himself nor to the reader. Whether it concerns buildings, people, shoes or train engines, he always uses models to depict them as true-to-life as possible. But most of all, it is the human dimension that matters to him.

My drawings are always three-dimensional, whereas architects usually draw plans and sections. I find plans more difficult and a bit boring. I prefer to draw buildings in perspective, as architects used to do in former times. Present-day architects use computers and more sophisticated conceptual tools. I regret that they have neglected the art of perspective, and the frequent absence of personages is also a great loss. When you draw people, you are introducing the human dimension in a natural way with your hand as well as your brain: a person, an extra dimension, a vulnerability or strength. This is how an entirely different concept of space is created. The art of drawing is very tangible and physical; mental concepts, dreams, utopias are internalized and given concrete shapes by means of pencil and paper. That is another aspect that makes them so indispensable in architecture: architects should occasionally indulge in some fundamental research in a utopian and experimental space. Some people manage to make great architecture without drawing, but I believe I can sense the difference between those who draw and those who don't. Drawing adds an extra dimension. When we were at the Expo in Hannover, it was really amazing. Everyone from Jean Nouvel to Toyo Ito was presenting his work. There were piles of free cards with all kinds of images. We were the only ones with "real" drawings; all the others had computer-generated imagery, and none of the other cards were going away as quick as ours. Obviously people were seeking for emotions, which the renderings couldn't give them.

The differences that Schuiten depicts have not always existed. In his opinion, they increased in the digital era but emerged during Modernism, when the accent was increasingly put on function and functionality. In former times, it was unthinkable for architects to draw buildings without a human figure inside to give an idea of scale. And above all, architects had the capability to enable people to dream. Schuiten is enamoured of earlier architectural drawings. He still has vivid memories of the large, black-and-white wash drawings created by his father, which, although their purpose was to impress clients, always had an overwhelming thundery sky. Not only did the drawings from bygone days look different from those of today, they also gave more information: architects were art directors. As a small boy, Schuiten sometimes accompanied his father on a visit to a client.

There, my father produced his pastel crayons and began to talk to the client. The client would pour some whisky, drink one himself, and then my father began to draw the house and—very smart—he introduced the dressing table of the lady of the house, the favorite chair of the man of the house, the dog, and drew it all probably four times as large as it would ever turn out to be. Then he sprayed fixative over the pastels, pulled out a passe-partout, framed the drawing and set it on the dresser of the lady. "So," he would say, "just think it over." Sometime later, the phone would ring. "Yes, Mr. Schuiten, we agree to your proposals." What did that mean? He drew their dreams; he opened a window on what could be their future.



Brüssel, 1992. Page from a fictive story with a critical view on historical urban developments in Brussels, a strip that the local authorities regarded as a defamation of their beloved city. © François Schuiten and Benoît Peeters

Architects are not the only ones who think they can simply make use of a comic strip, but to Schuiten, it is more incomprehensible to use it in architecture rather than elsewhere, because architects themselves can draw without having to tap into products from a different discipline. Why do architects want to make use of strips at all, he seems to suggest, when they can simply generate architectonic drawings?

When I see drawings by Archigram, I think, “these authors don’t need the comic strip, they have such a lively imagination!” Why should they make an excursion outside their own discipline? Their work has undisputable narrative qualities, it stimulates the imagination, the images are “splattering.” Certain architects are extraordinary artists. So why don’t they just draw like architects? I believe I would enjoy that much more than when they do so in the guise of a comic style. Actually, they are playing around with form; it’s a kind of game that resembles acting or karaoke. They could just as well make a video game. Perhaps I like architecture too much to watch impassively how it amuses itself and makes itself ridiculous.

A major difference with architects is that they use the art of drawing to design buildings, whereas Schuiten uses it to fathom the architectural styles of others and to penetrate to the essence of the underlying ideas: the thought processes of its designer and all the layers of significance that a building has attained in the course of time.

It is a wonderful experience to penetrate into the depth and bifurcations of a person’s thoughts, and memorable to find them well wrought and powerful. With [Victor] Horta and [Henry] Van de Velde, it’s such a great pleasure! It’s coherent, the light is amazing, there is so much behind it! But when I don’t sufficiently understand something, I cannot draw it. For instance, how am I supposed to draw glass architecture?! At best I can draw my own mirror image, but that is not particularly exciting.

Thus the art of drawing has a critical potential. There are designs that Schuiten ruthlessly dismisses because he cannot get a grip on their *raison d’être* via his pencil. In the *Brüssel* album (1992), Schuiten and Peeters take a critical look at the urban planning foundations of Brussels, their place of residence. *Brüssel* is a blueprint of Brussels and the characters have been borrowed from real-life figures, but the authors take the detour of a fictive storyline to give critical commentary on the policies of local authorities and urban planners. For Schuiten, working on the *Brüssel* album was an occasion to discover the local Court of Law.

The more I applied my drawing pencil to explore its details, the more value it acquired. I became fascinated by its spatial organization, equilibrium and logic, and the stage-management of a wealth of details. The building is an inexhaustible source of stories. Its architect was completely mad and his pyramid, which towers high above the city, embodies justice on the one hand but simultaneously bears witness to a country that, leaning upon its colony, the Belgian Congo, imagined itself to be a world power. Yet although it is an outrageous building and it is always cold at some spots, even so-called “sensible people” regularly confide to me that they are proud of it and they would not relinquish it at any price.



Brüsel, 1992. Page from a fictive story with a critical view on historical urban developments in Brussels, a strip that the local authorities regarded as a defamation of their beloved city. © François Schuiten and Benoît Peeters

In their album, Schuiten and Peeters obviously assume a position in urban planning debates. They are primarily disappointed that the property market's urge for wealth is the dominant force in Brussels, due to a lack of coherent urban planning policy and vision of the future. Although almost all the issues that are covered in *Brüsel* are now history, the book was a thorn in the flesh of the local authorities. In a frantic attempt to repair the so-called "damage" to the image of the city, the Minister-president of the Brussels Capital-Region even commissioned another strip cartoonist to create a kind of "anti-*Brüsel*," presenting the history of the city purged of all controversial episodes. This reaction was incomprehensible to Schuiten.

Actually, *Brüsel* was meant as a tribute to Brussels, our hometown that continues to intrigue us, fascinate and charm us to the utmost. We didn't even portray the leading characters as ruthless villains. Being the son of an architect, I know all too well those moments in which designers allow themselves to be dragged along in projects, giving their heart and soul, clinging on to the unshakeable conviction that they are doing good. But local authorities try to sell a fake image of the city that is limited to the Grand-Place and Art Nouveau and in which the contradictions, contrasts and schisms that make the city so fascinating and inspiring to us remain completely hidden. I realized only in retrospect that the almost literal appellation of the city in the title of our book had been considered as indelicate. Comic strips were meant above all to give pleasure to the readers. Even Hergé and [André] Franquin always veiled the identity of their city. And some readers simply don't understand or appreciate the black humor in our books. They take everything much too literally. It might even be due to something in my drawing style. Sometimes people realize only during one of our lectures, when meeting us personally, and say, "We didn't know that you were so funny."

And how did urban planners react to your book?

We observe each other; we sniff at each other like old dogs because we fight for the same things, but not in the same way. In a certain way, they are like aya-tollahs: they have to defend integrity and coherence. Sometimes they make mistakes, but by and large they do really good work. Their aspirations are very legitimate; it's just that they are sometimes a little dogmatic. I approach similar matters in a fictional way. But if you want to draw something properly, you need to know it. And when you start to know it, you start to appreciate it. And when you start to appreciate it, you don't want it to be endangered. So at the end of the day I'll end up like Greenpeace, chaining myself to the Court of Law.

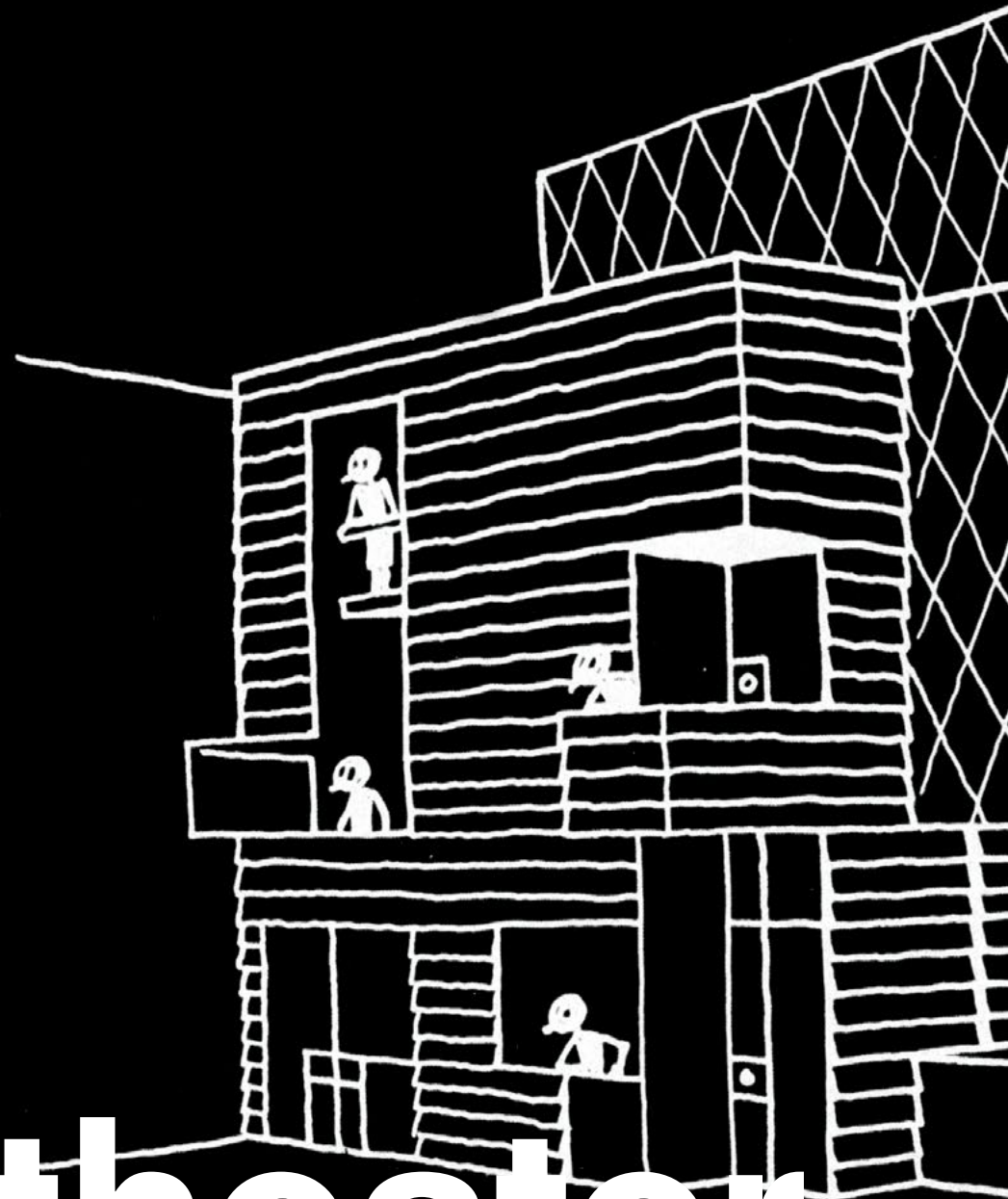
Swarte's

mystery

KOLDO LUS ARANA
in conversation

with
JOOST SWARTE

theater



Born in Heemstede, Netherlands, in 1947, **Joost Swarte** is an artists' artist, whose klare lijn style—a seminal term in comic book scholarship he coined himself—has influenced several generations of cartoonists. Starting as an industrial design student, Swarte soon moved onto comics and illustration, both as an author, whose work has been displayed in magazines such as *HUMO*, *RAW*, *The New Yorker*, and *Abitare*; as a publisher, founding the comic magazine *Modern Papier* and Dutch publishing house Oog & Blik; and as a cultural advocate, being one of the fathers of *Strijdagen*, a biennial international comic event held in Haarlem. Using comics as a platform, Swarte has built an impressive career that leaves no field unexplored, from graphic design (magazine covers, ex libris, stamps, and stained glass) to furniture design and, most interestingly, architecture. Since the late 1990s, when he was contacted to design the *Toneelschuur*, a new theatre for his hometown Haarlem built in collaboration with Mecanoo, Swarte has developed a parallel, growing career as a consultant in architectural design.



Joost Swarte's visions for the future of Piet Mondriaan, Cesare Lombroso, and Le Corbusier © Joost Swarte

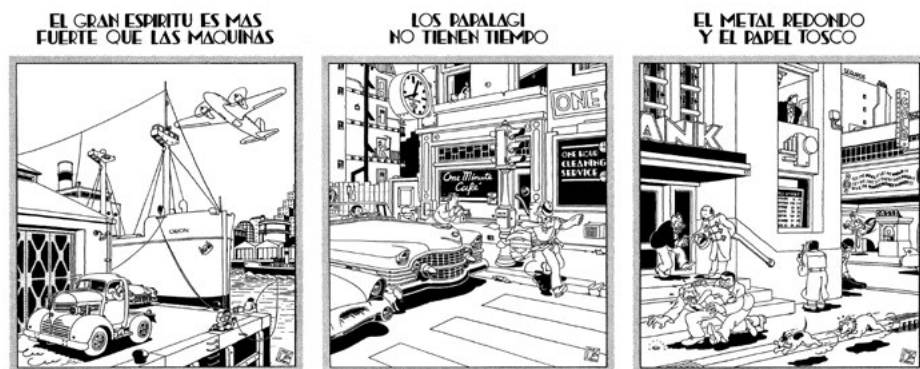
Before turning to comics, you started studying industrial design. Was this something that you had a previous interest in? Or was it something that you chose by discarding everything else, as it happens to many people entering architecture schools?

After high school, I started studying industrial design in Eindhoven because I didn't know so much about the design world. I had a strong cultural interest, I liked to draw, and I had a technical interest, so I thought, "This seems to be a good combination, so it's probably something for me." And it was. I liked it a lot, but within the comics I had more possibilities to express myself. So, I decided to quit my studies and be a comic artist.

So you already had an interest in comics prior to entering the school of design.

I already had an interest in comics, and it developed throughout my time at the design academy. When I started to do some comics, it was a kind of cultural comment. I published them in a cultural magazine, in the south of the country, and then I made more. My production of comics was more than I was asked for, so I decided to develop my own magazine. It was a primitive structure, but it gave me a lot of experience in the field.

I never thought of it as a career, but in 1973, a long-time friend introduced me to *Charlie Mensuel*. It was just after two or three years doing comics, when I changed a bit the style. It had always been inspired by the liberal and literal freedom of American underground artists like Robert Crumb, Gilbert Shelton, Spain Rodríguez, and Jay Lynch, but I was also interested in the magic of the comics that I knew from my childhood. I was interested in Hergé, and I was interested in *The Spirit*—which I knew later as a student. So I worked hard on my style of drawing, and in France they found it very funny that I combined the underground freedom with the style of drawing that we all knew from our youth. At first glimpse, my work from that period looks like a children's book, when in fact I talk about things that people only know from underground comics. This combination was quite new, and



Illustrations for Erich Scheurmann's book *The Papalagis (The White Men)*, drawn by Joost Swarte and published by Real Free Press, Amsterdam, 1975. Scanned from the Spanish edition: Pastanaga Edicions, 1977. © Joost Swarte

they loved it. So, from that moment on, I knew I could publish everything that I made in France. It was only five years after I started doing comics that I knew it could be a profession.

Something that struck me the first time I read your comics back in the 80s is the stark contrast between the style, that clear line which can be found in children's books, which also relates to Le Corbusier's renderings.

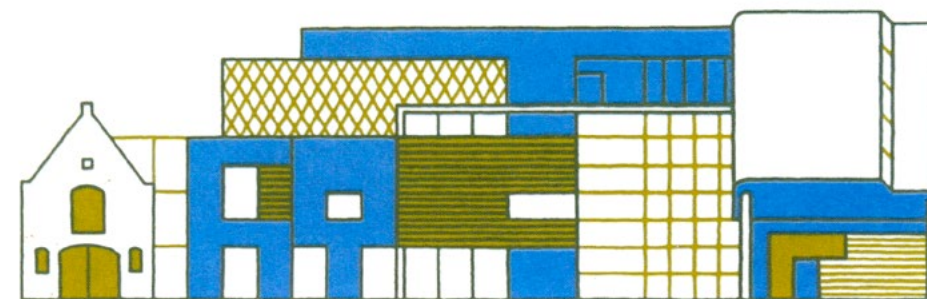
Well, the case is that this style of drawing makes it possible to draw technical details. I can almost draw like an architect, and show the essence of the construction. With the clear line, it seems quite logical, and as I am interested in all sort of technical details, I can express myself quite well with this style.

There is a strong neo-plastic flavor in your work. Your designs have a certain 'Reitfeld' flavor to them, and there is a certain early modernism in your approach. Would you say De Stijl has been an influence on you?

That's right. It's a period where the architecture got rid of decorations, and went back to the essence of what is space. And I am always looking for the essence. If I illustrate an article, I try to find out what in fact is the content of the article, and try to reduce it to a simple thing, without making it too naïve. It's better than talking about a hundred details. In architecture, it's not easy. If you want to have a simple connection, it asks for a lot of preparations. So, I like to have it look simple, but in fact it's a lot of work. But that's fun, it's sort of a puzzle. The movement of De Stijl was a great influence. Gerrit Rietveld was even more influential.

You also tend to use a lot of axonometrics in your representation of space, which makes sense within the context of the abstraction, objectivist quality of the clear line style.

Yes. The perspective drawing with vanishing points is one language, but there are other languages; it depends on what I like to draw. I use isometric projection often in stories, because it makes it possible to give a strong meaning to something that is far away, and I can use it in much of my storytelling.



