

"I am Cretan; all Cretans are liars"

Epimenides' paradox.

I. Situations of intrigue and decoding/uncoding

This "dispositive extraversion" of the "reactive" mechanisms we have discussed in these pages, this idea of an "open process", this "beyond", which brings up an implicit scalar leap or a relay of "multi-scalar back and forth", which is present in a period of transversal and holistic research, implies a possible – and paradoxical – situation of ambiguity and ambivalence:

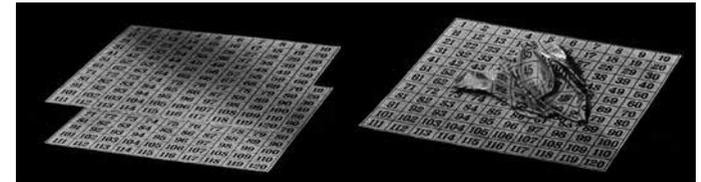
Being in one place – a spatial situation, position – and summoning "many others".

Being local and global.

Specific and generic, contingent and systemic, material and virtual, at the same time.

This is a paradoxical condition that condenses the complex progressive (and also paradoxical) nature of our environment and which increases along with the capacity to combine interaction and information; data, scenarios and trajectories: "levels" and "layers" of reality.¹

This simultaneity, this inform(ation)al polyvalence and ambivalence, this "back and forth" or "synthesizing coiling" between messages and formulations, refers back to the notion of paradox and its relation to the Greek root ***paradoxos***: a reality – a form(ul)ation, an expression, a trajectory – "possible" and, at the same time, "beyond expectation" (i.e., beyond what is "recognized", "pinpointed", "established" and/or "stabilized",



12.1. G.E.B. shadows: a single object and the multiplicity of its projections.

12.2. Topological paradoxes: a flat plane is a relief, a surface is a volume.

12 INTRIGUES (AND PARADOXES)

Crossing (and Looping) Trajectories:
Other Formulations, Other statements

“authorized” or “homologated”).

In this condition “*au-delà*”, “beyond”, but also “toward”, we can observe the virtual “meta-logos” of an essentially “open” logic (i.e., “unstable”, “uncertain”, “undetermined”, “unpredictable”, “unformal”, etc.) which refers us back to the positional instability of dynamic systems and complex structures which are the focus of this book.

A logic that expresses, in fact, a fundamentally paradoxical condition at the same time:² within this irregular and apparently disordered order, within this informal, variable, changeable open and discontinuous form, there are underlying shared flexible patterns, codes or criteria for evolution which reveal how the behavior of complex, dynamic and non-linear systems appears closely linked to flexible virtual rules; “indeterminate determinations” of induction and/or generation.

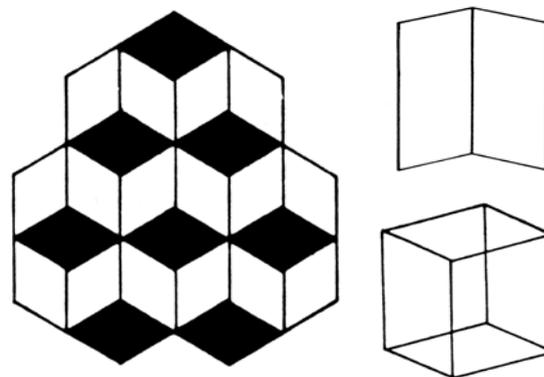
Although complex, uncertain and, often, “unsteady”, i.e., indeterminate, dynamics – and the structures derived from them – are based on patterns, rules or organizations with a certain degree of prediction and recurrence (generic “instructions”, i.e., “islands” or “horizons” of uncertainty, like trajectories or “attractor” diagrams), at the same time, they react to the influence – and interaction – of different and simultaneous levels of information and exchange, conditionally passing up on the system’s generic grammar and, eventually, promoting its “deformation” or “variation”, in the demonstration of a particular flexibility in the face of specificity.³

Dynamics of variation which could even, in certain circumstances, suggest the appearance of “perplexing” situations or unexpected combinations.

“Unmanageable” formulations which appear, on the one hand, as “local trajectories” – therefore, interpretable as revealing form(ul) ations of the system (associated with possible “fields” “of” and “in” movement) – expressed, at the same time, as destabilizing formulations – looping or paradoxical trajectories – in a framework of inertia (in the global convention) of the “host” meta-system.

This possible “glocal loop” –between singular (local) actions and plural (global) formulations, between generic logics and contingent events, between regulatory instructions and possible irregular trajectories– also underlies the open logic of dynamic systems, suggesting the ambivalent, i.e., paradoxical (ruled and irregular, eccentric and multi-centric, determined and indeterminate, structural and nodal) character of form (and order associated with it) as well as the –implicit– possibility of alteration, transgression and lack of discipline.

In the so-called “formal systems” related with programming and language, the usual appearance of these situations of intersection – or paradox – tends to be associated with the interactive quality of language and its ability to produce “limit statements”: “tangled trajectories” or “strange loops”⁴ as possible combinations – formulations – which are as “correct” from the semantic point of view as they are perplexing in the meaning(s) they bring together.



Ambiguous figures and geometries with reversible and/or overlapping connections.
 12.3. A surface of equilateral triangles. The black spaces can be read as on the top or on the bottom (Nicholas FALLETTA: *The Paradoxicon*, ed. Wiley, Hoboken, 1990).
 12.4. Mach’s reversible book, which can be interpreted either as the back or as the pages.

II. Linguistic Paradoxes

These considerations, related to language as a formal, dynamic and interactive system, adhere to the definitions of “paradox” by Nicholas Falletta:⁵

“A truth that resists (or that rises up). In other words, “a paradox is truth standing on its head to attract attention.”

Most paradoxical situations begin, often enough, with a firm action (an affirmation) that is formulated or expressed, which, at the same time, places the action in crisis or in doubt – negating it or disrupting it.

To quote the reflections by Falletta, we find three possible “paradox conditions”:

- 1– An apparently contradictory affirmation which, in reality, would be true.
- 2– An apparently true affirmation which, in reality, would be contradictory (both cases are related to the logic of language).
- 3– A real, operative – or “logical” – statement which, however, leads to illogical, incredible or apparently “impossible” interpretations, because they are a-conventional (this last premise is more in keeping with scientific and spatial logic).

