

MODELS OF DISPERSAL: Notes on the *Tabloid* project

Gean Moreno - Ernesto Oroza

Some old women use newspaper to dye their gray hair. They rub the pages insistently on strands of hair until the ink dust released seeps all the way down to their follicles. Afterward, the new blackness, so deeply entrenched at first, slowly abandons their heads and stains the pillow cases. In the washer, these pillow cases stain the rest of the clothes that they're spinning with. A dark color starts spreading inside the house. Ink that not a week ago had been employed to convey timely information is reconfigured as vague spots on the grandchildren's uniform shirts and as a new shade on the son's once-white work pullovers. But the inked water, as this is happening, has already left behind the domestic space. Through the foam expelled by the washer, and running down the different drainage systems, it expands infinitely. A river of inked water roars through the plumbing, and eventually escapes through corroded pipes, faulty unions, and cracked elbows, and invades the city.

Each washer is just a single source of this inked water, but there are thousands of them in the city. Imagine them synchronized, erupting simultaneously from the penthouses on Brickell Avenue, from the backyards in Hialeah and the hospitals in Allapatah, from the women's prison on Krome Avenue, from the shotgun houses in Overtown and the pseudo-Moroccan single-family homes in Opa-Locka, from kitchens in Little Havana duplexes. Suddenly, there would be innumerable tributaries, feeding on one another. The entire city, in this situation, is recast as a tidal basin. Currents would constantly gain strength. Eventually, they overflow the streets and other existing axes that channel them. Tributaries merge. The inked water and the foam begin to slip under doors, seep through the crevices in solid walls, run off into sewers and canals until they overflow these too and

continue to move.

Puddles remain in the wake of the foam and impure liquid. Their waters fill the grooves in truck tires and are pulled all the way to the port and onto ships running cargo across the sea. They also splash when messengers and food delivery folks race over them with their bikes and scooters. The packages they are carrying are soaked. This is how the inked water climbs through the hollow shaft of the elevator into office towers and stains the curtains in the conference rooms, the carpet, the linoleum tiles in the break rooms.

As the puddles grow shallow, dispersed, the wet asphalt still manages to blacken the soles of students' shoes as they, wearing shirts their grandmothers stained in the wash, cut across empty lots and fenced properties, carving new paths through the city, in order to get to schools and vocational centers on time and avoid afternoon detentions.

As the water finally evaporates completely, it leaves behind an ink residue, a black powder like the one that some old ladies tease out of newspapers to dye their gray hair. This black powder--the routes it marks--draws a new map of the city. These currents of inked water are real of course; they spread across the memories and imaginations of any child that has seen grandma dye her hair with newspaper, that has seen the smudgy stains on her pillow case, the stains on his/her own uniform shirts. But they are also virtual. These are currents that mark a physical passage as much as they mark the movement of a series of habits, of traditions, of vernacular and familial practices, of knowledge that has been handed down from one generation to another, taken from one geographical context to another. They are channels of information. Just as the lines that mark the large systems of distribution that tabloids employ are also channels of this sort. These, too, are real; they're there, even if they have no continuous physical manifestation. They are one of the city's invisible materialities, a virtual channel for one of its flows. They are plotted only by the spots where users pick up their tabloids, by the habits that drive these users to go every week to the same place, expecting new stories but always within a series of specific and familiar graphic parameters. These systems of distribution draw a new city over the grid that we find on the dusty maps and diagrams employed in architecture and urbanism schools.

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Employing a standardized typology, our tabloids slip into the systems of production and distribution in which this typology is a central component. Or rather, they emerge--as a kind of altered offspring, a teratological experiment--from these systems. For a project in Quebec City last spring, for instance, our tabloid was inserted (dissolved) in the city's free weekly, *VOIR*. It existed in a run of 15,000 copies, spread through a series of delivery routes that covered a significant portion of the city. Our tabloid--no longer an autonomous artifact, but grafted like a parasite to a temporary host--exploited a massive system of efficient distribution which, on the one hand, dispersed it throughout the city and, on the other, tapped into habitual behaviors of the local population to further enlarge the territory through which the tabloid travelled.

But, as a parasite, the tabloid may burrow deeper than these distributive systems. It may tunnel down into the substructures of the standard tabloid, into the very codes that organize it as both a cultural/social artifact or sign and a unit within



a productive system.

The newspaper printer is, above all, a distributor of multiples, of identicals, in the same way that a machine for injecting plastic or one for stamping metal can be this. Reconsidering such a system in its pre-cultural moment, that is, suspended before the usual social function of its products has been enabled, allows us to insert an altered product with an altered social function. With this alteration, the system multiplies an object that is different from the one it usually produces. But the multiplicative and serial mode of production is essential here. Its logic cannot avoid marking the parasitical "material." Knowing this, one has to consider how this multiplicative or serial element may be employed fruitfully. One works with it. And what products can better exploit processes of multiplication than those with the capacity to organize themselves modularly, in potentially infinite spreads; objects that can couple into larger continuums that themselves become new and different objects? A modular pattern printed on a tabloid page is pregnant with inexhaustible potential. The pattern favors and can participate in the configuration of a plane or a structure. It compels

Tabloid No.17

First printing
November 2010

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special thanks: Alexandra Cunningham, Liliam Dooley, Nina Johnson, Andrea Branzi and studio, Bettina Korek, Stefania Marino, Karen Marta, Sarah Williams, Institute of the 21st Century.

This tabloid was produced by Gean Moreno and Ernesto Oroza for Design Miami 2010, Dec. 1-5, 2010.

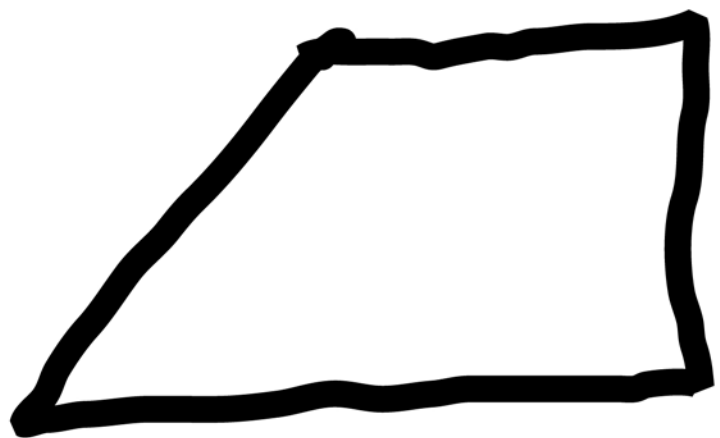
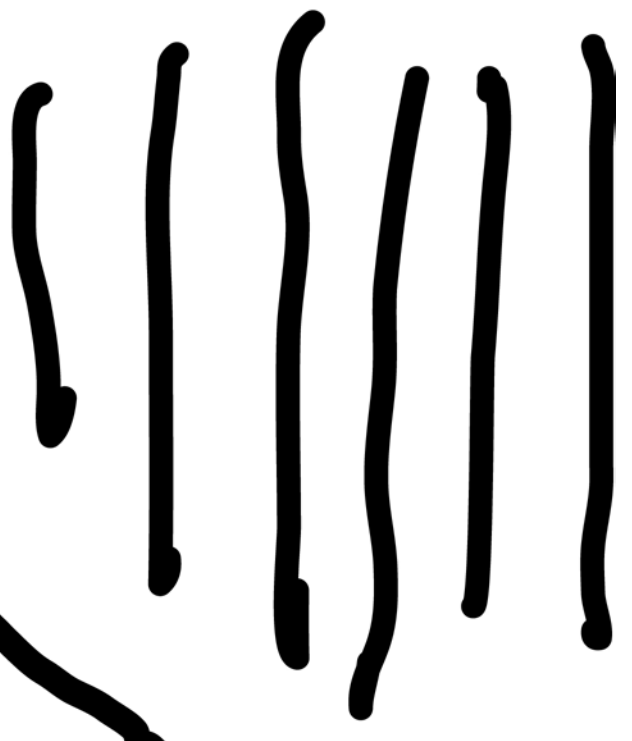
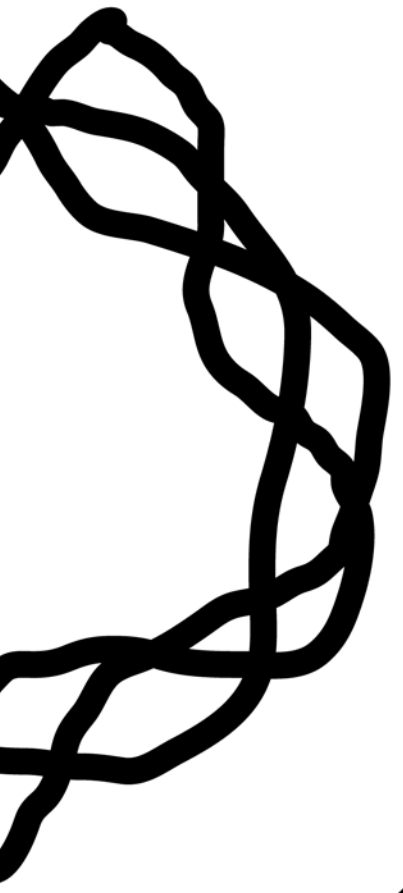
all the identical units spit out by the printing press to produce a condition--emergent in the relationship *between* them--that is greater than the individual object and that exists at a distance from the individual object's usual moment and form of consumption.

Methodologically, the project may deal less with the alteration of a generic product than with a "genetic" intervention in its produc-

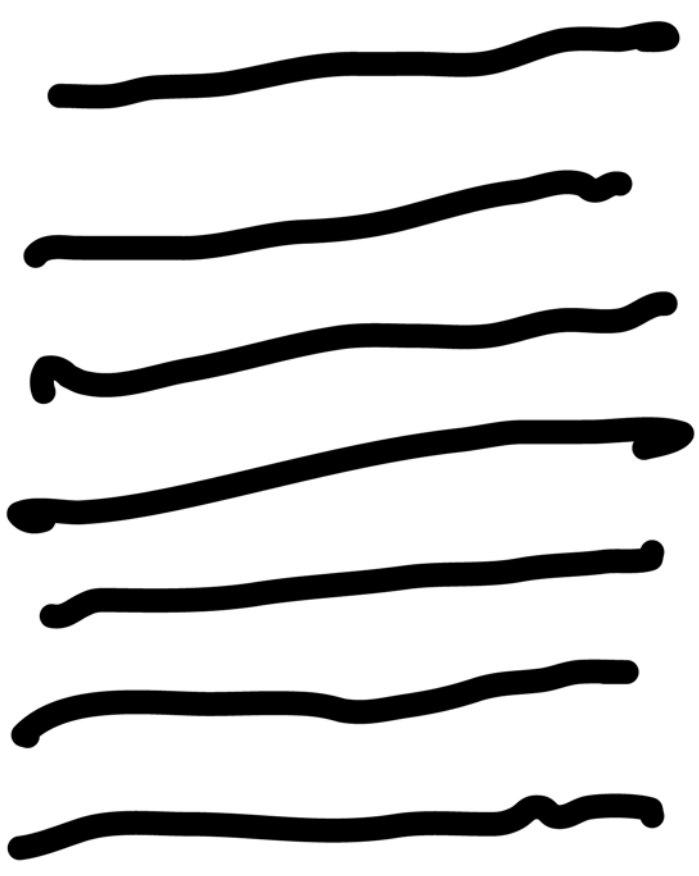
tive substrate, with planting an invasive cultural sign in the optimized space of generic production. With an awareness that the qualities of this invasive species are prone to themselves, due to the very nature of the system they have taken as host, take on a generic character; they, too, like any generic object, will be optimized to the point of abstraction, to where they take on the condition of something inevitable in the city, like linoleum tiles, drop ceiling tiles, and sheetrock panels.

In Quebec City, we employed a schematic version of a vernacular decorative pattern that we found on the facade of a house in Little Haiti--a spread of banal faux stones. A question quickly emerged: How can this pattern overcome its suspicious quality as a parasite? How does it slip into a kind of normality, of "genericity"? It has to exploit ambiguity, reappropriate familiar codes. The insertion of a foreign sign (say, the reproduction of false stones) needs to be associated to a text or some other common element in the language of the newspaper. It needs to activate other functions, be they indicative, illustrative, commercial, or documentary. The pattern, as foreign or intrusive





GUIXE
2010



IS THERE LIFE IN PARK LIFE? Interview with Martí Guixé

Octavi Rofes

Octavi Rofes: Your work as a whole is characterised by great coherence, at a formal level and in terms of objectives and approach. Apart from the systematic character and the rigour in the resolution that leave little room for singularities and exceptions, you have usually developed the projects in the form of collections or families of objects, typical formats in design. However, with "Park Life" for the first time you have used numbering accompanied by a generic title. "Park Life", therefore, exists before each of its partial works. What made you change your usual work plan? How far was the whole of "Park Life" predetermined?

Martí Guixé: Numbering always gives the effect of a collection, that there will be many. Moreover, I started with number 6, as it also gave the impression that there were 5 before. When I think about "Park Life" I think about something very generic, and numbering accentuates this effect; they are not evocative names, only codes and numbers. At first I saw "Park Life" with the *Kitchen Buildings* as a new area of work, elements which were neither architecture nor furniture. It was an in-between nourished by the two disciplines without being either of them. And therefore I think I began with the intention of making a minimum of 100; this is why I numbered them with 3 digits.

