



Incomplete Voyage

or the Process of Reappropriation of the Fantastic
IV - IRINI PERAKI, NATALIE DONAT-CATTIN

*The essay aims, through a brief history of subjectively chosen events and key protagonists, to understand the relevance of **representation** today, as well as its impact on society since antiquity. Without trying to present a complete historiography, which would be far too ambitious, this textual and visual journey, like a movie, passes through a sequence of episodes. The different stories, together, seek to establish a general continuity, and to acknowledge the passage from the oral and the writing to the digital and the virtual. Although both visual and acoustic representations have stimulated human imagination (through psychological mechanisms) and innovation (through the psyché), today we feel increasingly disturbed and repelled by images and videos popping out everywhere, overwhelming us, suffocating us. These, in the architectural discourse, find expression through various means: paintings, collages, compositions, montages, renderings and three-dimensional animations; all important, creative, communicative working tools that, however, seem completely consumed by the contemporary, alienated society.*

Incomplete Voyage, Montage of Various Frescoes from Akrotiri, Théra (1700-1600 B.C.), and Tomb of the Triclinium, Tarquinia (480-70 B.C.), 2020.

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Lexical Premises to the Reading

Representation

It is used to define all types of visual and acoustic representations from antiquity (frescos, paintings, sculpted friezes) until today (collages, compositions, montages, renderings and three-dimensional animations). The term can also apply to architecture, as the latter has borrowed many of these techniques from the Arts.

In-Between

It is interpreted as the grey ground between real and ideal, idea and realisation. The In-Between is spontaneity, emotion, it is the non-pre-meditated event, the moment spanning, the joy of the unexpected.

Sur-meaning

It is not the direct meaning, but what it is subtended in the meaning itself. It requires a process, a voyage. It is not immediate, yet it appears at the moment.

Uncontrollable

It is like the tears and the emotions. It is not measurable.

Sur-architecture

An architecture that is inspired by Surrealism and Bachelard's Surrationalism, that accepts the irrational and the dream, aiming for a reconciliation of reason and emotion, science and contradiction, imagination and reality.

Wa/ondering architecture

It is an architecture in-process - transforming, becoming, acting, active, being; it is a catalyst of performance and movement, a genesis of *soma* and *psyché*. In fact, the celebration of the process coincides with a simultaneous elevation of both its parts and its wholeness.

Renewed rituals

Like in ancient Greece, these are rituals where art and architecture, *soma* and *psyché*, sacred and profane join together, to become performance. This learning from the past allows for the creation of collective experiences.



Incomplete Voyage, *The Wheel of Fortune*, 2020.

The first part of this essay explores the relationship between representation and performance, as well as a continuous thread from antiquity to nowadays with the montage as a vehicle.



Elli Sougioultzoglou-Seraidari (known as Nelly's), *The Russian Dancer Elizaveta "Lila" Nikolska in the Parthenon*, photograph, 1930, Benaki Museum Collection.

1. Architecture and Cinematism

or about *Storytelling* through Representation

Today we live between two extremes: either detached from reality, or fully immersed in it. We oscillate from the infinite possibilities of the digital to the pragmatic acceptance of a fatal, catastrophic, merely cynical future. Welcome to the age of man: a dull time that, instead of imitating theatre - as Oscar Wilde wished -, rather seeks for magic in another invisible sphere, the virtual, inhabited by plenty of immobile spectators. Since the Enlightenment, we have been *attempting* to scientifically measure every event and analyse its cause, repressing the irrational and, by consequence, displacing the performance from the real to the ideal.

Originally, performance was related to the mystical and religious rituals, taking place once a year during the festivals that were devoted to the different divinities. Art was born out of these collective events: if architecture was the stage, art was the narration. Both architecture and representations - the frieze, the sculptures, the potteries - were there to frame the communal miracle of life: the temple, the theatre, the stadium, were part of

a larger *mise-en-scene* requiring movement to be experienced. Not by chance, in *Montage and Architecture*, Eisenstein uses the Acropolis as the perfect example of the most ancient film ever made.

Understanding the storytelling dimension of architecture is essential, since it bounds architecture - both material and immaterial - to representation - both visual and conceptual. Narration merges reality and imagination by dreaming of fantastic situations: **«all arts throughout the centuries tended towards cinema»** (Eisenstein 1989). For this reason, we are particularly intrigued by Jean Nouvel's, early OMA and Madeline's work. Their reflections translate into an architecture of screens and events rather than of spaces, weaving relationships with the past, present and future; a sequential multi-dimensional juxtaposition, used both in the conception phase - the plan, the images -, as well as in the actual building - materials, lights, signs -, arousing surprise, and opening up the way to the unexpected, the spanning, the in-between.



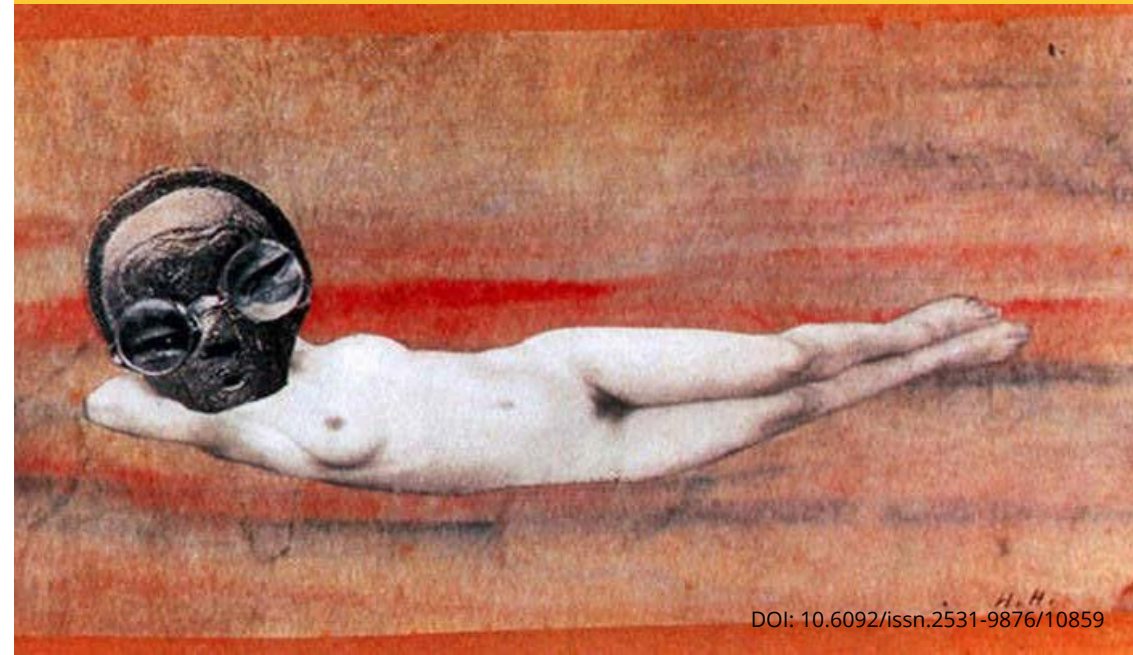
Richard Hamilton, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*, 1956.

