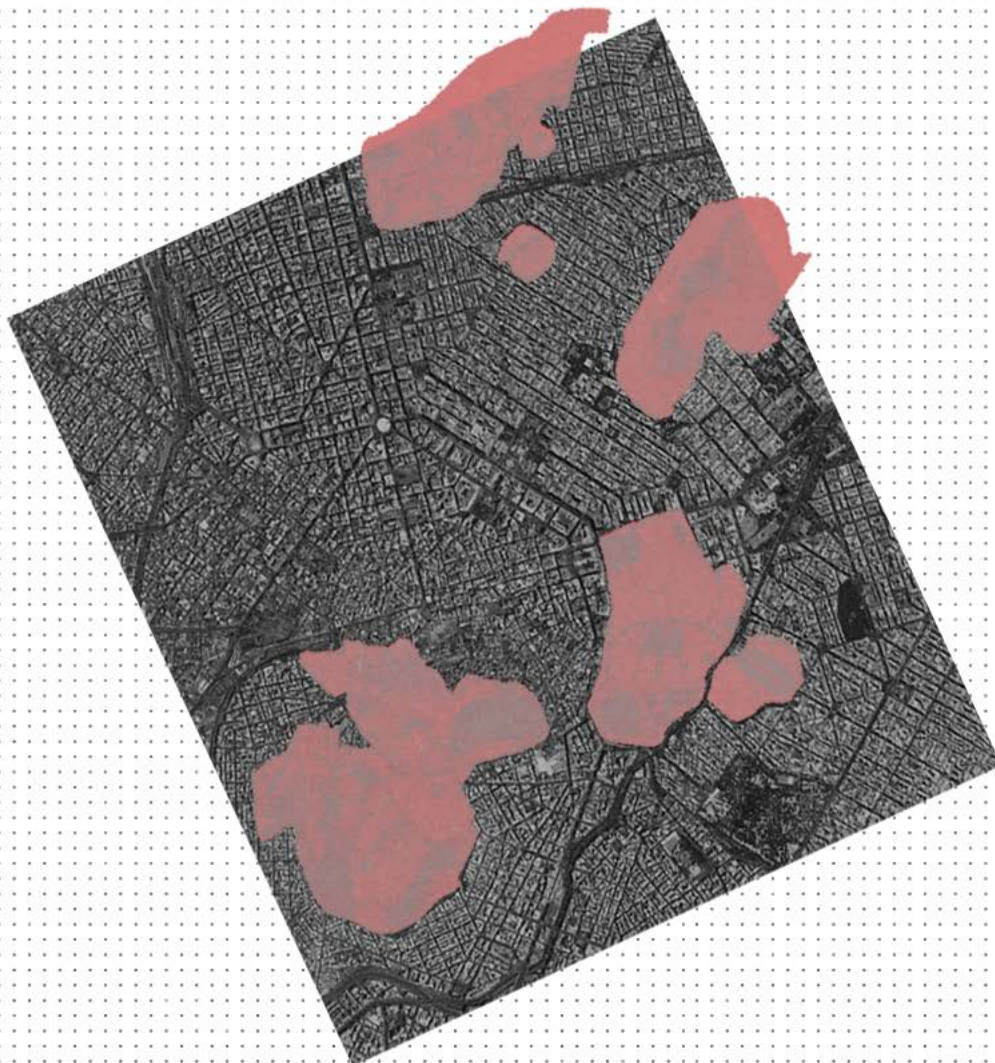


The Hopeful Monster's Hypothesis



A collection of short-stories concerning an urban creation

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A collection of short-stories concerning an urban creation

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Foreword

The biological term *Hopeful Monster* was first introduced by the German geneticist R. Goldschmidt in the middle of the 20th century, and it is referring to the scientist's hypothesis that "major structural transitions can occur rapidly, without a smooth series of intermediate stages". This biological theory on evolutionary transformations proposes the possibility of major mutations during a short period of time, producing *Monsters* whose genetic structure cannot be categorized under any known species. These hypothetical, unconventional creations, even though theoretically impossible to be reproduced, nourish the hopes for successful transformations, new beginnings or an important turning point.