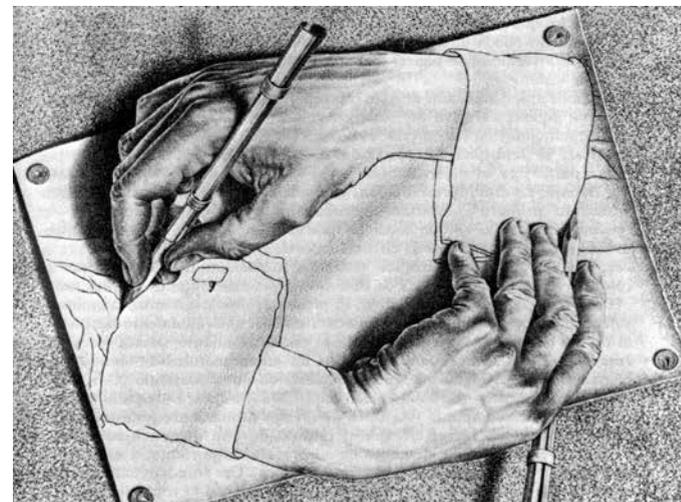
In any case, affirmation or statement, this paradoxical condition leads to a specific – local – reconsideration of the system as the consequence of an unexpected form(ul)ation – i.e., surprising, intriguing, unexpected or uncertain – a result of the strange singular agitation – or twisting – of the overall inertia in the process.

It is common to see these situations of “twisting” in unions between apparent oppositions (like the Cretan Epimenides’ paradox – **“All Cretans are liars”** – or the more well-known paradox attributed to Eubulides – **“A man says that he is lying. Is what he says true or false?”** – or Socrates’ aphorism – **“I know that I know nothing”** – or Zarsala’s – “in nothing there is everything” – expressions which violate initial logics, but which also reveal more complex “meanings”, for

simultaneous) created by this capacity for interaction between information and meta-information, compared and processed at the same time.

In these statements, apparently contradictory information and messages remain recognizable – independent – and, at the same time, ultimately linked – fused – like in the famous “figure-ground” combinations by M.C. Escher⁶ (often plays between “full and empty”, “truth and lies”); this creates strange loops (“vicious and vitiated circles”, interwoven and tangled at the same time) where information, the coding of language and its meaning, flow in an unexpected “whirlpool” between different levels of reading and understanding.

Possible and impossible. Correct and heterodox, because they are enigmatic in their capacity “to be and not to be” and to (re) concile “what is and what could be”.⁷



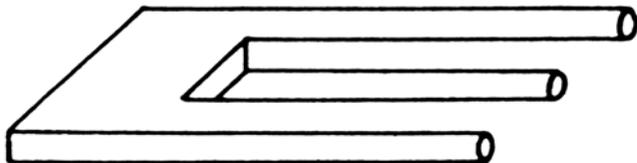
12.5. M.C. Escher. *Drawing hands*, 1948. Paradox and visual formulation. Left hand (LH) and right hand (RH) draw one another, and they refer to a higher level at the same time: the hand that is drawing them (MCE) in a loop of tangled hierarchies. (in Douglas R. HOFSTADTER: *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* ed. Penguin Books, New York 2000.)

In these loops of meaning, recurring dichotomies (truth/lie, affirmation/negation, but also unity/diversity, part/whole, small/large, open/closed, natural/artificial, etc.) overlap and shift into new and surprising combinations.

They do not attempt to construct “compositions” based on contradictions, or “extravagances” – which would be the Venturisque option, closer to aesthetic irony and the contrast that gives rise to an operating and operative paradox – but rather “interactions” (or “inter(pret)actions”) with the potential to reconcile – to bring into coexistence or simultaneity – apparently “impossible”, or “unexpected”, unheard of “twin” phenomena in a single hybrid dispositif: twinning, cuttings, grafts, etc., heterodox unions and associations which are common in certain disruptive (or absurd) types of humor – from Groucho Marx’s cutting remarks (**“I never forget a face, but in your case I’ll be glad to make an exception”**) to the famous “Greguerias” written by Ramón Gómez de la Serna (**“MMMM: mountain range”**) – and which demonstrate this meaningful “collusion” between different messages.⁸

As Douglas R. Hofstadter pointed out:⁹

“People enjoy inventing slogans which violate basic arithmetic but which illustrate ‘deeper’ truths, such as ‘1 and 1 make 1’ (for lovers), or ‘1 plus 1 equals 1’ (the Trinity). You can easily pick holes in those slogans, showing why, for instance, using the plus-sign is inappropriate in both cases. But such cases proliferate. Two raindrops running down a windowpane merge: does one plus one make one? It is not at all easy to draw a sharp line between cases where what is happening could be called ‘addition’, and where some other word is wanted.”



This synchrony of interpretations, this overlap of affirmations and positions, which are “contradictory” and “coinciding”, refers back to an implicit factor of simultaneity between the limits and facets – or layers – of a multi-phased reality, which presents different “orientations” at the same time. And this positional simultaneity could be compared to a dynamic dispositive (or dispositional) strategy, which fluctuates, waves, comes and goes, between – interpretative, narrative, spatial or visual – contexts that are different (even dissimilar) and connected at the same time.

In this disturbance inherent to all paradoxes – connected with the factors of dynamic instability and informality¹⁰ – any (pre) establishment of predicates is destabilized, favoring a constant play of interpretative (and positional) ambivalences and reversibilities, in breaking with the old bivalent, closed convention – i.e., the old fundamental notion of identity and essentiality between hermetic categories (something is what it is and, therefore, it can’t be something else) – for a more open type of logic – ambivalent and polyvalent at the same time – where the old idea of comparison or contradiction gives rise to a new potential for a multiplying interaction (more ambiguous, vague and fuzzy and, above all, more fluctuating and irregular in its manifestations).¹¹

The brain slips between one interpretation and another, showing this strange condition of polyvalent ambiguity between “recognition” and “translation” (resonance and transfer), fluctuating in nature, which recalls the phenomena of scalar recursiveness (or reversibility) between irregular structures that we have been concerned with here.

“Possible/impossible” figures

12.6. Impossible trident. The impossible trident is based on a “mistaken” connection, possible in two-dimensional space and impossible in three-dimensional space.

III. Systems and Metasystems

Most reversible or paradoxical constructions show this type of intriguing combination, generated between premises (mental or real images) and statements (arguments, formulations), between logical reasoning (trajectories) and contradictory conclusions (paradoxes, i.e., intrigues) demonstrating this condition in different multi-layered riggings which are revealed as “superinscriptions”¹² between (relational and narrative) “matrices” and/of “grids” and “weavings” of events, where (as we have mentioned before) “figure” and “ground”, “empty” and “full”, “structure” and “infrastructure” are interwoven and connected in a single strategy or dispositive logic, that is more or less recursive, which ultimately alludes to complex, fluctuating and irregular geometries, rather than to strict and linearly “rational” (“Euclidean”) frameworks.