In this essay, we will concentrate on the montage, and on its use in the architectural and artistic environment as a catalyst for dialectical relationships. In fact, its discontinuity and heterogeneity does not glorify the elements themselves, but rather their juxtaposition, opposition and difference. The in-between not only creates intervals within the whole, but also enables for a direct confrontation between the parts by establishing no hierarchy. Montage is about layering, process and dialogue: it aims to surpass the tangible in art and architecture. It takes the form of a mental map - immaterial and invisible -, rescuing fragments from the historical and contemporary context in order to create new meanings, while crushing classical beliefs. It enables the architect and the artist to detach themselves from their scientific grip and embrace, on the other hand, their role as storytellers and psychologists.



Hannah Höch, *Ohne Titel*, 1930.

Montage the technique of selecting, editing, and piecing together separate sections of film to form a continuous whole, or the technique of producing a new composite whole from fragments of pictures, text, or music.



Hannah Höch, *Fremde Schönheit*, 1929.

2. Architecture and Montage or about the Eternal Need for Representation, through Visual and Acoustic Experiences

Architecture, as an art based on visual communication, and so dependent on external perception, cannot be detached from the idea of *representation*.¹ However, since architecture is grounded in the real more than the other classical arts, it exploits various practices to evoke the abstract and infuse the buildings with meaning: from friezes, colours, and ornaments, to

paintings and billboards. In what aspects are the friezes of the Parthenon different from the projections on the screens of Times Square? Both act as story-telling devices, simply revealing a different story to another kind of society. Like Caravaggio's Narcissus desperately needing his reflection, in the same way, we perceive images as tools able to fill the emotional voids inside us. However, what kind of representation do we need?

Indeed, we believe that montage is an essential tool for architecture to pave the way for the fantastic and the indescribable. Even though collage and montage appeared around the same age of mechanical reproduction and technically-induced images, to quote Walter Benjamin, we feel **there is one major difference that renders montage more relevant today: its relation to time.** In contrast to collage, that is static, montage is mobile, temporal and spatial. It replaces the mono-focal regime of the single-point perspective of the Renaissance with a poly-focal, mobile one. Since the



Caravaggio, *Narciso*, 1597–1599.

¹ The word comes from the Latin *repraesentare* «make present, set in view, show, exhibit, display», and it is later envisioned, around the 1670s, as a «statement made in regard to some matter».



Pheidias Workshop, *Detail of the east frieze, Block VI*, 442-438 BC.

Industrial Revolution, montage becomes a primary cultural technique, juxtaposing whole or parts of reproduced images. It allows for heterogeneity and plurality, by cherishing differences and contrast. Preferably both visual and acoustic, it allows the loss of direct referentiality by inserting the fantastic into the real, and not vice versa.

The montage, in the art world, was first introduced by the Dada movement in the Twenties. The Dadaists applied its principles on a wide range of media, experimenting also in poetry, dance, theatre, painting, often combining disciplines in their performances. Therefore, the montage, a technique born from other disciplines (mainly experiments around art and cinema), is borrowed and used in architecture to become a tool able to bring back the sur-meaning within the built environment. The montage

gets inspiration from psychology and, through the unconscious, enables for new associations: it visually relates notions far away from each other. Like the assemblage, it brings together different fragments, managing to give strength simultaneously to the past, the present and the future. By doing this, montage rejects its only visual aspect, to open up to experience. As with cinema, with montage we can penetrate deeply in the fabric of the real and in the tissue of the city. **This makes cinema, architecture and montage linked, and highlights the possibility of an architecture accepting both the fantastic and the concrete. The architect's mission is to bring the unconscious to the surface, making the collective ethos readable.**

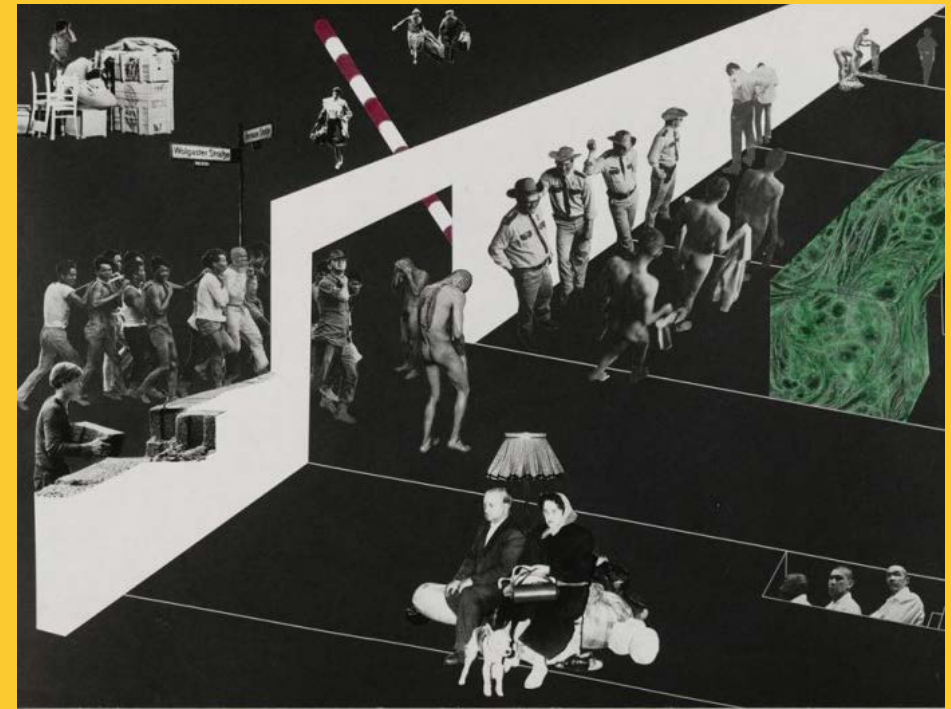
3. Architecture and Storytelling

or about the *Reaction* to Autonomy through Paper-montages

With the advent of late modernity, art rejects its conventional contemplative role to fully engage with the viewer. In the same way, the expressive potential of architecture, that Mies started exploring in the 1910s, inspired by the Dada movement, booms in the second half of the 20th century, when architecture employs representation to reveal the story of a society, and its inadequacies. Indeed, in the 60s, architecture detaches itself from the physical and engages in an intellectual discourse powered by images: supersurfaces, walking cities and continuous monuments depict the civilisation to come. **These proposals, a form of both reaction and resistance to the built environment, remain at a story-telling level and allow architecture to become narration.** Likewise, *Exodus*, the thesis of Rem Koolhaas elaborated at the Architectural Association of London in 1972 together with Elia Zenghelis, is a stage-set for human experimentation: a three-dimensional storyboard preserving the principle of the montage; a sequence of spaces creating a script both in plan and in perspective, like in a film; a

succession of events transposing us in an alternative world; erotic baths, ancient theatres, unconventional museums and radical laboratories.