Our thesis adopts this biological assumption willingly, as it is dealing with the genesis of a city which underwent a series of mutations since its recent creation, whose accumulation generated a unique contemporary reality, a reality appalling in the eyes of the many, or the face of an urban *Monster*. The word *Hypothesis* finds as well its place in title, as the procedure adopted for the following written text is in a big percentage based on speculations, assumptions and interpretations of a reality, creating as we like to believe the city's contemporary mythology. And finally *Hopeful*, as the city is intended to be studied the way it actually is, not the way it should or could be, welcoming small fragments of refreshing naivete which can hopefully lead to the construction of a new image for the city. Eventually, our thesis tries to deal with the *Monster* itself, and look for pieces of Poetry inside the procedure of mutations that misshaped it.

The text is composed by a series of autonomous *short-stories* which should be seen as independent fragments of thoughts or obsessions, carefully ordered according to chronology, in order to create a linear narration. The *short-stories* are organized under eight *Collections* regarding the scale to which they are referring, them distributed in four *Volumes* (I, II, III and IV) according to their thematic. The stories are orchestrated by the presence of a linear, metaphorical narration, the *abstraction*, which generates relations among them and justifies their position in relation to the whole. The *abstraction*, even though it is constructed as a coherent narration, is here fragmented in order to highlight its correspondence to each specific *Volume*, introducing the events that are to follow and colouring the scientific evidence with abstract atmospheres. In addition, the passage from one *Collection* to another is marked by the presence of one non-commented image, corresponding to an artistic interpretation of the main thematic with which it is dealing. The complexity of the chosen structure, reflects the complexity of the city that we are trying to understand, looking for an abstract narration behind the fragmented pieces of evidence.

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A City founded and re-founded upon fears and desires as all other cities, decided once upon a time to reconstruct its identity, carrying its faded memories towards a suspended present. This process lasted for years, or it will probably never be completed, while the motion it provoked became the impulse for a constant state of mutation of the City's body, infinitely absorbing, rejecting, expanding or contracting its own structure. This internal pursuit was initiated with the construction of numerous protecting Shells around the City's most precious of possessions, enclosing their present, past and future in a desperate act of maintaining their memory, a Faustian arrangement dealing ignorance in return to an eternally misleading memory and the illusion that the image of this City can stay frozen and intact, voiceless and harmless inside its custom-built glass Shells. Those Shells were destined to remain motionless amidst torturing storms of changes and geologic re-arrangements, storms which came strong and left stronger, and re-arrangements of the soil defining the City from its surface down to its soul. Perhaps, the City's memories may not be found elsewhere but in the geological layers of its structure, the inhabitant's footprints leaving traces along the past, their eyes wandering inside the present, and their mind collecting and ordering the City's unfulfilled desires and fears.



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Blueprints

The Capital of Greece has been chosen! After its recognition as an autonomous country and detachment from the Ottoman empire in 1828, Athens, the symbol of Greek ancient history, was named capital in 1834. At the time of its creation the city counted barely 4'000 inhabitants, and was in a great percentage destroyed because of the war for Independence¹. A thick layer of ruins laying one on top of the other traced the history of the city, from ancient times to recent past, while the ancient monuments, lacking of a clear structure, were entangled with the ruins of the Ottoman urban fabric, concealing an overall perception of the remains of the Greek ancient civilization. In this context, the newly nominated king Otto started a campaign to clear the city from what came to be considered as undesired remains, the remnants of Ottoman architectural traces, and invited numerous talented architects coming mostly from central Europe, in order to rebuild the Great Athens in its glory of ancient times. As the architects' interpretation of the re-discovered ancient architectural style was combined with a free poetic interpretation of the Greek ideal of classical perfection, two antithetical strategies concerning the way the city should interact with its ancient inheritance were to be proposed.

The first approach, whose values were appreciated and promoted by the architects Ferdinand Von Quast (1807-1843), Leo Von Klenze (1784-1874) and Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841), was a picturesque vision according to which the new town should be built in direct confrontation with the antiquities and without necessarily following a clear overall plan, a vision directly inspired by ancient urban schemes, producing a relation of interdependence between the ancient city structure and the new fragments of the town. In that sense, Von Quast wondered in an article for the German journal *Museum*, "would such a town, however, be justified in bearing the name of Athens? This name is irrevocably linked with the Acropolis. Only at Acropolis does the name of Athens have the resonance we all desire." He then argues that the town should be located in the hilly area around the Acropolis: 'How beautifully the districts are grouped on the different hills, how all life is concentrated to the valleys! The king could return to the old citadel of Kekrops and build his house close to that of Erechtheus... The houses then climb the hillside in painterly groups, merging with the greenery, in terraces up and over the hills, with long rows of villas, painterly situated in gardens, continuing as far as the neighbouring port'².