De Toneelschuur. Illustration for the inauguration of the theater, 2002 © Joost Swarte

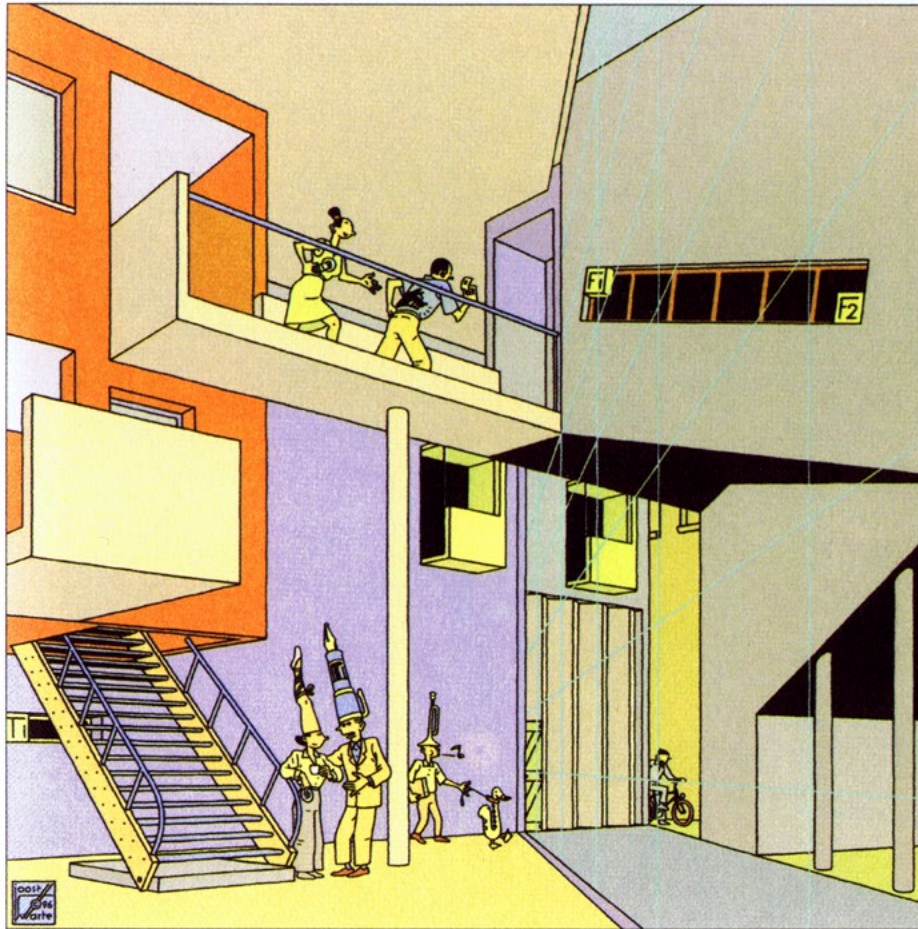
I. Toneelschuur

One thing that you also kept from this era is that you practice a whole range of disciplines. You have completed the whole circle from industrial designer to comics artist, then back to architectural designer. When did this full circle come to happen?

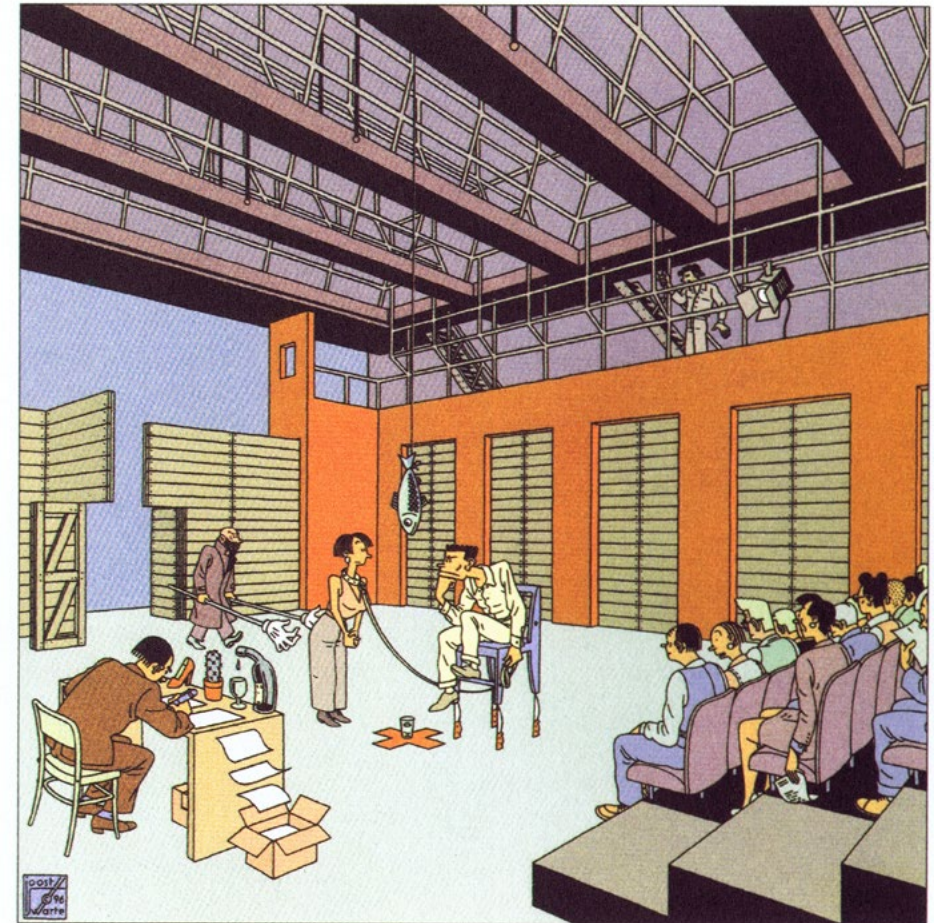
When I was still a student I found out that art, design, and architecture are very nearby, and often in institutes it is divided in different sections. I like to do different things, so to me it was never a goal to focus on one of the disciplines. I liked to do them all. One artist that I am especially interested in is Joaquín Torres García. He made stained glass windows, paintings, but also wooden toys... I never lost my interest in architecture. When I started doing comics, my first comics often had architectural subjects. I kept up with what's new in architecture, and I collected books on architecture, and each time I needed to draw houses and buildings, I considered it as sort of a study.

Before the Toneelschuur, you had already developed several design tasks, even some furniture. But how did the commission for the theater happen?

I did some furniture for a museum, and I designed an extension of my family house, but I never had an assignment as big as making a theater. That was quite bizarre. They asked me because, at a certain point, the theater organization didn't have the money yet to hire an architect, but they needed somebody who could invent the building and do a good presentation. They needed somebody who could make drawings that communicate it. I worked a lot with the theater, making posters, the entrance ticket, and the monthly magazine for them. And they knew that I was very close to their way of making theater. This is not a theater for the big public, it is more sort of an *avant-garde* theater, and I knew exactly how they worked. So they asked me, "Please, design a new building, and present it in a way that the city will say 'This really is fantastic, we are going to take care of the money.'"



De Toneelschuur, final design. Images developed for the presentation portfolio by Joost Swarte © Joost Swarte



Did they just want an idea, or did they give you a full program of necessities?

There was a huge program. They had a program of about 150 pages. They knew exactly what they wanted; they knew what wood should be on the floor for dancers, for instance. Within the limitations of the program, they gave me 100% freedom. I came up with lots of ideas. In the early developments, I had a friend architect that I visited sometimes, and he could give advice to me. I often came to the organization to discuss my ideas and, from the beginning on, they were only positive.

How did you approach the design? As a comic artist and illustrator, did you start with images?

I never start with an image. It is always trying to solve problems. Of course it's not an objective thing, because you involve some personal elements; a function is not something objective. I started by finding solutions for the major problems. In Holland, there is a law that says that set decorations should be changed within the building, so, there should be a garage in the building. And it was in the center of



DE TONEELSCHUUR

JOOST SWARTE MET MECANOO ARCHITECTEN

town, on a very small street. I solved the problem by saying that we should make an extra alley where this truck could come in. Within the old part of town, we have smaller houses so I decided to give each part its own façade, with its own material. There are two theater halls and you can recognize them: one is green with copper, and the other one has dark grey bricks; then you have two cinema halls, and, in a way, they are both pavilions, with purple stucco. Then there is the entrance building, which has also an old façade made out wood, and then we have the café, which is built out of red brick. It looks like a collage; it divides the building in many, many smaller parts, so it fits well in the center of town. The people who lived in this section of town were very happy that I wouldn't design one, immense building in their neighborhood.

Also, the idea was to work in the new theater with the same amount of people, even if the volume of the theater would be twice as much as the old one. And, of course, an important thing is how light comes in the building. With all of these elements, I started to make little sketches. And from the puzzle of solving these problems, came the idea to provide each part of the building with its own visual exterior, to make it as clear as possible. You give each part a specific and personal look.

I prefer to give the message of the building as clear as possible to the public. So, in a way, you can consider this a clear line solution. [chuckles]

In terms of the spatial design, did you use models, or primarily drawings?

Well, I started with drawings. But then I needed the model to communicate, not only for myself to know what was possible—but to know that the result of my drawings would give an interesting space. I needed it also to explain to the people from the theater what my ideas were, because I know how to read the drawing, but very few people know how. It was crazy. It was all done in secret, because we didn't dare to tell the politicians that a comic artist would design the new theater. They would think we were crazy. So, only when it was all finished and calculated we invited them for a presentation.

What was that like? What kind of documents did you produce for this presentation?

We did an audio-visual presentation with a lot of drawings by me in it, and a portfolio with four silk screens: two of the exterior, and two of the interior of the building. I also made drawings of the structure, of the floor plans, and a little *maquette* (model). With it and the plans, we calculated the cost, and it came out that it was a financially possible design. It worked quite well and it was well-received in the newspapers and the specialized magazines. That helped a lot. The community liked it, the politicians liked it, and then they decided to find the money.

After that, it was necessary to team up with architects to have it built. There was this group of young architects, Mecanoo, who knew my work and I knew theirs. I liked very much their buildings. We teamed up, and there was a contract in which it was stipulated that the purpose of the whole collaboration was to realize my ideas for the buildings. But I said, "If while developing the building, we come up with better ideas, I am open to them."

II. Beyond the Comic(s) page

How did the collaboration work?

It was the architects who made the final drawings, but we had a lot of sessions together. We had consultants for acoustics and installations. I was often in the architectural studio in Delft, and I discussed how I wanted to have it detailed. That was fantastically done. I followed the whole process from A to Z. While the contractors were building the theater, I often was at the site. Of course we had somebody who was in charge during the construction process, but I checked in. It was easy for me to visit the site, since my studio was a five-minute walk from it. So if there was any problem, I would get a telephone call directly at my studio, and five minutes later I would be there to help. Then, I would communicate this with the architects, so that they knew what was going on.

I remember one day I visited the site, and I saw that the color I had indicated for an entrance door wasn't good. So I went to the contractors and said, "I would like to change this color for another one, because it works better." And they replied, "That's okay." So I went back to this man with the paintbrush, and I said, "I just discussed it, and it is going to be another color." I always liked very, very much—and this is the sort of the inspiration for such behavior—a photograph of Gio Ponti in a construction site: with a coat on, he is sitting at the table, and he designs details to negotiate, or to show to the people working on it. I like very much people who continuously feel responsible for the final result. That's something that I do for my books and, inspired by this photo of Gio Ponti, I thought I should do it for the building as well.

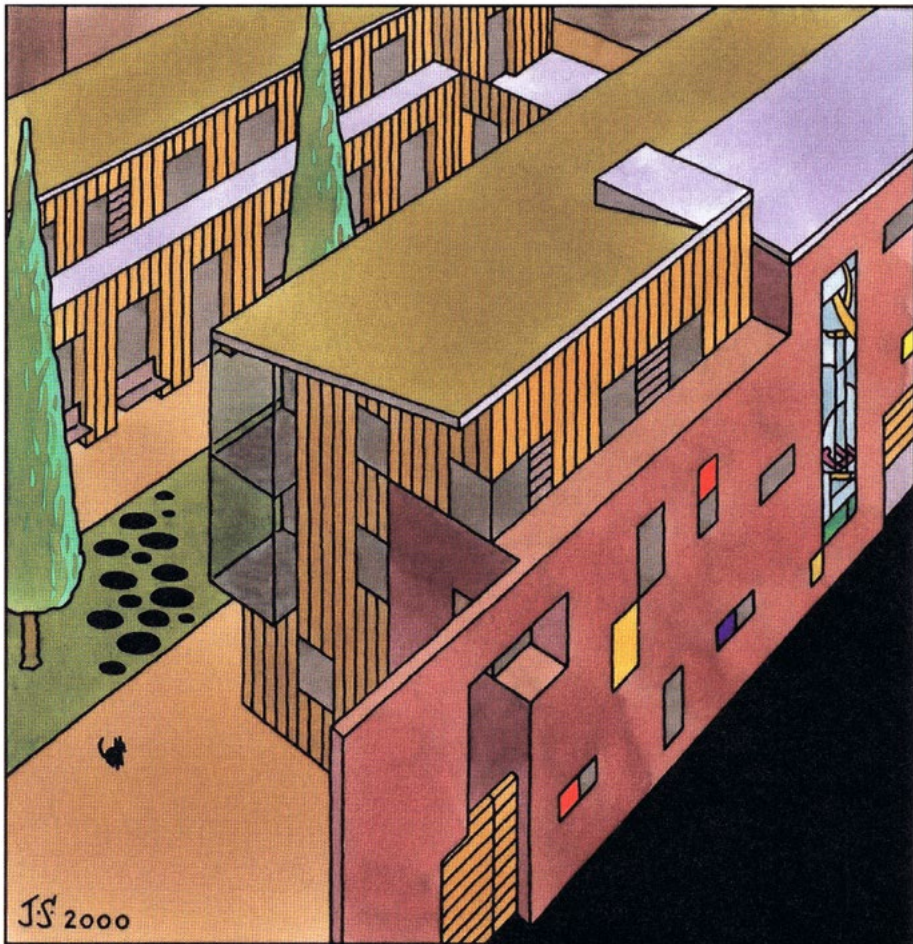
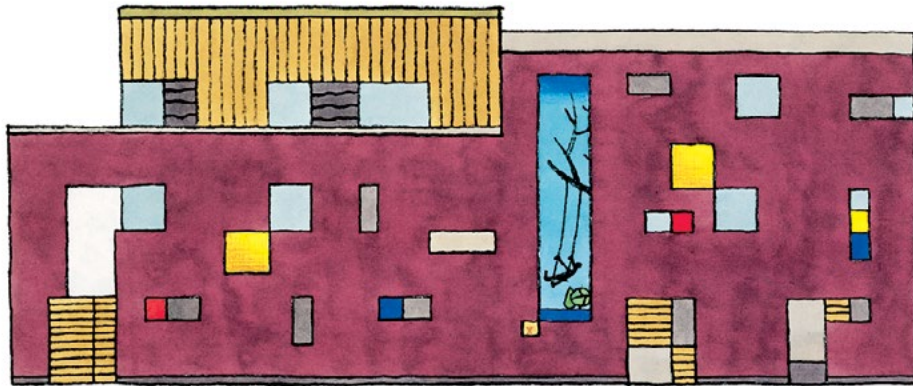
So, how does the final result compare to your design? Was the spirit of the design preserved?

Yes, absolutely, and the result is better than what I started with. The principles of what I had in mind are absolutely in the final building. It was only changed for the better. The garage is much better than all my first plans, the technical installations got more room... all these type of changes.

Was it somehow a dream come true, bringing your designs to life?

In a way it was. I never thought I could be asked to do such a thing. When they came with this question, the first thing that came to my mind was, "Don't hurry too much," but I knew that I couldn't say no to such a demand. I thought, "If I, within a week, can think of solutions for such an architectural problem in an old town, then I will continue to do so." In fact, I came up with the solution on the first night, and used the other days to check that I hadn't made any mistake. I couldn't find a better way, so I decided that my brains were enough "architect brains" to work on the project, and I accepted. In the beginning, when it was finished, it was sort of a dream. I would ride my bicycle from my studio to my house, and then I would pass the theater, I look at it, and think, "Is it real? Is this a dream?" But it was real. And it was really incredible.





I get that your collaboration with Mecanoo was very smooth. Did this spring your interest in doing architectural projects? You did some exterior design for the Johannes Enschedé Hof project, also in Haarlem.

Yes. It was a very good collaboration and, as a result of that, we collaborated on this smaller project, a group of houses for elderly people located just beside the theater. I was asked to think about it, but it was at the final state of the theater, and an extra hard job would have killed me. So I discussed it with Henk [Döll, from Mecanoo at the time], and we finally came to the idea that it would be best that he would get the job, and add me in his team of designers. This building had the smaller windows looking on to the street. So I thought, "If I could add some artistic elements in this façade, that would make a better building." I proposed it, and they accepted.

Then, about five years ago, I developed a little apartment building in the center of Amsterdam. The thing here was that I was first asked to design only a façade for the vacant spot. I said, "I can only draw a façade if I know what is behind it." So they suggested that I work with an architect [Sytze Viseer] to work on the details. They had never had to draw as many details as they did with me! [laughter] And, of course, they also added some ideas. It is always cooperation. It's a negotiation.

The stained glass work has become an ongoing line of work.

Yes, that's right. Sometimes, you can't solve all problems within architectural means. Sometimes an extra art supplement helps to make a building *sympathique* (nice). I did a huge stained glass window in the courthouse of the city of Arnhem, and, not too long ago, I did a series of stained glass windows for a chapel in the center of Grenoble and for some schools. Also, I have a project here, that I should start with, in an old industrial building in Amsterdam. It is now an apartment building, so they asked me to redesign the entrance. Another recent project is a kitchen that I designed for friends of ours. That was a nice little project, a project that I could follow from the beginning to the very end.

You do a lot of architectural surgery. Architectural jewelry, actually.

Yeah. [laughs]

Do you also keep an ongoing relationship with all these designs?

In Amsterdam I asked the organization, "When the building is finished, I want to live with my family in one of the apartments for free for one month to see if what I designed has the same social quality that I had in mind." And they agreed, so we all moved for one month into the building. That was great fun. When I visit a building, I realize that I am always busy giving comments about where I am. If I am with a group of people, in a big room, I ask myself, "Is this room big enough? Is it small enough? Is it high enough, did the architect place the window in a way that enough light is coming in?"

An architectural way of seeing. [laughter]

Yes, absolutely—a non-stop architectural curiosity.