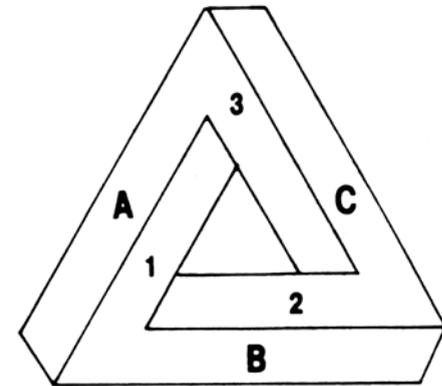
This fluctuation between what is possible and impossible, predictable and impulsive, inserted and outgoing, resonant and transferent, refers to a possible “uncertain negotiation with reality”, which is, ultimately, what all paradoxes propose.

The synchronic and diachronic (simultaneous and displaced, fragmented and connected) condition of our time lets us more readily accept this strange hybrid union between the possible and the impossible, the predictable and the transgressive, the systemic and the heterodox, the alternative and the operative – in short – which occurs in all paradoxical constructions and which alludes to different interpretative (and qualitative) levels that combine “real” (objective and objectual) meanings from the system (or language) in question, with virtual (procedural and processing) meanings from a higher metasystem (or metalanguage).¹³

In other words, between a real/real time – or dimension – and a real/virtual time – or dimension.

Certain well-known paradoxical figures can help illustrate this possible interconnection between “trajectories of synthesis” and “trajectories of linkage”, which are closed and open, stable and unstable, at the same time.

One example is the figure known as the “impossible trident”, where the middle prong appears in two spaces at the same time. This “false” connection in the real/real world would be true in the real/virtual world (since the drawn figure would exist).¹⁴ Something, then, could “exist” and “not exist”, “be” and “not be” (because it is “here” and “beyond”, spatially and temporally) in an ensemble of “belonging” and “transfers” between the local and the global, the real and the virtual, the material and the immaterial, which illustrates this “metalanguage” or “language about the multiple levels of language itself”. Ultimately, this is associated with the “multi-layered” nature of the contemporary metapolis, as a manifestation of the increasingly complex urban-territorial mechanism, which we have called a city until very recently, and which, in turn, refers back to the multiple loops of bypass and mutation in a process that is increasingly more open, vague and ambivalent at the same time.



12.7. The Penrose triangle: a demonstration of the triangle's possible impossibility and models in "relief" and in a "curve".
(in Nicholas FALLETTA: *The Paradoxicon*, ed. Wiley, Hoboken 1990).

IV. Quotidian/Extra-quotidian

Today, the growing influence of mobility and physical movement in our surroundings (and the associated feeling of fluctuation) is accompanied by the experience of connectivity and paradoxical displacement created by mass media in our daily lives, intended to increase this sensation of cohabitation and superposition (overlapping and intertwining) between projections and materialities, between “real realities” and “virtual realities” – physical and mirrored – bringing together, in an “uncontrolled” way, scenarios and screens, scales and sphere, hierarchies and images, messages and media:

scenery, scenes and scenarios.

Dissolving the boundaries between work, habitat and leisure; between production and nature; between urbanity and extra-urbanity.

Phenomena of cross-breeding and mixing, change and exchange, where we find this two-fold interactive relationship between “guest” and “host”, between intruding (transferred) information and genuine (native) information; i.e., the “transformative” character of what has been “transferred” and the “distinguishing” character of what is “specific”; the mutual contract of exchange between “endogenous” information and “exogenous” information, which have the potential to influence environments that suddenly find their points of reference to be “out of place”.

As such, as we have pointed out before, this is a time of unusual, surprising, strange and unique encounters – natural/artificial, ordinary/extraordinary, native/foreign, real/virtual, etc. – which suggest a possible disruptions (a ***bouleversement***) in the traditional relationships between man and milieu: a generalized feeling of paradox (like a “dual” simultaneity) which, though it appears to appeal to a general impression of terminological collapse, could also lead to new generative actions that could

demonstrate this ambivalent feeling of loss and birth at the same time: “topological” and substantive decoding and recoding. Faced with this constant feeling of intersection, simultaneity and displacement, perhaps one of the central paradoxes of this time, however, is that of observing how this accelerated awareness of a potentially innovative scenario of change and exchange – in its everyday and technological manifestations and in the resulting behaviors – tends to come up against scenarios and experiences, routines and inertias that are culturally and anthropologically “slow”: codes, traditions, habits, atavistic – if not anachronistic – satisfactions, bringing face to face – like no other period in our history, perhaps – atavism and innovation, practice and proposition, the commonplace and the unheard of, conservatism and novelty.¹⁵



12.8 “Glocalization and cross-breeding, modernity and atavism
The Mercedes-throne of King Nene Gorleku X.” (*Colours* no. 15, 1997).

V. Paradoxes as Reactivations

In this informational scenario of collisions, encounters and paradoxes, perhaps the most significant of them – related to the propositional capacity of culture, art and architecture at a time of change and transitions – is the dual desire to “coincide” with the surrounding reality and, at the same time, to develop a “critical vision” in and about it: operating, resonating and destabilizing, infiltrating and distancing, again.

The biggest intersection of the contemporary project and its new “reactive” vocation lies in this double push to “accept” and “reject”, to “collaborate” and to “intrigue”, to “attune” and to “distort”, to “resonate” and to “transcend”; in this need to release the creative framework from the excessively codified representative structures (because they are driven by inertia, cliché, by default), and to connect it, at the same time, with a reality that is particularly – paradoxically – prone to what is “accepted”, trivial, universal.

How can we approach reality positively; how can we interact with it and distance ourselves from it qualitatively at the same time?

Probably by acting, jointly, through collaboration and transgression, combined “unpredictably”.

Given this progressively paradoxical dimension in a mobilizing and simultaneous environment –slippery and shifting, varied and fertile, but which also produces and consumes conventions and conventionalisms, “standards” and “iconographies”, “types” and “archetypes” (where the importance of an image would be associated with its value of “attraction” and where a progressive iconic saturation would heighten the acritical indifference of our own perceptive intelligence)– a truly effective critical and suggestive reaction should not be limited to the order of the exquisitely aestheticist –merely episodic– or even intellectually cryptic – “distant” or “disrespectfully” resistant. On the contrary, it should originate from the order of the craftily “forwarding”.