OR: One of the aspects that most clearly makes "Park Life" a new area of work is the change of scale in relation to your previous work. With "Park Life" the domestic environment that prevails in the compilation "Martí Guixé 1:1" disappears. From "Park Life" onwards it is no longer possible to conceive a book with life-sized reproductions of your projects. In fact, I think that with the *Kitchen Buildings* for the first time you present models, while your previous exhibitions had consisted of diagrams and life-sized prototypes. "Park Life" is no longer "within reach" and rather than the formal elements of architecture and furniture perhaps we should start by talking about this environment, about the "landscape" of the different proposals. The new area of work evolves from being conceived for solitary individuals who construct, as you said in "HiBye", their "interiors in any place" and who had been the potential users of your work to social groups that make use of a predefined territory. It is in this urban or social engineering character that I see the main innovation. How would you define this environment and its inhabitants?

MG: With *Kitchen Buildings* I presented scale models for the first time and I attempted to define a new way of presenting these projects. The models were almost objects with generic applied graphics and the whole gave a very schematic impression. Some of the models were not even in their real position. Equally, I tried to avoid hyperrealist renderings or the typical perspectives of real-estate companies. In their place, I configured a sequence of use, in the form of illustrations, also very schematic, with generic people and a generic context. This user manual is what gives an idea of social engineering. In the case of *Kitchen Buildings* the building is a tool to develop a choreography based on working on something specific in a more sporting way.

Geographically, the context could be any developed country, or resorts within underdeveloped countries, with a completely dominated nature; that is, with the idea of garden as nature. *The Park* (in "Park Life") adopts the two meanings: a recreation area and natural resort. All these elements of "Park Life" could be public, or private, or elements within communities, and their users are people, groups or communities (not families, although they could be) that carry out an activity that is now obsolete, but which they recreate as sport. These activities are normally related to the everyday world of work, and range from cooking, cleaning, picking, cultivating, hunting and even manufacturing. As the context is functional, there is not the emotional component that there could be among the recreationists, or in principle it was cancelled by the generic character of the project. So I imagined, in a world of services, the need to perform everyday tasks as sport, as a leisure and physical activity, in a prepared context and always sporadically.

OR: It might be interesting to further explore the relation between "Park Life" and the recreationist movements. Recreationism seeks, on the one hand, an "authentic" reconstruction of the past – thus the link with experimental archaeology – but also more generally we can say that it seeks authenticity in the past. Therefore, it is a nostalgic activity, and it is here that I think the emotional component you mentioned originates. The present is seen as a moment of loss of values and primordial references and it tries to recover them through direct experience in an environment that, based on extreme historical rigor, seeks a break with the stereotyped image of the period recreated. It is significant that recreationists speak of "clothes" and never of "disguises" or that they have often taken cinema as a counter-model. In "Park Life", in contrast, there is no period reference although the activities taking place there seek, as in recreationism, to recover a lost motor function through pre-industrial activities. In this respect, there is however an important element: you have mentioned the illustrations that in "Park Life" take on a bigger role than in your previous works. In "Park Life" they are not only instructions for use in the form of gags. There is a more elaborated narrative structure that, with variants, is repeated throughout. These short stories have a common origin in a descriptive comic of the life of a primitive people. Is the fact of starting from a "primitivist" and ahistorical reference related to the aim of avoiding in the users the nostalgic emotional component? Is it about activities without a geographic and historical context?

MG: The difference lies in the fact that I don't see "Park Life" as the recreation of an activity but as a sport, meaning that the action is important. There is motion, and a choreography conditioned by the object, but there is no formal intent to play with the element. I regard as "elements" the tools or platforms of "Park Life" that do not formally recreate but provide a functionalisation of a situation, placing it, as you say, outside of a geographic and historical context.

OR: Sport was precisely outside the activities you proposed to the nomad worker of "HiBye". In that case the user, or user-fiction, at whom it was aimed, was a professional of management and manipulation of messages and symbols. He/She had no relevant background and his/her activity was mental and relational. The "HiBye" pills brought actions of minimal motor function. What led you to incorporate sport into the design of the social environments you propose?

MG: "HiBye" and "Park Life" are probably compatible with or necessary to each other. Someone who uses "HiBye" is in fact the main potential user of "Park Life", someone who works moving around the world without material is someone who needs points of reference, who must know (at least as a sport) the value of material and of the production of material, in the more abstract sense (in this case as a sport). The credit text of Park Life defined *Kitchen Buildings* as parks or real time museums of anthropology, where the sports person and the viewer are, however, the same person, in any case only with a temporal lapse: the time that passes between taking the photo and seeing it on the screen of the digital photo camera.

OR: Despite the aim to locate the activities of "Park Life" outside cultural references, tradition is present there, although highly generically, almost in the form of an archetype, like fire or hydromel. This gives the proposals a more ritual than sporting character (even hunting can take place). With this you recover the redesign of traditional elements which was already the most significant element of *Spamt*. What relationship do you establish between tradition and design, a practice more linked to a modernism confronted with tradition?

MG: With *Spamt* this was very clear: *Spamt* and the *Techno-Tapes* is a criticism of the importance of tradition within the world of objects and, more specifically, of food products. And, at the same time, it is a criticism of the world of design. The comparative reference between the traditional Catalan bread and tomato and the *Spamt* made clear the pros and cons positioning the perception and opinion of people quite clearly in the two positions.

In many cases tradition has lost meaning, and it is repeated by inertia. This repetition at some moment puts it completely out of context and, therefore, it is reduced to the formal and visual gesticulation without content, the representation of a forgotten ritual. It is clear that there is vital, functional, relational and identity information in tradition. Although this information at an abstract level is very important, at a formal and material level it is irrelevant as it is configured at a previous time and if it is not updated it becomes, precisely because of its temporal de-contextualisation, a form of the recreationism you mentioned before.

I think that in relation to tradition the most important thing is to question it and extract a new perception. I don't see either fire or hydromel as traditional. It is true that fire is an element that forms part of traditional rituals, but in "Park Life" it is used as an element in a very atavistic, I would say proto-traditional, way as when it was still an un-idealised function and did not have the current romantic connotations. In the case of hydromel, it is a lost element. It is difficult to make honey ferment, and it is not logical to force the fermentation from a point of view of the rationality of the process. The ideal way of producing wine is with the grape, doing it with honey is still an anomaly. So hydromel is rather a very specific and marginal element, and is also proto-traditional, prior to wine. It is true that to make the hydromel table I have used handcrafters who traditionally have prepared some of the elements that make up the table, but in this case it is because the handcrafter allows the possibility of a unique piece, something which the industry does not offer you.

OR: Therefore, in short, your final objective would be to question the formal traits of tradition and rescue a primordial function in order to bestow elements of reference on the inhabitants of a generic world. This "generic world" is not, in your case, an abstraction, or an imaginary projection in the future. When you talk about "generic world" I understand that you are referring to the set of real places that result from the needs of international transit and meetings: airports, motorways and restaurant and hotel chains, on the one hand, and congress halls, convention centres, museums... all those places apparently without "local flavour", the equivalent of what Marc Augé has called "non-places", places of pure transit different from the "anthropological spaces". The concept of the "non-place" has often been questioned arguing that, for example, an airport can be a place full of cultural connotations and emotive evocations for those who work there, or those who frequent it. So being a "non-place" is not a quality of a specific place but a perception of the user. When you talk about "Park Life" as a real time museum of anthropology, or perhaps we should talk about an eco-museum given its participatory and productive character, I understand that you are stressing the local character, albeit territorially disperse, of the "generic world". Is that right? Could we say, then, that your work is oriented towards the construction of the rituals and of the identity elements of transcultural environments?

MG: Yes, I understand a generic world to be a world designed according to functional or emotional objectivity where there is no place for subjectivity. Not only places of transit but also a house made with Ikea furniture imitating its catalogue is a generic Ikea world within an environment not of transit, and it could equally be defined as a non-place. In other words, it does not need to be formally very neutral; it can be very subjective but made of set expressions and, thus, achieve neutrality. It is therefore a perception of the user and I think that for many users the generic is an element of quality, and of comfort and security. This is very well seen in the great food chains, or in the German cities, where the urban structure is generic, and so you could almost make a map that would be more or less valid for all of them. This helps at a functional level, but is lacking in emotional values.

I don't know if I would talk of an eco-museum. "Park Life" is open, and it is a tool with which you can do very different things, just as with a hammer you can build a house, break a piggy bank or in the worst of cases commit murder. In "Park Life" the activities are not managed and programmed like an eco-museum: in the Kitchen oven, for example, you can make a pizza with ketchup instead of tomato, you can also cook a gilthead bream in salt, or burn important documents.

In the generic world the local character is not as important as the cultural level, in the sense of educational level, or as the intrinsic identity constructed for each individual, who has elements of ethnic identity embedded and developed within their cultural background. This in the end gives the perception of reality. "Park Life" would be, in this sense, a performative

work that helps project cultural identity in the form of sport. There is therefore a recreationism of identity, made clear in the techniques of the body, gestures and choreographies, necessary for the tasks of everyday life.

OR: You have often commented that when you started work on the design of edible products, you found a sector where design still had not entered and where the processes of creation and innovation moved between the handicraft of the creative cuisine chef and the attempts of the industry to simulate the qualities of traditional cuisine. With this you therefore placed gastronomy between the decorative arts and kitsch and you defined, as the objective of "Food Design", creating edible objects from the culture of the industrial product, adapted to emerging phenomena of contemporary societies such as the inclination to travel, the construction of lifestyles based on the combination of market offers or mobility in roles and status. Is this same approach applicable to "Park Life"? Within which sector of application of design would you locate this project? Are the theme parks and the virtual leisure environments of videogames a reference?

MG: Yes, at first I framed it directly within the sector of sport. A sport which is not an evolution of the arts of war, as would be athletics and many other Olympic disciplines, but that evolves from everyday life. In the case of "Park Life" it would be a sports practice which emerged directly from a day to day processed by the world of design. The theme parks, I think, are steeped in fiction, and often literally follow film references; this makes them kitsch and very primitive. And the video game is limited by the lack of material. If we think about a user who moves within information in a generic world, the videogame already forms part of his or her world, but it does not have a place when you want to make sport. The videogame has more the function of removing you from reality, while "Park Life" practices reality.

OR: Returning to "Food Design", your work has regularly been seen in exhibitions, publications, festivals and in media events, but has not yet had any stable repercussion in the world of food. However, you understand that its ideal materialization would be the insertion into the sector, as happens with your work in commercial interior design or furniture. Does the same happen with "Park Life"? The different pieces and the comics seem in this case to have value in themselves, as happened in "HiBye", without the need for a "real" materialization, without the need to visit the "park". Perhaps this sensation comes from the fact that both projects have, in contrast with the rest of your work, a more marked orientation towards the future. Can we talk of "projects of anticipation" in the sense given to literature?

MG: I don't know if they are of anticipation. I have seen published architectonic theme parks where the context could perfectly well be "Park Life". The Jinhua Architecture Park in China, which I saw published in *Domus*, already has small constructions, but which refer to *topics* (small hung house to have tea, reading shelter, etc.) These *topics*, structured in the form of a resort, try to be highly conventional to reach a public in search of figurative idealism in their lifestyle.

But there is anticipation in the fact that "Park Life" understands that the user is a target defined with a specific kind of life and cultural level which today is not that of the majority. Although we are now moving towards a former industrial society, I don't think we are yet in its plenitude. "Park Life" is in any case a free project, as happens with "Food Design" it has no client. This is the difference with projects of product and interiors. "Park Life", just like "Food Design", must await the emergence of this new generation of clients formed in the former industrial society.

OR: So we have a future "super-target", an ideal user who "Park Life" is aimed at but also defines him/her and, in the same way, a "super-client", an agent-fiction who would assume the project. How would you characterise them? What characteristics of the present can already be seen in this direction? What dynamics of change take us to "Park Life"? And what are the resistances of the present that today make it a project aimed at the future?

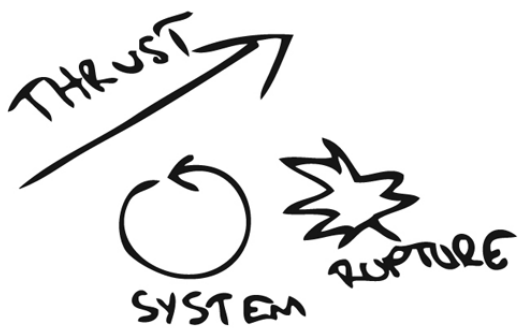
MG: The super-target would be a youth with an old mind, or an old person with a young body. The first model of super-target could be provided in the short term by internet, based on the idea of the social and educational substitute offered by the platforms in place of friends, social groups, parents and schools; and the second group will probably be provided by scientific advances in the field of medicine. The super-client is thus the person between these two groups, who is neither young nor old and can see the economic potential of the project.

The most important dynamics of change come from the disappearance of industry converted into a brand, and the fact that, in our cultural environment, everything becomes services and information. This leads to the distancing of the person in relation to the material and functions of physiology and decay. The main resistance of the present that makes it a project oriented to the future is the inertia that means that perceptions of reality that are unknown, the fear of the unknown, are refuted.

OR: You have talked of sport and ritual. Lévi-Strauss distinguished them by saying that ritual starts from a situation of inequality between the participants and leads to equality, while the game starts on a basis of equality and ends by showing up the inequalities. The "social choreography" proposed by "Park Life", in this sense, can seem more ritualistic than entertaining, don't you think? The activities seem to take place in a more collaborative than competitive environment. Can we imagine that in the Park individuals enter and groups come out?

MG: I don't know if groups come out, as they are not very big groups, but they could be. It is not established if it is collaborative or competitive. By sport, I imagine a physical activity done for pleasure, a game, and therefore I don't enter into what would be competition, either in sport or self-improvement. However, there could be a situation, for example with the *Hydromel Factory*, where two people could make hydromel in competition, where there is a spirit of rivalry. "Park Life" does not define this point, and you can use it as you like.