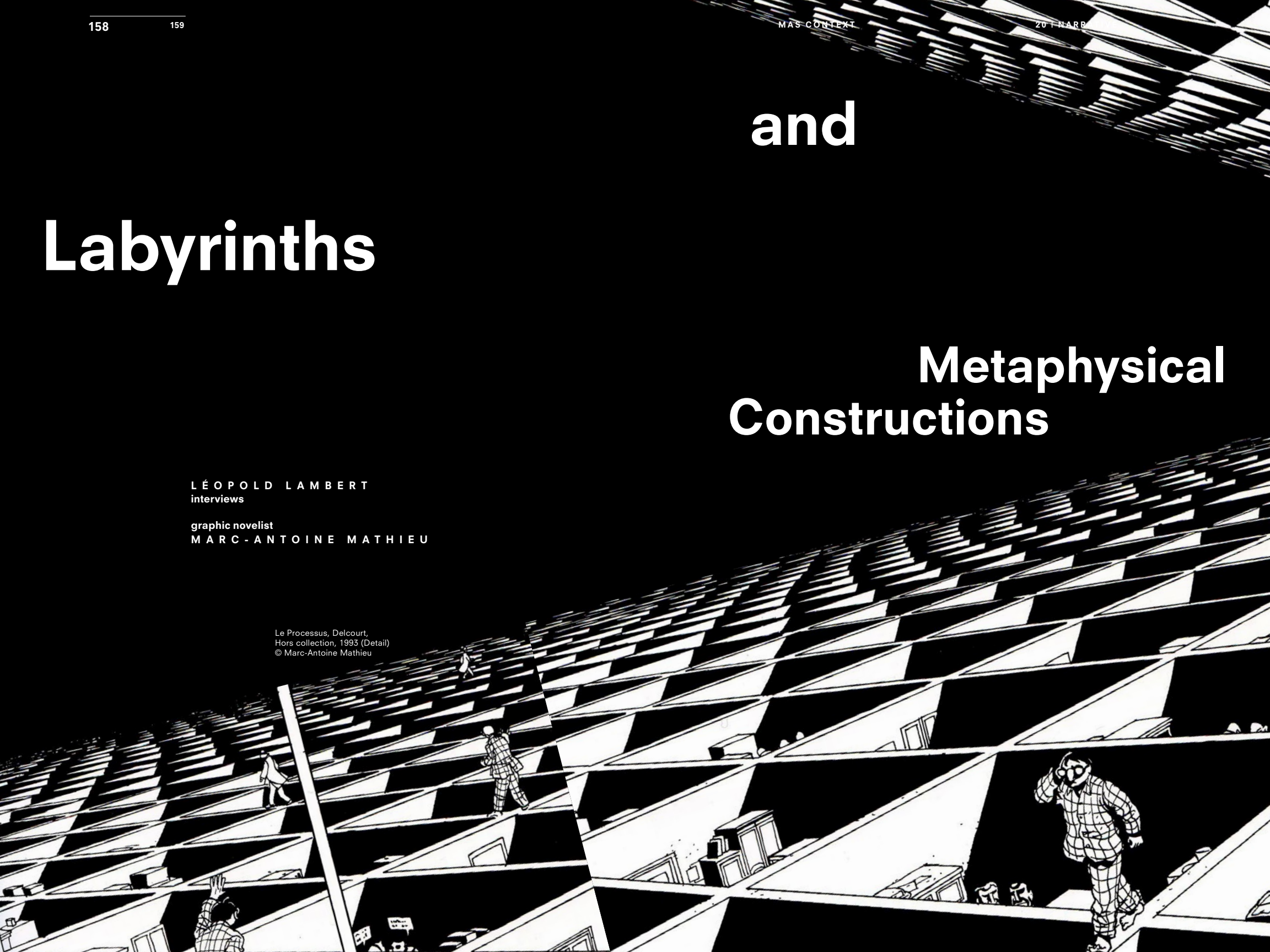
Labyrinths

and Metaphysical Constructions

LÉOPOLD LAMBERT
interviews

graphic novelist
MARC-ANTOINE MATHIEU

Le Processus, Delcourt,
Hors collection, 1993 (Detail)
© Marc-Antoine Mathieu



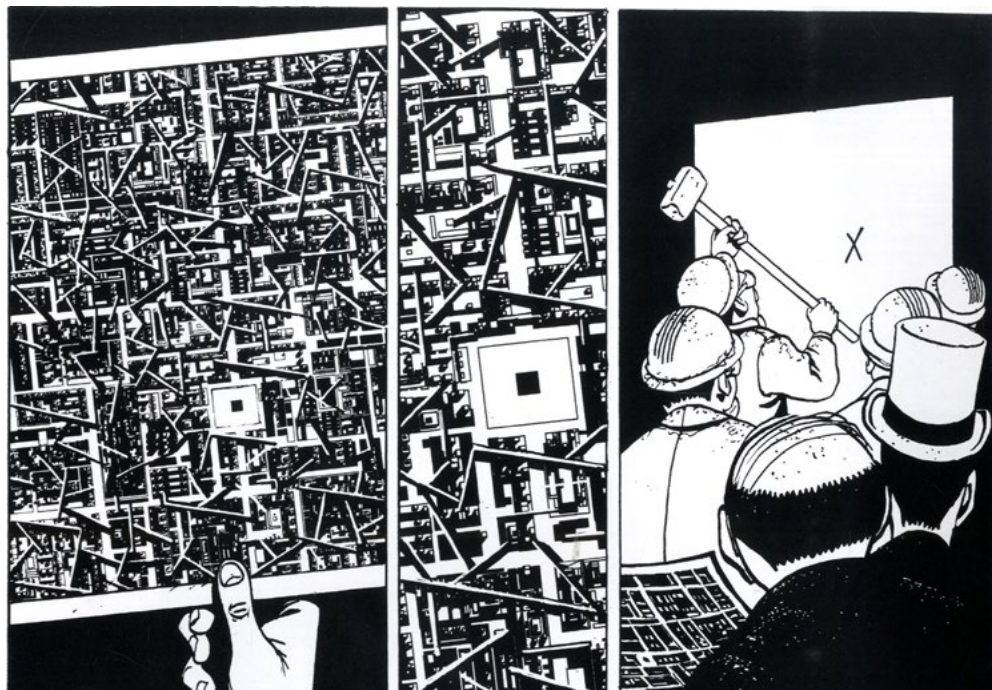
Marc-Antoine Mathieu is a French graphic novelist who, book after book, explores new ways to integrate the very form of the graphic novel, as an integrative part of the labyrinths of his narratives. His series *Julius Corentin Acque-facques, prisonnier des rêves* (Julius Corentin Acque-facques, Prisoner of Dreams), which gathers six books from 1990 to 2013, in particular, deconstructs one by one every formal component of the graphic novel (cover, frame, perspective, two-dimensionality, page direction, and flatness) while composing metaphysical considerations of what reality *really is*. As said in the following conversation, he seeks “for the loss of control, the Borgesian vertigo,” in which he himself as the author would get lost and let the world he instigated acquire a certain autonomy.

He believes that, as architects, we have the possibility to either impose an absolute transcendental control over our design or to accept its immanent characteristics by integrating a protocol of desappropriation within the creative process of the design itself. The way Marc-Antoine Mathieu’s graphic novels can help us to do so lies in how his own design—he says he feels more like an architect than a storyteller—is considering the elementary components of his disciplines and explicitly refuses their presupposed purpose by subverting them in their essence. What Marc-Antoine Mathieu does with his frames, his pages, his lines, we can do with our walls, our floors, and our ceilings.

The specificity of your stories can be found in the subversion of the graphic novel’s forms and codes. You use its graphic and narrative elements as a creative essence of spatial, temporal, and metaphysical labyrinths that compose your books. These labyrinths are not the classical ones, drawn by a demiurge architect from above, who is laughing to see all these small bodies getting lost in the complexity of his lines. The labyrinths you create seem to me in the continuity of another form, invented by Franz Kafka, who also gets lost in the labyrinths he creates. Not only are his stories labyrinthine, but so is the medium: at Kafka’s death, *The Trial* (1925) was a disarticulated sum of chapters that his friend, Max Brod, reconstituted retrospectively—and erroneously in my opinion—to give them a logical order. Similarly, Kafka’s *The Castle* (1926) ends in the middle of a sentence. How important is this figure of the labyrinth for you?

The labyrinth is indeed a form that has been working on me for quite a while. It has been a while indeed since you don’t “enter” the labyrinth just like that. It’s a bit like the color, or the absolute. There are many things in which we hesitate to enter; we have to think twice first. The next book that I am going to publish in October will be called *Labyrinthum* (L’Association Publisher) and it will be a fractal labyrinth. It will be fractal since, for me, the labyrinth is more Borgesian than Kafkaian. I would say that what is Kafkaian is a literature of the absurd, whereas Jorge Luis Borges is more a poetry of metaphysics. I think that the labyrinth is more a metaphysical figure than an absurd figure.

At least in my work, the labyrinth is always somewhere around. Perhaps it is an illusion though. I mean that it might not be the “true” labyrinth in the sense of a complete loss of references in something that we built for ourselves. I don’t think that this is the labyrinth that I am talking about. The interesting thing with the labyrinth is indeed the experience of losing our references; it means the experience of losing ourselves, the loss of our own reality, or so-called reality. This way, it is true that there is the artist’s symbol in the labyrinth, because what is the artist doing if he or she is not trying to lose himself or herself in his or her creation in order to experiment always further? There is a risk of madness in the labyrinth, and this is why we don’t enter it immediately. It is a figure of maturity or, on the other hand, a figure of survival: this is Ulysses who is obliged to go through the labyrinth. Either he dies in it or he survives it. My next story will have for only setting only a labyrinthine route, in the Borgesian sense, that is the desert-labyrinth.



You are referring to Borges's short story, *The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths* (1939), aren't you? You seem to be indeed more interested in Borges's labyrinth than in James Joyce's labyrinth, since that is what is implicit in this story: Joyce creates literary labyrinths full of complex apparatuses, and Borges, on the contrary, produce labyrinths in the form of deserts. We find a lot of those in your work.

Yes, it is an infinite erratic labyrinth that ignores its own status. In my next book, there is a character who is lost in the desert, but who does not know that he is in a labyrinth. This awareness is the one of the demiurge. The form of the labyrinth is here, but it is not represented. It is a roving that goes to the right, to the left, straight ahead, that gets lost, but there are neither walls nor structures; there is no architecture.

One can find the labyrinth in most of my stories. There is also the labyrinthine story, the fact that it can be cyclical or in the form of a spiral, since another labyrinth, just as pure as the desert, is the spiral. In a spiral, wherever you are, you are simultaneously in the center and at the periphery. It is almost the symbol of the labyrinth. The most radical form of the labyrinth consists for us to wonder if we are on the wall or between the walls. In a spiral, whether you are on a spire or between two spires, it is the same thing at the end of the day: you are on something that escapes from your understanding. In a certain way, you are trapped. That might be where the labyrinth can join the figure of the absurd in the sense of Albert Camus.

The "Sisyphian" absurd.¹

That's it.

We can observe several layers or levels of architecture in your books. There is architecture in a relatively classical sense, as you use it in your story and that is far from being neutral: the various City departments' architecture for example, the Station in *La Qu...* (Delcourt, 1991), but also the giant computer in *Dead Memory* (Dark Horse, 2004). There is also the architecture of the book's page, with which you play (empty frame, "anti-frame," the page in the page in the page etc.) and the architecture of the book itself, as an object that involves both the author and the reader inside the narrative. How do you articulate these various levels of architecture together?

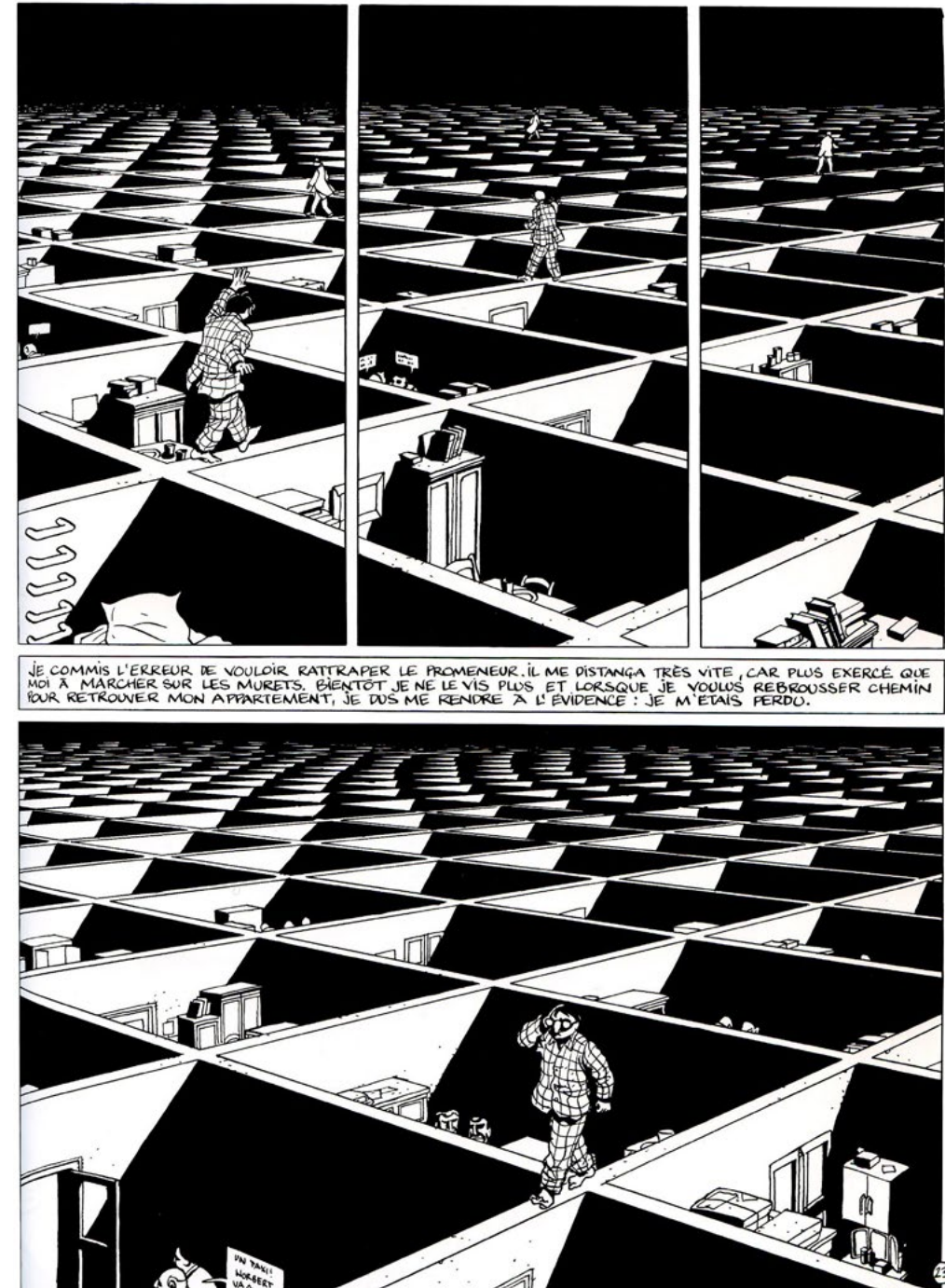
I prefer to leave this analysis to specialists. Personally I am not so interested in doing it. That being said, what I would be interested in doing, is to elaborate on the fact that I am thinking of myself more as an architect than as a storyteller. I feel that I am more a space and time manager than a narrator. I have the feeling that, often, the narrative, the dialogues, the texts are a bit of pretext to set up a space/time of which I am less in control. It is as if with words, with dialogues, with a story, I was building a skeleton and what is really interesting is everything that happens around this skeleton that I build from book to book. Each time I am adding some flesh to the skeleton and this flesh belongs much more to the world of architecture—sometimes, even a scientific architecture—than to the world of literature. That is what might make the specificity of my work.

Your question can be pertinent in the extent that the departitioning between some arts can be interesting. When I created *3 secondes* (Delcourt, 2011) for example, I did not feel that I was producing a graphic novel at all. I was feeling much more that I was in an architect's shoes, someone that had made a sketch of a bridge, and who, later, had to wonder about engineering problems for six months, wondering how this can hold itself, which pathway I should add to it, which spring to adjust so that it can work and that the whole thing would be quite harmonious. I was wondering much more about structural questions than narrative ones. Structure is a notion of space and time; much more than narrative that calls for concept like linearity, for example. Linearity is what is appearing: there is a dialogue, it is fluid, it seems quite obvious. In *Le décalage* (Delcourt, 2013), the dialogues are following one another, they look similar and we feel to surf on a sort of crest, but actually, what is weaved around it is something completely different, something that escapes from me completely. I don't know how to analyze it. This is what is interesting by the way. What escapes from me at this specific moment, it can only escape from me this way, only in this medium that we call graphic novel. It is a sort of mix between a shaping of time, a shaping of space, convergence lines, a sort of alchemy that not only I am not interested in analyzing, but I actually refuse to do so as it is my terrain of adventures and experiments.

That is perfect, since I wanted to ask you a question about the graphic novel as a specific medium and you just answered it.

The specificity of graphic novel, where it embraces its value, lies in what it does with the drawing. It creates shapes/forms, but without designating them completely. Cinema, on the contrary, produces forms but automatically designates them. In a graphic novel, you can draw shapes/forms without designating them, by giving them masks. That is what I do in my books: *The City Department of Justice*, *the City Department of Humor*, whatever *Palace*, *the Station* etc. they are things that I designate, but only partially, 10% or 35% of it, or that I even de-designate, I non-designate them. It creates shapes/forms but they are shapes that the reader will have to complete. The reader is the one who has to designate them completely. That is the challenge.

There is also space-time. Time is the same thing: we designate a time, but what is it? Will the reading of the book take five minutes? Half an hour? Three hours? This time that is defined by the graphic novel is very blurry and mysterious. We can even go backwards. There is also some text. We think that we dominate it, but if we work on it a bit, we can leave blurs, holes, ellipses, shortcuts, it can go very far. The graphic novel is a true terrain of experiments, somewhere in the middle of genres and mediation tools that make of it a real blurry/sandlot terrain (*terrain vague*), where anyone can have fun experimenting as a creator and experimenting the way the reader reads.



4

RATIOCINATIONS

DURANT LES JOURS QUI SUIVIRENT CETTE VISITE MOUVEMENTÉE CHEZ LES
DALENVERT, MA PREMIÈRE RÉACTION FUT D'ÉVITER LES BIBLIOTHÈQUES, LES LIBRAIRIES ET
LES ARCHIVES. PAR PROVOCATION, SANS DOUTE... PUIS JE COMPRIS QUE S'IL Y AVAIT
PRÉDICTION, CE REFUS DEVAIT ÊTRE LUI AUSSI PRÉVU. JE N'AVAIS DONC PAS LE CHOIX :
ATTENDRE LA PAGE 27 ET VÉRIFIER SI ELLE SE DÉROULERAIT... COMME PRÉVU.

25

If I follow your reflection, the graphic novel is also an object, and you have been playing with this object a numerous amount of times. If I just evoke the covers themselves, *L'épaisseur du miroir* (Delcourt, 1995) has two covers and two reading directions, *Le décalage* (Delcourt, 2013) has an order of pages that seemed to have shifted in such a way that the story starts on the cover and what should have been the cover can be only found at the end of the book. There are multiple other similar examples.

Yes, we can play with the fourth dimension or an analogy of the fourth dimension when we start to consider that the graphic novel is indeed an object, an image book that I have in my hands as a reader. When I find a spiral that seems to exit the book, a pop-up, color or a torn page, I am starting to ask myself some questions.

It is interesting that you speak of a fourth dimension. For us readers, the book is the third dimension, but for your characters that it is indeed a fourth dimension, is that it? What is our own fourth dimension? Is there a great object in which we can also be read in one way or another?

That's it. It was the idea of *L'origine* (Delcourt, 1990), the first book of Julius²: to create for the reader a sort of vertigo, an existential story within the story. If these two-dimensional characters were becoming aware that they were living in a world that had actually three dimensions, then we could also try to imagine ourselves that there is a fourth dimension. When we listen to astrophysicists nowadays, that is what they attempt to explain to us: try to imagine that time is also a dimension, I mean a *physical* dimension and you will have a richer and more complete image of the universe in which we live. Einstein is the one who updated all that: he looked under the carpet and he discovered that the three Newtonian dimensions could not explain everything. It remains however very hard to imagine. A four-dimension world is not something intuitive. The space/time light cone is very hard to imagine, even with a lot of imagination. Sometimes, we succeed imperfectly to have a glance at what it is, but it is so complicated. That might be where the artist sometimes can help.

Let's go back to *L'origine* and this analogy of a two-dimension world that lives on a sphere. In this two-dimensional world, characters and scientists discover that their world is a gigantic sphere and that if they go in one direction, they will ultimately go back to their starting point. Other characters, obviously, they wonder what this madness is all about, what this sphere means. They are two-dimensional, it is not possible; there is no thickness. They are being told that they have to imagine that there is a third dimension. The scientists are being called crazy, but at the end of the day, it is our own situation as well: we are prisoners of a three-dimensional world and of the illusion of the world in which we are embedded. Yet, the fourth dimension exists, we have to deal with it.



In *Dead Memory*, a multitude of walls grow overnight in an endless city. These walls are blocking the streets that become different spaces. In order to move, some squads of minors/policemen go through the houses' walls. This has very poignant historical references. There is Auguste Blanqui and the 19th-century Parisian revolutions, there is the Israeli army that went through the walls and Palestinian living rooms during the 2002 siege on Nabulus's refugee camp. We can also evoke the fictitious opening scene of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* where a character is arrested by policemen who swarm inside his apartment from the ceiling. Can you tell us about your interpretation of architecture as a material assemblage and its political consequences?