A strategic-tactical action capable of summoning the narrative

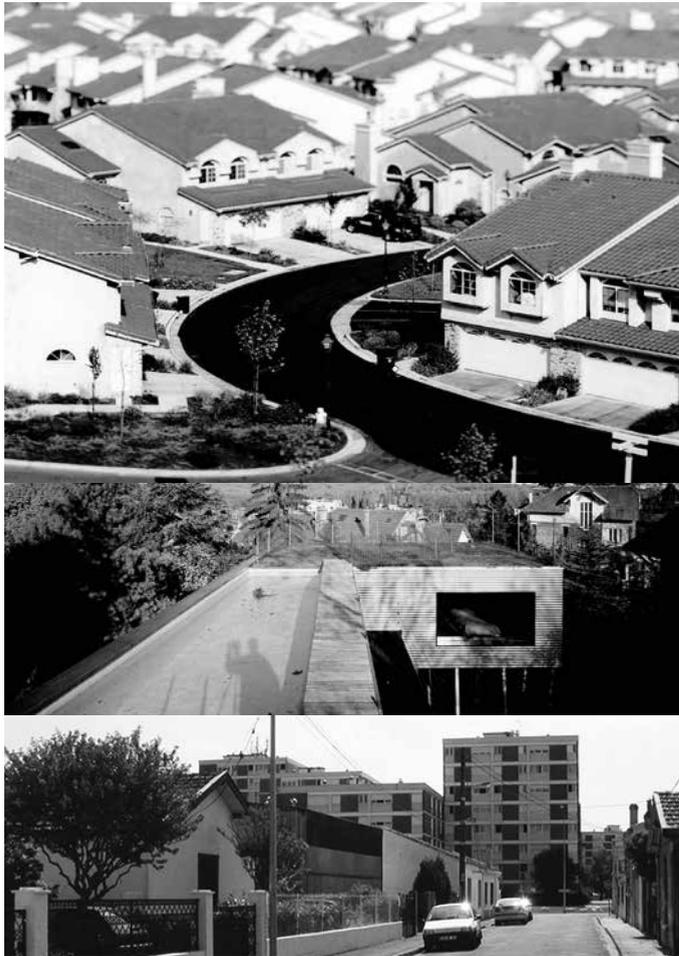
and iconic tendencies of reality, disrupting them at the same time, based on ambivalent operations of intervention, invention and imagination; positive and critical; productive and transgressive. Operative and reformulative.

There would be a certain flexible “desire for infiltration” in this action that would move between the two poles we have indicated – intervening and pulling back – using strategies that are simultaneous and different at the same time.

- On the one hand, through the positive assimilation of the system.
- On the other, through the introduction of a new type of recoding statement.

A strange reactive and interactive infiltration, capable of acting through “collaboration” and “surprise” at the same time. Accepting, re-stimulating and, at the same time, “destabilizing” the dynamics of the global system, re-evaluating – i.e., reactivating – the mechanisms of that reality by disturbing/ distorting or disrupting its routine in a strange loop of local torsion, contortion and distortion, which has the potential to accept and transgress its own “codes” while proposing new ones.

It is worth highlighting this developmental desire for a reactivating infiltration into reality, which confides in a qualitative reinterpretation and/or reformulation of its baseline conditions through the – strategic and tactical – introduction of new formulations and new movements (more operative, in their elastic and fluctuating answers) “in” and “between” the initial – and inertial – movements in the system; through the critical “resonance” of their dynamics and by taking selective advantage of their potential.



Infiltration, interference and reactive intrusiveness in pre-codified scenarios.

12.9. Urbanization in the desert, fragment (Marc RÄDER: Scanscape, Actar, Barcelona, 1999).

12.10. OMA-Rem Koolhaas: Villa dall'Ava (Saint Cloud-Paris, 1995).

12.11. Lacaton-Vassal: Latapie House, Bordeaux (1993).

VI. Intrusiveness

In a scenario as typically inclined toward codification as the current one, it seems appropriate to propose this insubordinate capacity of the infiltrated element, which is an intruder – both “alien” and “attentive” to the data of the context – not only to invert the tendencies, but to qualify them from a new formulation capable of decoding reality, “decoding” its internal logics, “uncoding” its inertia and “recoding” its potentials.

Faced with the inertia of signs as an “exchange value” (this progressive banalization and homogenization of the built object), it is worth putting forward the strength of possible “formulations” that create “intrigues” and, therefore, a “reactions”.¹⁶

Implicit and explicit, positive and critical, strange and eloquent expression; adapted and insolent, at the same time;¹⁷ with the potential to transform rejected proposals into unexpected productive situations. Unexpected trajectories.

More qualitative ones, for more relational.

Not mere occurrences – isolated episodes – or “blockages” (or “short-circuits”).

Not **extravagances**, but rather **eccentricities** (in the system and at its edges at the same time).

Extreme “evolutions” of the system, in effect, and “detours” (via stratagems, ruses and tricks) “derived” from it... and in it.

Strange loops – “inside” and “outside” the system – adapted to – and infiltrated in – specific situations of reality (with the ability to foster a beneficial pact with the factors and agents of its production), which are also intended to stretch beyond their limits.

Combinations based on the simultaneity of data and stimuli, less “homologated” and “categorical” in their manifestations; more open to interaction and intersection; to overlapping and coupling; to “exchange” but also to “interchangeability”.

A new kind of interaction, more informal for more informational.

Intersecting and boundary trajectories (usually, on the limit between places and times) proposed as direct responses to programmatic and relational diagnostics, but also attuned to the communicative – expressive – value of form. And its capacity for re-evaluation. Ultimately “operative” paradoxes, which can be considered as “ambivalent reactions”, but also as symbols and narrative icons of “other possibilities”. As Kelly Shannon pointed out:¹⁸

“Architecture takes on the current post-capitalist condition with new ‘surprising’ actions, while negotiating with it through a new type of brazen action; a transgressive action in the fluctuating state of the market; an action that is free from the old obsession with control, predictability, permanence, hierarchy and limits. An evolving and flexible, ad hoc action.”