OR: During these days, coinciding with the World Athletics, the media has echoed the poor interest of this sport for the young. When you talk about change of attitude and perception of the world, this seems to be a good example. Athletics is still in a state of pure effort and self-improvement; it is an epic sport and, as you said, "primitive". It does not have the glamorous lifestyle component of football or basketball where the clubs have abandoned the productive orientation to manage the image and promote brand values. There is a successful videogame where the avatar the user identifies with is not a player but a manager. It



INDIVIDUAL
EFFICIENCY
COMMUNIST
CAPITALIST
I WANT TO
WHEN NOT STOOD
UP TO LIVE

STRANGE LOVE

USE VALUE
EXCHANGE VALUE
ENERGY (LOVE) VALUE
AMATEUR
STOP BUYING
END CAPITALISM
DO + BE TO AMATEUR TOPIA

NON PROFESSIONAL
→ A WAY WITH NO MONEY

AMATEUR DECLARATION OF RIGHTS ?

- NO BORDERS
- POSSIBILITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL
- POWER OF GIVING AND SHARING

ECONOMY

LOVE

APPASSIONATO

BEING

DESIGN AS SITUATION

OF LIFE

EXTENSION MATERIAL ON BODY



DIFFERENT PEOPLE

FORMABLE MATERIAL

CHANGEABLE TRANSFORMABLE DESIRES

LAVA VOLCANOES

PEACEFUL RESISTANCE

LOVE CAN TEAR US APART

CONSPIRACY UTOPIAN PROVOCATION

HUMAN EMOTIONS EXPERIENCED JOY SUFFERING

EXISTENTIAL LIVING

PRIMORDIAL BIRTH

MAN THE AQUATIC APE

VOLCANIC
POOL 33°C
HOT + SALTY

THE FURNITURE OF THE AMATEUR

WATER FEELING ERUPTION THE CHANCE OF RUPTURE EMOTION

Monobloc – On the World Chair

Jens Thiel
www.functionalfate.org

During WWII, a pilot of the Japanese Air Force crash lands on the island of Borneo and is severely injured. Locals of a nearby village save his life. 60 years later, in memory of their kindness, the former pilot, today a professor emeritus, donates one million Yen (about 9,000 US\$) to the village. The locals go shopping: two diesel powered generators, tent canvas, pesticide, and 1000 white plastic chairs.

On 1 April 1991, Detlev Rohwedder, the man responsible for privatizing the East German economy and thus one of the most important economic leaders of the time, is shot dead in his Düsseldorf home by a member of the left-wing terrorist Red Army Fraction. One of the last political murders of the RAF in Germany, the complete list of the evidence consists of three empty bullet cases, a pair of field glasses, a blue towel, and a plastic chair.

In April 2004, Islamic extremists kidnap American businessman Nicholas Berg and, after four weeks of holding him hostage, they behead him. The video documenting the gruesome act shows the bearded victim clothed in orange overalls and sitting in a chair. Soon after the footage became available on the internet, discussions in weblogs and forums begin about the possibility of the CIA's responsibility for Berg's assassination. Primary evidence of the alleged conspiracy includes the white plastic chair on which Berg last sat. The very same chair, some claim, is recognizable in snapshots taken at Abu-Ghraib prison.

The conventional, nearly traditional, often white plastic chair is without a doubt the most successful piece of furniture produced by our culture. In Boston and Bangkok alike, these chairs appear on private balconies and cafe terraces. For political rallies in Cuba, one of the few places in the world one might imagine still free from their omnipresence, they are lined up in seemingly endless rows. The Metropolitan Art Museum of Manila allows a good

dozen visitors to contemplate the fate of the gladiators in Juan Luna's large-format painting „Spoliarium“ – sitting in Monoblocs. In many African countries, these chairs are an important component of many a felicitous funeral. They have made their presence felt in rogue states too, where there isn't even a local Coca Cola subsidiary. Possibly, the population of plastic chairs outnumbers the world's population. Our memories of a world without them are vague or even nonexistent.

The awkward name “Monobloc(k)” (with only slight orthographic variations in English, just as in French, German, Turkish) is owed to the simple fact that the furniture is fabricated from a single piece of plastic in just one work step. Still, it never fails to astonish us to find it nearly everywhere in the world. Its outstanding characteristics easily explain its success: it is light, stabile, and stackable – and in this way, a true space saver; it is washable and weather-proof, nearly impossible to destroy, and yet it can be very comfortable. However, decisive to its worldwide triumph is its cost. The very idea that one can buy a chair for the price of a slice of pizza would have been an inconceivable promise to previous generations.

The plastic chair, with all of these qualities, is by far the best furniture piece of all human creation - and by far the most unloved.

The popular white of the Monobloc invites one to use it as a screen for projecting one's own interpretations of the world. Those interpretations may take many directions, depending on one's preconceived notions.

One can easily arrange the plastic chair in a phalanx of culturally pessimistic phobia to substantiate fears of overall cultural decline. There the Monobloc sits awkwardly alongside the TV and the automobile. The loose alliance of do-gooders in the world -- whom we also owe gratitude for a great number of other unfit visions -- have little respect for this patio chair, first and foremost because it is made

of plastic. Therefore, it is inherently evil and should be replaced post haste by something naturally grown. Neglected is the fact that a contemporary wooden chair off the factory line today will rarely last 10 years – and a Monobloc might well exceed that age. Even the fact that it is recyclable seems to be purposefully ignored.

Today, when we utter Roland Barthes's sentence: “the fashion of plastic is evidence of the development of a myth of imitation” (from his essay “Plastic,” published in 1957 in *Mythologies*) we are forced to envisage unconvincing products such as a

desk calculator equipped with wooden buttons or a vacuum cleaner made completely out of metal.

A further popular association evocative of the Monobloc is



that of the so-called “throw-away society.” However, as furniture, no one purchases the Monobloc for one-time-use only. Although the purchase cost is slight, one doesn't throw them away simply because the effort necessary to acquire new ones is greater than the effort needed to put them into storage until their next use. Rather uniquely, it would seem that the plastic chair has developed its very own strategy against fickle fashions and technical obsolescence. Despite the fact that numerous new models have entered the marketplace each year, the old ones were never replaced. The Monobloc, once acquired, will not be substituted by one of a better technology or different style. The lifespan of the chair is essentially the same as the lifespan of the material itself. To find an object with similar characteristics in even a moderately well-to-do household would require a lot of time and effort. One ends up with little more than an opened pack of copy paper and a screwdriver in the hand.

Considering its global presence and because it is undoubtedly industrially produced, the Monobloc also seems a suitable representative of a greater mistrust in the economic and social order of the world: the chair as an instrument of recolonization. Many who have sat in these chairs in some dusty third-world cafe will have arrived at this thought. This doesn't make the thought more potent, for we will see that the Monobloc is less a part of the international trade carousel than other goods. It would be extremely unlikely that the chair in which you recently sat in Tanzania stems from Europe or North America, or even from a local subsidiary of companies based there, even if the model is identical to those you have sat in before. And if you have cultivated this suspicion, then it is high time to consider which goods --besides baskets and coarse wooden toys-- are presumably produced in these poorer regions of the world.

On the other hand if your objections are rather derived from assumptions that the West forces its cultural beliefs onto Third World countries, other questions come to mind: should people there be sitting in elaborately

decorated carved furniture they have made after their long hours of work in factories or in the fields? Or would we prefer to see them sitting on rough hewn blocks only because we love to get a taste of exotic indigenous culture when we travel? Do we really wish to deny the people in the Third World the right to buy a cheap and reliable piece of furniture according to the same criteria that we have

reserved for ourselves?

Even without having to sing a paean of praise for cultural or economic globalization, we easily recognize that these objections to the Monobloc are nothing but our own obvious post-colonial prejudices. In a nutshell, almost every popular claim brought against the Monobloc proves to be more decadent than enlightened.

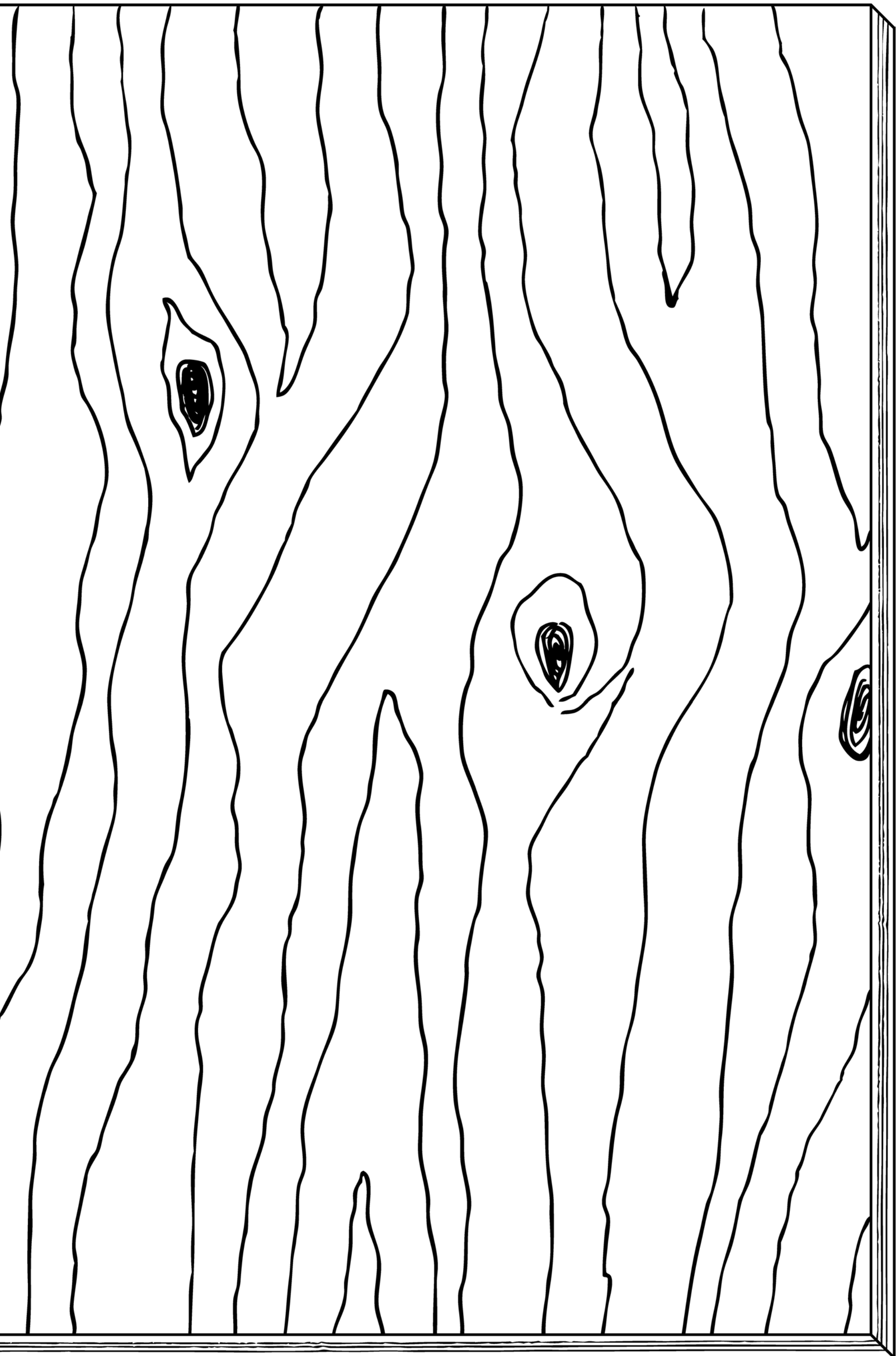
The paradox of the Monobloc is that it is a global piece of furniture that is, however, locally produced. Because of its cost structure, manufacturers in Western countries are protected from otherwise fearsome global competition. By far the most important cost factor is the polypropylene which is traded on international markets at by and large uniform prices. The use of manpower has been reduced to a minimum in the completely automated process, and the price of about 100.000 US\$ for appropriate injection-molding equipment varies only slightly all over the world.

The granulated polypropylene is fed into the machine's horizontal barrel automatically. The plastic pellets are mixed with talcum and lime in order to lend the material a better stiffness and a more pleasant surface feel – and to save input costs. In the barrel this compound is heated to around 220°C and melted into a homogenous, viscous mass. Through its rotational movements, a screw inside the barrel presses the material into an elaborately constructed steel mold that describes the negative form of the chair. The forces necessary to keep the mold closed during the process are enormous. To prevent the material escaping from the mold a clamping power of no less than 1.000 tons is needed. If the hydraulic clamping mechanism lay in a vertical instead of a horizontal position, then it could carry the weight of a thousand small cars. The parts of the ton-heavy mold are allowed only thousandths of a millimeter tolerance.

When the sharp inner edges of the super-precise steel block are worn

source: www.functionalfate.org





Models, transfers and technical object

by Catherine Geel

We are all aware that design is a field of activity which, at least in part, pre-empts. This means that it is in fact relatively similar to contemporary art (or is it the other way?) which takes hold of the world's objects, usages and arrays to remix, hybridise, "produce".