In OMA's early work (*Exodus*, *City of the Captive Globe* and *Delirious New York*), the images' unfolding force is translated into the intensity of the user's experience: the juxtaposition of materials, the concatenated volumes organised like in an Exquisite Corpse, the extreme exaltation of the communal life surprise and shock at the same time. Both OMA's early representations and buildings act as indicators of a society: they de-intellectualise architecture by bringing the human and his feelings to the foreground. This storytelling side of architecture and its space-time dimension is what renders it more than just an intellectual apparatus. The edifices demand motion and time to be understood, unlike the ones that instantly seduce as complete static figures. Experience merges into the built; movement takes over the function; the exterior is the resultant of the interior. The result is a theatrical effect, encouraging the user to circu-



Rem Koolhaas, *Exodus or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture, The Reception Area*, 1972.



Madelon Vriesendorp, *Flagrant Délit*, 1975.

spaces, embracing tensions and connections. Madelon Vriesendorp's images, like *Flagrant Délit*, embrace a psychological dimension to communicate a sur-meaning, and therefore offer new possibilities of association to the unconscious, enabled to create unexpected connections. In the same way, the *City of the Captive Globe* and *Madelon's Manhattan Project*, grant a surrealist facet

to the New York's skyscrapers. Through the eyes of Madelon Vriesendorp and Zoe Zengheli, and thanks to their magical creativity, the soulless high-rises appear now breathing and pulsing. However, the buildings and their performance become the protagonists, whereas architecture's main goal should be to put human beings in the foreground and to tell the story of the people.

4. Architecture and Representation or about the Reaction to Homogeneity through the *Virtual*

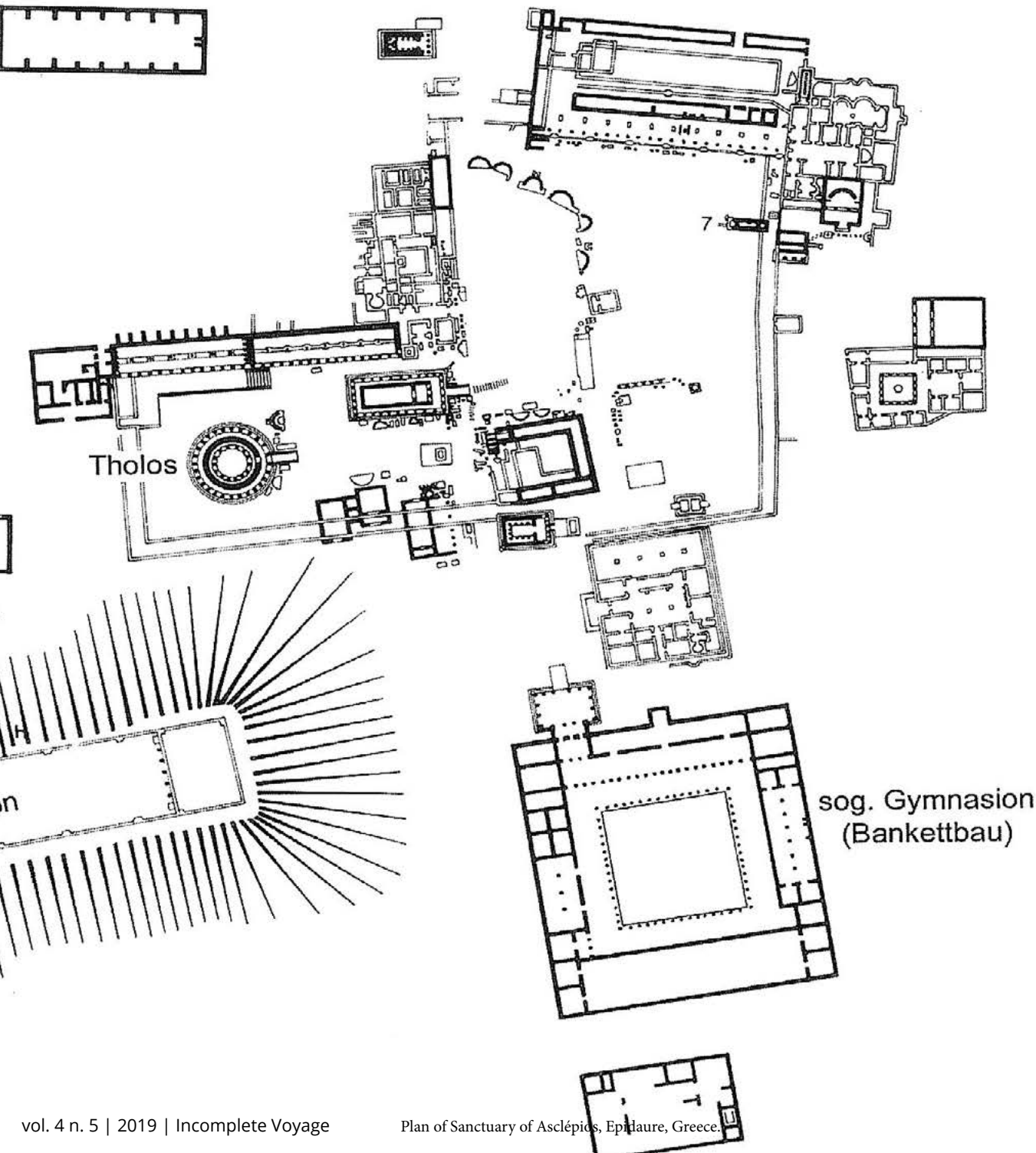
Even though representation is what propels the architectural discourse, it also has its own limits. Polemical and visionary tools, like the paper-collages and montages of the Avant-garde and Rem Koolhaas, in just a few decades turned into either fashionable aesthetic *tableaux*² or, like in the above-mentioned case of the *City of the Captive Globe*, into detached realities concentrating merely on architecture and not on its impact.

In general today, through pure forms and simple compositions, we tend to forget that architecture's focus should be the contemporary society, with its issues of ecology, affordable living, social injustice, working instability and economic crisis. Images are instruments to affirm a cultural and critical position, where the human is at the centre, but as part of the larger system of nature: **architecture is the performing frame where the two unite.**

Representations are essential in an architectural discourse. However, we need to start being more critical about how we use them. We need to learn from the past and the present, in order to propose an architecture capable of offering meaning in the world of today. For this reason, in the second part of the essay, we will found our research on four concepts that Walter Benjamin claims revolutionary requirements in the politics of art (*Kunstpölitics*): **the notions of creativity, genius, mystery and eternity, which inject the uncontrollable into society.**³ This is how art maintains its primordial role as a tool for engaging the masses intellectually and, by extension, politically. Therefore, we would like to start from these four values and apply them to the architectural context to question the status of representations today.

² Stierli, M. (2018), *Montage and the Metropolis*, Yale University Press, New Haven.

³ These four concepts were originally taken from Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, but for the purpose of this essay they have been used in a personal way. Likewise, the use of the uncontrollable is not related to how W. B. uses it, but rather stems from our own interpretation.



Montage, to our understanding, is not just a representation technique, but a key tool at the base of architectural thinking.