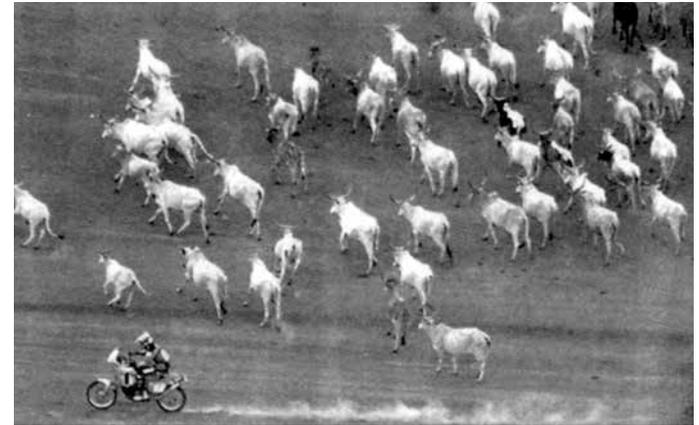
It is a strange – singular and artificial, irregular and heterodox, rebellious and transgressive, perhaps irreverent – celebration of complexity, diversity, and ultimately impurity, as a combination of



Interference, infiltration and reaction.

12.12. Silvert Lindblom: Two figures and/in a banister, 1999 (in *Arkitektur* no. 1, 1999).
12.13. NL archs: (Carstadt-Amsterdam, 1996) // 12.14. Abramovic & Ullay. *Performance*.

events, realities, messages and layers of information, which are simultaneous and interactive: expressions, variations, distortions, alterations and/or contaminations that end up deforming, enriching and tarnishing – playfully perverting – the initial parameters and the support (infra)structures, in order to better harmonize, interact and relate “in” and “with” the milieu. New dynamics that make up a new vocabulary in which action is based on this hybrid contract between territory and architecture, architecture and landscape, landscape and infrastructure, etc. – not as a brutal graft, but as a possible overlap between categories that were previously unconnected. In these dynamics, the goal is not “dilution” in (or in the face of) reality, but rather to create an “other” type of reality(ies). Based on operations of intersection and encounter, but also fusion and “transfusion”; of “transfugitivity” (as opposed to desertion) and “interaction” (as opposed to integration). Of “recoding”, through “decoding” (proposing new codes) and “uncoding” (overcoming the old codes) at the same time.



Intrusiveness, infiltration and reaction.

12.15. An intruder causes a stampede in the Dakar-Cairo rally.
Photograph: EPA/Patrick Herzog (in *El periódico*, January 9, 2000).

VII. Images “on the edge”

In this sense, it is interesting to highlight the contemporary exploration of the idea of a “limit” as an ambivalent space (linked to the concept of “paradox”) and its relationship with the acceptance of crossbreeding, or of impurity, associated with the conceptual substance of paradox. We see this, habitually, in certain “contemporary” disciplines, such as cinema or publicity that are capable of generating “images on the limit” which bring together, sometimes unnaturally, different elements, situations, references, codes or energies through an intensification of the idea of a crossroads (images that are “on the edge” of things and events).¹⁹

If the power of conviction is still rooted more in stimulus than in constraint (in the emotional capability of the suggestive, a real desire for communicative exchange), the creative challenge today is to continue establishing – despite a growing cognitive indifference – images which are not only forceful, but also convincing: situations of intrigue and surprise that are both unheard of (i.e., unexpected) and constructive (i.e., revealing). The strength of architecture that is conceptually inductive and narrative (often “diagrammatic” and “ideogrammatic”, a trajectory of synthesis, between “n-related” and activated stimuli) is then shown to be paradigmatic of an operative “action” that would be open to new relational keys, based on the instrumentalization of expressive intersections, appropriations and movements.²⁰ Proceedings in which the largest capacity for innovation lies precisely in this attempt to make the approach to a (nearly) coincidental order into a working material, where a strictly functional approach to the project is combined with this capacity for expressive shock inherent in contemporary culture, where the old scale of slow and predictable movements is replaced by a new situation of fragile stability between mediation and manipulation, control and spontaneity, rigor and fantasy;²¹ a

Denaturalization-decoding-reaction-reactivation:

12.16. Vito Acconci: Personal Island, 1992. “Natural-Artificial”.

12.17. Image on the limit; scalar leap and denaturalization. Tagheuer advertisement, 1994.





Nature and artifice.

12.18. "Express yourself." Advertisements for Ericsson, 1997 and The Frederic Homs Own Wear.

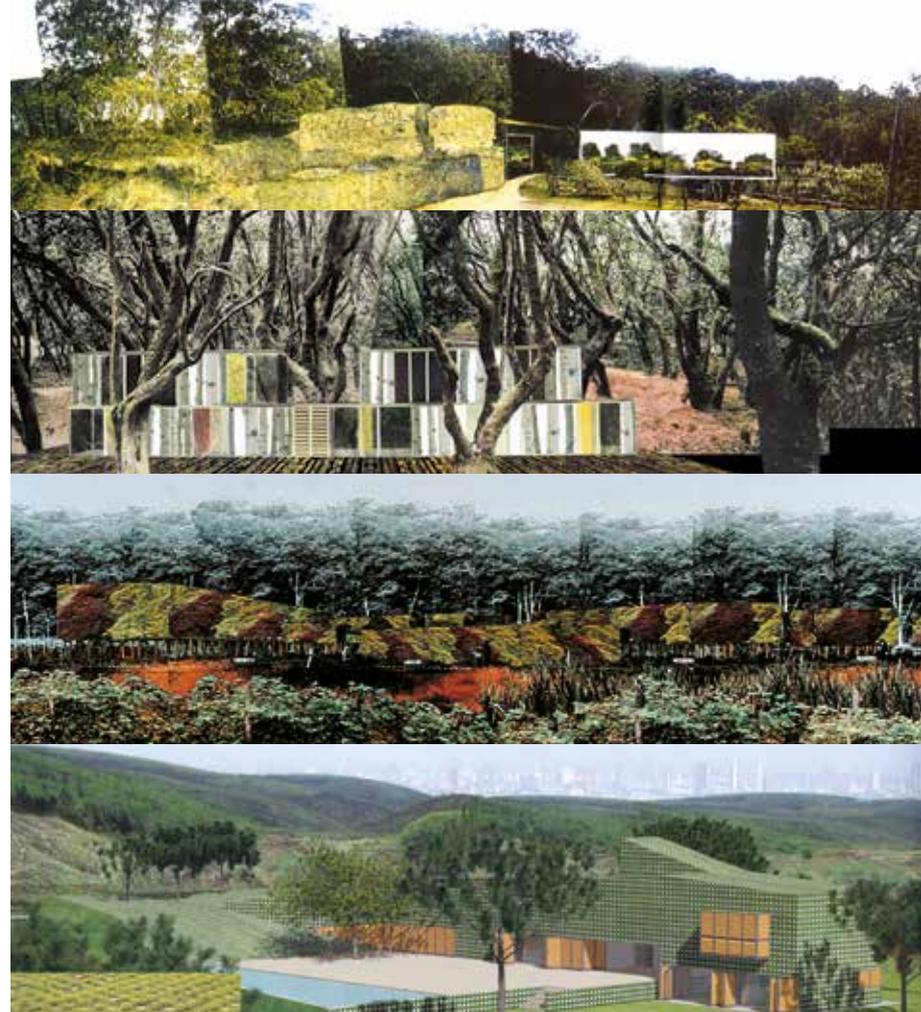
12.19. Roche, DSV & SIE P.: Cultural Center (Réunion, 1997).