In its brief history, design has succeeded in forcefully establishing models - typus turned archetype, iconic forms signed by major designers and now deeply rooted in our cultural industry, their image reasonably well covered by at least part of the media, enough so to be notorious and recognized. However, this field is dependent on technical objects and appliances: lighting, for instance, depends on a key technical item, the light bulb. We still find it hard to envisage Prouvé's cantilever, or certain castiglioni items, functioning with these new-fangled tube-like artefacts that are fundamentally changing the visual and mental category of the electric light bulb and disrupting the effects of retinal persistence we had become so used to. Here, designer David Enon is engaged in an opportunistic exercise, and does so most humbly for the field of design... What and how can you do when the object's bulbous form, with its minor variations -

clear, frosted, tinted, with or without a reflector... is changing, and by law, what's more? Admittedly, the point here is not to dwell on the new standard's lighting qualities; it is probably more a case of seeing how a new technical standard "forces" a designer to review the "standards" of his or her field and demonstrate a certain degree of finesse that is to reinterpret and redefine archetypes and icons, here rightly relegated to the same level: lamps. The kind that has often, through the designer's typical admiration of industry since the onset of modernity, offered the naked light bulb to view, in its beauty as a technical object. The lamp then becomes a "thing-bearer", with the other technical and aesthetic object enhancing it and making it usable. Respect for the source, concept, synthesis. Here, design pre-empts itself and remixes itself, in the type of admiration and adaptation exercise it so relishes. There are numerous examples of designers discussing among themselves through the development of models surpassing the previous product (this type of pride is not the point here), and changed by advances allowing improvement (from Ponti to Meda): new adaptation to morphologies, redesign which Castiglioni had turned into one of his activities. It then becomes

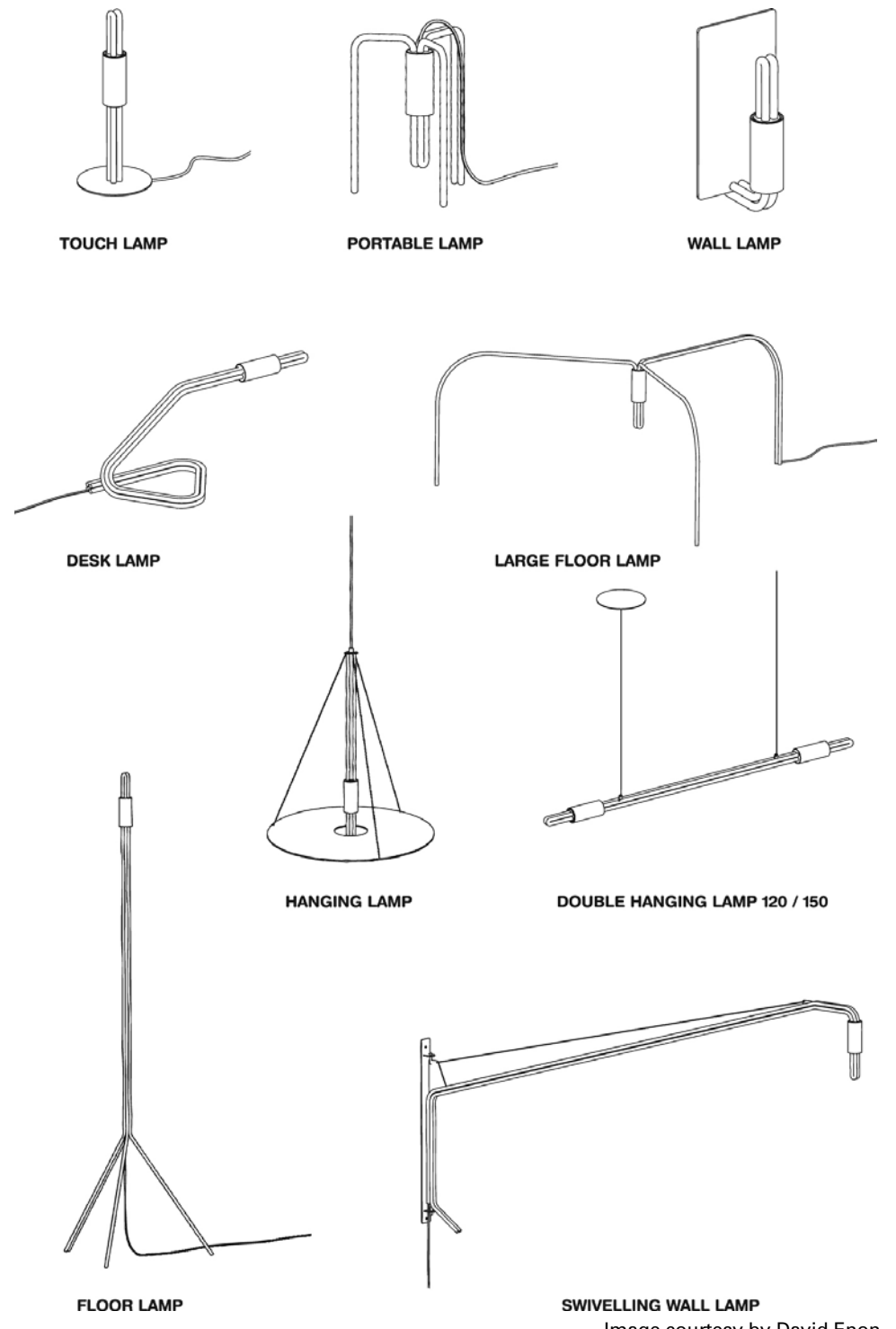


Image courtesy by David Enon

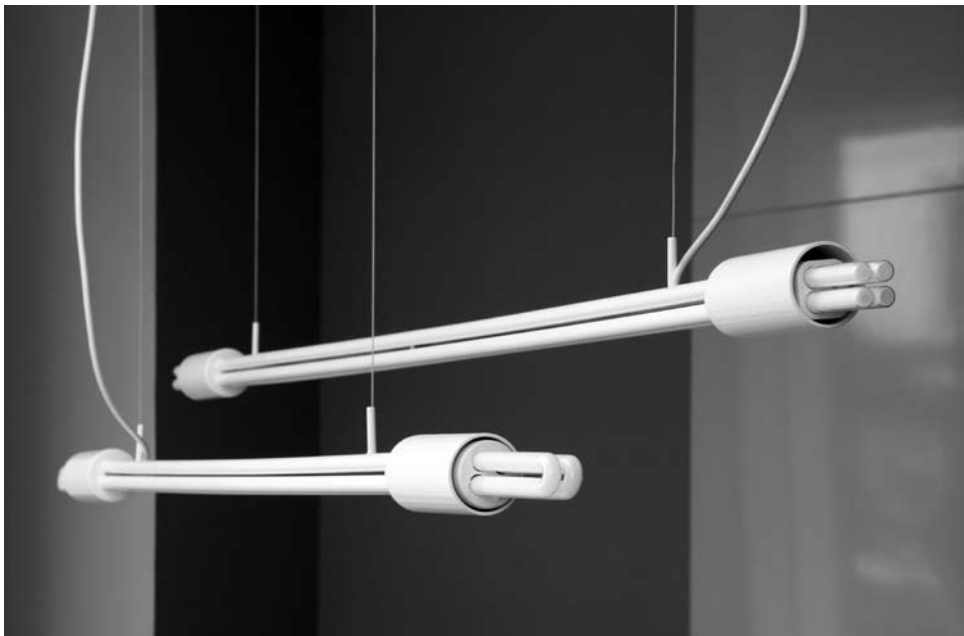


Photo by Stanislas Wolff

clear that the object is changing. What David Enon provides, with his position as a designer aware of industry but not working for it, typical of a generation that is coming "unstuck" of it, for reasons of factual intelligence or historical period, nurtured with the milk of modernity and post-modernity, influenced by many a precise argument, intellectually fuelled by a double awareness of both periods. The thing is simple. The exhibition, the gallery are making something irreplaceable possible: a sufficiently fast reaction to technical change, which (oddly

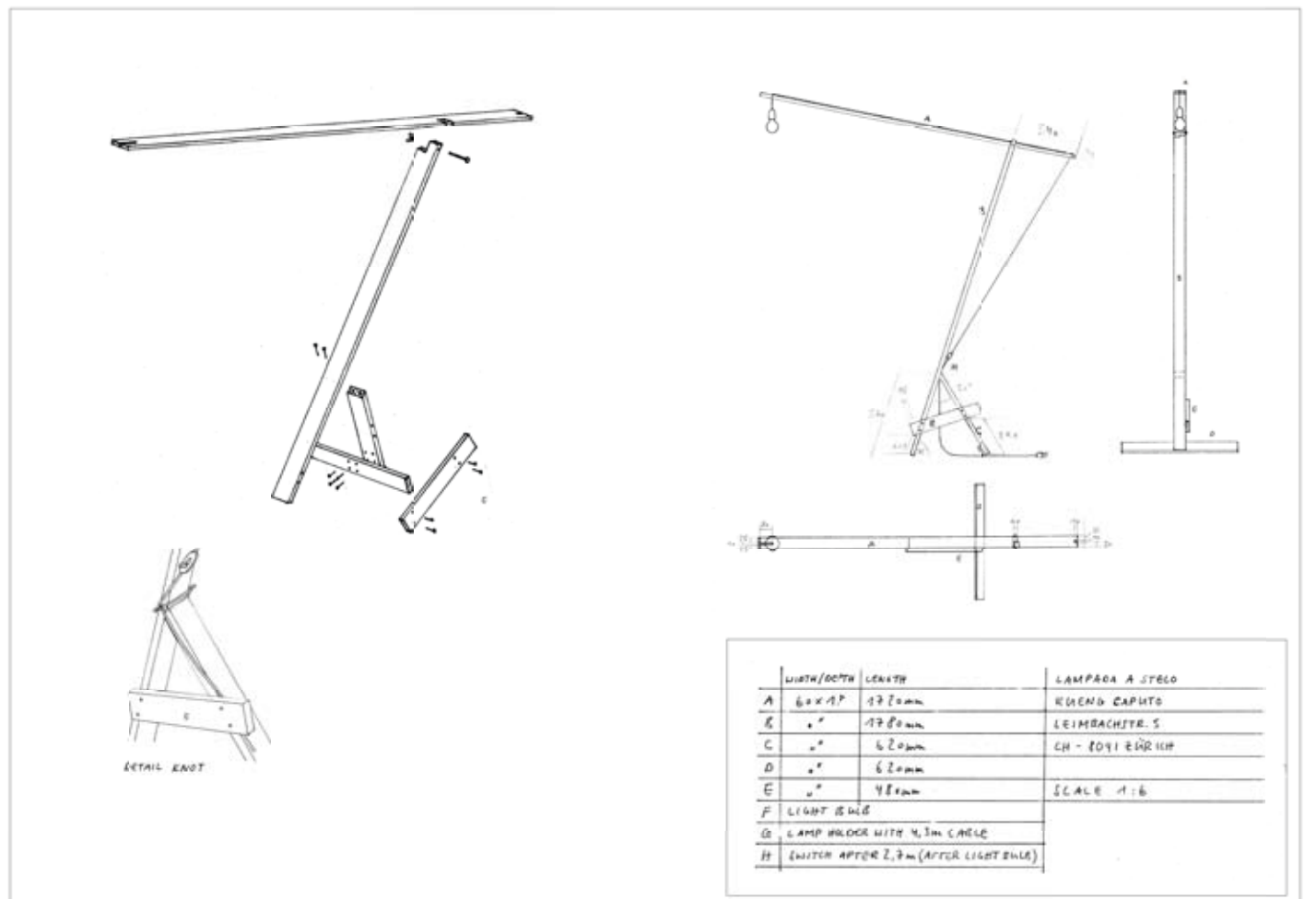
enough, although logically), the light-industry world of design is unable to follow completely, and the even stranger fact that it is unable to anticipate them.

Reflective transfer - the self pre-emption of the industry - thus starts with the production of limited-run models, in a fast, smart and fun response to the new technical object. What used to be thunderous manifestos unable to avoid the market has now become, factually, very manifest.

la lampada a stelo, 2009

by Kueng Caputo

www.kueng-caputo.ch



Interview with Andrea Branzi

Hans Ulrich Obrist

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Andrea, this is the fourth interview that we do. It is very exciting. I hope we will talk about your "Manifesto" of the *New Charter of Athens*. But first I want to ask about your beginnings in architecture.

Andrea Branzi: Well, I graduated in 1966, in a very particular climate that was linked to the crisis of rationalism in the Modern movement. A whole series of phenomena that have transformed Western culture were beginning to open up. While the new "imprinting" consisted of an extreme realism taken from Pop culture, the vision of a reality that became invasive, out of control, consisting entirely of communications, sales promotions, commercial language and behavior was totally beyond the theorems of classic modernity. For example, my thesis (among other things, preserved at the historical archive of the Centre Pompidou) had as its theme a permanent amusement park inside a shopping mall. At the time, this was something completely outside the

more anarchical, in the developments, languages and behaviors, more and more numerous, it would offer. In effect, this happened. Today, we can say that this intuition was important in relation to the idea of order that modernism, interpreted in a reductive way, seemed to foreshadow.

The other important point was: the Radical movement was the first to point out that the unity of the "modern project" was broken. Urban design, architecture, the whole universe of merchandise, design, were not cultures that worked together harmoniously to realize this future within an "order." These were conflicting cultures. Today--and this is registered in this last Biennale--and also if we consider all that has happened in the past decades, the conflict between architecture and city, between the universe of merchandise and architectural culture, are now evident. Indeed, the power of this conflict feeds one of our most important energies.

HUO: This gives us the context for many

answer to the issue (which for me would be present in my work in subsequent years) of overcoming one of the syndromes of contemporary architecture, which is to always start from a perimeter, from a foundation, a closed circuit. When this perimeter breaks, it becomes an infinite texture, theoretically infinite, which no longer corresponds to the urban place, but to the industrial market, to a market of information, etc. Here you enter a different, liberated mental circuit.

In those years we read a lot on all the theories about sexual liberation and then attempted to overcome, through creative energy, the straightjacket of character and typical human behavior. We also attempted this in architecture.

HUO: That is interesting because it also leads to the idea of art. You told me in an earlier interview that there is "reduction, reduction, reduction" until it reaches Nirvana. And this also leads to art. You told me that your favorite artist is Rothko and it would be interesting if you could tell us a bit about your relationship with art and how to achieve this reduction to the absolute.