Indeed, even if the etymology of the term is only born at the time of the Industrial Revolution, its principles were already applied in the arrangement of the ancient polis, in order to distinguish the utilitarian grid from the sacred-montaged communal sphere. The dialectical immaterialism of images needs to no longer be just a representational tool, but to find concrete application in order to make people authentic actors, experiencing the built and natural environment. Architecture needs to perform as a storytelling device, in order to provide a cinematic experience which, thanks to virtual representation today, is no longer bound to the flat bidimensional surface, but is also able to move to the three-dimensional world.



The second part of the essay is structured as an α -chronic **incomplete voyage**, which aims to put the importance on the *hic et nunc* (here and now) of montage and, consequently, on its condition of authenticity and originality. If in Homer's *Odyssey*, Ulysses is driven by the burning desire of returning home, on the contrary, our Ulysses - now a female heroine- ventures on a journey without destination. However, her thirst for knowledge and dreams of adventure - «ch'i' ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto, / e de li vizi umani e del valore» - does not condemn her to eternal suffering, as it happens in the *Divina Commedia* of Dante Alighieri, but truly elevates her to «virtute e canoscenza». Throughout her incomplete voyage, she will stop on four invisible islands: creativity, genius, mystery and eternity, in an attempt to rediscover the uncontrollable.



Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools*, 1500.



Théodore Géricault, *Le Radeau de La Méduse*, 1818-1819.



Hieronymus Bosch, *Christ in Limbo*, 1550.



Photograph of the movie set scenography of Sergio Leone's *The Colossus of Rhodes*, 1961.

After a long, tormented night in the Aegean waters, our profane heroine reaches the sacred centre of Antiquity: Delos. The three conical mounds stand out at the horizon upon her arrival at the sacred harbour. The ruinous theatre, Apollo's majestic temple, the holy lake are just some of the many sanctuaries on the island. However, the special quality of the island lies in its religious openness and diversity of cults. For this reason, the visitor, even if at first estranged, quickly finds herself surrounded by an almost familiar landscape, where reality and dream, sacred and profane become one: a point supreme. This equivocal duality insinuates into Ulysses's mind, first shocking her, then letting her gently abandon herself to its multiple beauty.

Montage as a general principle: performance as a vehicle.

1. Creativity

or about storytelling that makes the *multiple* understandable

In Ancient Greece, because of the intrinsic connection between art and ritual, the body was an essential component in artistic creation. In the same way, architecture was there only to frame the performance of the religious processions and give rhythm to movement. The theatre, the gymnasium, the stadium, Apollo's temple were all carefully positioned in relation to the people's processions,⁴ following a montage plan that made the participants actors and makers rather than viewers. These festivals, taking place once a year, were organised in order to allow the city to tell its own story and keep alive its memory. All citizens attended, making the masses (women included), for the first time, regular and dynamic participants in public life. These important collective moments unfolded at the encounter between the Dionysiac ecstasy and the Apollonian beauty: it was when the popular culture met the "higher" culture. The essential, cathartic feast was the result of the necessary counter-balance

of the everyday. For the Ancient Greeks, the tedious "being yourself", was complemented by the festive "being the other". **A religion of joy, where mythology (storytelling), religion (joyfulness) and competition (body) became one.**

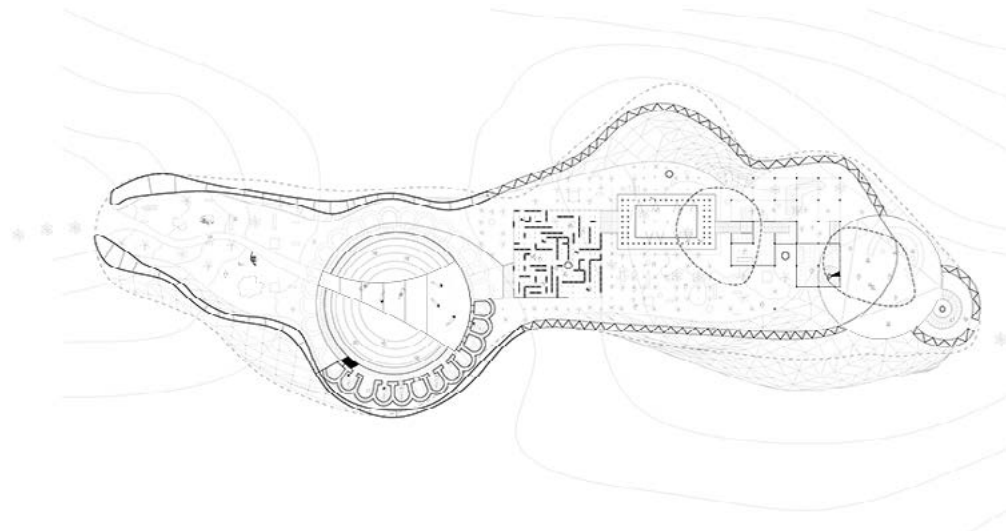
Art - and, by extension, representation - was a direct result of these moments, envisioned to stimulate collectivity and experimentation. Within artefacts (the building, the frieze, the sculpture), storytelling - seen as the ability of human beings to communicate about the outside world - evolved from verbal to spatial, and from a cognitive activity to an embodied experience. The frieze, like a sculptured storyboard, portrayed the people during the religious processions, merging the profane with the divine. Myth enriched architecture and art through performance, allowing the spiritual to descend into the world to be grasped by the masses. There was, therefore, a direct relationship between reality, myth, and spirituality and, in the same way, between archi-

⁴Most of the architecture we admire today did not belong to the public (political) or to the private (economical) sphere, but to the sacred or, as Lieven de Caeter writes, to the heterotopic one. This concept was first elaborated by Hippodamus, that applied the grid only to private buildings, and broke it by inserting collective artefacts.

ecture, representation and the fantastic.

This episode from the infancy of the West helps us to better understand **the original, mutual relationship between body and mind in the creation of art**. Architecture and its representation, like many other disciplines today, is now tossed between science and art, logic and emotion, mind and body. Mon-

tage is used as a general principle - both in the spatial arrangement of the plan and in the pictorial enrichment of the objects - to connect mind and body. A key connection in the past, but now often neglected because of the predominance of rationality in Western culture and of our constant use of technological devices, which make us believe that the body is now superfluous.



Irini Peraki, *Pantopia, Retour à la mèr(e), Santorini Surrationnelle*, 2019.



Irini Peraki, *Panthéa, Pantopia, Retour à la mèr(e), Santorini Surrationnelle*, 2019.

If, by voyaging on the Aegean waters, we debated over the general principle of performance, and its power as a catalyst for the relationship between architecture, representation and the fantastic, now it is important to do a conceptual step backwards, while thus stepping forward. Even if we do not wish yet to talk about why this connection got lost, we would like to concentrate on the sign (**the object**), the signifier (representation) and their predominance on the signified (the idea, the Genius), which brings a loss of meaning in the world of today. A precise definition of Genius does not exist in scientific terms, however, its concept is a direct consequence of the idea of creativity.





Aldo Rossi, *Teatro del Mondo*, 1979.