I have indeed an interest for history, but what I am interested in *Mémoire morte* is to lift my antennas and to express in the best way possible, feelings, intuitions, and instinctive thoughts that I can have about the polis, the city, new networks that are being created, etc. I did *Mémoire morte* fifteen years ago now, but from what I heard, it might have pointed out a few things. Walls that are interacting and emerging with the city are a bit the symbol of a society that would like to declare itself as transparent, open to everything but that actually closes itself to everything. I formalized it through these walls in quite a radical manner. I would say that it is not the best of my books since it is a bit rigid, a bit stuck, and talkative even. The sociological domain is not the field where I feel the most comfortable.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Sisyphus is a Greek mythology character who was condemned to roll a heavy stone up to the top of a mountain, but the stone would roll down on the other side of the mountain, a situation repeated endlessly. Camus used this mythological story as the paradigm of the existential absurd in his book *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942).
- 2 Julius Corentin Acquefacques is the main character of a six-book series created by Marc-Antoine Mathieu.

ANDREA ALBERGHINI

interviews
MANUELE FIOR

Images

come

first

La signorina Else, Coconino Press,
2009 (Detail) © Manuele Fior



Born in Cesena (Italy) in 1975, Manuele Fior received his degree in architecture from IUAV in 2000. He then moved to Berlin, where he worked until 2005 as cartoonist, illustrator and architect. His career in comics began in 2001 with his collaboration with the German publisher Avant-Verlag on the magazine *Plaque*. Since then he has created several graphic novels, including *Les gens le dimanche* (Atrabile, 2004), *Rosso Oltremare* (Coconino Press/Atrabile, 2006), *La signorina Else* (Coconino Press/Delcourt, 2009), *Cinquemila chilometri al secondo* (Coconino Press/Atrabile, 2010), and most recently *L'intervista* (Coconino Press/Futuropolis, 2013).

His illustrations have been published in magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *Le Monde*, *Vanity Fair*, *Internazionale*, *Rolling Stone*, *Les Inrocks* and in newspapers such as *La Repubblica*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, and *Il Manifesto*. He has collaborated with the publishing houses Feltrinelli, Einaudi, Edizioni EL, Fabbri, Nathan, Bayard and the Far East Film Festival.

Architect Andrea Alberghini talked to Manuele to learn about the relationship between his work as an architect and his cartoons, his influences, the different techniques found in his graphic novels and the importance of the settings he chooses.

You are a comic book artist and an illustrator, but you have a background as an architect. For a short period you also worked professionally in both fields at the same time. Did your interests in architecture and comics come up at the same time or did one lead to the other in a more or less natural way?

My interest in comics was born very early. In elementary school, I used to fill entire exercise books with comics. The interest in architecture came later in a more tangential way. My family didn't like art that much, so I felt obliged to orient my education toward more scientific studies. My parents would have been happier if I chose engineering, but I found a fair compromise in architecture. At the beginning, after a couple of years, I wanted to drop out of University, but for various reasons I didn't and I started to work in the office of Romano Burelli, a professor who really enthused me. He was an architect and a painter; we shared the same interests. I became very interested in architecture and, above all, I began visiting it. With my university colleagues I toured France to visit Le Corbusier's masterpieces. I have to say that I've always kept architecture and comics apart from each other. Only recently have I begun experimenting with possible contaminations. The more trivial way is to insert in my comics famous buildings I studied at the University. But you can do more than just mere citations. Comics have a great visionary capacity, and architecture draws from it. Take Moebius' *Venise Celeste*, for example, or his visions of a multilevel vertical city so influential on the whole Blade Runner urban imagery. So, without flaunting any programmatic manifesto, I can say that I'm currently trying to channel my interest in architecture into my graphic novels, not simply citing famous buildings but also trying to describe the way cities change.

What were your most important influences in your training years in the fields of architecture and comics?

IUAV [The School of Architecture at Venice] mainly focused on Rationalism and the Italian interpretations of the International Style. Le Corbusier was everywhere, as well as the Italian Rationalists like Terragni. At the beginning, it wasn't easy for me to get into this kind of architecture; I think this architecture above all has to be visited and studied. On the contrary, I became fond of Organic Architecture that was brought into Venice by Carlo Scarpa and other Friulian architects like Marcello D'Olive and Angelo Masieri. So, even if it sounds like a paradox, the biggest influences I still feel today are these two antithetical tendencies: Rationalism (the International Style) and Organic Architecture, both of which I visited in Italy, since I've never been in the United States. In Friuli Venezia-Giulia there are various buildings by Scarpa and Masieri. It's a kind of architecture in which drawing is predominant. Take Scarpa, for example. Most of the design passes through the drawing hand. It was during my University years that I stopped reading superhero comics and became fascinated by Lorenzo Mattotti, a cartoonist and artist who had a background in architecture, too, and who I felt was able to transpose in his comics the same intensity that could be found in certain architectural masterpieces. For me they were the most interesting things that could be found in the field of comics at the time. Actually, I've always been fascinated by these architects-cartoonists. I think also of Guido Crepax.

Many people ask me how much architecture can be found in a comic book. The answer isn't that easy. There's not only the direct citation of famous buildings. An architectural plan and a comic book page share some common elements. It's just like when you compare a painting by Mondrian and a house plan by Mies van der Rohe: there are similarities. The rules of Architectural Composition virtually correspond to the ones that give structure to a comic book page. For me it's not the mere stacking of strips—like in standard French comics—but the view of the page as a whole dictates the articulation of the panels and the rhythm of the story.

You said that you've always kept apart your working activities as an architect and as a cartoonist. Was it difficult to harmonize them? Why, at a certain point, did you choose to drop out of architecture and devote yourself exclusively to comics and illustration?

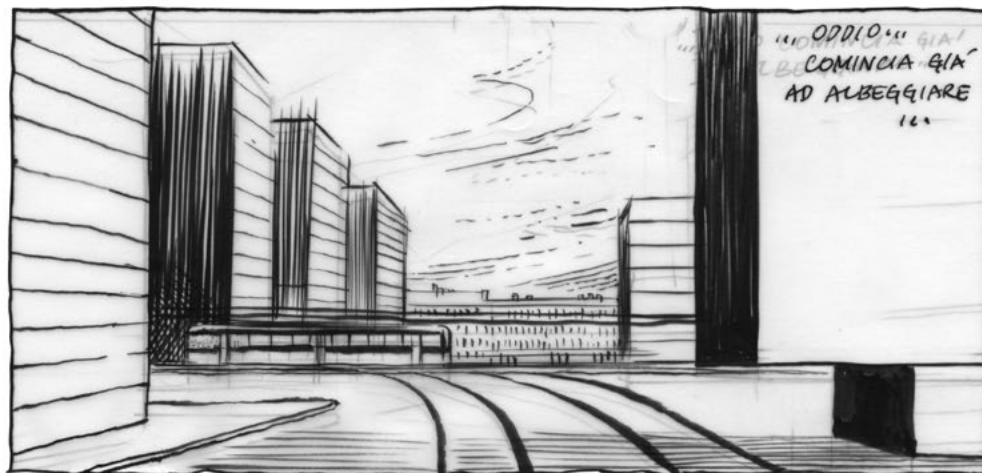
Harmonizing the two activities was very difficult because they both require an absolute devotion. It was very clear to me from the beginning that I could pursue just one of these two careers. When I first showed my drawings to Mattotti, he asked me: "Okay, but what do you want to be? An architect or a cartoonist?" The choice was done out of contingency. I lived in Berlin for five years working as an architect. After the boom of the 90s, in 2002-2003 I found myself with less and less work to do. The firm I worked for closed down and in my free time I began doing some illustrations. Then a publisher stepped forward and offered to publish a short story of mine. From then on, I arranged to be involved in more operational tasks (3D, drawings) and gradually left behind the design process, because designing is a very demanding task. In the meantime, in Italy, the publisher Coconino Press was born. There were concrete opportunities to publish high-quality graphic novels. So I had to choose, and I chose to become a full-time comic book artist. It's been six or seven years now.

Do you still feel the urge to build? Do you think it will be possible for you to return to architecture one day?

The desire remains the same, even if architecture is a field you have to practice if you don't want to get rusty. Sincerely, I don't think I'll ever practice it as a job anymore. But in the future, I'd like to come back to designing, even if only in my private life. I really miss the design process: interacting with other experts, making models, going to construction sites, but realistically, I don't think I'll come back to architecture as a full time job. I'm now too focused on comics.

Have you ever used comics in your job as an architect, or when you were a student, to introduce a narrative element in your design presentations?

No. When I went to work in the office of Romano Burelli, who was very rigid but also had a very personal style, I drew a clear line. In fact, architectural design has nothing to do with comics. I always tried to use the barest graphic presentation to highlight the intrinsic qualities of the design and not the presentation in itself. I was fascinated by Le Corbusier's and Mies van der Rohe's drawings, of course, but I always kept the two things apart.



Catchy architectural representations done with comics and other atypical graphics are a quite common trend now. What's your opinion?

I'm not very up-to-date on the subject. My most recent memories concern Archigram! Anyway I'm very skeptical about renderings, 3Ds and so on. Obviously, you don't always have to present an architectural design to experts. But I think architecture is contained in plans and sections. I don't believe in rendering aesthetics. Anyway, if you do things intelligently and with a bit of irony, why not? I believe Botta did something similar, a quick comic strip about his architecture.

Above all I believe it's a problem of proficiency.

The language of comics has precise rules. You can't just improvise for promotional purposes.

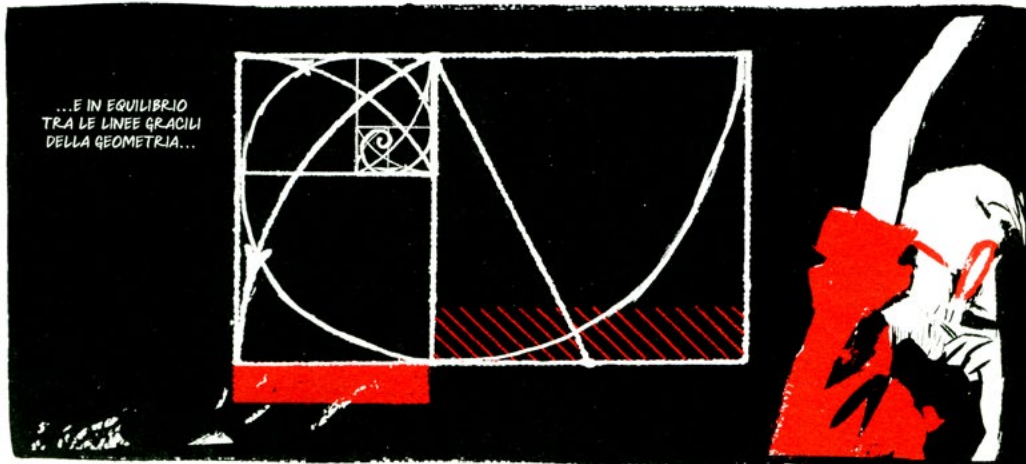
Your architectural background shows through your comics. Your spatial and typological competence, for instance, is self-evident. Is there something more? The original art of *Les Gens le dimanche* (2004), your first graphic novel, was done on tracing paper like the old technical drawings intended for heliographic reproduction, even though the book is printed in ordinary black and white.

When I came back to comics, I was working as a full-time architect. I wasn't truly aware of the state of the art in comics. So I used the materials that were at hand at the office. It wasn't something required by printing demands; those were simply the materials I was confident with at the time.

Fausto, the protagonist of *Rosso Oltremare* (2007), your second graphic novel, is an architect obsessed by the irreconcilability of rationality and natural laws. Your reference to the Modulor in the shadow he casts on the floor when he raises his right arm in the course of his delirium is very beautiful and effective. Fausto then gets lost in the Labyrinth, which is a metaphorical space. Is the search for an absolute, unassailable architecture just a narrative starting point or is it a problem you really felt as an architect? What does the Labyrinth mean for you?

No. On the contrary, my idea of architecture is the Wrightian one of an architecture totally 'assailable' by time, by nature. The sheer beauty of some of Wright's buildings in ruins strikes me. I've always been charmed by architecture that little by little fades into the landscape. I believe it was Ruskin who spoke about this subject. On the other end, for instance, I've always been annoyed by the fact that Ville Savoye had to be continuously kept clean because its sense was in its alienation from its surroundings, the building being a sort of spaceship lifted over the soil. Of course I like lots of other things done by Le Corbusier. So I can say that I've never aimed to an immutable and unassailable architecture.

About the Labyrinth... who knows? It's a difficult question. I have to admit that in *Rosso Oltremare* the problem is left unresolved. Even the book's plot is unresolved. If I could go back, I would change lots of things because there are some problems with the story. It's not clear what the Labyrinth really represents. I put it in



the book because I was flirting with all this mythological imagery: the minotaur, the father and son relationship, and the Labyrinth were an interesting setting in which to stage part of the story.

Sometimes I can only analyze in retrospect the things I do because in the beginning, there isn't an idea, a theoretical project or frame, but only the desire to enter an enigma and try to untangle it from within. In *Rosso Oltremare*, I didn't succeed.

Quite appropriate, I think, for a tale with a Labyrinth at its center! Anyway, the Labyrinth is a metaphysical architecture. Let's think of the powerful image of the central courtyard, and a metaphysical architecture is also the one that appears in Piero's dream on the train to Assuan in *5000 chilometri al secondo* (2010), your fourth graphic novel. You also did a short story titled *Giorgio e il Drago* (2002), which is a reference to Giorgio De Chirico, the metaphysical painter. Have you ever thought to use comics to give vent to unattainable architectural fantasies?

When I began doing comics, I was very influenced by Lorenzo Mattotti's work and I wanted my comics to be a deviation from the necessarily very concrete and technical drawings I was doing at the time. So in my first comics there was a sort of utopian, metaphysical, dreamlike architecture. Then things changed. Reconciling with existing architecture, I found again the pleasure to draw architecture "as it is." In my last graphic novel, *L'intervista* (2013), the house in which Raniero (the protagonist) lives is truly one of Wright's Usonian Houses. I took it as a model and studied its plans, sections, photos, and it took me time to come back to realistic architecture. I didn't want people saying, "He's an architect and he puts architecture in his comics: that's his style." I think there are very few cartoonists who are truly able to depict realistic architecture in comics. One of them, though, is Paolo Bacilieri. He does nearly documentary work on the changes of the city and the landscape. He also has a keen eye for lesser-known architectures. Caccia Dominioni's and Studio BBPR's in Milan, for example. It's a pleasure for me to resume viewing the city with the architect's eyes. That's what I've done in *L'intervista*: I examined Udine, a not very well known town that actually includes very different urban landscapes, from the low-rent districts to the old town center to the brand-new suburbs. Even Gregotti built there. Doing that, it seems to me that I can keep together both my current and my old professional lives.

Can we draw a parallel between the way you represent architectures and your depiction of the human body?

If you want to avoid the "character-walking-in-front-of-a-traced-building" effect, a drawing has to maintain a unity. Comics aren't collages; you draw a whole. The buildings can be affected by the character's emotions, of course. It works this way in comics. In my case the clearest example is *La signorina Else* (2009). For this graphic novel, my third, I studied [Gustav] Klimt and [Edvard] Munch, trying to find a line that could jump from the neck of a character to the roof of the building behind him because I wanted this harmony between the person and the architectural background—or the landscape—to be clearly felt by the reader.



In *The Scream* by Munch, there's this wavy figure whose screaming makes all the landscape undulate: the bridge, the clouds, the fjord. So for me, there aren't really two separate kinds of lines, one for the characters and the other one for the backgrounds. There exists only one line.

I have to say that I also appreciate very much those comics in which, on the contrary, you strongly feel this difference. I'm referring to Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira*. I believe in that manga, Otomo drew the people while the backgrounds were inked by an assistant. In *Akira*, you feel the tension between the flesh and the machine, the reinforced concrete. But it's something done intelligently. It's a statement: it's humanity living inside a jungle of skyscrapers.

Each graphic novel of yours is defined by a different drawing technique that changes according to your narrative purpose. How important for you is the act of drawing, not only in the actual process of making comics but even before that, in the very conception of the story? Can we find similarities with the design process done by the architect that always passes through sketching/drawing?

Absolutely. Certain architectural gestures lie in the hand more than in the head. In comics, images tell everything. In some cases, narration is strongly supported by dialogue. But for me, narration in comics is the attempt to decipher a series of images that come first. I can't think of my drawings only as a simple execution of a storyboard or a script. I can't work that way and I think I never will. For me, images can change everything in a story. Images come first.

I can see in your comics the "location/context/references" triad that characterizes the typical approach to architectural design. Your style is personal and recognizable, but the different drawing techniques you use are also an active element of the narrative and you're obviously sensitive to the historical, artistic and cultural context in which your stories take place. Do you agree with this statement or do you believe that your background in architecture has nothing to do with your approach to narrative in comics?

I don't know if my way of doing comics derives from my training as an architect. There are artists who stick to the same technique and bring their style to a very identifiable, even crystallized, perfection. I think of great masters like Moebius, who developed not only a signature, a style, but a true system of thought. There are other artists, like me, who get tired of single tools or specific techniques. I have a very playful approach to drawing. I want to enjoy myself when I draw. This doesn't imply a lack of discipline, of course. When I start a story I use very few materials. But, before that, I search in my toolbox for the tool closer to the idea in my head and once I've found it, I learn to use it. I don't know if you can find a similar approach in architecture. I think it's more related to my passion for drawing and painting. It's a playful vision.

The settings of your comics follow your personal experience: Berlin, Romagna, Oslo, Aswan, Udine. Can we talk, in your case, of an “autobiography of places”?

Definitely. This also comes from the teachings of Igort, an influential Italian artist/cartoonist who taught us that you couldn't talk about things that you don't know. Since the setting for me is very important, I necessarily use for my comics places I know. Perhaps, through comics, I also start to know them better, in a different way. Themes certainly derive from my feelings, but the settings are places where I've lived and that I think I know pretty well. Egypt, too. I was lucky enough to work there. I didn't go there as a tourist, and it gave me so much that I felt the urge to put it on paper.