AB: There is this idea of liberation from architecture itself. This is a typical procedure in the vanguard culture of the 20th century. To come out of itself--coming out of its harmonies and out of rules, and it becomes sound, knowledge, experience. It becomes something different. Certainly, that was what happened in painting. We dispute that this philosophical and structural revolution happened in architecture. Architecture continues to present itself, and in some way it is always self-referential. It can have different shapes, different languages, but architecture, in my opinion, is not aware of existing in a world where the historical foundations on which it was built are broken. The contemporary city differs from the historical one.

Thus, certain experiences in art, those of Mark Rothko for instance...They are these large chromatic oceans that he asked be looked at from 40 cm away. This is very interesting, breaking the distance that was at the origin of the traditional perspective system. Perspective arises when the observer is placed outside the frame and then orders it according to certain rules of geometry. When the observer is in the painting, in the story, inside the reality, he loses his sense of vision. This is one of things that architecture has not yet reflected on. Non-figurative architecture, which we talked about in the first document of *No Stop City*...we wrote: non-figurative architecture is no longer something you

look at. It is a different reality, a sensorial experience, informational, etc. A non-figurative architecture is already produced today, I think, in the contemporary city, where there is no longer a perspectival distance between the urban phenomenon and the observer. Non-figurative architecture does not mean an architecture that does not exist. On the contrary, we live in very dense areas, full of environmental and spatial elements, and as the sea to fish (fish in the sea do not have a vision of the sea), we do not see it because we are in it. Or as Pierre Restany said, the Indians do not have a vision of the Amazon because they are in it and they just see it as an integrated reality. They do not feel the overall external structure. This is a bit what is going on in our society, where the space in which we live is so dense that we lose any figurative vision. It becomes a physical experience that passes through the pores of the skin. The sounds, the perceptual experience. This is already a condition of non-figurative architecture.

HUO: This brings us to our days, to the city of the 21st century. We met in London where you participated in our Marathon, on the theme of manifestos by artists and architects for the new century. We presented a manifesto that continues to write itself and which is here at the [Venice] Biennale--the manifesto for a *New Charter of Athens*. In it, we find several points, which you call recommendations. I wanted to know if you could talk about this *New Charter of Athens*?

AB: Well, the idea of writing or suggesting the *New Charter of Athens* was not born from the idea of having to find a solution. The first *Charter of Athens* was pushing the idea that there might be a working model of the industrial city, written by Le Corbusier and the CIAM in the thirties. It was a vision of a city where there is a place for working, a place for living, an area for leisure, the old town and so on. A city of the mechanical age. Today, we say that the city is completely different reality. Everything takes place everywhere. No more mechanical-hydraulic system. The city is an integrated, informational space. The idea [in the *New Charter*] is not a utopian proposal for the city of the future, but a set of reflections on the city. In fact, the real title of my participation in this Biennale is: *Ten Modest Recommendations for a New Charter of Athens*. And just as Le Corbusier's first *Charter of Athens* was never been realized--there is no city made according to its program--it was very useful in intellectual terms. It gave order to a situation that appeared chaotic. So, this *New Charter of Athens* is a realistic gesture. It says: look at how the world really is and not to how it should be. This is an important attitude that goes beyond how things should be realized. There are ten points that address different issues, such as



prevailing functionalist tradition.

From this movement of extreme realism, the Radical movement was born in Italy and strangely in Florence, a city that, then as today, has no direct relationship with modernity. It is certainly not an urban society characterized by a vanguard culture. But perhaps this has led to the fact that my generation (those who studied in Florence) elaborated a different idea of modernity, outside the typical parameters of the industrial culture and social order that all of this would have entailed. Recently, a book was published by Princeton Press, written by Pier Vittorio Aureli, an Italian-American who teaches at the Berlage [Institute] and at Columbia [University]. It analyzes the ties that existed between progressive political thought, what we would call "Operaista," and characters who were not political activists but let's say philosophers. Massimo Cacciari, Mayor of Venice, was one of the young representatives of these new theories that foreshadowed the end of bourgeois culture and the birth of another kind of culture that was much more secular, without all the hierarchies typical of the previous century.

So, the Radical movement was born in this climate. It was primarily an Italian movement, but it also developed internationally, in Austria, the United States, France, etc. The Italian side of it was, in my opinion, the one with greater political preparation. Despite its many contradictions--which are part of all the uncontrollable movements that also arise from generational energy--I would say that it produced two important theorems. The first: the future of industrial society would no longer have an order, would not be rational, nor would it be the standard of what was to come, as it was thought at the time. The future would be more complex,

of your inventions. When I interviewed scientists, they very often remember the exact moment, the minute, of an invention. For example, Benoit Mandelbrot remembers when he discovered fractals and Albert Hofmann remembers the moment when he discovered LSD. I wanted to know if we can talk about *No Stop City* and the moment in which this idea was born.

AB: First we should say that *No Stop City* is the result of one of the contradictory components of the Radical movement. As I was talking about this conflict between architecture, cities and universe of objects, Superstudio, for instance, was working on the idea of an architecture without the city, where the presence of architecture predominated and gave the city order. Meanwhile we, the Archizoom group, were working on another idea--a city without architecture. This was going completely in the opposite direction. We discussed this topic for long time, but we could not figure out how to get past all the compositional and linguistic aspects of architecture. Then, through the different experiences we had with the project as we developed it for competitions, we began to think that architecture no longer had a central role in the city, but that the city was a place of merchandise, an area of information and services, of intangible experiences. It was no longer a set of architectural boxes. At a certain point (also because ideas happen in a short time span), I remember very well that, while working on these issues, the idea came up of trying to extend the "linguistic" elements typical of architecture, such as walls, elevators, etc., and redistribute them freely on the sheet of paper. This meant that the idea that all of these elements correspond to a building or a function was no longer necessary.

This intuition was liberating. It gave an

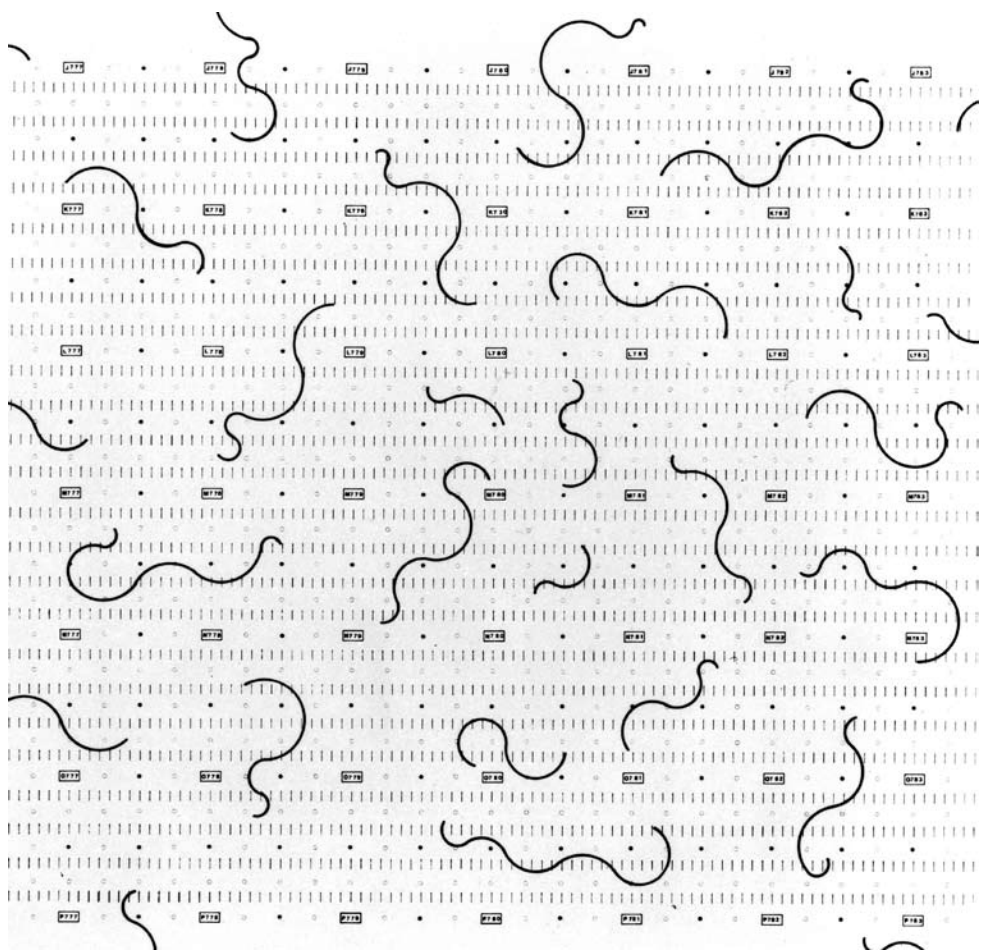




Photo by Kai Juenemann

interpreting the city not as a definitive, rigid landscape but as a kind of high-tech slum that changes rapidly over time according to needs. This is, in some way, relevant to our current society, a self-reforming society, which must constantly change, adapt, make new laws, new statutes to manage the state of permanent crisis in which it exists. Our society does not have a single model of reference. So there are the needs that architecture begins to confront within a historical-political reality that is very different from the 20th Century's, in which they thought in terms of permanent solutions. We need follow new strategies--reversibility, provisionality, the incompleteness of the project. We have to also consider a political component and even to begin to see the urban area not as a set of architectures, but as a personal computer. We have also to consider the effects of globalization, and have an awareness of different urban cultures. An example is the Indian metropolis where people live together, along with the sacred; the sacred along with all the technologies, together with sacred cows, the monkeys of the Shintoist temples. We need a vision of a city that has the capability to [exercise] a "global hospitality" that goes beyond the idea of sealed perimeters.

HUO: You are talking about "cosmic hospitality" and also of the weak urbanization. But biology is specially important. When I spoke to Freeman Dyson, in 2000, he said that the third millennium will be biological and right now there is all of this research on synthetic biology

and you talk about the city as a genetic laboratory.

AB: Yes, as a genetic laboratory, which among other things, is also the theme proposed by [Kazuyo] Sejima in *People Meet in Architecture*. I have interpreted this theme as a predominance of human genetics, of the human body and all the energy of genome transmission, of eros, of gender, as an energy that fills up the contemporary city, that moves it, that agitates it. This also stems from the fact that for the first time in human history we are nearly seven billion people. While historic architecture was born in empty spaces with a few thousand people, seven billion people are now active participants and express themselves with great energy. They produced a post-Fordist economy. There have been some extraordinary changes of scenery that are worth considering.

HUO: Can you tell me a little about the "installation" here in Venice? It is interesting to see that for you the exhibition is a medium. You have never used the exhibition and the book as secondary things. I am very curious to know how you have used it here.

AB: I collected 12 projects, 12 models, which are not intended to be realized. They are not positive utopias, but reflections on the infinite dimensions in which we move at this time, in the age of globalization. Even political philosophers talk about a society that no longer has an outside. This is a fact that touches on the genetic elements that form architecture. Instead of the perimeter, of the limit, of perennial foundation, the typical dimension of these projects is based on territories that are unlimited, imperfect, incomplete. They somehow try to recover the cultural category and concept of infinity, which was a very important concept in the Renaissance. It was the starting point of the architecture of that era.

HUO: That's interesting because you say that some philosophers call the 21st century a century that no longer has an outside, despite a reinforcement of the globalized world's boundaries. I wanted to know who are the philosophers that you read?

AB: Paolo Virno, Bauman, Negri and others. It seems to me that at the moment political philosophers have begun to move their pens. We have, I think, gone through a period where there was this idea of living in a historical interval--the important things had already



occurred. Some things had already occurred in the 20th century. Some in the 21st century. Still, it was unclear what the strategies could be in our century. But, in this sense, I am concerned not only with philosophers but also with economists such as Muhammad Yunus, who has changed the economic situation of 170 million of people through micro-credits. This idea of changing the world through micro-projects, subsystems, from the interstitial spaces--it is one of the reasons why I have always declared more interest in terms of working at the molecular level of design than with macro-structures. In relation to what happened in the 20th century, which produced big disasters, this strategy is "weaker" but more experimental; it works more in terms of approximation. It enters into the recesses of domestic spaces, into the spaces of the city and that is what changes the quality of the city and of dwelling. In this sense Cedric Price was our teacher (although I only saw him once). He was the first, in the sixties, who said that it was more important to look at the quality of the "micro-climate" than at the form of architecture that contains it. This shifted the point of reference. No Stop City comes from this kind of thinking, which hasn't yet had the chance to change contemporary architecture. Giving it this dimension, you want to say that the strategy is "weaker," rougher, more flexible, more approximative, less figurative, less promotional, less self-referential. It treats reality as molecular.

HUO: And material.

AB: And material. This gives it its contemporary dimension.

HUO: Two last questions. Rainer Maria Rilke wrote a beautiful book, *Letters to a Young Poet*. In 2010, I would like to know what advice you would give a young architect?

AB: I would hope that a young architect has advice to give me, since I believe that the younger generation is born to teach us something new.

The advice that I can give is that the third millennium will be fun, because it will be a millennium in which we will see all sorts of things and in which the culture of architecture-design, the culture of the project, will be less tied to the professional practice. It will become a culture that interprets history, economic changes of society, technology. I must say that when it comes to talk about doing research and experimentation in architecture, many of my friends think that research is "to search for new customers." This is a legitimate attitude, but it can produce misunderstanding. It makes the market the determinant of the evolution of this culture. This cannot happen. It would be highly improper. The architect must take responsibility for a space of autonomy, of independence, for a time for trials and research. And, also, because the new architecture of today does not necessarily mean building. Now, the architecture and the culture of the project, two territories, are the real world where things are being built, but the territory of big media creates icons. At bottom, Le Corbusier changed the way we understood architecture in the 20th Century. He was the first to realize that being an architect also means writing books, [developing] the core theoretical and philosophical culture that we need to recover.