The years pass by, and our Ulysses abandons the Aegean water to navigate west. She neglects the route previously traced by Aeneas and, instead of moving up in the direction of Rome - «substantially homogeneous in its problems and solutions» (Baukuh 2012) -, chooses the Adriatic sea. She sails up the Italic boot wishing to experience, comprehend and develop. It is only by reaching the northernmost point of the Lido, and by entering the lagoon, that the floating island of Venice can finally be observed. An unconventional city, oscillating between constructive issues and oneiric scenarios. A fragmented reality, cursed but seeking rescue. A montage in itself: substantially heterogeneous in its problems and solutions. In the end, Venice is just a form of reaction, an alternative, a pretext to talk about Tafuri, Rossi and, indirectly, many others. «Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it. Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it, little by little» (Calvino 1974, p. 63).

Montage: the staticity of the fragments.

2. Genius or about the *dialectics* of the real

In ancient Rome, the *genius* indicated the guiding spirit or the individual deity of a person, family, or place (from this came, for instance, the *genius loci*). The advent of architecture as an independent art, no longer tied to a ritual, brings it to a breaking point: the community spirit, the general genius, is rejected to grant independence to the real. The refusal of the direct relationship between the spiritual and the real develops into a loss of value of the means used to connect them: the myths become empty. In the same way, representations no longer act as a unifier of the architecture and the fantastic and, therefore, drained of meaning, transform themselves into art for art, image for image, losing their main characteristics: creativity, genius, mystery and eternity. The form kills the function. **The objet singulier takes over the collective performance. Aesthetic turns into a principle** of its own, and ambiguity is repudiated. The finite is researched, the incomplete is forgotten. The shared values found in the ancient festivals are lost. The Western man rationalises

and de-complexifies the irrational, with the discovery of the central perspective as a consequence. Likewise, the ancient theatre, which was simply about the insertion of the spectator in its environment with the minimum of means, surrenders to its complete institutionalisation, resulting in the complete detachment of the viewer, now totally disconnected from the space. In the 18th century, Piranesi attempts to overturn this detachment between architecture and art, consequent to the Renaissance rationalising process, and strives to murder the object, by embracing the chaos and poly-focality of the *Carceri*. «The violence wrought upon the laws of perspective, the intuition of the possibilities offered by an indefinite “opening up of form” - the constant metamorphosis of the spaces in the *Carceri*, [...] mark, without any doubt, the end of Alberti's theoretical precepts of *concinnitas* and of *fnitio*» (Tafuri 1987, p. 40). By allowing the viewer to move, the prison is no longer a prison, but a theatre in which we are, at the same time, actors and spectators. However, this exercise remains bound to

the world of representation and could be defined as one of the first virtual experiments.

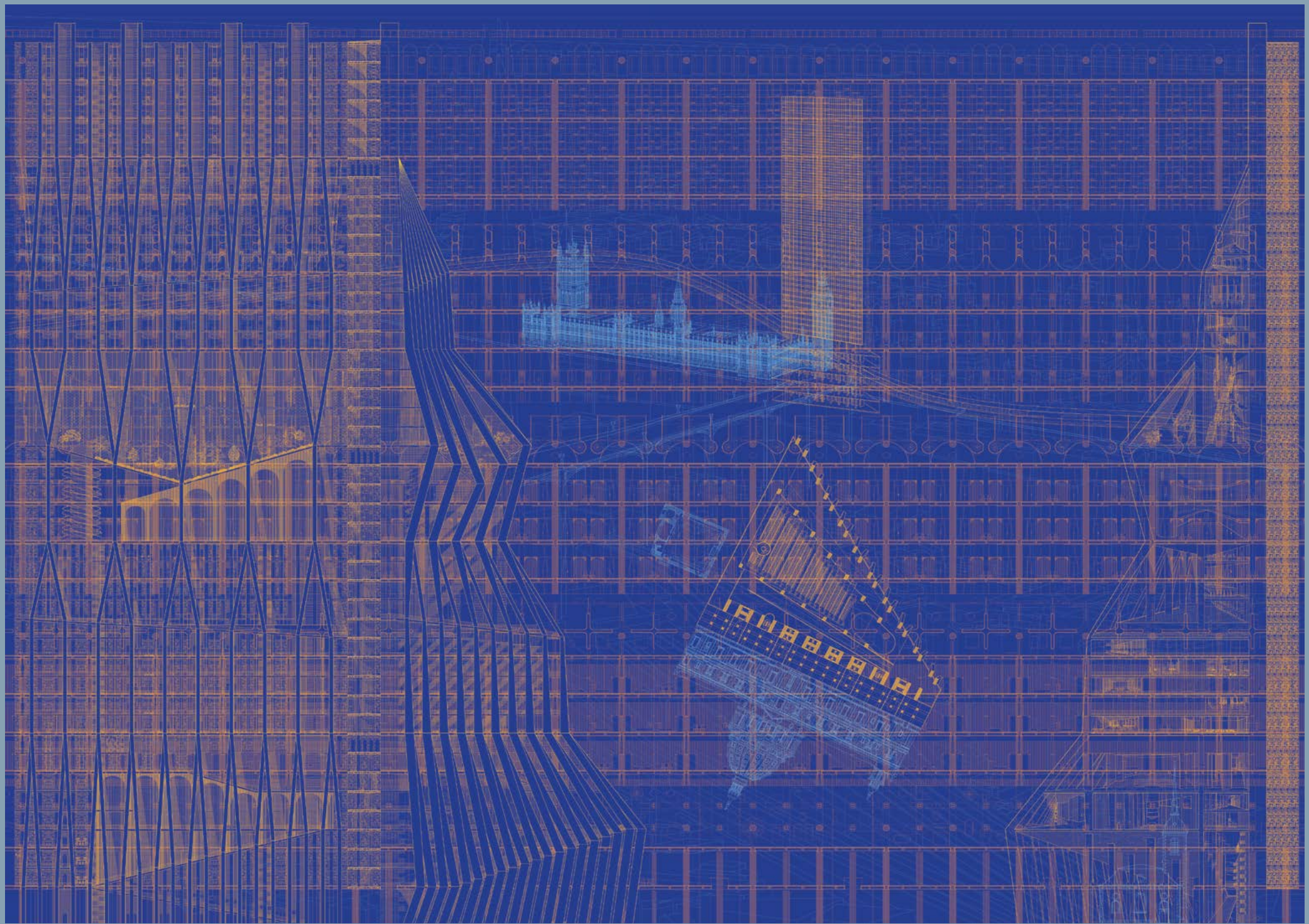
Furthermore, Rossi also uses the principle of montage in order to inject once again meaning into the city. However, the initial interest of the *Architecture of the City* in the irrational and desire for multiplicity disappears later on. «The empty space that, in Rossi's earliest architecture was ready to generously house the spectres of a whole multitude, has now been entirely filled with private ones» (Baukuh 2012). **Now, the void hosts object-like buildings, static and nostalgic: silent monuments in front of which many questions remain unanswered.** As Rossi himself declares, «I have always said that places are

stronger than people, the fixed scene is stronger than the story» (Rossi 1981). The contesting society of those years might have found itself wandering in front of those silent edifices, and perhaps wondered: what is architecture? Do we really need it? What can it do for us?