12.20. Actar Arquitectura: M' Houses (1998-2000).

12.21. Lewis & François: Rural holiday retreat in Jupilles (Compiègne, 1997).

12.22. Ábalos-Herreros: Green House (Madrid, 2001).

12.23. Vicente. Guallart. Green El Corte Inglés (Barcelona 2000).





desire that ultimately reveals the ability of contemporary design to acknowledge two important assumptions.

- On the one hand, the transfer from simple classical artifice – the more or less bizarre or ingenious mannerist deformation of nature – to what is decidedly artificial, singular, unusual, new, “original” (as the “founding of the origin” rather than a “return to the origin”).
- On the other hand, the ability of contemporary culture to “transcend the circumstances” and associate actions with structure processes – but also with new “informational scenarios” – which, in turn, have the potential to connect events with other, superior scales, which are in synergy with the scenarios that are generated in the surroundings.

This is the potential strength of contemporary art and architecture, and one of the major challenges: producing new systems able to generate form, according to a new creative attitude born without prejudices, confident in the possibility of encouraging positive redefinitions in a reality that is, in turn, open to the collision of forces and references, and which, as a result, can only be approached based on the conception of new “relational dispositifs” that can condense both the tensions of place and the other energies characteristic of global contemporary space.

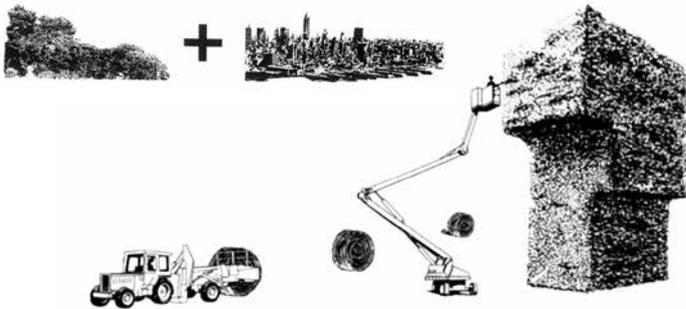
Local responses, global projections.²²

Dispositifs which are capable, at the same time, of generating “evolving spaces” (scenarios) and “reactive mechanisms” (paradoxes): operational and operative.

Natural-artificial paradoxes.

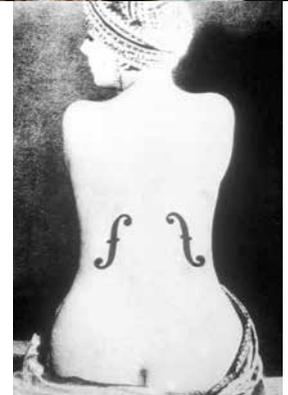
12.24 FOA: *Virtual House* (1997).

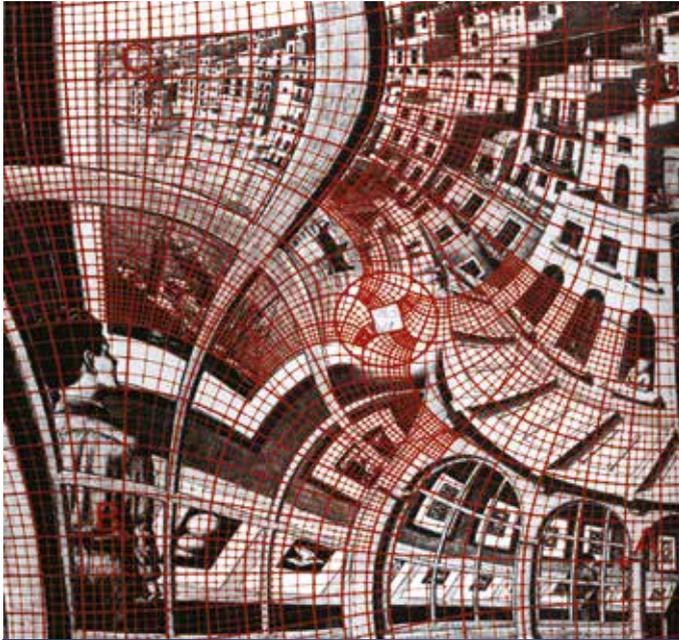
12.25. François & Lewis: Project for a water treatment station (Nantes, 1995).



Nature and artifice. Denaturalization, decoding, paradox and reactivation. Linked images "on the limit" of categories, environments, landscapes and scenarios.

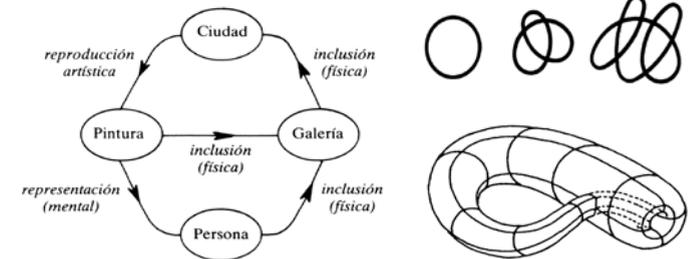
12.26. Pau de Nooijer: "Electriclawnmowingiron" 1977 or "Ironing the landscape" (in Archis no. 10 1996).
 12.27. Peter Walker & Martha Schwartz: Whitehead Institute. Splice Garden. M.I.T. Campus, 1986.
 12.28. and 12.29. West 8-Adrian Geuze: Vertical gardens (New York, 1997).
 Naturartificial coupling: "buildings as landscapes, landscapes as buildings".
 12.30. Man Ray, photograph: Violon d'Ingres, 1937.