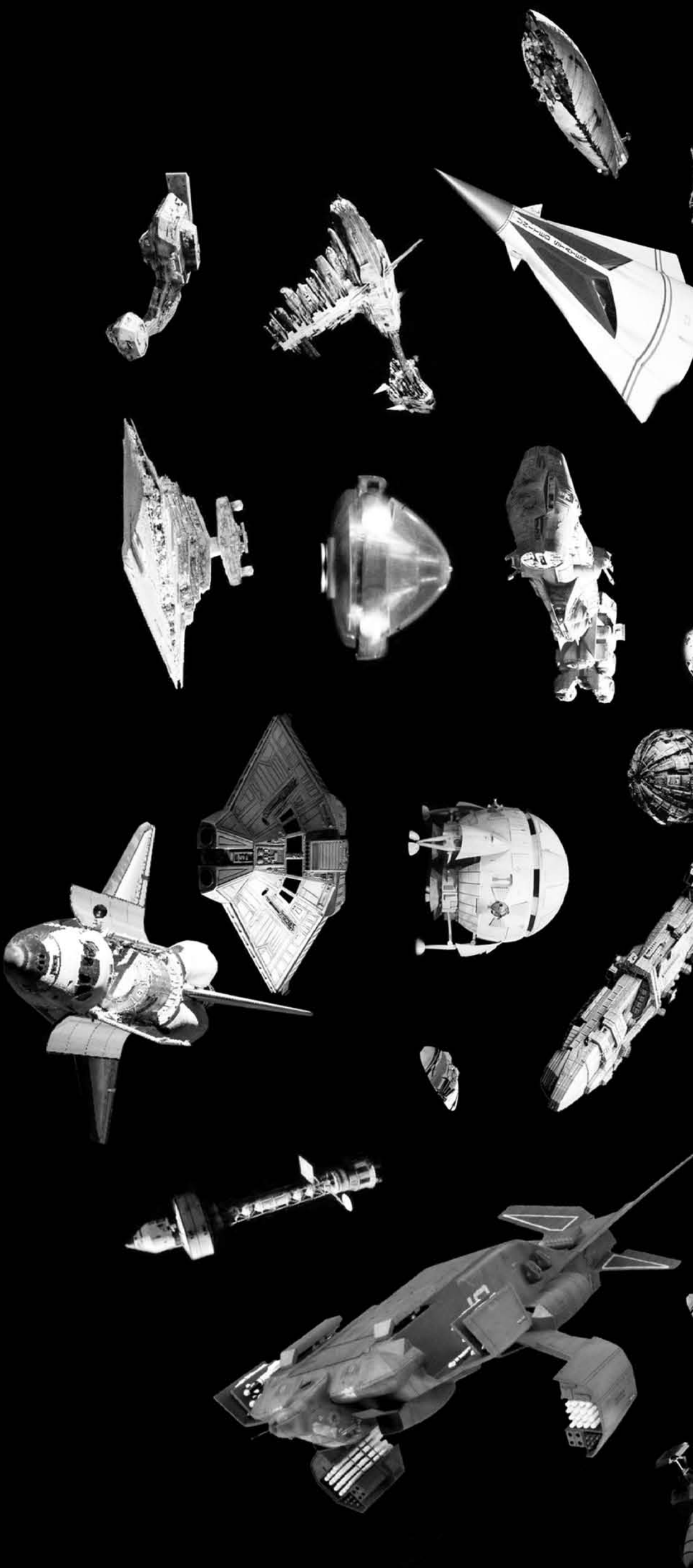
HUO: Last question. I would be very curious to know what your dream is. Sejima says that in the end we will be satisfied if we can define ourselves through his exhibition and perceive the direction in which our society is headed--the dreams of the future. What is your dream for the 21st century?

AB: Well, a bit of what I said: to work toward a non-figurative architecture. As I tried to explain: An architecture in which interior space--experiences, relations, services, etc.--take place in the city. The story of the Twin Towers shows how exhibitionism may produce negative feedback, and may actually be very fragile. So, a world micro-climatized, urban, lit, ventilated and fragrant, which consists of internal spaces. There are many cities where this has started to happen, such as Tokyo. In my opinion, a city made up entirely of interiors, the outside is an inside. There is just the idea that there is a reality outside in which we are immersed. From the point of view of the physical body, one is always already inside the architecture. Looking at it is a passing accident. In reality, our experience is already consolidated by living in an architecture that is less a formal language than sensory, conceptual, and material experience.

HUO: Many thanks Andrea and I hope we can continue soon. No stop interview. Many thanks. ■

Translated by Stefania Marino

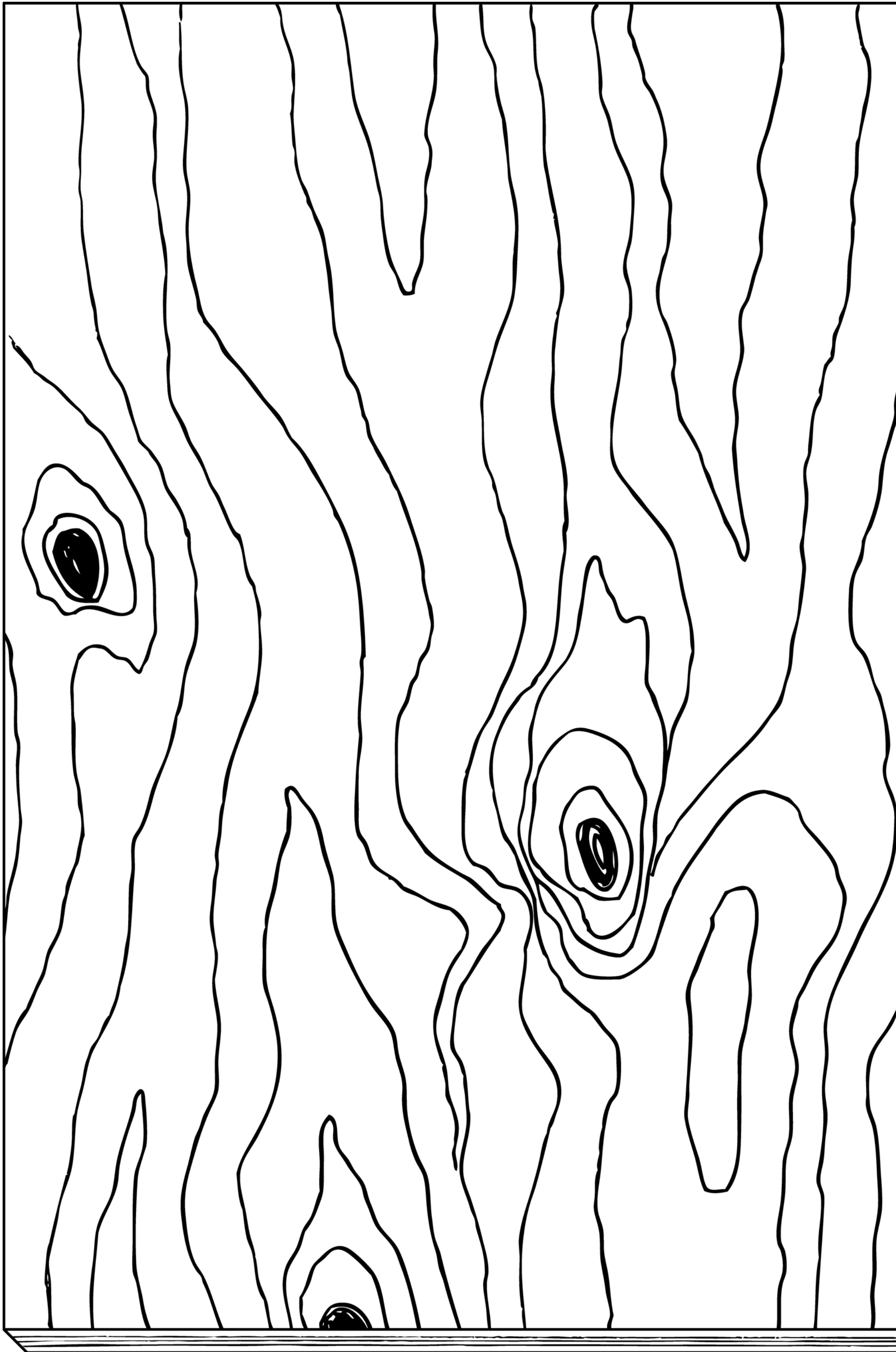




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(monobloc – on the world chair / jens thiel)

off after about a million injections and material starts swelling during the process, the mold is sold at a fraction of the initial price in poorer regions. Further millions of chairs are being produced in countries where consumers find the little plastic skins at the rims acceptable. A Monobloc identical to our recent purchase will soon populate Ghana or Russia.

In the mold, the work piece is cooled until it hardens, and usually a robot-arm takes the chair and stacks it in with the other finished products. The entire cycle takes no more than 60 seconds. About 500 chairs can be completed in an eight-hour shift, and in the case of uninterrupted production, more than half a million pieces could be manufactured in a year on a single machine.

With a technology like that, labor cost advantages can not offset the costs resulting from transport over long distances. A 40-foot container holds about 2,500 Monoblocs stacked on pallets. Shipping it from Shanghai to the US Pacific coast or Rotterdam would increase the price of the chair by roughly one US Dollar or Euro. Taking into account the current wholesale price for a Monobloc of about five US Dollars, the Western manufacturers have no reason to be frightened of Asian competitors.

for a moment the “look-at-me-I-am-designed” stress exerted by all this stuff from upmarket apparel stores and museum shops.

Of course this strategy soon revealed shortcomings. To make the chair seem more comfortable, its back was heightened although low back chairs are no less convenient and offer a more pleasant appearance. This additional material had to be economized in other parts in order to comply with the desire for ever lower prices expressed by buyers and consumers alike. A solid, stable plastic chair demands no less than 2.5 kilograms of polypropylene, nevertheless Monoblocs are now made that weigh barely 2 kilograms. Savings can be made by reducing the quality and thickness of material or the extension of the piece’s surface area. The chair has suffered badly from these strategies since they result not only in awkward shapes but also in an unsatisfactory torsion elasticity. Sitting in one of these chairs, one is in constant fear that the piece is distended enough that it is eventually about to break.

But even erroneous paths are well-worn as long as they lead to the realm of the cheap. Years ago I observed customers of a home-improvement store in the process of selecting Monobloc chairs: they passed among the various groupings, discussed the choices briefly and soon decided



source: www.coolbuzz.org

chairs combining aluminum legs and fish-like plastic seat shells.

Over recent years, municipalities worldwide have proceeded resolutely against the Monobloc. Since 2003 the Swiss capital of Bern governs unambiguously: “Full plastic furniture with no textile covering is not permitted.”

as well as economically superior to any other seat. It has become the essential world chair, the only furniture that all people have in common in one way or another. The Monobloc is the pride of efficiency of our industrial society that has made life easy and free of peril. As an anonymous product it has asserted itself for a long time in an economy where almost every commodity is subjected to arbitrary branding, way out of touch with the product’s actual benefits. Meanwhile the Monobloc’s white appears to be more honest than that of the early iPod models. With all these achievements, the chair should have earned our love.

Instead of abandoning the Monobloc to the owners of beach bars and trailer park homes, we should welcome it into our homes. Combined with an ample table, for instance from early Scandinavian modernism, this arrangement will lend our lush apartments an air of unexpected easiness. Also, the chair should not be excluded from the photos we make when traveling. To find it in remote places is not a curse of globalization but instead testifies to a reality that grants us the opportunity to go there in the first place. To refuse the Monobloc is not proof of superior judgment but only a denial of reality.

The plastic chair has become immune to taste and this makes it even easier to use it to express a style of one’s own. Simply choosing a particular chair is enough to ennoble us. Another strategy would be to modify the plastic chair such as what the Swedish design team Front did for the interior of the Tensta Konsthall in Stockholm in 2003. By simply padding white Monoblocs with black leather, Front achieved a stunning result, recontextualizing the chair. While the original Monobloc is what Jean Baudrillard called “a series”, with manageable effort “a model” is created with markedly increased quality which forcefully questions our established preconceptions. Since Front’s seminal re-phrasing, more than a hundred designers and artists have taken on the Monobloc and put the artefact into new contexts.

We may easily join these revolutions - or instead calmly lean back in our plastic patio chair, giving all these intellectual exertions a rest, and rejoice about stuff that is just there, that is plain and simple and works. ■

Earlier versions of this essay were first published in: *Art Review*, London, April 2006, pp. 58 – 61 and *Der Freund*, Kathmandu, May 2005, pp. 6 - 13



Photo by Moi of Ra

Nevertheless the profit margins have shrunk considerably. When the Monobloc started its world conquest in the early 1980s it cost about 50 US\$, now it often sells at a tenth of that price.

While straightforward designs not unlike the classic rectangular chair dominated the 1980s, the Monobloc has now emerged in quainter shapes. The complex design of an injection molded chair remains more the domain of engineers than of designers. The design has to obey technical limitations: properties of the raw plastic material, its flow paths in the mold, velocity and pressure of the injection are all critical to the process. Thus often the engineers and the marketers of a plastic furniture manufacturer will sit down and conceive new models. With the Monobloc, design is given a vacation, thus relieving

on the cheapest of them all. Hardly anyone tested the chairs out. If they had, the differences in comfort and steadiness between various models would have become immediately obvious. Moreover, the appearance and conduct of the shoppers did not make the impression that the design of the newly acquired furniture had any relevance for their decision to buy. When I visited the store again last summer, the Monoblocs were gone and had been replaced by tropical hardwood furniture, most likely from illegal logging.