The second approach, supported by the architects Stamatios Kleanthes (1802-1862) and Eduard Schaubert (1804-1860), promoted a Greek revival using a European vocabulary instead, with the application of various monu-

1. "At the end of the War of Independence only 80 houses of approximately 1200 which had made up the old town remained with their roof intact; The Athens settlement was virtually demolished". Papageorgiou - Venetas, Alexander. *Athens, the ancient heritage and the historic cityscape in a modern metropolis*. p. 8

2. Von Quast, Ferdinand in the journal *Museum*, "Mittheilungen über alt-und neu-Athen: neubau der Stadt Athen und des Königlichen Schlosses auf seiner Burg", 1834. Quote from Papageorgiou - Venetas, Alexander. *Athens, the ancient heritage and the historic cityscape in a modern metropolis*. p. 12

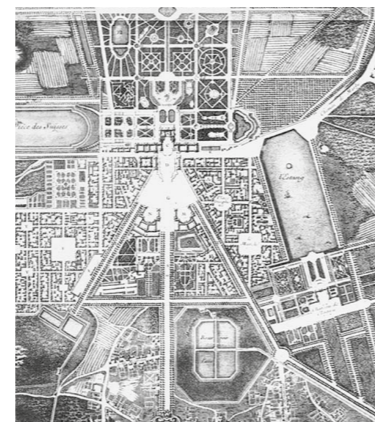
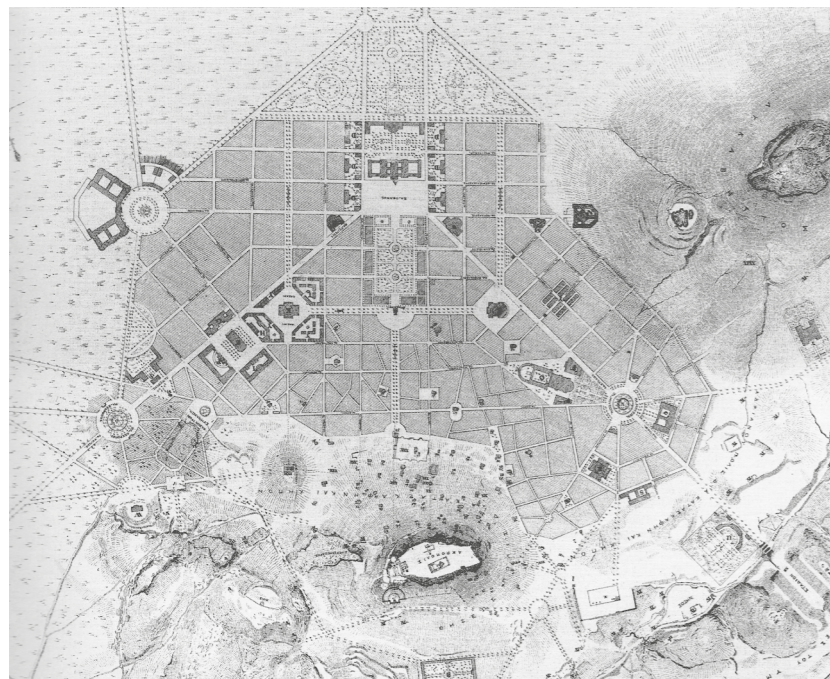


fig.1 Stuart James and Revett Nicholas, *The Acropolis*, "The Antiquities of Athens".

fig.2 Schaubert and Kleanthes, *Proposal for the new Athens*, 1833.

fig.3 Plan of Versailles, with the royal residence at the centre of the axes.