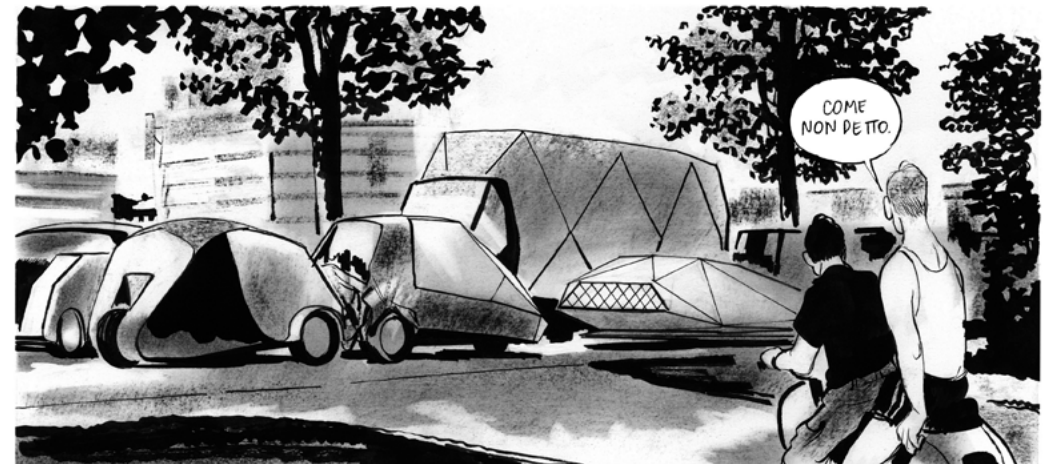
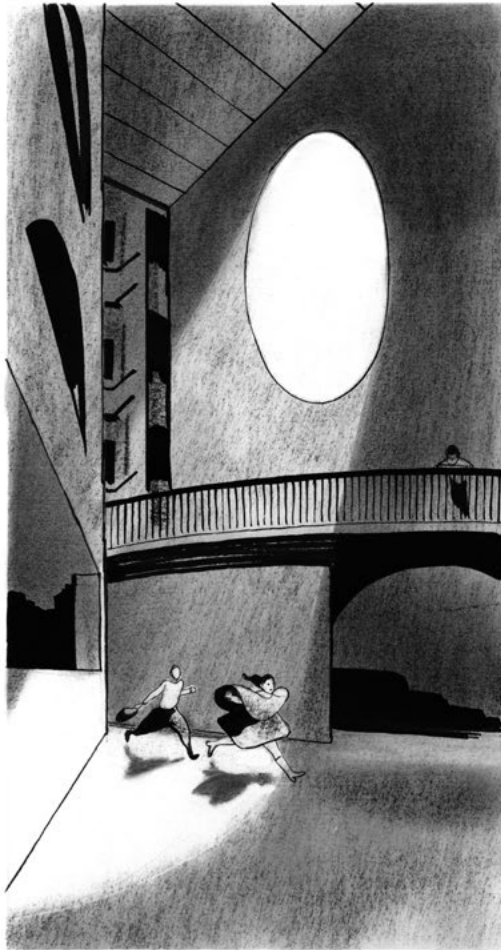
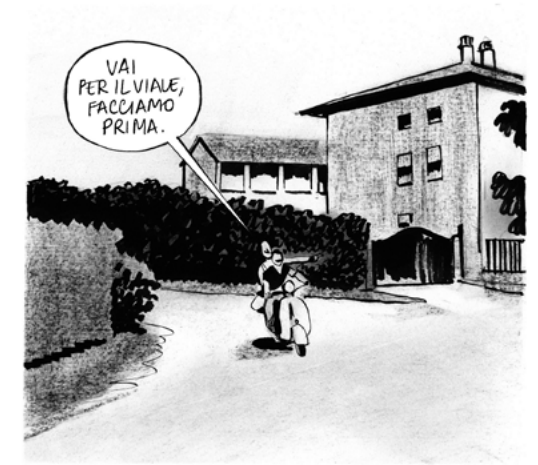
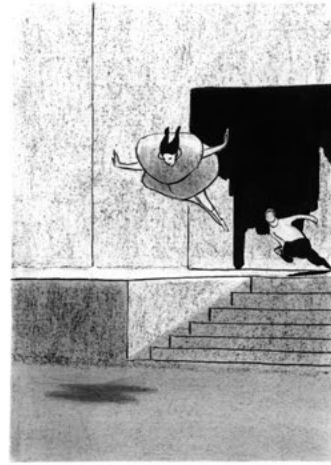
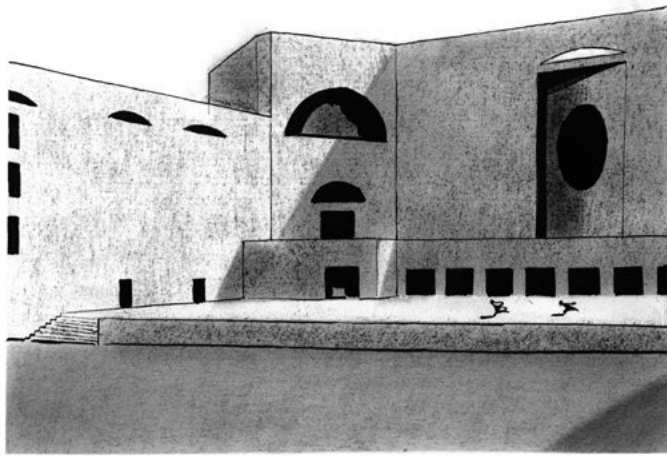
Speaking of which, in *L'intervista* (2013), your last graphic novel, you recount the territory of Udine in which you grew up. You include the architectures of Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Kahn that you studied at the University and which affected your imagination. Can we interpret that book as a wider work on your personal memory?

I said earlier that I don't like to draw impossible buildings. The “impossible” thing I did in *L'intervista* was a kind of Piranesian capriccio. That is, I put in Udine some buildings that I like very much and that I wanted to draw. It's a little a trap for architects. I still like visiting architecture very much. I am passionate about drawing it. There's also something more functional to the story. When you put one of Louis Kahn's buildings in a science fiction story like mine, this building is perceived as a futuristic one even though it was actually built in the 60s! Modern architecture possesses a kind of visionary inertia. The architects who designed it had a real visionary power. When we look at it today, it talks to us about things that haven't happened yet, a future still to come. I thought this was quite an interesting question. When you look at the old pictures of Le Corbusier's Villa Roche, you see a car in front of it and you say, “Heck! They had cars with cranks while the architecture seems to come directly from 2020!” I'm glad this thing worked out in the end. Readers who don't know modern architecture think they're invented futuristic buildings. But they are not. They were all built more than fifty years ago.

Do you think you would have felt free to use these architectural masterpieces in your comics if you hadn't quit your job as an architect?

It's difficult to answer your question, because being a professional architect and cartoonist at the same time would have been too complicated. About using masterpieces, I think the same happened to me when I started to look at Klimt's paintings while I was doing *La signorina Else*. Some images didn't become icons by chance, but because they are the result of true genius. At first I was hesitant in examining the work of Klimt. Then I realized that that was the right thing to do: to try to learn and to let him tell me his epoch through his art. I think I did just the same with the architecture in *L'intervista*. There is so much architecture in the graphic novel: there is a small piece of Palladio, there is public housing, there is so much landscape. I took things from everywhere to tell what I wanted. The architecture can be drawn in many ways: it can be drawn for actual construction, it can be







painted, you can use it to say so many things. I'm not interested very much in architectural citations; I enjoyed putting these architectures in the story because they are a real passion for me. It is not a self-imposed commitment. It has to do with my pleasure in studying the plans and driving around on my Vespa to take pictures. These are the things that warm me.

The female element is very important in your stories. The role of your female characters is always far from obvious and in some ways even destabilizing. In the short story *Signorina Lubiana* (2005), you depict a "woman-city." Do you see a parallel between the seduction of women and the seduction of a place?

Obviously, I'm not the first one to hint at these parallels. I think of [Italo] Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. I remember that going to Berlin to study was a very beautiful moment of my life because, while discovering a new city, I also discovered freedom. Learning a new language, meeting new people for me was like the opening of a horizon. In this sense, the love you feel for a city is almost the same feeling you feel when you meet someone special. *Signorina Lubiana* is just a short story of a few pages. It's a little joke. However, for the main protagonist of *Les gens le dimanche*, leaving the city really means leaving the girl who won his love. I think this analogy shows all the respect and love that I have for women, who I see as a city to discover, something very large, synonymous with everything you can achieve. This is actually a thread that runs through my books: it's the encounter with another person, the meeting with a new city.

Beta

testing

KOLDO LUS ARANA
interviews

TOM KACZYNSKI

"Structures" series (Detail)
© Tom Kaczynski

Yearning for Space with
Tom Kaczynski

architecture

Working now from his office in Minneapolis, Tom Kaczynski has made it all the way from science fiction reader to architecture school, comics author, educator, and, finally, comic book publisher. Founder of indie publishing house Uncivilized Books, Kaczynski has put in the market a steady flow of iconoclastic comic books, both by himself, notable newcomers, and consecrated stars of the alternative scene, such as David B, James Romberger and Gabrielle Bell. In a conversation with him, we covered his new book, *Beta Testing the Apocalypse* (Fantagraphics, 2013), the influence of J.G. Ballard and the appeal of dystopia, mini-comics, Archigram, architecture, and architects as an audience for comic books.

Oh, and his background in architecture.

One more interview. There has been a great demand for Tom Kaczynski this year, with your work receiving a lot of attention.

Yeah, my book [*Beta the Testing Apocalypse*] finally came out, so all of a sudden there were a lot of interviews, but that's the reason basically. Before that I was confined to the fringes—not that I'm now all that popular at all but...

You're making your way towards mainstream indie then.

[laughs] Yeah, I guess so.

You keep producing comics as an author while publishing other authors with Uncivilized Books.

Yes, my own work is always a separate project from the publishing venture. Publishing has grown into a bigger thing, but I keep making stuff. A new thing just came out in *Noir Anthologies*, the detective fiction anthologies published by Akashic Books, which aren't even comic books. This is a publisher based in New York, and they are doing this for almost every city in the world: there is an *LA Noir* anthology, a *New York Noir*, even a *Gotham Noir*. All have their own "noir" collection now.

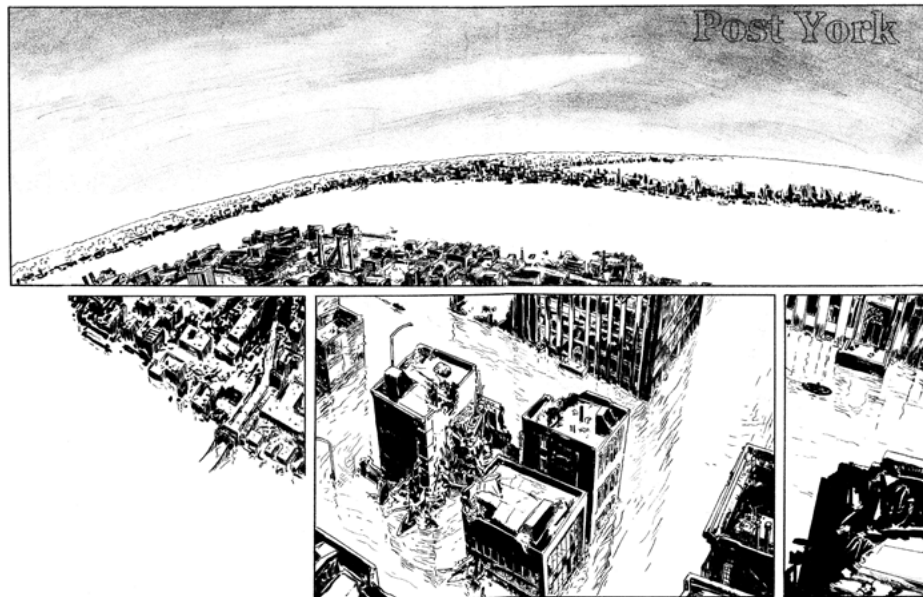
I was brought in as the only cartoonist in order to do *Twin Cities Noir*, about Minneapolis and Saint Paul. The premise is that the stories are set somewhere in one of these cities, and I chose the Minneapolis skyway system. Minneapolis has the biggest skyway system in the world. Pretty much every building downtown is connected with these little bridges, which basically turns the whole downtown into a mall, because you can go from building to building without ever stepping onto the street. It really killed the downtown for a long time—it had a dampening effect on the street. However, recently that's been reversed. The street is becoming popular again in Minneapolis.

In your comics you always seem to be particularly interested in this infrastructural aspect of urban growth.

Yes, it's always this silent organizing process, where someone has put together an infrastructure at some point, and we have to deal with it for generations afterwards. Structures are such an important part of our life—much of our life is in where we go, and how we get there. I find some drama in there.

The structures (urban, infrastructural) that you usually depict are in a way alien beings that people have to inhabit, which feel unnatural, not particularly suited for human beings.

That's always fascinated me about built environments. They are designed, constructed, and built. Basically they're unnatural beings, but to the generations that come later they are a new nature. It's something that preexists, and they have no input whatsoever on it unless they make a strenuous effort to change it in some way. So their strategy has to be to inhabit it somehow—unless, of course, you're Baron Haussmann or Robert Moses [laughs].

Two double-page spreads (4-5 and 6-7) in James Romberger's *Post York* © James Romberger & Crosby

I. Testing Architecture [Beta]: Architecture, utopia and other nightmares

I understand you have an architectural background.

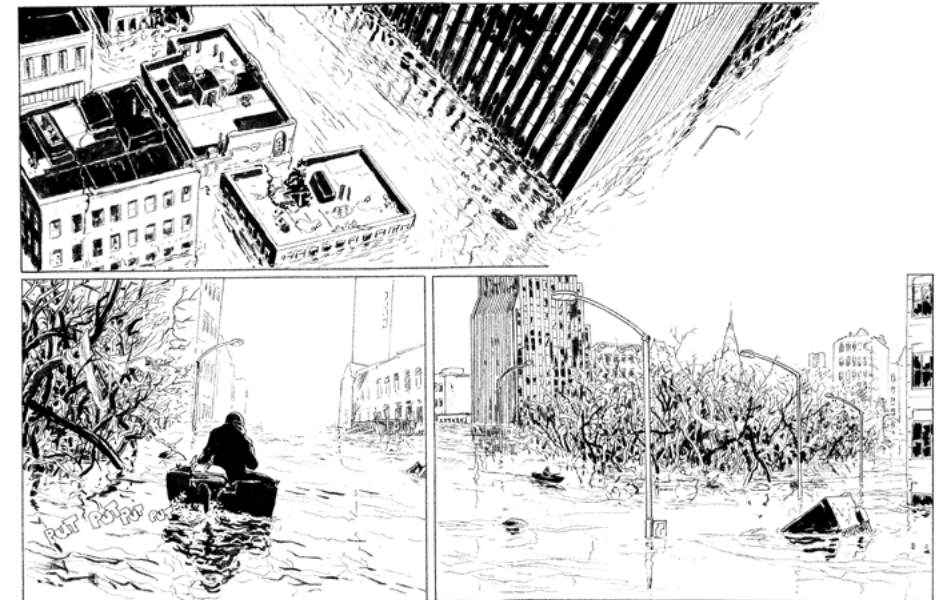
Yes, I focused on architecture and art in my undergraduate studies. I never pursued graduate studies—for a long time I thought I would go back to school to finish, but I got caught up in the internet boom of the late 90s. I learned HTML very early on, and I ended up doing a lot of design work in advertising, graphic design, and I did a little bit of programming—flash for a long time. I kept doing comics throughout this whole time of course, and I was also teaching at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. I still do, actually. I just took a break because I'm too busy now that I'm publishing. So I saw architecture fall by the wayside, from an educational point of view. From an artistic point of view, it was something that became more and more important in my production.

Were you still doing comics while you were an architecture student, too?

Yes, I was drawing comics since I was 8 years old or so. I wanted to be a cartoonist, and I needed to go to school, so architecture was the natural choice: it's practical, and it involves art. But I didn't go as far as others. I was already making and amateur-publishing mini-comics just before going into college in the early 90s, participating in the mini-comics scene explosion of the 80s and 90s in America.

So, while you were studying architecture in college, you already knew you would go into comics afterwards?

Yes, but it's a "yes, but" kind of situation. I was doing it, but I didn't think I was very good, so I'd be doing all these other things just in case, such as graphic design or HTML. I thought, "Oh, I'll be able to design my own comics, or at least, I'll

Two double-page spreads (4-5 and 6-7) in James Romberger's *Post York* © James Romberger & Crosby

be able to do that, if I never get to be a cartoonist." It was a goal, but it was always tempered by reality, like the fact that I wasn't making enough money with that work, so I needed to do something else to pay the bills. Comics were always the major secondary activity, until more recently.

Did you enter architecture thinking that an architectural education could somehow help you as a comics creator? Did you foresee that before starting?

Well, I guess I thought that at least it would help me draw the backgrounds well [laughs]. Perspective definitely seemed like an important thing to know. I have always admired those cartoonists that could create whole worlds, believable worlds on paper. In architecture school I did actually draw some comics to show buildings, trying to use comics as a way in for myself into architecture as well. I think I learnt more in terms of drawing from my architecture classes than I did from art ones. My art teachers at that time were still very focused on non-representative, gestural work, and figurative, representational drawing seemed to be frowned upon. Comics were looked down upon in my art classes, whereas in architecture, there was a "Oh, well, this is interesting" attitude.

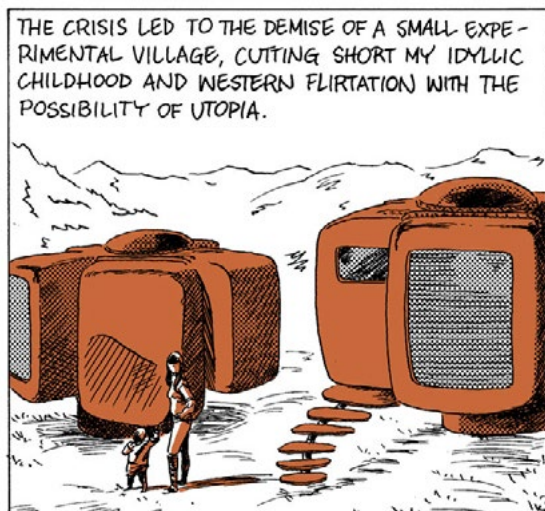
One of the professors I had in architecture school loved using perspective as an expressive tool, using the vanishing point (or multiple vanishing points) very intentionally, and taking sections of very specific places in buildings to elucidate certain relationships. In one of these assignments we had to do some drawings of Casa Malaparte, watching *Contempt* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963), trying to elucidate the relationships of the different characters and this building. It's something that I come back to a lot when I do my comics, trying to find that relationship between architecture and the characters, to pick the right angle, the right moment.

However, the architecture in your comics usually leaves the reader with a feeling of emptiness, of un-naturalness, because the way it is represented. People are shown living in those linear, white, empty vessels. There's actually an ongoing, very "Ballardian" "silent desperation" feel in your work, more akin to J. G. Ballard than, say, Phillip K. Dick.

I'm a big fan of anything Ballard. I have pretty much read everything he has ever written, and the few books that I haven't read I'm kind of savoring them. In the early stories in *Beta Testing* his voice is very easy to detect. Later on, I think I depart from them a little bit. Philip K. Dick is someone I also admire, but he was less influential on a writing basis. I think in terms of voice I'm closer to Ballard, even though I'm trying to be less of a Ballard cover act. Actually, I came to Ballard quite late. I was aware of him in college, but I didn't actually read him. I'd read *The Atrocity Exhibition* (Jonathan Cape, 1970), and my young mind at the time didn't really get it. I came back to him later through his early science fictional work.

You seem to be interested in showing the dystopian side of the modern city life, with its cold, anonymous city blocks and modern houses. That is where I find this "Ballardian" feel. Because in Ballard, for every *Concentration City* or *Billennium*, you also have all this lonely suburban-ness, this quiet, downplayed, silent dystopia.

I am attracted to dystopias. I am also attracted to utopias (I'm a little conflicted here). *Beta Testing the Apocalypse* is such a dystopian work. I wanted to have an utopian counterpoint, but it always evolved/devolved into a dystopian narrative. I just never got there. I feel it's so much easier to create the dystopian. It's so easy to inhabit the mid of everything falling apart. It's so easy to imagine the dissolution of everything, but it's so hard to create something against that.