In fact the Monobloc is imperiled and in urgent need of our attention. Sales figures in Europe and Northern America have been declining for years. Hardly any new models are now being introduced. Customers increasingly opt for wood, whose origin can scarcely be tracked, or

Likewise the situation in Copenhagen, Manchester, Helsinki, the Slovak capital Bratislava or in Californian high-tech center Mountain View is hardly different.

The repugnance the Monobloc evokes has helped to create outlandish alliances. While the urban elite desperately strives to merge coziness with copies of Bauhaus designs, the customers of Wal-Mart, on the other hand, have always disdained unpadded furniture. A pact to lock out the Monobloc, however, is quickly agreed upon between both troops.

We have reached a time where the pragmatic plastic chair in the First World is in urgent need of our help to survive. The chair is functionally



(is there life in park life? interview with martí guixé/octavi rofes)

is about speculating with players and seeing the result in terms of business. Is "Park Life" conceived more for this manager than for a long-distance runner?

MG: Yes, athletics now resembles another era, still with the issue of nationalities, where race and ideology play a very important role in the perception of what physical effort, competition, is, always combined with high doses of sentimental emotion. In fact, sport or physical movement is always related with the body and matter, and it is this body and matter that make us mortal, weigh us down and make us ancient. And it is precisely the body that needs this movement to be fit. "Park Life", in this sense, is very ancient, and in counter-position to "Hibye" it does not seek the disappearance of matter maintaining the function, but promotes matter based on a schematic function in the form of an everyday game.

Athletes are victims of their own body, and therefore I think that everything that is not related to their physical features is for them anecdotal. The manager seeks profit at political and then at economic level; he/she could use "Park Life" like an Anglo-Saxon executive uses a golf game.

OR: The elements of "Park Life" are small pavilions, pieces of furniture and tools spread over a natural tamed environment. The relationship between nature and culture had already brought you to projects that caused disruptions between the two categories, such as a cocoa powder dune or a cloud and a gin and tonic pool. In these cases they were completely cultural environments where nature had a phantasmal character, the projection of a desire that transformed perception. The result was an illusion, a second nature constructed out of culture. "Park Life" seems to go in the same direction but the participation, the "necessary collaboration", with bees introduces a new dimension: now culture is seen reflected in nature. While in "Fish Futures" you had conceived a park of fish, passive receptors of human design, in "Park Life" aren't you, in fact, taking bees as a model? Is there not in the social choreography of "Park Life" a naturalisation of human politics, an illusion of "beehive culture"?

MG: *Fish Futures* presented a series of statements about my vision of the future: climate control, manipulations of reality, changes of perception of the world, etc. All of this was projected in a fish, or two, which, given their character as a pet, were the projection of any human. Therefore, in the case of "Fish Futures", humanity is reduced to an aquarium fish. "Park Life" would have a relationship with bees in that the model refers to a social group integrated into a society of work/consumption, and in this case the world is seen from the perspective of a group, a collective. But I don't see either the illusion of culture of beehive, or the naturalisation of human politics. The beehive is a very simple mechanical-biological system and very easy to manipulate. Therefore it has been associated with the buildings of Le Corbusier, and with the primitive industrial concept, very much a pyramidal structure.

If design is concerned with everyday life, solving banal details that enable us to forget the servitudes of the everyday, I see "Park Life" more in this direction. It is like a tool that allows you to evaluate these actions indirectly related with a first generation industrial design.

OR: We are, therefore, facing a future where, in leisure time, traditional activities are carried out, the primary function of which has become obsolete, although they maintain their emotional weight and social cohesion, and where these practices have been emptied of specific historical or cultural references and take place in a protected and controlled environment. Isn't this the description of a world where the modern project of design has triumphed? The world of *everything-design? Burn-Me Piece*, the element number 3 of "Park Life", for example, is an over-rationalised Saint John's eve bonfire, where every detail has been considered: the combination of different types of wood and its arrangement respond to logical criteria that guarantee easy transport, good combustion, a pleasant smell... What room remains for improvisation, for DIY, even for imperfection? Is there not a totalitarian attitude, a kind of technocratic control of all aspects of social life?

MG: Yes, of course, it is a sport! But this is a simplification of everyday life according to the parameters of the modern design project, when there is no longer everyday life, or design in the old school sense. It is a game, but not competitive, a physical leisure activity that combines identity, design and movement. This does not mean that in the future there is only this but that this new practice has been added. Improvisation, DIY and imperfection exist in real life. "Park Life" is an ideal environment as is a football or athletics stadium; it is a schematic configuration of everyday life. "Park Life" is a playing field, a state of the art sports field, where the modern design project is fossilised, just as athletics is a simplification of the arts of war. "Park Life" is a simplification of the everyday life of the environment of the modern design project.

OR: At first you said that the elements of "Park Life" were halfway between architecture and furniture. In relation with the rest of your work, you use a new formal repertoire with direct references not only to architecture but also to sculptural tradition. You have been, like the users of "Park Life", practising without too much commitment in fields left aside in your usual work where there is a radical separation with the formalisms both of architecture and sculpture. Do we not find in "Park Life" a Martí Guixé distancing himself from Martí Guixé?

MG: I think that for me the fact of working with micro architecture has been very important, albeit from a not very architectonic point of view. I say not very architectonic because I have not started from construction techniques but from concepts, and this has given me a series of forms very distanced from what could be shelters, for example. Equally I have tried to distance myself from the topics to represent architecture, such as the photorealistic renderings and the wooden models, and I have sought a new representation with this comic, or instruction, which is more like a "lifestyle" manual, and which, contrary to what architecture does, does not enhance the form and the materials but rather the use and attitude. The models are also more schematic, more like work models than models for the presentation of buildings. Working with these models at different scales and the prototypes has given me a vision of the different perceptions of the ideas in relation to its physicality. I also think in some cases that the project is close to a new kind of public sculpture; a sculpture, just as in the "Sculpt Me Point" or "Car Mirror" requires or demands an intervention, a manipulation, and has a use, sometimes absurd, but somehow demands interaction and communication, and approaches design from its curious functionality.

OR: In fact, couldn't "Sculpt Me Point" be another element of "Park Life"? Perhaps the difference is that it was made in a dense complex urban environment and, in contrast, you located "Park Life" in a mono-functional space. An interesting element of "Sculpt Me Point" is that it combines the participatory character of public art aimed at communities with *Do it Yourself* trends of the entertainment and show business industry and, at the same time, it is related with the tradition of commemorative monumental sculpture. It is therefore a conglomeration of intentions that fits well with the formal non-definition of the result. It can be seen as a celebratory monument that pays homage to the practices of the users of the city, to the appropriations of public space, to vandalism, to low intensity terrorism or to the rejection of the functions programmed by urban planners. And here there is another possible difference: between the "sports" activities of "Park Life", although all have symbolic and ritualistic contents within the pseudo-primitivist framework where they take place, there are none that involves a kind of manipulation of matter with formal intentions equivalent to the traditional notion of art. Don't hunting and gathering, cooking, brewing spirits, making fire... drawing or carving, in contrast, form part of this repertoire of basic activities?

MG: It may well be that what is closest to "Sculpt Me Point" is "Forever Bau Haus", where the user plays to configure, un-configure, and maintain a house made of pieces of different materials. This can eventually be carved or painted, or drawn on it. The difference with "Sculpt Me Point" is that it is a consumable and does not refer to everyday life. It is however a reference to DIY and to the "user-generated content" platforms. A concept I've worked with on some of my projects, such as "Food Facility", or objects such as *Do Frame, Scratch Lamp*, or the stores *Walk in Progress* of Camper, and the *Paint Parties* of Desigual. The context of "Sculpt Me Point" was the Urban Play design festival, which was located in the city of Amsterdam, after 10 weeks in front of the Lloyd Hotel. The most important intervention you could see in "Sculpt Me Point" was that someone sculpted a ladder in order to go up the cube; in other words, he turned the possible "sculpture" into an architectonic element, a belvedere, displacing it in this way from the symbolic to the functional ambit.

OR: In this exhibition you have for the first time brought together all the elements of "Park Life" and thus in principle you bring this work to an end. Why have you ended it when you had planned to reach one hundred elements? Is it the end of a phase? You say that thematic environments have a very immediate obsolescence and that in seven years they have lost their attraction. Do you think that "Park Life" is a project for a specific historical moment? Don't the new attitudes and new values that have emerged or are emerging with the crisis give a new dimension to the project?

MG: Yes, I think that what you can do now will follow some already established parameters. It is the same as with the ambit of "Food Design"; it will only make sense to continue when there is a context that makes it possible to truly create some or all of the pieces such as the *I-cakes*, the *Neutrum Drink*, the *Geometric Pommies*, the *Tapes Pasta*, or new ones.

Within the project of "Park Life" there is a set of intrinsic concepts that I might follow, such as mass production in museum environments, in this case clearly with the theme of hydromel or buckwheat honey, and can lead to a business plan if it is correctly developed and in the right context. Also, the subject, which I already approached with the project "MTKS-3", of recreational cooking is interesting and could be further developed, depending on context, based on the *Kitchen Buildings*. In other words, I think that the foundations have been laid and I sense new projects.

OR: In fact, the idea of the production within the museum was already in *Spamt Karaoke*, a piece that forms part of the collection of the Centre d'Art La Panera and with which Hydromel Factory, element number 13 of "Park Life" created for this exhibition, establishes a direct relationship. However, the first case was based on a technically very simple manual procedure, the preparation of "spamt", where the expertise lay only in acquiring the speed necessary to be able to synchronise the movements of the user with those demanded by the "machine". The production of hydromel is, in contrast, a long complex process which requires different actions and the use of different instruments over a period of time of between 35 and 40 days. Although the production of "spamt" is an activity that fits the characteristics of the visit to an art centre, being an active user of *Hydromel Factory* demands an unusual degree of commitment in the cultural activities of this kind. The object, as often happens in your creations, invites change of habits, in this case to a patient, attentive and more conscious attitude in relation to artistic practices. Does the change of pace made clear if we compare *Spamt Karaoke* with *Hydromel Factory* and the new user profile that emerges form part of the reflection on the limits of the artistic institutions to which, on different occasions, you have referred with the programmatic aim "it is necessary to redesign the world of art"?

MG: Yes, often the world of art seems too withdrawn in itself. In *Spamt Karaoke* (one of which is in La Panera art collection) the visitor changes roles, as he/she becomes an active participant when using the karaoke, and in being "author" at the moment of making a "spamt" later eaten by another visitor. In other words, he or she plays all the roles found in an exhibition, that of author, visitor and participant. In the case of *Hydromel Factory* it is different. I think that while *Spamt* is like a *CtoC* ("consumer to consumer"), *Hydromel Factory* is more a *BtoB* ("business to business"). The museum has a machine that is a piece of art, but that constantly produces, in this case bottles of hydromel, which can be sold, ambivalently, as alcohol (honey wine) or as a piece of art ("numbered bottle made at the Centre d'Art la Panera within the exhibition "Park Life", for Martí Guixé's *Hydromel Factory #013*). In this case the art centre acts as a tax haven, or port area, as if it were Andorra or Gibraltar, with its own rules, outside the logic of the rules that regulate production and consumption, and therefore have an effect on the character of withdrawal and introversion of these centres. In this sense, I see quite a great potential, of course, from an academic point of view of the world of art; it can be seen as an instrumentalisation of itself, but in itself this possibility of using the museum as a duty free zone is already an artistic form.

OR: In *Hydromel Factory* there is, in principle, a task of rationalisation of the process and of optimization of the instruments for the artisanal preparation of hydromel. Although you have widely studied the methods and work habits of beekeepers and producers of hydromel, the objective has not been to introduce,

from design, improvements in their work environment, or in the final product. There is no benefit from your product for the "real" producers of hydromel, or for the gastronomic quality of the product. The "production of value" is in the institutional displacement that, on the one hand, enhances the potential of the art centre making it a duty free area of production and marketing and, on the other, you invest a commercial product with aural qualities. The hydromel acquired in the art centre not only is part of an artistic project and "creative" product, but also its poetic connotations are multiplied. At the end of the cycle, the hydromel resumes the status of sacred drink without having resorted to any form of pastiche of mythical, literary or historicist references. The "sacralization" has been achieved from within the system itself. The hydromel, therefore, has acted as a mediator between different fields of social life constructing relations and connecting agents until then distanced from each other in an unpredictable social network. It is from the study of the creation and maintenance of these complex networks that you reach a better understanding of the uniqueness of your work. And in this respect it is significant that, often, whether talking about gastronomies, handicrafts, or like now, art, you refer to the problem of "withdrawal" of these worlds. Could we say that the "deployment" is the main orientation of your work?

MG: Yes, you often see attitudes or small details that are exclusive of a guild, or of an ideology, or of a form of life, and can be easily extrapolated to other contexts where directly or through an adaptation they can be very useful, as in this case, to create new perceptions of products, or new values. In many of the cases the discipline itself delimits these practices. This cross over is possible only with the help of collaborators and consultants, who allow you to delve more deeply maintaining, at the same time, a more holistic vision. I understand withdrawal for its value of conserving, of maintaining purity and some established values. However, in my case, when I try to discover new fields of work, and inquire into the functioning of new social, economic or political mechanisms, I must open myself to understand and verify.