mental axes connecting the new town to its ancient monuments. This vision, shared as well by king Otto, allowed the two architects (both former students of Schinkel) to start building their ambitious form of the city, in 1833. The new image of Athens had, on the plans, all the characteristics of a western capital combined to the volition of incorporating and protecting the ancient remains, clearing the traces of the Ottoman state and enclosing the area of the Acropolis in order to allow excavations. The project proposed to build a new city on the northern side of the old town, employing the scheme of a *trident*, a gesture often present in the European tradition of city planning, defining monumental perspective views within an urban fabric composed by southern typologies and a multiplicity of squares for gathering, reinterpreting the model of the ancient *Agora*. The *trident* was never completely realised, leaving however traces of its eastern diagonal, planned to connect the royal residence to the Panathenaic stadium, and its northern one leading from the Acropolis to an imposing royal garden. The tracing of the western axis was ceased before its completion, but was meant to reach the ancient road leading to Piraeus and the Mediterranean sea, making a strong link between the capital and its territorial scale.

This vision was supposed to be enriched by several public parks and generous green areas, as well as a park traversing the ruins of the antiquity, none of which was materialized. Its composition however, could be considered as the aspiration of an early garden city, inspired by models like Versailles or Karlsruhe, where the royal residence was to be placed in the centre of a green system. The main idea of this “garden city” would be to obtain intense relations with the antic monuments, making them active parts of the system and therefore, directly connecting the Acropolis to the royal palace through the central monumental axis. However, this clear vision of a “green” Athens full of interest for archaeology, was too idealistic for the unstable political, social and economic situation of the newly formed country, and received a great deal of criticism against its tactics, starting from the numerous expropriations necessary in order for the plan to be realised and the positioning of the royal palace in the centre of the urban system.

A second phase of the project would thus commence in 1834, leaded by the architect Leo Von Klenze who was invited to revise and reinterpret the initial project in order to adjust it to the political and financial reality of the capital. The architect however, had a completely different vision from that of Kleanthes and Schaubert concerning the urban strategy for Athens. He claimed that the urban setting on classical ground should follow the free composition of the ancient layout, adopting to a vision much closer to that of Von Quast or Schinkel, liberated from the imposed and imposing previous project. Therefore, Von Klenze proposed a compromise between his ideas and the traces of the previous project's *trident* which were already materialised.

Klenze's belief in picturesque led him to make some considerable changes to the plan he received, like the re-localisation of the royal palace, previously planned at the top of the *trident*, to the eastern part of the city where it would directly be confronted to ancient monuments, acting as a new element in a composition of the Athenian *objets trouvés*. The principles which Klenze tried to develop in his urban planning had the potential to influence the future development of the city. While the first project was defined by its axis and its flows, the second one started to reveal the capacity of architecture to be part of a free composition of volumes, where the tensions between the elements would be more important than any formal logic of monumental perspective.