One of the "Archigrammy" capsules in *Beta Testing the Apocalypse*. Kaczynski had this to say about it: "Being more mobile, just-in-time production, more temporary, faster product cycles... I feel that architecture expressed it in many ways. Obviously it's become even more so these days. I've had jobs where I never had to go to work, and in a way this was part of that dream. That's a utopian notion which I find these days to be very dystopian: working never ends. I miss the 9 to 5 cycle where you can say 'I'm done.'"

Utopia is a very unstable, fragile state, also difficult to imagine. You have no data, so you have to design it from scratch; as opposed to dystopia, which is much more welcoming for a designer, especially in a postmodern context.

I probably agree with you, but it's something that we need, probably as a species. We need that "something" to undermine, that utopia that we can start pulling apart. I love reading utopias, both the classic and the modern ones, although it seems that there was an uptake in the nineteenth century, early twentieth century, and since then, utopia has waned. I hope we go to another cycle of utopias, if we can make them work [laughs]. I tend to think of it almost as a verb. It needs to exist, just not necessarily in the real world.

It's interesting that the look of technological utopia from the early twentieth century, epitomized by *Things to Come* (William Cameron Menzies, 1936), has become the dystopia of today, with its antiseptic environments (I'm thinking of *Logan's Run* (Michael Anderson, 1976) and *THX 1138's* (George Lucas, 1971) reversion of that type of dream).

Yes, their utopias have turned into our dystopias. A lot of later utopias tend to be more organic, less sterile, let's say Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975), where the Western half of America secedes and becomes this ecologically-based utopia. Another ecological utopia I found fascinating was Alasdair Gray's *A History Maker* (Canongate Books, 1994). Again, those can become dystopias too. One of the subtexts of the *1,000,000 Year Boom* story is that this ecological utopianism can also carry a lot of negatives. A lot of these utopian notions are some kind of virus carrying this weird disease into the general system by way of positive thinking, I'd say.

"There are other dystopias, but they're in this one."

[laughs] Exactly.

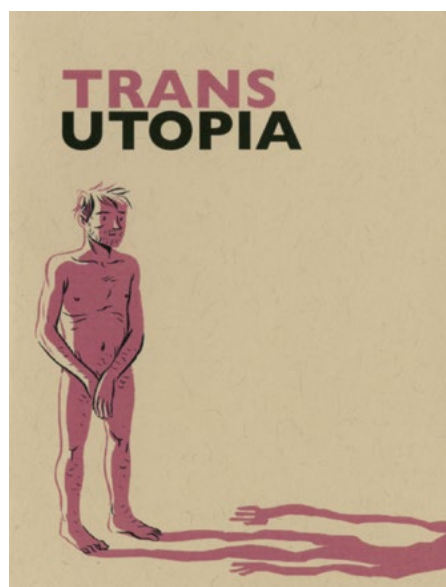
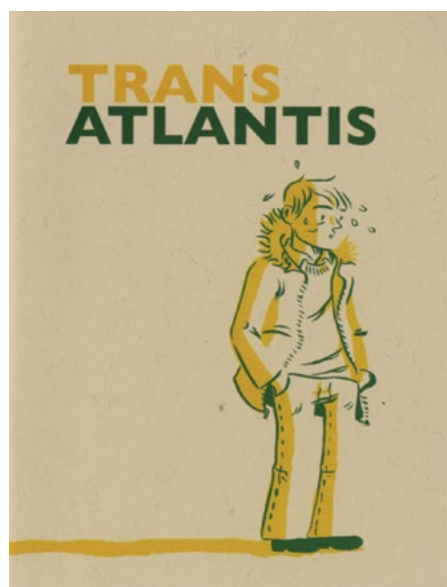
I sensed the presence of Archigram, inflatables, and this fun & flexibility, free-will 60s utopia in *Beta Testing*. In "The New," you have a small panel with this experimental village that reminded me of Greene's inflatables. Is it there, or is it just me?

It's interesting that you saw it. I don't know if these drawings survived, but I had a bunch of referential drawings that came from Archigram that I ended up discarding in the comic.

One of your latest published books is James Romberger's, *Post York* (2012), which is again a post-apocalyptic book. How did this one come into being?

I think he's an amazing artist and here's this work that he had never published—he was sort of unsure about it—and I just fell for it. It's a very simple story, in the sense that it's a character moving through. James Romberger was in Columbia, studying modern film and this was his sort of comic take on *The Camera Writes*[movement], where as he moves through his narrative he rewrites it and takes it in a different direction. Obviously the apocalyptic dimension made it just beautiful to look at. Decay is very pleasing aesthetically. Albert Speer wrote this

book [he refers to *Die Ruinenwerttheorie*] on the theory of ruin value in architecture. Apparently all his architecture was done with the ruins in mind, thinking that in 1,000 years the ruins of it would have the grandeur of the ruins of Rome. The other weird thing about *Post York* is, when we were publishing it, New York itself was going through Hurricane Sandy, and some of the locations in the comic are the locations where Manhattan flooded. It was a bizarre confluence of events.



Caption: Covers of the Trans series, a journey with prominent stops in Soviet Siberia, Communist Poland, Plato's Atlantis, 19th century New York and Sir Thomas More's Utopia. © Tom Kaczynski

II. Writing for the Architect: Trans utopia, Structures, and more

Could you talk about the *Trans* series, and how it happened? It also seems to touch on some of those ongoing themes: utopias, dystopias, urban life, cities... but with a very different approach.

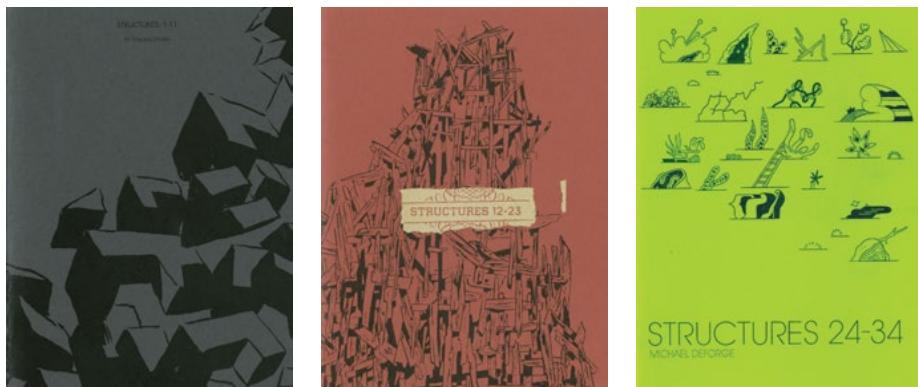
It really happened out of desperation. I think it was 2005. It was the second year of the MOCA festival in New York, I wanted to have a comic book for it, and I had been beating my head against the wall of what I wanted to do with comics. My notebooks were filled with these theoretical diatribes, and it was something that I really liked to read, to write about, but I never felt could really work in comic form. It was out of desperation that it poured out, very quickly. There was no penciling, just all straight to ink. I got a really great response, and slowly, as I got deeper and deeper into it, I thought, "I need to come up with some sort of unifying idea. I can't just be regurgitating." So that is the genesis of the project. I just kept doing it with the other mini-comics, *Trans-Siberia*, *Trans-Atlantis* and *Alaska*. It is probably something that I will continue doing, because it was a great way to generate ideas. There are some proto-ideas that ended up in the *Beta Testing* stories. I really liked this very informal, but somewhat structured way of putting down ideas and cross-linking them.

And the *Trans Terra* volume? Is it part of the series?

Trans Terra was going to be the fifth part, but then I decided to collect them all, which will encompass and finish off that thought. [*Trans Terra* is now the title of the compilation]. There is going to be notes, and there will be an index. I want it to be this rich in ideas project that feels almost breathlessly created—very quickly rich.

Can you speak a little bit about the *Structures* volumes?

Comics have a lot of great drawings of architecture, and a lot of times they are done by artists that maybe don't have any architectural training. I always wanted to create some kind of project with cartoonists and architecture, and it just bubbled up under this. The first volume [by himself] came out of a story in *Beta Testing*. It was a completely different story, before it ended up in the form that it did. Originally there was an autistic architect that was creating crazy structures in a third world megalopolis, and I wanted to inhabit his mind a little bit, so I created drawings to feel my way into this character. I ended up abandoning that character, but I still liked the drawings, so I created this little *Structures* book. After that, people started asking me if there were going to be more books, I started talking to people about it, and now it has become a full-fledged project where I continue working not only with cartoonists, but also with people who are doing interesting work in other disciplines as well. There was a lot of interest in Michael Deforge's one, and it spawned interest in the previous ones, so it is a growing project right now.



Covers of the *Structures* series, where an increasing catalogue of structural follies reflected in the cover of each issue, which is named accordingly: 1-11, 12-23, 24-34. © Tom Kaczynski

The interaction of architecture and fiction is something that's coming to the front nowadays. Do you feel comics (fiction, narrative, graphic narrative) can be a tool to analyze and explore architecture, and to speculate on the design of architecture and the city?

I think comics are underutilized as a medium for criticism. So much of architecture critique is word-based. Images are often used, but there's something that isn't done in comics, which is criticism. I think there is potential for that. I do a little bit of that myself in *Cartoon Dialectics* and *Trans Terra*, but I'm just dipping my toes.

Do you think there is a kind of comics for architects? I do think certain comics—Chris Ware, maybe Victor Moscoso, or some of the comics in *OuBaPo*—can really appeal to architects. Do you think architects are a good potential audience for comics in the future, now that they have come out of the ghetto, in a way?

I do, partly because it's a very visually literate audience. It's an audience that understands the image, which has spent a lot of their professional life examining images and trying to understand the meaning behind them. Obviously, not every comic is going to appeal to them, but I think that comics as a medium can hold a lot for architects. The people that you mentioned are especially resonant. In a weird way, if I look deeply underneath *Uncivilized Books*, it is almost like I am trying to find the comics that will appeal to architects.

I get the sense that you still keep an eye on architecture. On the cover of *Beta Testing*, for instance, we can find Rem Koolhaas' CCTV building.

Yes, I definitely do. I love architecture magazines. It's something I come back to very frequently and Rem Koolhaas has such a media presence that he's hard to ignore. He was also here when the Mall of America, the largest mall in North America, was being built in Minneapolis, talking about bigness in architecture. He made a big impression, and I've followed him ever since. I don't agree with a lot of what he says, but he's definitely an interesting figure. I loved *Content* (Taschen, 2004). I thought "Junkspace" was an amazing piece of writing. In some ways, I think a chunk of that influenced the first story in *Beta Testing*, "100,000 miles," which is also very "Ballardian."



Structure by Tom Kaczynski

You said that at some point you considered going ahead in your architecture studies. Do you feel any desire to design, to build?

I do. At the same time, my life has its own trajectory. Maybe in the future I'll consider it again. I would like to build. I feel like it's a failing in me that I haven't. And maybe partly why I focus so much in architecture in my art is because I feel guilty not to have taken that route. [laughs]

Archiporn or

Essay by
MÉLANIE VAN DER HOORN

Storylines?

Creative architectural
Commercials as challenges to
the communication and
Marketing of architecture

In March 2009, in the course of my research on architecture comics, I travelled to Liverpool to interview Laurie Jones, then creative director at Uniform, a brand communications agency specialized, among others, in architectural visualizations. They had recently finished a movie entitled *Nido: 22nd at the District* (2008), in which they managed to combine three-dimensional computer-generated images (CGI) with a two-dimensional comic strip, drawn for that purpose by cartoonist Jamie McKelvie. Uniform had been commissioned by the Blackstone Group to realize an animation aimed at convincing prosperous exchange students of the benefits of staying in its luxury Nido student accommodation in Barcelona. They hoped that their target group would be able to identify with the hip lifestyle and aura of the characters created by McKelvie. According to Jones, with the exceptional importance attached to the storyline and staging of characters, their film was representative of recent developments in the architecture-animation sector in the early years of the third millennium, in particular of the increasing differentiation between design visualizations and marketing films. Until then, a “fly-through” was by far the most common form used for all kinds of architectural animations: a guided tour in which the spectator is first given a view of the exterior of the building, then enters it via the main entrance and subsequently “flies” through the building. This form used to be employed for both design visualizations and marketing films, although their intentions do essentially differ. Generally, a design visualization is commissioned by architects or project developers in a very early stage, to depict the visual impact of a project on its surroundings, in order to win the approval of potential clients or investors, or to help urban planners to assess the desirability of the project. Extra accessories and details are usually unnecessary. Marketing films, on the other hand, are generally commissioned at the end of the building stage. Project developers rely the films to arouse the interest of potential buyers or users, even when the building is not yet ready to be put on display. In the early third millennium, Jones and his professional colleagues realized that for marketing purposes, there were much more adequate means than the traditional fly-through. Just like Smoothe in Manchester and Neoscape in the United States, for instance, they began to devote comprehensive creative sessions to the brand and ambitions of their clients and to treat marketing films as commercials with their own storyline.

The emergence of marketing films within architecture and urban planning has to be understood against the background of two recent developments: first, the architectural world has started to overcome certain taboos regarding advertising, branding, and more generally, marketing, which—with few exceptions—have tended to be regarded rather suspiciously all through Western architectural history; and second, the appearance and prosperity of such videos has been induced by the digital turn in architecture—both in a positive and in a negative way. On the one hand, technological innovations (particularly ever more accessible and efficient software and cameras) have enabled their realization as well as their diversity, paving the way to the emergence of a new visual culture. On the other hand, the same technological developments have enabled the realization of even more sophisticated photorealistic computer-generated imagery, which in turn has given

rise to a certain lassitude or critical stance from some professionals and stimulated them to search for alternatives that could communicate more than just an architectural design or planning concept in itself through highly sophisticated, but not necessarily meaningful, images.

In March 2013, I returned to Liverpool to speak to Laurie Jones, this time purposefully about what I had started to call “creative architectural commercials”: films that contain a clear narrative, more “lifestyle elements” than visualizations, and that display an awareness for the stories behind architecture such as its historic, cultural or social context as well as the identity of its (potential) users. The value of fly-throughs, I believed, was mainly to be sought in aesthetic or technological innovations, and thus of less interest to me. Creative architectural commercials merited closer attention because of their affinities to advertising, their depth in terms of content as well as their various levels of meaning. Yet I had not expected Jones to tell me that, since our previous meeting, things had, in a way, stagnated. For Jones, the development of architectural marketing films in his agency culminated in their movie *Beyond Boundaries* (2009), commissioned by the Jumeirah Group in the year following completion of *Nido: 22nd at the District*. At that point, computer generated visualization was still needed to explain the architecture and the spatial ends, but more and more, clients also expressed the wish for lifestyle and marketing elements. *Beyond Boundaries*, which promoted a brand of independent hotel boutiques, was very unique in that it was almost entirely hand sketched, except for a few shots. Uniform finished the film, but it was never used because in those years the whole property market (and, as a consequence, architecture and the visualization industry) was severely hit by the economic crash.



Beyond Boundaries, Uniform, 2009 © Uniform

Creative architectural commercials constitute a promising yet fragile niche. After some five to ten years of actively investigating and experimenting with the potentials of such films, companies returned, to some extent, to more conventional forms of visualization. This was partly due to the financial crisis, which resulted, since 2008, in less creative briefs from commissioners who wanted to “play it safe.” Yet despite this setback, visualization companies have continued to invest much effort into aspects of branding and storytelling—partly even integrating them into their standard working procedures—even if the proportion of these efforts is not always explicitly reflected in their most recent portfolio. In particular, it seems that creative architectural commercials have the capacity to bridge between traditionally distinctive areas of the architectural world, between a market-oriented architecture and a more visionary, artistically oriented architecture. What is it that makes such films so promising? What are they able to achieve and what hurdles continue to exist?

Architects and developers have not waited until the third millennium to start using short films as a means to present and promote their projects. For instance, in anticipation of the 1929 CIAM [Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne], Paul Wolff (a photographer) and Ernst May (an architect and urban planner) directed a series of four films about the ambitious New Frankfurt housing scheme. This was part of a larger campaign by May to use radio programs, guided tours, and a variety of educational programs to explain recent urban developments to an audience of non-architects. Among the four films, *Die Frankfurter Küche* stands out by the efficiency of its storyline, meticulously comparing the time and effort required for each of the housewife's activities in, respectively, a traditional kitchen and in the one designed by Schütte-Lihotzky, in order to illustrate the influence that an architect can exert on one's daily life. In the same period in France, the young journal *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* was experimenting with new means of communication and commissioned director Pierre Chenal to make three short films. The structure of *Bâtir* and *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (1930) clearly demonstrates an early awareness for marketing strategies: they praise the advantages of modern architecture from a functional and aesthetic point of view and underpin this with comparisons between specific traditional and modern buildings.



Die Frankfurter Küche. Designed architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, 1926

Both films end with a promotion of Le Corbusier's *Plan Voisin* as the most appropriate means to solve planning issues in Paris at that time. In recent years, architecture firms such as MVRDV, UN Studio, OMA and Zaha Hadid Architects played an important role as precursors, each approaching in their own way the opportunities offered by new means of visualization and, as such, stimulating others to do the same.

The UK, notably, proved to be a fertile soil for agencies such as Squint/Opera, created in 2001 (known for instance for *Picture a City: Bradford or Gardens by the Bay*); Uniform, since 1998 (*Nido: 22nd at the District, Beyond Boundaries, Lister Mills*); The Neighbourhood, since 2006 (Saxton film series *Painting by Numbers, Grow Your Own, Love Your Neighbourhood*, etc.); as well as Assembly Studios (formerly Smoothe), since 2009 (*Cooling Towers, Stone's Throw and Creeping Prow, Plumlife*). Several of them benefited from repeated cooperation with innovative developers (such as Urban Splash) or architecture offices (such as Make Architects), who were not afraid of experiments. In other countries as well, a number of agencies have been operating in the same field: Neoscape, in Boston since 1995 (*Harvard Allston Campus, Innovation and Design Building, BIM City*); Brooklyn Digital Foundry, in New York since 1999 (*Museum Plaza, Droog Town House, Architecture and the Unspeakable 1*); Studio Aiko, in Ramat Gan since 2005 (*Classroom Scene, Desert Villa*); Placebo Effects, in Oslo since 1999 (*Media City Bergen, Akersveien 26*); Estudio Luis Úrculo, in Madrid since 2006 (*Place des Cercles, AIC, Vizcaya Pool, Epsilon*); and Simone Muscolino (Id-Lab), in Milan since 2005 (*MongoPalace*), to name just a few. And then, there are also architecture offices that have produced or commissioned a creative commercial of their own practice, such as Langarita-Navarro Arquitectos in Madrid (*Langarita-Navarro, The Movie*), Kube Architecture in Washington (*Your House is Fantastic!*), and Germerott Innenausbau near Hannover.

Parallel to the production of videos, several initiatives have contributed significantly to divulge them, stir up exchanges, debates and reflections, and indirectly contribute to further production. As early as 2002, the Catalan Architects Association organized a large exhibition entitled *Architecturanimation*, coupled with a festival, lectures, and debates—the richness of which was documented in a catalogue with the same name. A few years earlier, in 1997, Italian Marco Brizzi created *Beyond Media: Festival for Architecture and Media*, an event which “aims at promoting the emergence of a new agenda for contemporary architecture by means of a more widespread awareness of the role of the media of communication in the professional as well as in the didactic field.” The festival took place nine times between 1997 and 2009. Brizzi also created a company called Image, dedicated to “enhancing the design discourse by means of a wider knowledge of media issues in architecture.” One of its main activities consists in running an archive of architecture videos.