VIII. Loops of Meaning and Architectures of Paradox

Both in the field of architecture and in other plastic arts understood as formal – and spatial – systems, which are actually or potentially dynamic, there has been – as we indicated in chapter 2 – a reassessment of the archaic oppositions associated, until very recently, with the recurring constants of a “disciplined” and “inertia-based” thought. Oppositions such as “unity-diversity”, “part-whole”, “small-large”, “open-closed”, “movement-rest” are no longer divided, like in the rational deterministic tradition, levelled off, neutralized (or smoothed over). Rather, they can be potentially activated and inter-activated, simultaneously fused and made in(ter)dependent, reconciled in “twinned structures”: It is not a call to contradiction (between “thesis” and “antithesis”) or an absolute “sublimation” into a superior state or category, but rather the explicit demonstration of a new capacity for informational interaction.



12.31. M.C. Escher. Print Gallery, 1956 and Klein bottle.

Original print with an overlapping of the deformed internal layout: a picture gallery where a young man stands observing the drawing of a ship anchored in the port of a small city, where a woman leans out a window just above a picture gallery where a young man stands observing the drawing of a ship anchored in the port of a small city...

12.32. M.C. Escher. Print Gallery, 1956. Diagram of its different levels of coiling and layers of reading (in D.R. HOFSTADTER: Gödel, Escher, Bach: *An Eternal Golden Braid* ed. Penguin Books, New York 2000).

12.33. Möbius strips and Klein bottle.

In a “twin phenomenon”, real or imagined – a loop, a paradox, a spiral – opposites continue to be recognized as opposites – similar to what happens in a hybridization or an “anti-typological coupling” – and, at the same time, they interact together – combined – in new contracts and meanings, as “layers” which are both recognizable and interwoven at once.²²

In the very notion of a loop (implicit in any paradox), we see the idea of an expansive and irregular development – “in a spiral” – that is characteristic of any evolving and entropic process; but also the idea of “coiling” (or a “tangled hierarchy”) as a trajectory that can cause, surprisingly, different overlapping levels – i.e., territory, city, landscape, building, etc. – to converge on themselves (like the famous Klein bottle), violating any established hierarchical principle.

A strange capacity for “interactive connections and links” between “systems” and “metasystems”, where new and surprising cross-cutting formulations can be recognized, in which **“a sentence refers to other higher sentences which, in turn, refer to the first sentences”**, in a circular play of resonances and transfers that emerge or arise from a starting point and develop, and progress, and relaunch the starting point, joining together, as we pointed out earlier, different levels of interpretation (like in Gödel’s famous theory which uses mathematical reasoning in exploring mathematical reasoning itself).²³

In the case of most of the dispositifs we have discussed here, their “image” and their “form” refer to their own configuration, which, in turn, refers to the configuration – and structure – of the city that is then related to the structures of the space time processes, of open configuration and distribution, associated with the spontaneous behaviors of fluctuation that characterize dynamic organizations – dispositions – which are “similar to” or “recursive with” those of the dispositif in question.

This “extroversion” of form “beyond” itself and its circumstantial movements, this transversal “a-scalar” quality that is recursive “in” and “with” the milieu, creates a temporary situation of “intrigue” when it promotes not only “unexpected” unions or

“impossible” combinations, but also “scalar leaps” called upon to overstep the local situation in order to talk about “other” global dimensions.

Promoting “trajectories” and/as “formulations”.

Local responses and global projections, yet again.

The notion of “positionality” – i.e., the confidence in the precise and fixed position of a typological or essential category – makes way for the concept of “dispositionality” (that of a mutable position, that is open to (inter)change, inscribed in a dynamic, interactive, open process, and therefore implicitly unstable and irregular – i.e., informal).

Therein lies the strength of paradox.
 In formulated alternative trajectories, for interactive.
 Informal trajectories, for informational.
 Expressions of “other possibilities”, generated using –
 apparently – impossible formulations.
 Capable of being in the “system” while outside of its
 conventions.
 Of adapting to the particular and skipping to the general.
 Of shifting to generality and then returning to particularity.
 “Loops” of meaning, with the ability to:
 Gather together and skip around.
 Refer to a place while stepping beyond that place.
 Propose a formulation while revealing (an)other(s).
 Exist in one form and promise many others.
 Be a type and an anti-type, at the same time.
 Move in one time and refer to other times.
 Attend to the local context and refer to the global processes.
 Respond to the system and to contingency.
 Articulate – and orient – order, without imposing control.

We have already discussed this – reactive – aim,²⁴ innovative and transgressive at the same time, inherent in contemporary design and its ability to formulate new (and old) paradoxes. Combinations intended to disrupt the orthodox (and secular) divisions and codes of the discipline, coupling dissimilar

concepts (“above and below”, “exterior and interior”, “figure and ground”, “public and private”, “volume and surface”, “building and landscape”, “landscape and infrastructure”, “infrastructure and building”, etc.) in new hybrid unions – or “couplings” – which (as we have pointed out) allude to the interactive, inform(ation)al and extroverted nature of order and form (and the associated factors and parameters) that we are concerned with here.

From the famous roof-ground of **F.O.A.’s Yokohama Ferry Terminal** (a “fluctuation”, but also “a landscape above another landscape, “fullness as emptiness”, “building as ground”) to the impossible cantilevers in **MVRDV’s WoZoKo building** (a “conglomerate”, but also “a vertical growth, horizontally”; from the hybrid configuration of **W.J. Neutelings’ residential complex in Sittard** (a “conglomerate” too, but also a “compatible coupling of incompatible genes”) to the continuous fluctuation of **O.M.A.’s Jussieu library**, or the multi-layered unfolding of **MVRDV’s Villa VPRO** (an “enclave”, but also an “expanding retreat”; from the strange “weightlessness” of Toyo Ito’s Sendai Mediatheque (a frame, but also “a structure of – and above – voids”, a “dissolved matter”) to the fluid profile of **Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum** (“a liquid matter”, but also the virtual sublimation of an immaterial “field” of forces); or from the ambiguous nature of the “grafts” by **Duncan Lewis and François Roche** (“a building like a landscape”) to the vertical gardens by **Adriaan Geuze & West 8** (“a landscape like a building”), the true cultural dimension of contemporary design is rooted in its capacity to formulate “new and strange paradoxes” – rebellious trajectories – where, for example,

“The roof of a building can be, at the same time, its main floor”;
 “a growth can sprout horizontally”;
 “a building can also be nature”;
 a conjunction can be a disjunction;
 “different overlapping levels can become a single unfolded level”;
 “matter can be fluid”;
 or “weightlessness can be supported by dematerialization”.