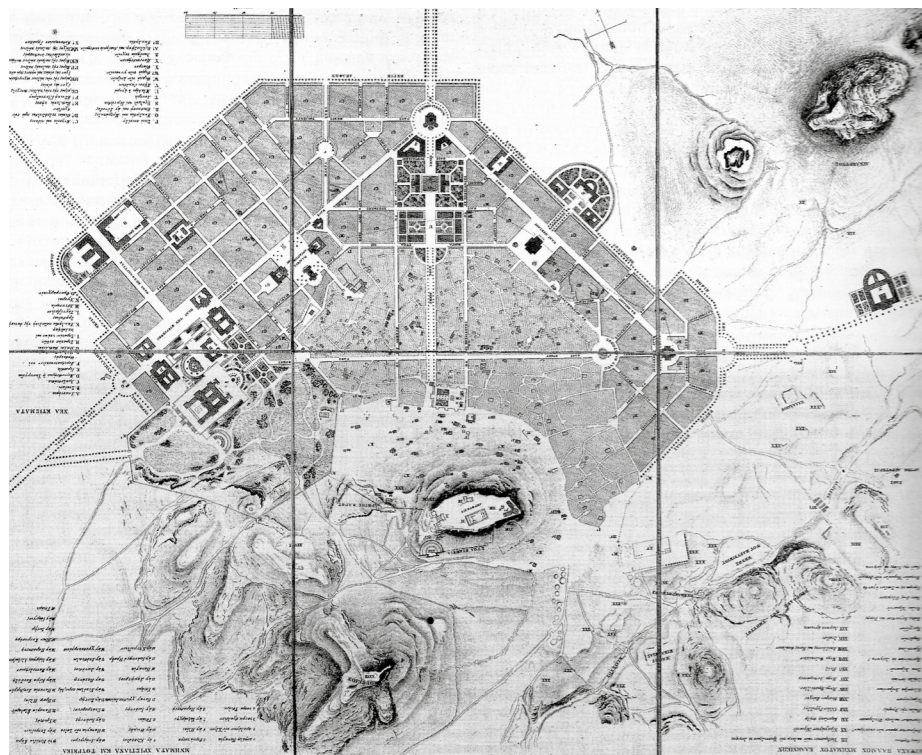
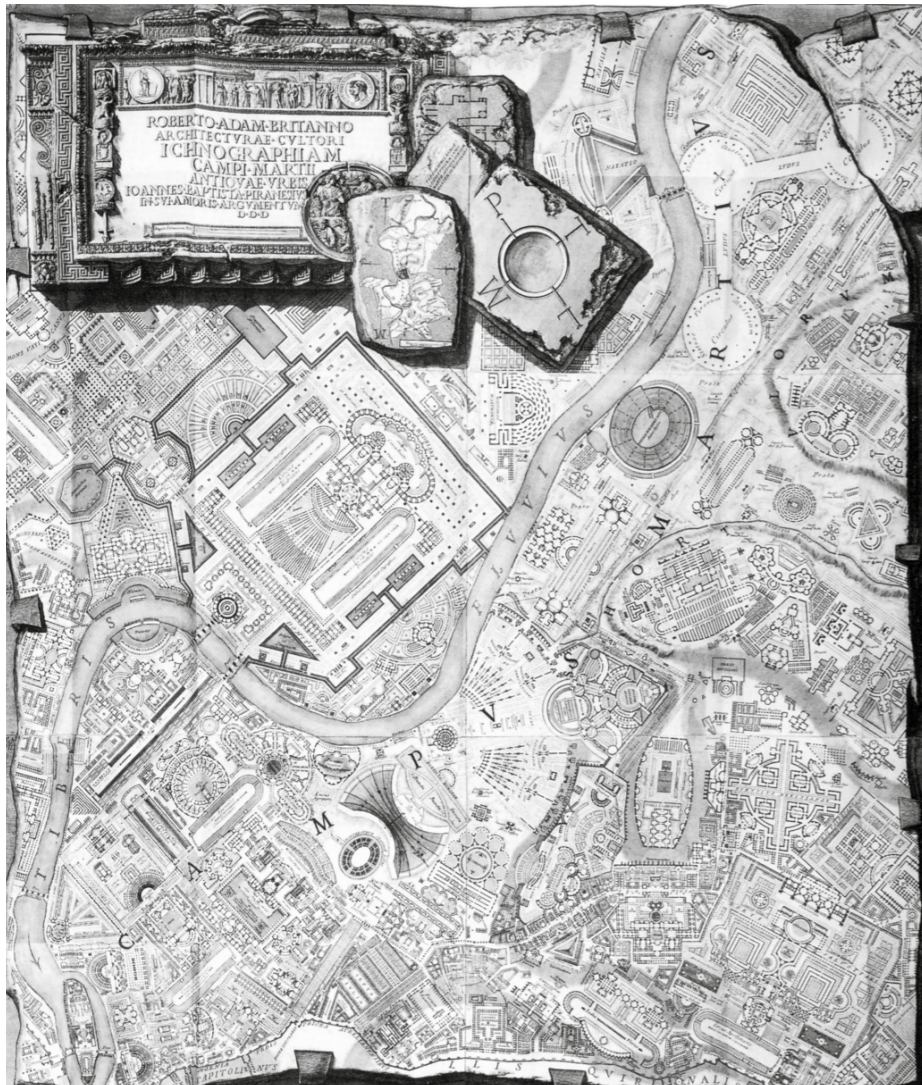


fig.4 View from Royal palace Athens designed as an autonomous monument confronting itself to the hilly topography and the ruins.

fig.5 von Klenze Leo, revision of the plan for Athens, 1833. Here, the Royal palace is already located on the eastern axis of the triangle, its original position on top of the *tridente* being taken by a church, directly in relation to the Acropolis.