The apparent return to more conventional forms of visualization in recent years cannot solely be imputed to the financial crisis. Various creative directors depict most property developers, and even more so architects, as rather conservative and reluctant towards advertising. For Oliver Alsop, creative director at Squint/Opera, the “advertising culture” of architects has not evolved much since

the 1950s, when even a Coca Cola advert solely consisted in showing a can and repeating, “Buy Coca Cola! Here it is! This is it!” Similarly, architects merely want to show wide shots of their building and keep hammering, “This is the building, this is the building.” John Humphreys, creative director at The Neighbourhood, also deplores this disproportional focus on the actual building. Architects, he says, treat architecture as an objective thing and merely give facts (“Here is the door, it’s got ten floors”), whereas they entirely fail to tell a story *about* that building, to focus on the beautiful elements and to build a bit of mystery and intrigue. The communication with architects and property developers about marketing films, thus, is not always easy. First, they seldom have a clear brand or brief in mind, so it often takes considerable effort to clarify these issues. Then, according to Nick Taylor, Alsop’s colleague at Squint/Opera, if there is any brief at all, it usually doesn’t excel at imaginativeness. “The typical brief from an architect would be, ‘We want a fly-through, it needs to start here and then the camera should go along there and it turns left there and you look at this and you go along there.’” Advertising experts and architects, in other words, strongly diverge regarding the type of information to be communicated in their films: the former are often selling a single concept of convenience or luxury, whereas the latter rather wish to get so many building details across that it hardly leaves any latitude for more narrative or so-called “lifestyle” elements. At Squint/Opera, they invented the notion of “archiporn” to denote extreme examples of films with “slowly moving cameras, showing very orchestrated empty spaces, lovingly caressing bits of architecture.”

The relationship between architecture and advertising has traditionally been an ambivalent one. Advertising agencies, for their part, have long started to recognize the marketing potentials of architecture: adopted for their attractive aura, architectural highlights are integrated in commercials for cars, perfume or ice creams. The figure of *the* architect is frequently portrayed as a tasteful, successful, and reliable person. Strangely enough, when it comes to advertising architecture itself, it seems that the attractively portrayed buildings are not able to sell themselves. That is, not only does advertising need architecture, but the insights from advertising can be very rewarding when making publicity for architecture. Yet architects and architectural organizations such as Chambers of Architects have not seldom exercised “restraint,” to say the least, towards advertising and branding—equating those with superficiality, uniformity, and mass consumption whereas architects rather like to be praised for their originality, inventiveness, and penetrating concepts. In certain countries, such as Belgium, Germany, or the US, architects’ capacity to make advertising for their own work has even been legally restrained.

Removing apprehensions for marketing is a long-lasting process. Alsop speaks about a sort of “keeping up with the Joneses” attitude from the clients, which prevents the Squint/Opera-team from exploring new, more creative ways. Jones summarizes it this way:

If one of our clients came to us and said we have £50,000 budget for a film and we said we are going to spend the first £7,500 on research, we wouldn’t get the job. That receptivity to trying something new isn’t there. Whereas branding clients, if you tell them you are going to spend the first £5,000 to 7,000 on research, it is often seen as a positive thing. They are much more receptive to trying new things. They know that’s how the market works, so much is about novelty.

Alsop tells about an ongoing battle with clients to convince them that, “[by] having some kind of genre in mind at the beginning of the project, you’re not putting their development on the back seat; actually you are creating a sort of identity for that place.” One of the major issues, he adds, is that lots of architects would rather keep their buildings empty. “There are lots of architects who don’t like their buildings ever being used. They like to represent their spaces completely clinical, empty and lifeless. A person, in one of those images, is like a bacteria.” If ever clients want to have real people in a visualization, Taylor adds, they strictly determine how those should look like. Those so-called “real” people are not much more than “space fillers;” they have to “be drinking and eating in the right cafés at the right time, walk towards specific places, be dressed in the right clothes and carry shopping bags to ensure that retailers will spend money.” Finally, a major concern that often stands in the way of creativity, is that clients continue to expect more sophisticated, photorealistic images. Moreover, this wish for photorealistic images is closely connected with a belief that these images represent reality exactly as it is, or will be. Taylor explains:

It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that they *are* totally real because they *look* real. But especially in film there is much more marketing than in still images. What you do with the cameras and what you do with the nature of the shots and what happens in them can totally spin a tale in any direction. Even if you are working of architects’ plans and designs, it doesn’t mean that the thing is a scientific rendering or a portrayal of the truth—it is still impressionistic.

How, then, can branding and communication agencies counterbalance the lack of lifestyle and narrative in architectural presentations? The Neighbourhood clearly captures its contribution in its slogan, “Building worlds and telling stories.” In his agency, Humphreys explains, architecture is primarily seen from a subjective point of view as “a living entity that is about the people that are going to inhabit it or interact with it.” *Lakeshore* (2008) was one of their first movies in which characters played a leading part and architecture (a building from the 1970s, revamped by developer Urban Splash) became almost like a background element, indirectly presented in interaction with the characters. Inspired by the collection of pop art in the building, The Neighbourhood structured the film as a “chronological



Gardens by the Bay, 2008 © Squint/Opera

walk” through pop art style between the 1970s and 2010. A small milestone in the evolution of architectural film has probably been Squint/Opera’s *Gardens by the Bay* (2008), a film which is like a stylized documentary of the process that led to its making: an expression of the design process, the creativity, ideas, and action that were going into it. When the architects came to Squint/Opera a month before submission of their competition entry, they had hardly done any work yet. Squint/Opera proposed a kind of pin board technique and started to capture the design process from there, without having to wait for the architects to resolve all kinds of issues beforehand. A third, strongly narrative-driven architecture film that captures the spirit of a project and the intent of a design, is *The Story of Straw* (2011), for which Lee Mallett and Sara Muzio were commissioned by Make Architects. Mallett and Muzio are very concerned by the technical jargon that too often excludes people from understanding architecture and planning. Just like Squint/Opera, they consider it their task to make complex architectural concepts as simple and accessible to as wide-ranging an audience as possible. For *The Story of Straw*, they were in the exceptional situation to get precisely this as a brief. Make Architects had completed a building for the University of Nottingham with a very low carbon footprint; they wanted to share the environment-friendly building technology which they had developed for this purpose. Mallett, guided by what he calls his “indistinctive knowledge of other people’s communication needs,” successfully answered the brief, together with Muzio, in the form of a careful and funny adaptation of the fairytale of the Three Little Pigs.

Realizing creative architectural commercials thus also consists in condensing an important quantity and density of information within a few-minute-long film. Sometimes there is so much to tell that it hardly seems possible in one film, in particular when different target groups have to be reached simultaneously. The

Neighbourhood was confronted with these issues during an Urban Splash commission for a big development in Leeds. The developer wanted to show the allotments for the residents, the huge landscape gardens all around, elements of the design, social aspects, etc. Humphreys and his team decided that it would be too much for one film, especially if it had to be “nice and punchy.” They split it up in six concise and refreshing storylines: six fifty-second-long films to be launched on urban screens around the city. Assembly Studios did something similar for their project *Two Kingdom Street* (2010), except that their three films weren’t to be released simultaneously but as three subsequent stages in a marketing process. Ross Cunningham, creative director, explains that his agency seeks to distinguish itself from others in their understanding of architectural animation as a more filmic experience than traditional fly-throughs: something more dynamic and engaging for an end user, getting more information across in a shorter period of time. With *Two Kingdom Street*, it was the first time that Assembly Studios got the opportunity to work holistically on a campaign in the UK and that they could think about a film or series of films as a long-term marketing vision, within an entire campaign life cycle. Still according to Cunningham, short architectural films are generally a medley of contextual location filming to sell the area, computer generated fly-through to show the building to be, motion graphics to sketch the location or explain specific aspects, etc. For *Two Kingdom Street*, they decided to release bits of film over a longer period of time and to achieve those various goals in separate filmic entities. The first, *Creeping Prow*, is like a teaser to stir excitement for the project. It consists of a really dramatic scene in which a person is literally overrun by the identity of the building (embodied by the shadow of its very characteristic shape, also the logo of the project). Building brand and identity, here, are entirely blended. The second film, *Two Kingdom Street*, is a computer generated animation that explores the floor plan and gets across factual details; the third, *Stone’s Throw*, is a humorous piece of location filming to site the building, its amenities, and the benefits of the surrounding area. The fourth, *Talking Heads*, which was eventually not realized, would have staged local people, developers, architects, the project team and local clients talking about the project in an engaging way. The films were a success for all people involved. Cunningham and his team were able to realize them for a fairly standard overall budget, without having to compromise a really strong message, and the developer was pleased because the overall campaign had a much longer duration than usual.

A major issue—or even hurdle—in the making of architectural marketing films with a plot exceeding the promotion of a building as such, is how to evoke human presence. In most of the cases, the architecture to be presented is still on the “drawing board” or at least under construction when the film is made. Long before completion would allow the shooting of live footage, computer generated imagery, with the unknown level of photorealism and sophistication that it has reached in the last decade, is able to show a building as if it were “there,” and to allow spectators to immerse themselves in its experience. The creation of virtual characters, however, or at least the mere suggestion of human presence in or around the building (without necessarily populating it with human figures), is a much tougher nut to crack.



Aberdeen City Garden, 2011 © Diller Scofidio + Renfro

Architects who articulate their dissatisfaction with the ubiquity of photo-realistic computer visualizations often mention the meaningless silhouettes that are later added as scale indicators without further depth or significance. Specialists in three-dimensional architectural visualizations outline some of the reasons why people are so troublesome in architectural animations. Either you portray them as a component of the three-dimensional model, which often does not look at all convincing, or you spend a fortune on Hollywood effects to give them a realistic allure, but there is almost never sufficient budget to cover this. Or you can film people in a studio (employing so-called “blue screen” or “green screen” technique to remove the background and obtain images of the people solely) and assemble them in your animation, but that is also time-consuming and very expensive. There are some tricks to mask that virtual characters look like zombies, such as time lapses in which they can be blurred, abstract cutouts like in *Alconbury Airfield* by Squint/Opera (2011) or white cutouts such as in *The High Line* (2008) or *Aberdeen City Garden* (2011), both by the Brooklyn Digital Foundry. When these figures are two-dimensional, problems emerge as soon as you turn away from the flat surface and suddenly encounter very slender people as you move “just around the corner.” One option is to approach such hurdles openly instead of attempting to conceal them, and to explicitly stylize human figures with motion graphics. Uniform did so in *Nido: 22nd at the District* (2008), Squint/Opera in *Gateshead* (2011), Assembly Studios in *Cooling Towers* (2010) and *Plumlife* (2010). This approach harmonizes with the recent marketing impulse within which target groups are directly addressed, but it is not so self-evident with a less homogeneous or less precisely defined target group. Cartoon-inspired images are not suitable to every project. In *Cooling Towers*, they were a means to better target the audience in an emotional way, but for a different



Corby Cube, 2011 © The Neighbourhood

audience they could be entirely inappropriate. Finally, several agencies have found creative ways to allude to some kind of personality without showing people at all. For instance, light or crystals are staged as characters in, respectively, Uniform’s *The Walbrook* (2008) and *Crystal—Trinity.EC3* (2007). In a film by Squint/Opera for Toyota that has not been disclosed yet, a car has been conferred a personality and is exploring the building while having a sort of conversation with it.

In some other examples, live action footage of the architect, developer, or other people involved is combined with computer generated images of the three-dimensional model or the building to be, for instance in Squint/Opera’s *Cidade da copa* (2012), Uniform’s *Lister Mills* (2011) and The Neighbourhood’s *Corby Cube* (2011). In the latter two, the architect, sitting at his desk, is enthusiastically talking about his concept when the model, as if by magic, emerges from the tabletop and allows him to present his thoughts even more convincingly. For Assembly Studios’ *Talking Heads*, the idea was to interview a variety people about the building to be, and to edit their answers without the corresponding questions, so as to generate excitement and suspense. In all these examples, people in flesh-and-blood confer the films a truly documentary character and a level of depth and significance that would still be very hard to reach, in the actual state of the art, with advanced augmented reality technology.

It is suggested here that creative architectural commercials form an innovative cross-fertilization between the fields of architecture and advertising and that they are able to reconcile commercially oriented and visionary architecture. Compared to traditional fly-throughs, creative architectural commercials are message based rather than technique based. They inject life into the buildings presented and narrate all kinds of stories behind the design. Interestingly, it seems that



meanwhile architectural visualizations with a more “straightforward” storyline (principally aimed at showing the architecture or planning in itself) have started to benefit from the creative impulses in marketing films. This is illustrated, for instance, by some consciously stylized visualizations by Neoscape (*The Lowell Plan, Pike & Rose Federal Realty*), some others by The Neighbourhood (*Two Snow Hill*), Placebo Effects (*Statoil Hydro*), Simone Muscolino for Id-Lab (*Yellow Fever*) or Squint/Opera (*Istanbul Seaport*). In all cases, the moving image is a very suitable medium for telling a story. Nowadays it has a very flexible format that can be put on a desk, website, or screen somewhere and easily be shared.

When I spoke with Jones the first time, in 2009, he told me that since software had become increasingly cheap and accessible, architects had started to produce three-dimensional design visualizations internally. According to Jones, it would take some time, however, before architects would start producing marketing films because these require enormous computer capacity, a time-consuming creative process, and intensive collaboration with others, which architects simply could not afford. For this reason, Uniform was experimenting with various styles, in the hope of capturing a niche market in which pure realism could be combined with extra dimensions and thus upgraded. Almost five years later, Cunningham still describes a similar situation:

The software has become so sophisticated that it still demands the same intense computing time and effort. It's just that the quality of what you can do with the physics and geometry have continued to improve, so for an architect it's too much effort to move into visualization as a fulltime discipline when there are so many other things to contend with. The architect would almost need two completely different skill sets.

In the near future, thus, the agencies mentioned in this text might pursue their work on creative architectural commercials and further develop this unique genre. For Jones, important breakthroughs are to be expected as soon as CGI will be able to provide credible characters against an affordable price. For other agencies such as The Neighbourhood, interesting innovations are to be sought in combination with other new media such as applications for mobile devices. Both agree

NOTE

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creative industries fund NL

Beyond

built

Concept of the future city for the
exhibition "Under Tomorrows Sky"
(Detail) © Factory Fifteen

architecture

ETHEL BARAONA POHL
and
CÉSAR REYES
from dpr-barcelona

interview
JONATHAN GALES
founding member
of
FACTORY FIFTEEN

Factory Fifteen is an animation studio based in London that researches the mixed use of film, animation, music, and photography. They call themselves Synthetic Architects who work in film and animation to produce the imagined, the unreal, and the surreal.

Jonathan Gales, one of its founders, answered this interview about their work, experience, and expectations.

To start off, how was Factory Fifteen was born?

Factory Fifteen was formed at the end of our time studying in Unit 15 at the Bartlett. We all met in the post-graduate architecture course in Nic Clear's unit. We were all interested in architecture, but not necessarily to become architects; it was the film aspect of Nic's unit that drew us I suppose, and the opportunity to be free to study what we wanted to. Originally, six of us from Unit 15 formed the collective that is Factory Fifteen: Paul Nicholls, Kibwe Tavares, Dan Tassell, Chris Lees, Richard Young, and myself. We put on our own exhibition and film screening around the time of the summer show, celebrating the work we had finished. It was a pretty exciting time. A few weeks later we had an opportunity to take on a job, which three of us (Paul, Kibwe, and myself) setup Factory Fifteen as a company to undertake.

We know that you have different backgrounds and trainings, from architecture to engineering, animation, and photography, among others. So how did you three meet and decide to work together?

Whilst studying in the unit, we were encouraged to learn and try new techniques and explore all aspects of filmmaking that interested us. I was really into the photography and camera department, and was freelancing for a music label making music promos. There was quite a lot of skill swapping in our unit, and we all traded tips of things we were good at for things we weren't. Paul had a lot of experience in Architectural Visualization, and was working in a few offices in London in and around university work. The summer between 4th and 5th year at the Bartlett, a large visualization job came up where Paul was working, so Kibwe and myself joined him to work at the same firm. We all pretty much worked there for the summer, so we got to know how each other worked in practice as well as being friends at university. I think this really helped solidify our ambition to set up our own studio. We had a good idea of the cost of the work we were undertaking, and how much people were getting paid.

Being at architecture school, you had the opportunity of studying with Nic Clear on topics such as "city and science fiction." How was your experience with Nic? Had this research been a primary influence of some of your further works?

We all chose to study in Nic's unit for similar reasons, but the main ones were the attraction of animation techniques within architecture school and the agenda of the work being wider than built architecture. I was really drawn to the opportunity to study urbanization and socio-political aspects of the built environment. There were a lot of conversations that would question the role of the architect in the traditional sense. Not that it was cynical, but there was a lot of critical thinking. I didn't want to specifically learn how a building is constructed, although this is something that you cover parts of within the course. I was interested in the idea that people outside architecture have as much or a larger impact on the development and design of architecture than the architect. I think Unit 15 was a really interesting environment to be part of. It has, in some ways, impacted how we approach and treat projects we take on now, but also projects that we try to conceptualize and initiate. The relationship between film and architecture is an interesting one. As professions, they have a lot of parallels. For me, great architecture is about space making, telling stories, and inviting people to move within them. Film is not so different.

Academic education has been in the focus of several discussions during the past years, with so many architects arguing that it needs to be refunded and go through a radical change. What do you think about architecture schools and their role in the current times?

I think there is a lot of discussion (good and bad) about architecture schools, and what is or should be taught within them. Architecture is an incredibly vast subject. I think that first we must acknowledge that there are different types of architecture schools that teach different types of courses. I come from an arts background, and am much more interested in the design and theory of architecture. Perhaps it should be made clearer by the universities what type of course they choose to run. But, I think in architecture you need many different minds; it is inevitably a profession of collaboration. I think that if you want to learn how a building is constructed there are more efficient, less painful, and cheaper ways to find out than studying architecture. I have always been fascinated by theory, and believe that we should continue to learn to question why we should build what we are building, not just how. I also see a great value to studying architecture because it is a fascinating subject. There is, at least in the UK, a tendency to assume that everyone who studies architecture will go on to become an architect. It was only in my later years of study that I found I loved it as subject, but saw so many opportunities in other professions with the skills and mindset I had been developing.

Architecture is changing and evolving with new technologies and production methods. Although the majority of people who study architecture will go on to work in practice on relatively normative building projects, I think its important to develop and test things within architecture schools.



Tourist Town artwork for the film "Jonah" © Factory Fifteen

Related to the previous question, can you explain briefly your thoughts about the polemic that emerged when your work Robots of Brixton won the RIBA Silver Medal, the article written by Patrick Schumacher, the open letter by Léopold Lambert, and all the debate around architectural education?