This is not just a linguistic action, since the goal is not just to explore language, syntax, or poetic metaphor.

The true meaning of this type of architectural paradox lies in its

capacity to generate new “experiences”, new “structures”, and spatial “natures; which are significant, incisive and transgressive at the same time.”²⁵

Spatial trajectories with the ability to respond to local demands and to synthesize possible global formulations.

Which belong to a new informational time.

Case and class, once again.

Paradoxes, then, for a new architecture called upon to generate complex processes using mechanisms which are often simple.

An architecture of information and interaction, which demands a new logic that is “precise and indeterminate at once”; stable and committed to evolution; active and interactive.

That of an “extroverted” form (associated with an inform(ation)al order) with the potential to foster images intended to translate – like visual aphorisms – new expressive avenues of action.

New operative paradoxes.



12.34. Dual intelligence, figure-ground, true-false.

(in Douglas R. HOFSTADTER: *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* ed. Penguin Books, New York 2000).

- 1– See the considerations discussed in chapters 1 and 4.
- 2– See BRIGGS John: *Fractals: The Patterns of Chaos*, ed. Thames & Hudson Ltd., London 1992, ch.7.
- 3– See HOFSTADTER, Douglas R.: *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, ed. WH Freeman and Company, New York 1982.
- 4– Ibid.
- 5– See FALLETTA, Nicholas: *The Paradoxicon*, ed. Wiley, Hoboken, 1990.
- 6– See HOFSTADTER, Douglas R.: *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, op.cit.
- 7– See ROCHE, François: "Materials: a low-technology inventory," in 2G no. 3 (Landscape Architecture), 1997, pp. 6-7.
- 8– The term "twin" is used as a translation of the French "jumelé".
- See the reflections in STRAUVEN, Francis: "L'orphélinat d'Aldo van Eyck," *Bulletin de l'École d'Architecture de Versailles*, 1997.
- 9– See HOFSTADTER, Douglas R.: *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, op.cit.
- 10– See 10– See FALLETTA, Nicholas: *The Paradoxicon*, op.cit.
- 11– Ibid. p.18.
- 12– Ibid. p.39.
- 13– Ibid. p.96.
- 14– Ibid. p.66 and p.73.
- 15– See CERTEAU, Michel de: *The Practice of Everyday Life*, ed. University of California Press, Berkeley 1984.
- 16– As Alejandro Zaera reminds us in referring to O.M.A.'s work, these dynamics appeal, on the one hand, to irony (humor, aplomb, the instrumentalization of informality, as a weapon for desanctifying and decoding in the face of messianic utopia or unyielding solemnity); but, on the other hand, it calls upon the optimistic reintroduction of desire (stimulus, fantasy, innovation) as a factor for "everydayness", but also as a tool for escaping purely descriptive, technocratic and (or) conventional planning. Bringing to life new, more exciting and excited images – iconographies – in that they are uninhibited and desnaturalized/izing, no longer conceived as mere – evocative – figurations, but as latent trajectories: at once, the promise of new potentials.
- See ZAERA, Alejandro: "The Day After: A Conversation with Rem Koolhaas," in *El Croquis* no. 79, 1996, pg. 19.
- See GAUSA, Manuel: "Infiltration" and "Intrusiveness" in V.V.A.A., *The Dictionary of Advanced Architecture*, ed. Actar, Barcelona 2000.
- 17– "The image can also be a 'word' which provides for the passage from thought to reorganized matter."
- AURICOSTE, Isabelle: "Yves Brunier: narrator" in *Quaderns* no. 217 (Land-Arch), 1997, p. 143.
- 18– See SHANNON, Kelly: "Re-Politicizing the Metropolis: The Strategic Project Approach." Lecture given in the context of the "UIA-Barcelona 96" congress.

- 19– See FALLETTA, Nicholas: *The Paradoxicon*, op.cit. pp. 14 and 15.
- 20– "Movements which act through variation, expansion, crossing, recycling, adaptation, analogy, capture, grazing, modification...through new associations and transversalities..."
- See ROCHE, François: "Materials: a low-technology inventory," op.cit.
- 21– For a note on the issue, see *Housing: New Alternatives, New Systems*, ed. ACTAR, Barcelona 1998.
- 22– We might indicate, like the architects njiric & njiric how:
- "The true beauty of architecture consists of this definitively "synthetic" clamor".
- See the text by the architects njiric & njiric in the Archilab catalog no. 1, 1999.
- 23– "Intuition sense that there is something mathematical involved here. [...] And, just as the Bach and Escher loops appeal to very simple and ancient intuitions – a musical scale, a staircase – so this discovery, by K. Gödel, of a Strange Loop in mathematical systems has its origins in simple and ancient intuitions. In its absolutely barest form, Gödel's discovery involves the translation of an ancient paradox in philosophy into mathematical terms. That paradox is the so-called Epimenides paradox, or liar paradox. Epimenides was a Cretan who made one immortal statement: "All Cretans are liars." A sharper version of the statement is simply, "I am lying"; or "This statement is false". [...] It is a statement which rudely violates the usually assumed dichotomy of statements into true and false, because if you tentatively think it is true, then it immediately backfires on you and makes you think it is false. But once you've decided it is false, a similar backfiring returns you to the idea that it must be true. Try it!"
- See HOFSTADTER, Douglas R.: *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, op.cit.
- 24– See GAUSA, Manuel: "Paradoxes de l'architecture nouvelle", in *Beaux Arts* no. 179, April 1999, p. 15. See also "Reactive architecture: proneist frame", in *Quaderns* no. 219 (Reactive Architecture) 1998, p. 5.
- It is also worth citing the studies by Chris YOUNÈS on "Paradox and contemporary creation", in particular his reflections on the notion of the "unexpected" presented during the colloquium "Architecture, philosophie et imagination," which Younès directed together with Jean Pierre Chupin in Montreal in October 2005.
- 25– "[Many of O.M.A.'s projects] draw upon the basic tactics of reductive *disestablishment* developed at Jussieu: the aggregation of program to generate an event-structure incongruent with program, the reliance on generic form to suppress historical or typological reference, the use of infrastructure-like organizations to liquify rigid programming into non-specific flows and events, and the erasure of *poché* to weave together exterior, interior, vestigial and primary spaces into a frank differential matrix that rids the building of the hackneyed, bourgeois niceties of cosmetic hierarchies."
- See KIPNIS, Jeffrey: "Recent Koolhaas," in *El Croquis* no. 79, pg. 30.