An Ideal City

In 1824, Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841) painted the *Blick in Griechenland Blüte*, representing an ideal vision of Athens¹. The background of the panorama represented in the painting, is interrupted by what seems to be the archaeological site of the Acropolis, where the whole process of construction is precisely represented, from the atelier of sculpture to the placing of the marble blocks of the *frise*, underlining the fundamental importance of construction and details in the ancient Greek architectural vision. The representation of the Parthenon as a construction site could be perceived as the symbolic reconstruction of a harmonious community for the new Athens, following the liberation from the Ottoman occupation². Indeed, this interpretation of the painting was further reinforced by Schinkel, as on the left part of the frame the Greek army is depicted approaching the Acropolis, symbolizing the liberation of the ancient monuments. The viewer is thus confronted to a palimpsest of different time periods, and Schinkel's interpretation of the Parthenon, depicted not as the melancholic representation of its ruins, but as a fresh and dynamic representation of its reconstruction.

What seems like a simple view of the ancient city on a first sight, comes to be a composition of three different periods; the antic city and its monuments, the revolted present (1824) and the fantastic Athens, shining after its reconstruction. The painting is sheltering at the same time a memory of the greatness of the antiquity and a desire to rebuild the city. The background of the painting is not recognisable as the city of Athens of that period, but rather as a series of metaphorical objects forming the Greek Ideal as inspired by Schinkel. Without any exclusion of sizes or types, the architect has painted his own referential world, including buildings of his master Friedrich Gilly, Greek monuments destroyed during the Ottoman empire and artefacts inspired by the drawings of James Stuart and Nicholas Revett in *The Antiquities of Athens*. The city is thus composed by a collage of different and chronologically distant elements, juxtaposed without a clear planification or programmatic organisation, as if only the condition of being "built", was sufficient to structure the city.

This way of representing Athens, abstracting the urban fabric in order to obtain a different way of understanding the city, reminds of an Italian ideology developed between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, the *Instauratio Urbis*, a conceptual series of projects attempting to restore the image of the ancient city. Rather than just an antiquarian survey, as were the earlier *Mirabilia*, the *Instauratio Urbis* tried to decipher and interpret the image of Rome (in the case of Schinkel, Athens) based on its ruins, in the pursuit of a new urban

1. Schinkel had never been to Greece. He composed this painting through other existing paintings and images, and his imaginary ideal vision of what the city of Athens looked like.

2. Interpretation of the painting by Papageorgiou-Venetas, Alexander in his book *Hauptstadt Athen*, p. 116-117



fig.1 Piranesi Giovanni Battista, *Iconographia Campus Martius*, 1762.

fig.2 Piranesi Giovanni Battista, *Scenographia Campi Martii*, 1762.

fig.3 Stillman William James, *The Acropolis of Athens* (1870), plate carbon print. The monuments stand as autonomous objects, like the monuments projected by Piranesi.



fig.4 Copy of the *Blick in Griechenlands Blüte*, August Wilhelm Julius Ahlborn interpreting a painting of Karl Friedrich Schinkel, 1836. The original painting, by Karl Friedrich Schinkel has been lost during the second World War.

fig.5 From William James Stillman, *The Acropolis of Athens* (1870), plate carbon print. Inspiration for Schinkel in order to project a mental image of Athens.

Athen(s)

form. This research on the constitutive elements of Rome brought to light a different way of planning the city, the liberation of any rational overall plan. Indeed, the map of this “*instalment of the city*”, became quasi archaeological representations of its monuments and topography, that allowed to project the liberation of the ancient ruins from the invasive axis and the urban fabric.

In the *Ichonographia Campus Martius*, Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) used this process to experiment a saturated juxtaposition of antiquities. Ruins are no longer represented as neither the reminiscence of the past world, nor a melancholy for the greatness of the ancient civilisation, but instead as free-floating forms, acting as the conceptual guides for the creation of a new city which would be liberated from any clear overall planning. The project is constituted of two fundamental principles, firstly that the form of the city is not given by axis, geometries and streets, on the contrary the city is formed by pure architectural artefacts acting as its *datum*, whose chaotic juxtaposition creates a resulting exterior public space, completely opposed to the axial configuration of flows of the 16th century, and secondly, that the city (Campo Marzio) is not composed by a specific typology, but rather by unclassifiable constructions creating an overall abstract image of urbanity. In order for the image to be deciphered, the project has to be examined beyond typological considerations, investigating the constitutive elements of the depicted constructions and looking for the primary artefact composing the image of Rome, in this case the wall². The city is thus not be understood by classic architectural vocabulary, streets and typologies, but instead, as a series of spaces enclosed by walls.