OR: What does this mean at an organisational level? In contrast to many designers and architects, even with a number of commissions much lower than yours, you have never consolidated a stable group of collaborators of more than three or four people, and so you are closer to the organisational structures of work in artistic projects. In contrast, your external team of collaborators and, above all, of "interesting contacts", is very wide and diverse. How do you manage this micro-studio structure with a very strict personal control over all the projects and, at the same time, a system of external ramifications that allow you to find, at all times, the right person for each need? What would be the ideal organisational structure of a studio adapted to contemporary needs? How would you design the studio of a current cultural producer?

MG: Basically, it can be managed with a very small team because the work is not undertaken formally but conceptually, which means that the result is always conceptual, although with a tangible form. But this form is not very relevant for explaining the product. This makes it possible to easily delegate everything involved in dealing with the material and formal detail. Moreover, the detail delimits the product geographically and socially when, in contrast, the ideal is for a project to adopt, depending on the cultural context, different forms or formal finishes. I have always thought that the material I work with as a designer is information, and not the wood, or plastic, or metal. I think that the best team format is that of cinema, a team put together for a project which is temporary and that must carry out a complex task, within record time, and with great responsibility. I now have a set of collaborators I feel very comfortable with, some close by and others delocalized, of course. There is no problem working in different countries or continents. As I undertake projects I discover new possibilities.

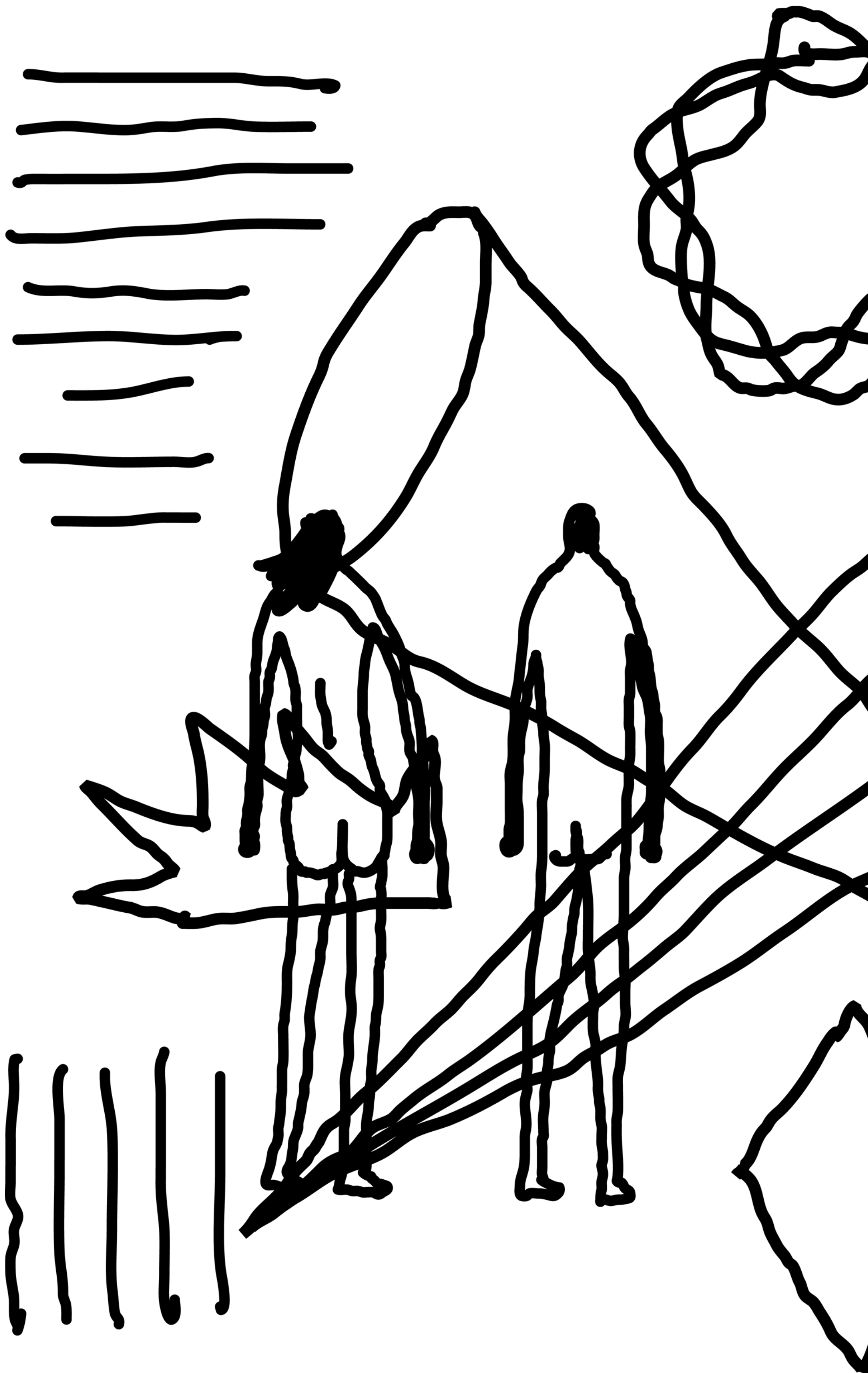
The studio, the physical space in carrer Entença no. 1 in Barcelona, is only a place of representation. I need it for security; apart from that, it has no use.

Then the ideal organisational structure would be a network of external collaborators of high quality, a vision and long term objectives, and two or three internal collaborators supporting the basic functions of the studio, and giving coherence to the work.

The studio of a cultural producer? I would divide it between three cities, and a minimum of two continents, and I would work with de-contextualised consultants. In other words, I would take the best but always to advise in disciplines in which they are not specialists, and which they know from outside. I think this is how you can better work the hidden structures and identify the inertias that impede change. This is how, from the studio, you can envisage and analyse to reach a more real perception of the contemporary world.

OR: Although the elements of "Park Life" can, as you say, be adapted to different situations, in the case of Bee Roaming you have started from a very specific assertion of an ultra-local phenomenon as is the buckwheat crop in the area of La Garrotxa, a practice more linked to preserving the image fixed by the tradition of landscape painting than to an agro-food function. With the buckwheat honey you develop the image of an edible material, in the same way as with the private growing of apple trees from the cuttings of the trees in Karl Marx Allee in Berlin you expect to obtain "edible ideology", some apples without any notable gastronomic quality but that in contrast incorporate, because of their origin, a major part of contemporary social history. When you talk of adaptability do you mean, for example, that in the case of Bee Roaming being developed outside Olot it would be necessary to find a flower to produce an analogous effect within a new cultural context?

MG: *Park Life #014 Bee Roaming* is adapted to Olot, but it could be any other place, and it would not have to be a special flower. In fact at the Espai Zero 1 I place "Park Life" within a situation, as you say ultra-local, so as to obtain more levels of interpretation, more density in the piece. On the one hand, the transhumance of bees, which in fact is a more or less habitual practice among beekeepers, in the format of a beehive suitcase, which is the functionalisation provided by *#014*. On the other, in the context of Olot I thought it was interesting to make clear the theme of buckwheat, which I know about from a lunch in the restaurant Les Cols, where I was served buckwheat bread. On that occasion, the group of people from Olot who had invited me commented on the fact that landscape painters ask the peasants to plant fields of buckwheat to be able to paint them. True or not, I am quite interested in the idea of visual manipulation of the agricultural landscape to obtain real artistic models, to afterwards represent them. It is a practice so unconsciously commercial that it allows me to have the best communications campaign for buckwheat honey!



(models of dispersal: notes on the *tabloid* project/ gean moreno/ ernesto oroza)

element, remains exceptional but within a very familiar and schematic structure. It can't obviate the defining qualities of the typology it has invaded. One imagines that a tabloid that is all patterns or that is highly idiosyncratic in some

run-of-the-mill tabloid article with its geometry of columns and requisite accompanying photos, we spoke of a running surface of plywood sheets that was covering certain sections of Miami in the wake of a massive wave of home foreclosures. Banks

seal empty houses with plywood sheets over the doors and windows to keep squatters, junkies and thieves out. Many people in Quebec associated, strangely to our ears, the rock pattern produced by Haitian immigrants (as a microscopic version) to the multiplying plywood plane. One, the rock pattern, we thought, was an effort to claim at the level of the home

and the family, and by deploying a decorative structure, space for a particular value system. The other, the plywood sheets, we thought as potentially endless urban wallpaper that spoke of the massive force of an economic crisis. In fact, we propose in the text that the knots and the grain of the plywood added up to the repeating "decorative" pattern of a catastrophe that no one could figure out how to avert. The goal in bringing these two very different patterns (and worlds) together was to highlight different patterns of expansion--patterns that, in their forceful multiplication, in the ineluctable character that their growth assumed, served as metaphors for the way we imagined our tabloid--and tabloids in general--spreading through the city.

There is a virtual or abstract plane, after all, on which the 15,000 modules distributed in Quebec City can be collected. On it, they produce an enormous alien surface

other way always risks becoming the sort of graphic project that is produced for the protected space of galleries and museums--its meaning and autonomy upheld at the expense of the social function and mobility of the typology it appropriates. Something vital, the way the tabloid moves through the city, simultaneously unseen and ubiquitous, organically woven into the urban flows, would be irrevocably lost from such an iteration of the tabloid. Its condition as a vector of information, as a familiar structure, as a natural inhabitant of an urban ecology, as an artifact that is embedded within the larger economic forces of the city--in short, all that is interesting about the tabloid--would be smeared out of the picture or diluted to a sad and unimportant state.

In the text that accompanied the pattern inserted in the Quebec City weekly, which sought to mimic (in structure, if not in content) any

of tangled trajectories.

There is, finally, an imaginable theoretical plane, a narrative space, on which the final consumption and use of the pattern can be documented. One imagines the Little Haiti rocks, having migrated north, further north that is, used as wallpaper in a record store, in a dorm, in the bathroom of a bar; or used as a doile or as a book cover. As a picture frame. The pattern can be used to wrap beer bottles outside the bodegas where it is illegal to loiter and drink. It can be employed to cover and replace dislikable or outdated posters, to run over bare city walls, and to wrap around telephone

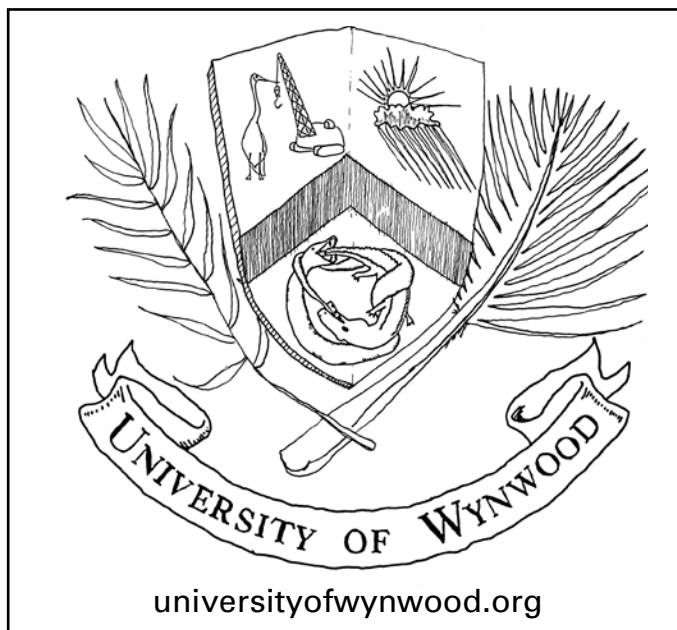
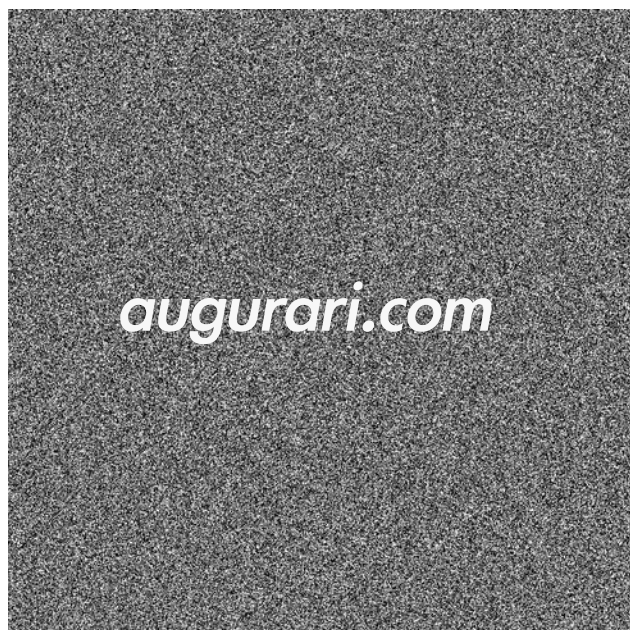
poles lined with unpalatable concert flyers and record release party announcements. It can be used as a decorative layer over the glass of all the empty storefronts in a faltering mall. It would certainly brighten the mood of the place. It can cover the plywood sheets that seal homes that have been foreclosed on or the rotting wooden fences around abandoned construction sites. It can be used by some old ladies to dye their gray hair.

Once the information vectors of Quebec City were contaminated, the expansion of the Little Haiti rock pattern threatened to be endless, to dissolve into the city.

www.thetabloid.org



that threatens to blanket the entire city. Like the snow that covers its streets every winter, but climbing the city's vertical surfaces instead. There is also a map--perhaps not yet drawn by real all the same--of the truck routes through which *VOIR* is delivered. There is a potential drawing that documents the distribution points where the stacks of weeklies are dropped off. It would be made up of the doorways and stoops in front of bars, record shops, bookstores, cafes, stores, fast food restaurants, cultural institutions, and student centers. Maybe it's just a set of coordinates or address numbers. Each of the metal stands and bins in which *VOIR* is kept inside these spaces, in turn, is a node in yet another possible sketch



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