The attention is now on the object, visualised as an interactive element to observe, and not on society. Architecture becomes too predominant: in the *Teatro del Mondo*, what moves is the building, and not the people. Rossi's projects become pure representations. They stay as fragments of the past, rejecting the possibility of a wholeness within the today. **The festivity is lost. The experience as well.**



Natalie Donat-Cattin and Mickael Pelloquin,
*Tower of occupation/s, A Social Condenser of
Urban Conditions of Living*, model, 2019.



In the Venice lagoon, the sign and the signifier enforced their predominance on the signified. However, when reaching the unknown waters, the signifier (representation) and the signified (**the idea**, the Genius) take over, completely rejecting the sign (the object), and therefore the concrete. However, in the same way, this creates a phase of stall. The wish for action still does not aim for concretisation, remaining in a mysterious space, away from reality.



Drawn by several hands, *La Carte de Tendre*, 1653-1654.

The island of mystery cannot be found on nautical charts. To get to it, Ulysses has to cross the Mediterranean sea, skirt the Northern African coast and finally surpass the Pillars of Hercules. Two days of navigation, second stream to the right, and then straight into the Unknown waters, a looping void within the Atlantic ocean. At the dawn of the third day, our heroine begins to see through the morning fog the expanses of the non-stop archipelago and, right there, in-between, the unexpected...



3. Mystery

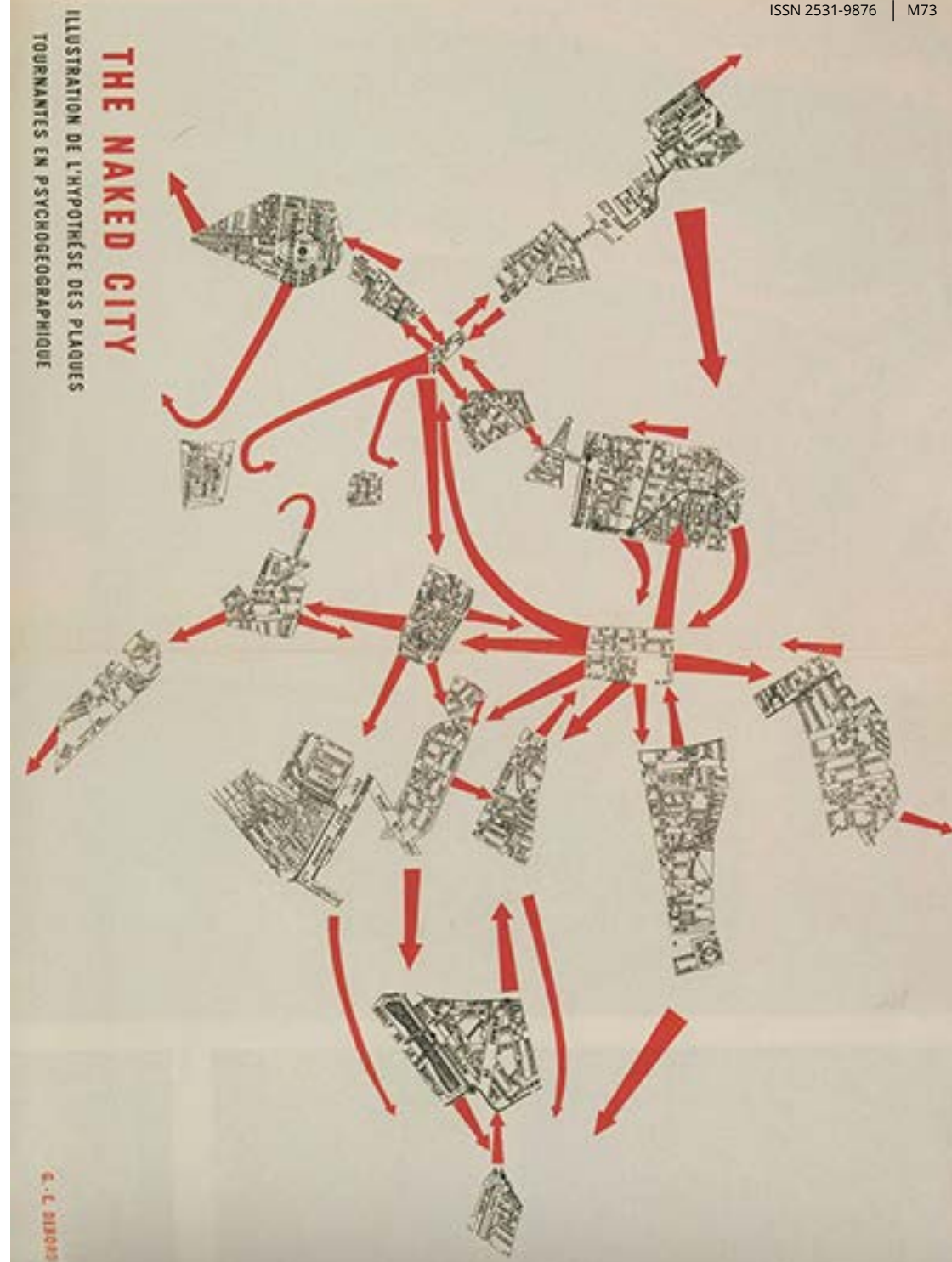
or about the *in-between* as an injection of the unexpected