This was quite an interesting time, I suppose it had been "bottlenecking" for a while, and that year was the cherry on the cake. It's quite easy to assume that a lot of beautifully presented work lacks substance behind it, or that it is not a serious project because the proposed program is avant-garde and seemingly ridiculous. I don't think that there is a resolution to this argument, as I said earlier. I saw our education very much as a foundation of skills and critical thinking that can be applied to numerous things. Some people would prefer that everyone designed mixed-use developments within regeneration areas, and used only AutoCAD as a tool. Perhaps this would save us a few debates and prepare students for time in practice. I personally enjoy some of projects that are imagined within education. Students should be having fun. Undoubtedly, they should be executing their work to the highest degree, and acting truly as designers. I guess some people can't indulge in something other than traditional curriculum. I think there are a few units out there that are breaking away from the norm, and really questioning what architecture is now and what is our relationship to it.

If the academic world needs a change, and you have been working on the margins of architecture, if we talk traditionally, how do you perceive the future of our practice?

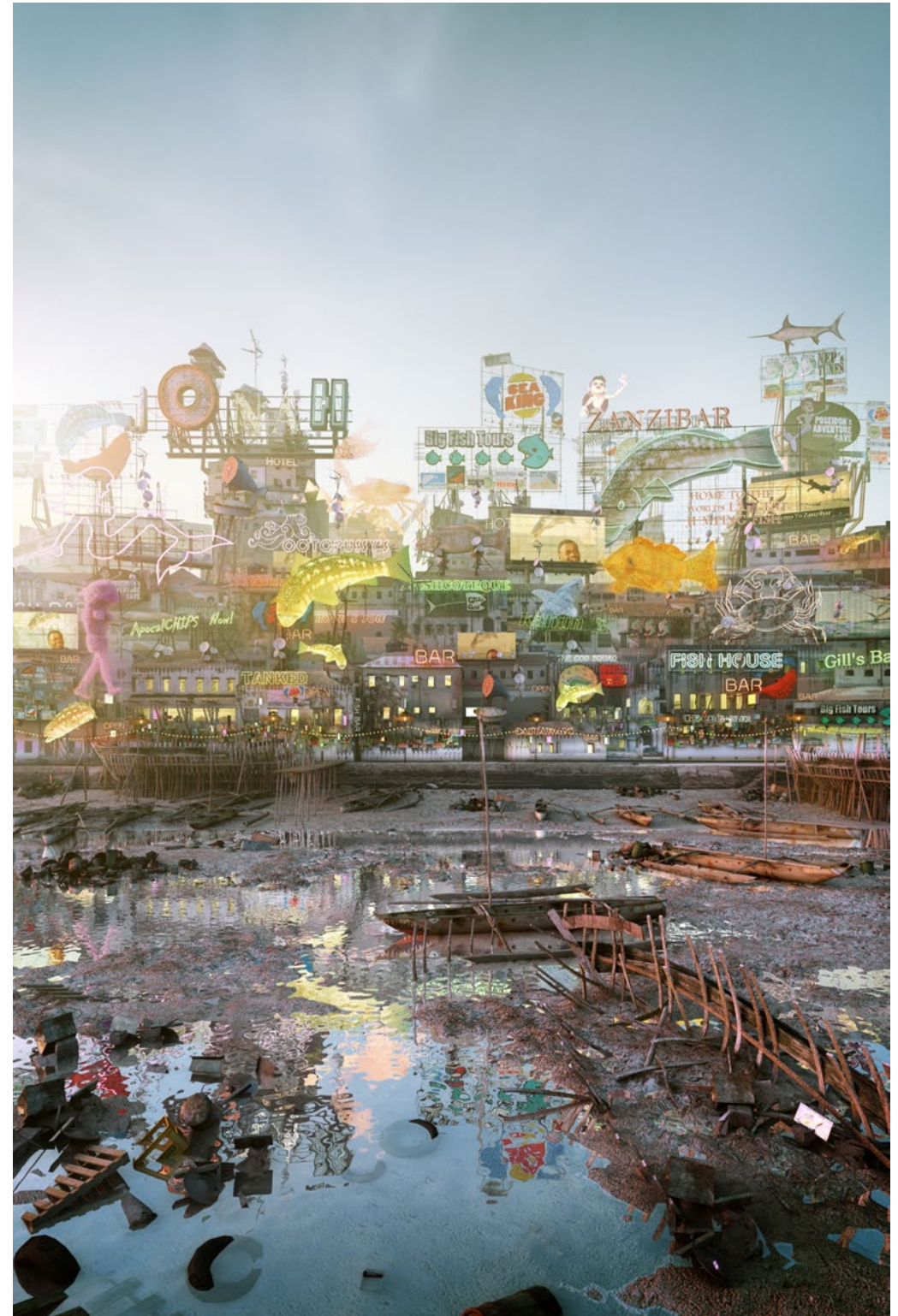
It's incredibly hard to predict what the future of our practice will be. I think the role of the architect needs to adjust to the realm that we now operate within. As you say, we are working on the margins of traditional architectural practice, so I would not like to comment directly on a profession I do not directly practice. We do, however, consider our practice as an extension of architecture, and are defining ourselves as architects outside of the traditional practice. I think this approach needs to be echoed throughout the profession if it is to continue to excel and engage in what we define as architecture.

Do you understand your activity as filmmakers as "architecture"? Is the medium the message, or is the message independent of the medium?

Yes... and no. I believe that what we are doing as filmmakers and designers is, in part, an iteration of architecture, though I am under no pretense that we are practicing architecture. We work to create projects that engage in narrative and envisage space. Some are from an overlooking perspective, though we are taking the direction of the projects now to the end user perspective. All projects engage in some way with the built environment, posing "what if" scenarios, or using the visualized environment to aid the narrative of the story. I feel that our work engages as architecture should, although its product is more temporal and ephemeral than a building. I suppose in some ways that allows us to comment on things without the responsibility of the project imposing on people for the duration of its life.



Concept of the future city for the exhibition "Under Tomorrows Sky" © Factory Fifteen



Tourist Town artwork for the film "Jonah" © Factory Fifteen

We are very much using our means and skill sets to engage a message. The way we work, the tools we use are just tools. I think there are many parallels with the way we work and how an architectural studio works. I think film and animation are fantastic mediums, which are unique in framing some projects, though I'd like to think that the message of the projects surpasses the mediums. Our recent studio work has centered much more on the design of environments within films and stories. We have evolved our process collectively to approach projects from a design and solution point of view, whether they are film, print, commercial, or other. I think it's clear to talk about the design projects where we are literally designing buildings in relation to traditional architecture. The difference comes with the output, as our product is graphic, and won't go to planning, tender, or encompass design and detail changes in the same way traditional architecture would. Most of us have worked in the UK on projects in stages A-D [Appraisal to Design development], so I suppose this has had an affect on our current ambitions.

Can you explain your experience with the Unknown Fields expedition from Chernobyl to Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan?

The Unknown Fields expeditions have had an interesting affect on our work. I think initially I saw opportunity and a fearlessness to construct projects through working with Kate Davies and Liam Young. They are really interesting people who have an incredible knack of getting to amazing places and creating stuff from nothing. Chernobyl to Baikonur was an incredible expedition. I didn't know what to expect when I went, but all I can say is that some of the experiences from the trips will stay with me for a long time. I mean, not many people are walking around a 200,000-person city abandoned for 30 years one day, then watching a radio satellite launch at a Cosmodrome another. I enjoy the way that Kate and Liam engage in the present to pose questions about the future. Our project "Gamma" was a test for us, an extracurricular project we ran whilst working commercially. It did, however, allow us to create a film project that continued the ethos we practiced in Unit 15, and hope to continue throughout our careers.

Many of your films (*GAMMA*, *Megalomania*, *Robots of Brixton*) present a dystopic urban future, some of them deeply related with science fiction from the 60s and 70s. Based on the current evolution of technologies and social and cultural issues, how do you envision the future of our cities?

I think that the evolution of our cities will be to some degree symbiotic with the evolution of technologies. Our cities are getting smarter and technologically occupied increasingly by a variety of parties; some authoritarian, some anarchic and open source. I think that it is inevitable for any technology that is successful to become utilized by governing bodies, but what I find interesting is the development of technological democracy that has emerged with user content driven platforms like social media. We have recently completed an exhibition project for the Lisbon Architecture Triennale titled *Chupan Chupai*, which touches upon this subject. We created a short video piece that explores how children play with the city. Through the game of "hide and seek," we follow a group of children who interact with



Image from the film *Chupan Chupai* © Factory Fifteen

surface control of their city to help them hide. Two children go further than hiding and hack the surface to immerse themselves in the city infrastructure. In our piece we wanted to show how gesture based control can be adopted to interact with our surroundings. We wanted to create a colorful project that breaks away from the dystopic a bit. I wouldn't go as far to say that it was "utopic," but we like to frame it as "heterotopic" as with some of our other projects. Also, we shot the project on location in India, which we were interested in thinking about in context of its technological and production industries, as well as its current infrastructure.

One more question to conclude the interview. What is the importance of storytelling in your work?

Storytelling is becoming increasingly important in our work. Initially we were quite focused on the design of scenarios and what stuff could look like. We are now developing projects that are driven by the narrative although the subject may use the environment heavily to explore that narrative.

ANDREA ALBERGHINI

is an architect with an interest in the relationships between comics, architecture and the city. He studied at IUAV (Venice, Italy) and is the author of the book *Sequenze urbane. La metropoli nel fumetto* (2006). He co-curated the exhibition “City of glass” (2009) about the graphic-novel adaptation of Paul Auster’s book and has been artistic consultant for the XV Napoli Comicon dedicated to Comics & Architecture (2013).

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ETHEL BARAONA POHL

is a writer, publisher and curator, whose instead of her [net]work is a real hub linking several publications and actors on architecture and theory. Co-founder of the independent publishing house dpr-barcelona, and editor at *Quaderns d'arquitectura i urbanisme*. Associate Curator for “Adhocracy,” first commissioned for the Istanbul Design Biennial in 2012 and exhibited at The New Museum, NYC (May 2013) and Lime Wharf, London (Summer 2013). Curator of the third Think Space programme with the theme “Money.”

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is an architect currently leading CRAB studio in London, founder of Archigram, and former Director the Institute for Contemporary Art and Bartlett School of Architecture at University College, both in London. He has been a pivotal figure within the global architectural world for over half a century. His achievements with radical experimentalist group Archigram have been the subject of numerous publications and public exhibitions and were recognized by the Royal Institute of British Architects in 2002, when members of the group were awarded the RIBA’s highest award, the Royal Gold Medal.

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MANUELE FIOR

is a cartoonist, illustrator and architect born in Cesena, Italy, and currently based in Paris. His career in comics began in 2001 with his collaboration with the German publisher Avant-Verlag on the magazine *Plaue*. Since then he created the following graphic novels: *Les gens le dimanche* (Atrabile, 2004), *Rosso Oltremare* (Coconino Press/Atrabile, 2006), *La signorina Else* (Coconino Press/Delcourt, 2009), *Cinquemila chilometri al secondo* (Coconino Press/Atrabile, 2010), and *L'intervista* (Coconino Press/Futuropolis, 2013).

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FACTORY FIFTEEN

is a UK-based film and animation studio, led by directors Jonathan Gales, Paul Nicholls and Kibwe Tavares. Their backgrounds range from architecture, 3D visualization, engineering, animation and photography. They translate this to a multi-disciplinary and distinctive approach to filmmaking.

www.factoryfifteen.com | @FactoryFifteen

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is an architect and director of MAS Studio. In addition, he is the editor in chief of MAS Context and the co-director of the Chicago Expander program at Archeworks. He is the recipient of the 2010 Emerging Visions Award from the Chicago Architectural Club.

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TOM KACZYNSKI

is an Ignatz nominated cartoonist, designer, illustrator, writer, teacher and publisher based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His comics have appeared in *Best American Nonrequired Reading*, *MOME*, *Punk Planet*, *The Drama*, and many other publications. He’s currently teaching comics at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and occasionally contributes to the Rain Taxi Review of Books. Since 2006 he’s been the publisher of Uncivilized Books. The imprint publishes limited edition, hand-made booklets and chapbooks by established and less-well-known artists and cartoonists including Gabrielle Bell, Jon Lewis, and Daniel Thomas Wieden.

www.transatlantis.net/blog | www.uncivilizedbooks.com | @unciv

KLAUS

is a frustrated cartoonist who lives in an old castle in Europe, intermittently uploading his cartoons in Klaustoon’s Blog since 2009. Much to his surprise, his work is often published in architectural publications, such as *The New City Reader*, *Aequus*, *eVolo*, *(In)forma*, *Clog*, *(Dis) Courses*, *Harvard Design Magazine*, *The Harvard Satirical Press*, *MAS Context*, *Conditions*, *Studio*, *Project International*, or *Volume*. Also, it has been exhibited in places such as Barcelona, Cambridge, Chicago, London, Naples, New York, Portimao, or, most importantly, OMA’s canteen. Currently, he publishes a monthly cartoon in the “Klaus’s Cube” section of uncube magazine and still owes Sanford Kwinter a cartoon. He is not Rem Koolhaas.

klaustoon.wordpress.com | @klaustoon

JIMENEZ LAI

is an Assistant Professor at University of Illinois at Chicago and Leader of Bureau Spectacular. His first manifesto, *Citizens of No Place*, was published by Princeton Architectural Press with a grant from the Graham Foundation. In 2012, Lai became a winner of the Young Architects Forum / Architectural League Prize.

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LÉOPOLD LAMBERT

is an architect who has been successively a Parisian, a Hong Konger, a Mumbaikar and a New Yorker. In addition of his enthusiasm for design, he is the writer/editor of *The Funambulist*, an online platform approaching the politics of the build environment through philosophy, legal theory, literature and cinema. He is the author of *Weaponized Architecture: The Impossibility of Innocence* (dpr-barcelona 2012) that examines (and acts on) the inherent characteristics of architecture that systematically makes it a political weapon. He is currently publishing the twelve first volumes of *The Funambulist Pamphlets* and the first volume of *The Funambulist Papers* with Punctum Books through the CTM Documents Initiative. He is also the coordinator/editor of *Archipelago*, an online archive of inter-disciplinary podcasts that will start in January 2014.

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LUIS MIGUEL (KOLDO) LUS ARANA, PhD

is an architect, urban planner and scholar (University of Navarra/ IUAV/ Harvard GSD) whose two main lines of research are the interactions between architecture and mass media, and the History of Utopian Planning. He is the Author of “Futuropolis,” a history of the evolution of the image of the future city, and his research work has been published in magazines such as *Menhir*, *Aequus*, *(Dis)Courses*, *(In)Forma*, *Lars: Arquitectura y Ciudad*, *URBES*, *Clog*, *Flow Platform*, or *RA*, as well as books such as *Seeking the City: Visionaries on the Margins* (2008), *Ecological Urbanism* (2010), or *Once Upon A Place* (2013). He is currently professor of Theory and History of Post-War and Contemporary Architecture in the University of Zaragoza (Spain).

MARC-ANTOINE MATHIEU

is a French graphic novelist who, book after book explores new ways to integrate the very form of the graphic novel as integrative part of the labyrinths of his narratives. His series *Julius Corentin Acquefacques, prisonnier des rêves* (Julius Corentin Acquefacques, Prisoner of Dreams) that gathers six books from 1990 to 2013, in particular, deconstructs one by one every formal components of the graphic novel (cover, frames, perspective, two-dimensionality, directions of the pages, flatness of the page) while composing metaphysical considerations of what reality *really* is.

CLARA OLÓRIZ SANJUÁN

is a researcher, tutor and practicing architect. She developed her PhD thesis *Projecting Technology* at the ETSA Universidad de Navarra and the Architectural Association. She has worked for Foreign Office Architects, Cerouno and Groundlab. She is a design tutor at the AA Landscape Urbanism Master programme and she co-directs the AA Visiting school in Bilbao and the AA Research Cluster titled “Urban Prototypes.”

CESAR REYES NAJERA

is an architect, PhD in Bio-climatic Construction Systems and Materials. His work seeks a thermodynamic approach to architecture focusing on social issues. His research deals with the development and application of low-tech biomaterials for architecture. He is co-founder of the independent publishing house dpr-barcelona, and curator of the third Think Space programme for 2013/2014.

www.dpr-barcelona.com | @dpr_barcelona | @cerreyes

FRANÇOIS SCHUITEN

was not yet 20 years old when he published, in 1973, his first comic strip panels in *Pilote*. In 1968, he met his future partner in crime, Benoît Peeters. In 1982, they ultimately created their first joint project. The readers of (A SUIVRE) magazine are introduced to Les murailles de Samaris. Ever since, the two men have remained inseparable. They designed books of all shapes and sizes within the framework of the Cités Obscures. Since the mid-80s, he has collaborated with various filmmakers, for whom he dreams up décors and costumes. He is also an illustrious scenographer, be it for the public sphere (Porte de Hal metro station in Brussels and the Arts & Métiers metro station in Paris) or for exhibitions (Le pavillon des utopies in Hanover in 2000). He was awarded the Grand Prix de la Ville d'Angoulême in 2002.

JOOST SWARTE

started to draw comics at the end of the 1960s, while studying industrial design. In 1970, he published his first comic book, and from 1971 on he worked for the famous Dutch comic magazine *Tante Leny Presenteert* (Aunt Leny Presents). With the comic series *Dr Ben Cine & D* in VRIJ Nederland he rose to international fame. In 1990 he initiated the Strippedagen, a biennial international comic event that took place for the first time in 1992 in Haarlem, Holland.

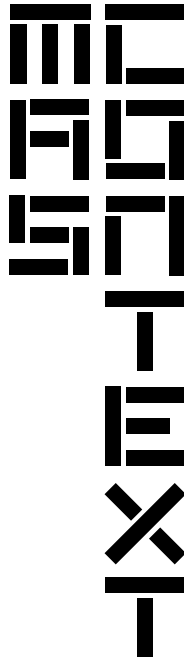
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MÉLANIE VAN DER HOORN

is a Cultural Anthropologist with a specialization in Material Culture. She is the author of *Indispensable Eyesores: An Anthropology of Undesired Buildings* (Berghahn Books, 2009) and *Bricks & Balloons: Architecture in Comic-Strip Form* (010 Publishers, 2012). Currently she is working as an independent researcher (research project on creative architectural commercials) and as an external lecturer at Vienna University of Technology and the University of Innsbruck.

CHRIS WARE

is a comic book artist and cartoonist best-known as the creator of the Acme Novelty Library, publications in various formats that feature the adventures of such characters as Quimby the Mouse and Jimmy Corrigan. Not quite comic books, not quite graphic novels, Ware's work mines art history, popular culture, and personal experience, capturing a queasy sense of reality of modern life in a “retro” style distinctly his own. His latest book is *Building Stories* (Pantheon, 2012).



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NARRATIVE

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MCA AGE STX T E X T

Issue 21 / Spring 14

REPETITION

Our next issue will focus on the topic of REPETITION.

This issue seeks to explore and critically address the role that repetition plays in our built environment by proposing a series of initial questions:

How does repetition manifest itself in our built environment? What are the scales at which repetition operates and what are the consequences of each one of them? What types of patterns and rhythms does repetition generate? When and how should we introduce variation to avoid monotony? Do we even have to avoid monotony? What is the role of replicas when we have the original versus when the original no longer exists? Considering simulation as a form of repetition of an action or environment, which conditions are worth simulating? Now that we can repeat actions and objects exactly and indefinitely, what do we gain or lose by imperfect repetitions?

These questions act as a springboard from which to explore multiple approaches to repetition—some manifested in concrete and built forms and others revealed as actions, cultural movements, or experiential conditions.

21 | REPETITION SPRING 14 will be published in early March, 2014.