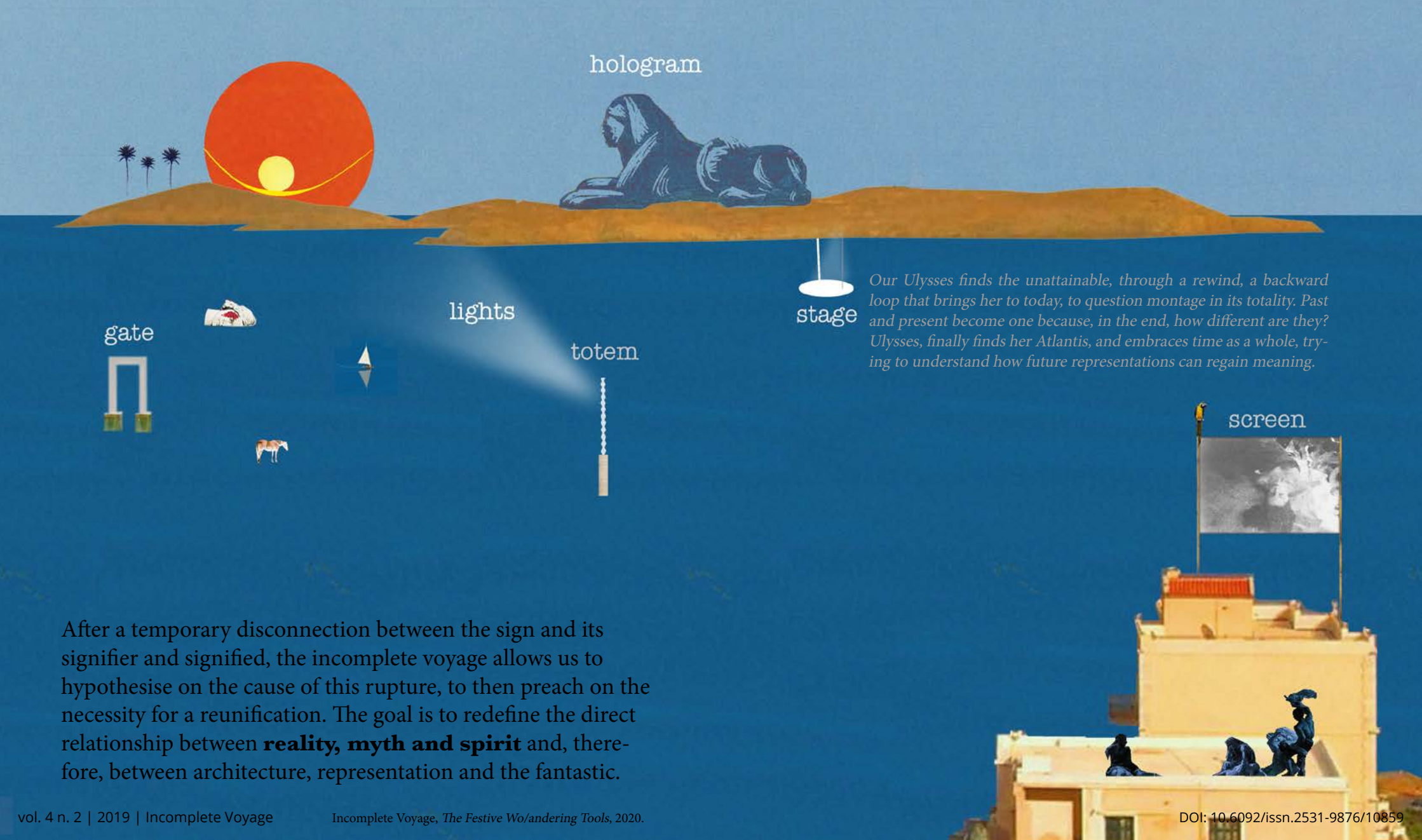
As a reaction to the Modernist approach, fully concentrated on the *tabula rasa* and on the creation of a powerful type of architecture, the Situationists, as well as the Radicals after it, fight to shift importance on the experience. **The object is rejected in its static and silent nature and, consequently, also the built environment, which appears now as a lost ground.** The whole architectural production transposes to representation.

The Situationists wish to change the everyday and its spaces - more and more functional -, through the creation of a series of moments, situations, sparks of life. They rediscover the city through the wandering, raising questions and making people think about the context in which they navigate. It is a very "instinctive" process, based on the idea of *dérive*: a fast passage between different environments. Wandering around without a precise destination, letting the environment to passively stimulate and influence the walker, forced to accept all feelings aroused by the movement. «We did not find the formula to overthrow the world in the books, but wandering» (Debord 1978). The whole pro-

cess is based on the idea of personal disorientation to acquire a new psychogeography. **The value of the uncontrollable and the immeasurable get injected in the everyday life to idealise feeling against materiality.** The endless search for experience, found in the void, sees the marginal and the movement as generators of new, surprising associations. The return to the senses, in the work of art and architecture, brings the disciplines back to their primordial mission: to raise questions and accept individual answers. Yet, this research remains very personal, linked to the individual and to the notion of the self (the conditions of identity that make one subject of experience distinct from all others). From these periods, all the documentation left is mainly on paper. The psychological takes over, killing any possibilities of concreteness. The paper representation remains empty without a conceptual explanation. We could say that the Situationists attempted a montage in time when trying to transpose their experience into representations. A positive attempt, yet a map of a mysterious place. **A solitary performance.**

Montage: ruptures as connectors of experiences.





hologram

lights

stage

Our Ulysses finds the unattainable, through a rewind, a backward loop that brings her to today, to question montage in its totality. Past and present become one because, in the end, how different are they? Ulysses, finally finds her Atlantis, and embraces time as a whole, trying to understand how future representations can regain meaning.

totem

screen

gate

After a temporary disconnection between the sign and its signifier and signified, the incomplete voyage allows us to hypothesise on the cause of this rupture, to then preach on the necessity for a reunification. The goal is to redefine the direct relationship between **reality, myth and spirit** and, therefore, between architecture, representation and the fantastic.

4. Eternity

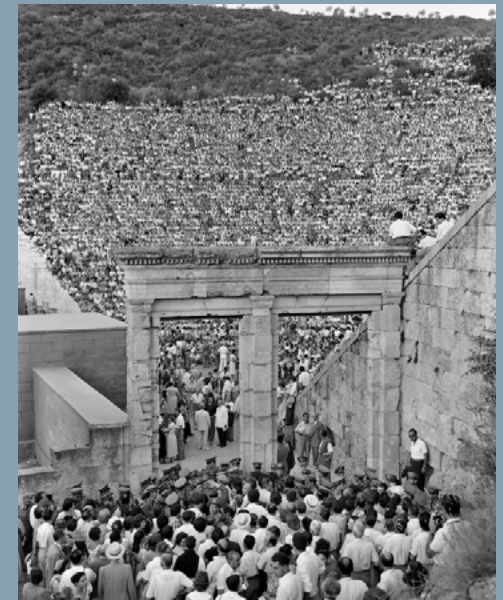
or the ever-lasting questioning of *society*

The predominance of the object over the psychological or, vice versa, the predominance of the idea over its concretisation results either in an architecture for architecture, or in no architecture at all. However, is there a way to reconnect architecture, representation and the fantastic to create buildings and representations able to surrender to the overall experience? Buildings that do not follow a grid just for aesthetic reasons, but that focus on community needs and envision a ritual of some sort. Today, the whole problem arises from the disconnection between architecture and fantasy, real and spiritual, *soma* and *psyché*. **In order to blur the difference between art and life, all interactions need to become psychosomatic, and allow architecture to transform into a live-montage.** It is exactly the interplay between these three levels - real, mythical and spiritual - that, we could argue, gives life to the montage. Like in the ancient festivals, which were born out of the need to understand oneself in order to become a good citizen - both spiritually (Apollo) and physically (Dionysos) - MadeIn, for their

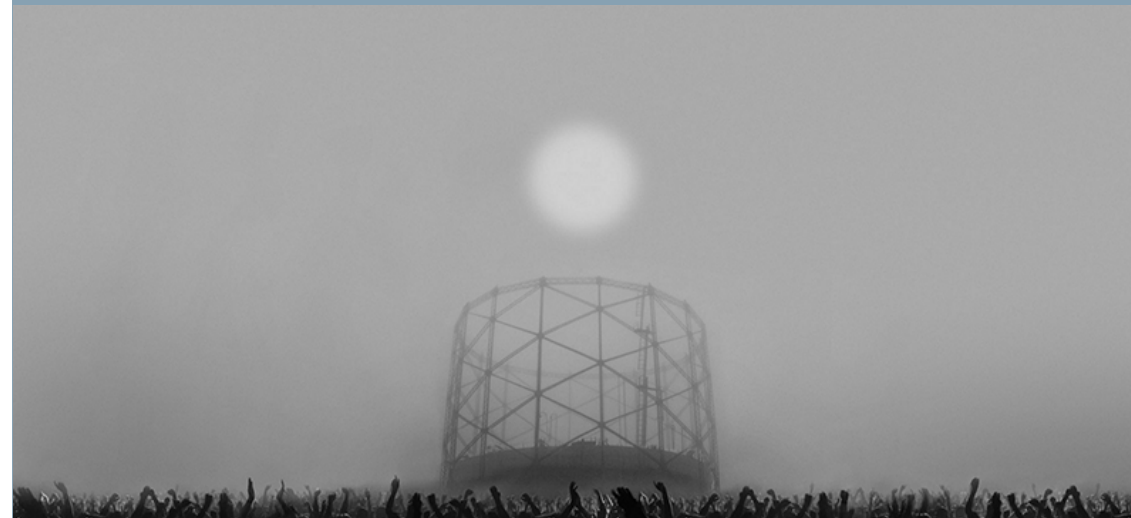
competition proposal for the Polytechnic School of Lausanne, attempted to recreate a space of performance. The sign, the signifiers and the signified come together, proposing a series of non-sacred yet contemporary ritualistic spaces, carefully placed inside the campus, like in the montage plan of Delos and the Acropolis. Indeed, they do not propose one building for reading and learning, but six punctual interventions. Each one becomes an interactive space, a temple of today, where the distinction between the performer and the audience is dimmed. **The aim is to create a sacred moment and to radicalise the performance.**

Here montage, used both in plan and in representation, lets architecture fully embrace its storytelling aspect and engage the viewer. Montage is no longer just a conceptual process, but a built form: **it is not about the design, but about the performance of the objects.** A three-dimensional storyboard where people are pushed to move, live and experience not only through their mind, but also through their body.

Montage as a whole: an indicator of society.



Dimitris Harissiadis, *Epidaurus*, photograph, 1956, Benaki Museum Collection.



MadeIn, *EPFL Pavilions*, 2012.



Pink Floyd Concert, Venice, 1989.

Montage: integrating cinematism in architecture.

Incomplete island

or our attempt of reappropriating the *fantastic*

If we compare the modern world with the ancient one, the loss of human experience is extraordinarily striking. It is not only and not even primarily contemplation which has become an entirely meaningless experience. Thought itself, when it became “reckoning with consequences,” became a function of the brain, with the result that electronic instruments are found to fulfil these functions much better than we ever could. The trouble with modern theories of behaviourism is not that they are wrong but that they could become true, that they actually are the best possible conceptualisations of certain obvious trends in modern society (Arendt 1958, pp. 321-22).

The virtual cannot provide us with the hic and nunc (the here and now), as it repulses the very notion of time and place. However, we believe that, today more than ever, it is important to bring these two qualities back in the world of representation, to make sure that a “physical” connection between architecture and sur-architecture exists. In fact, this link cannot just happen through mere intellectualisation - it cannot be forced -: it is automatic, and it happens through the performance - itself a physical act. That is why we believe that our first concern should be the social: so, how can we rediscover the ritual in our contemporary society?

The predominance of rationality marks the end of the collective performance and the rise of the representations for representation. The images surrounding us daily fill the emotional voids inside us, and are necessary for our psychological well-being. However, instead of disengaging and seeking refuge in parallel realities, we should try to create a better one, here and now, using the digital only to intensify the experience. **Architecture needs to resurrect its original sense, encapsulating art, and becoming the stage of renewed rituals, able to bring together the community.** God is dead, not because Nietzsche killed him, but because society did. However, more than a century after the publication of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the “ordinary individual” avenges God’s murder, and atheism is replaced by a renewed belief: imagination.

The ordinary individual today must confront the flaws of a corrupted society: the political engagement, the collective convictions, the architectural movements belong to another epoch. Today, the will of imagining and dreaming is often seen as abnor-

mal, and the connection with the “other” - be it religious or spiritual - is equally rejected. We criticise, but we do not act. Let’s take a position! Let’s react and use contemporary digital tools. Let’s restore faith. Let’s embrace the connection with our alter ego: religions of every kind, ancient mythology, spiritualism, narrative, storytelling...everything is accepted and welcomed. Let’s get rid of the mere cynicism! Accepting our human condition means emphasising our search for the intangible: we tend not only to the abstract, but to the psychological. The “other” lives above us and inside us, and we ourselves belong to these multiple-layered universes. **However, this change advocates not only for a return to the anthropoid dimension, but also for a renewed interest in our environment.**

So, how did we pass from the celebration of the ordinary, in nature and body, to a conformist downgrading of them, and to a predominance of psychical experience over the physical

one?⁵ The overall digitalisation is a danger, but it also holds great potential. It all depends on how we use it. The *Deus ex Machina*, the first spectacle machine, was created to inject the unexpected in the everyday life and to allow humans to embrace the beauty of potentiality, not to cage them. If we use the virtual simply as a representational tool, without engagement on the side of the audience, it will continue to have a negative impact on the whole of society. It will only portray unattainable ideas, or superficial tableaux, in the long run corrupting us: we will get lost in it and forget our body. We all need to understand transhumanism - not just the specialists -, in order to handle positively the digital tools, assuring direct engagement and rousing of action, emotion, shock and surprise.

However, **the montage is a type of representation that, when used as a key tool to envision the building to come, becomes a principle of architecture itself. Or better, it becomes an instrument to create a wa/onder-**

ing architecture, able to inject the fantastic into the latter, and vice versa. Its dimensions become interactive: time (speed), lights (intensities), materials (touch) and signs (images). In this way, the final building aims to encapsulate the same qualities of the initial thinking of the montage. These characteristics reside both within its bi-dimensional etymology (the technique of producing a new, composite whole from fragments of pictures, text, or music), which allows to create new relationships and tensions, as well as in its tri-dimensional one (the technique of selecting, editing, and piecing together separate sections of film to form a continuous whole), creating ensembles rich of cinematic qualities.

Today, thanks to the digital revolution, we can push much further the boundaries of this initial thinking (the montage). Using the video as a narrating tool for our diploma project made us realise how its interactivity can push the boundaries of designing. Using conventional methods, like line drawings and fragments of paintings, but animating them, adds so many

layers to the architectural creation and, therefore, to the built environment: **no longer just shelters, but buildings injected of sur-meanings, celebrating the human, the experience and the collective performance.**

We need to offer spaces for human-occupation and re-propose the scenes of the ancient Greek festivals. We must create architectures and representations that cannot be controlled and measured by electronic instruments, and we can do that by employing Walter Benjamin’s re-semantised values as vehicles: creativity, genius, mystery and eternity. Let’s look for meaning more than pure aesthetics. **Only through the performance, the architecture and the fantastic will reunite, allowing representation to rediscover its ancient narrating role, not just as an empty image for image, but rather as something meaningful and eternal.**



⁵ With the ordering of the Christian Church, the body is slowly rejected and seen as something negative.



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