In the *Scenographia Campi Martii*, an image preceding the *Ichonographia Campus Martius*, Piranesi directly claims a necessary *tabula rasa* of the existing fabric in order to comprehend the artefacts composing the very essence of the city. Whereas Rome had to imagine an impossible and controversial *tabula rasa* in order to reflect upon the urban fabric and its relation with the past, Athens had almost a complete freedom to plan a city structured by a free disposition of ancient and contemporary monuments³. The painting of Schinkel could thus be seen as an ideal view of a city without a clear form, similar to the one represented in *Ichonographia Campus Martius*, whose chaotic organisation researches the affirmation of its fundamental *datum*, attempting to represent the city as a laboratory of infinite solutions, a liberated collage of architectural constructions.

2. Pier Vittorio Aureli and Martino Tattara, developed this idea with their project *field of walls* for the Venice Biennale of 2012, explaining how “*The politics embedded in Piranesi’s etchings are revealed to be not a function of forms but of walls and as such provide a guide for contemporary architecture to reconsider the power relations it deploys, wittingly or not.*”

Applying the same strategy in order to find the fundamental artefact of Athens, we could define that the two fundamental elements of the city’s genetic would be the walls and the columns, present in the archetype of the temple.

3. This almost complete freedom was given by the fact that the majority of the urban fabric was destroyed during the revolution, giving the possibility to rethink the city from start. But because the ruins of the ancient were conserved the *tabula rasa* is partial.

The Captive and the Freeman

The moment that *Adam and Eve* crossed the thick walls enclosing their garden and left behind them the heavy door of Paradise, they should have expected to find themselves in an indoor space. Surprisingly, when the door was opened, it turned out leading to an external space, wild and infinite. As they turned their heads to take one last glimpse of the Holly Garden they used to enjoy, they perceived the presence of enormous walls, indicating that the paradise is a walled exterior or an open-air finite space¹. The garden laid its restraining, artificial walls in the landscape of the infinite and organic nature, while inside the walls the garden was a finite and artificial microcosm detached from its exterior as an autonomous island. A paradoxical image is thus created, where the garden -or the walls enclosing it- conditions the landscape surrounding it, while simultaneously excluding it by means of its hermetic surrounding walls.

The belief for a terrestrial paradise inspired a new architectural form during the middle ages, which adopted the scheme of the Holly Garden as its archetype². Under the name of *Hortus Conclusus*, literally enclosed garden, this new type was conceived based on the paradox of the creation of a completely defined landscape, maintaining all its complexity but excluding its infinity simultaneously, being internal and external at once. In contrary to the Garden of Eden, the *Hortus Conclusus* is surrounded by a built environment erasing completely the notion of horizon into the perception of townscape. This series of small *paradises* of unlimited forms and appearances gives free rein to the expression of their creators³, generating an archipelago of autonomous microcosms⁴ which could potentially be seen as independent, autonomous islands, floating in the sea of an unstructured urban fabric.

During the first half of the 20th century, a radical modernisation of the city of Athens took place including the implementation of new infrastructures and facilities in order to host the various immigration flows⁵. Meanwhile, a campaign was initiated proposing the reforestation of the hills of the Athenian valley in order to become public gardens, open and accessible to the inhabitants of the city. The result of this initiative was the declaration of nine areas (including the archaeological sites) as protected and excluded from any future development of the urban texture⁶. During the following years, the city of Athens experienced an exponential growth without a clear overall plan, giving the image of a wilderness extending in the territory. The only parts of the city centre able to resist to this expansion were the protected parks and archaeological areas, destined to remain motionless and surrounded by the construction

1. As an illustration to this metaphor we could refer to the engraving *Topographia Paradisi Terrestris* by Athanasius Kircher, 1675.

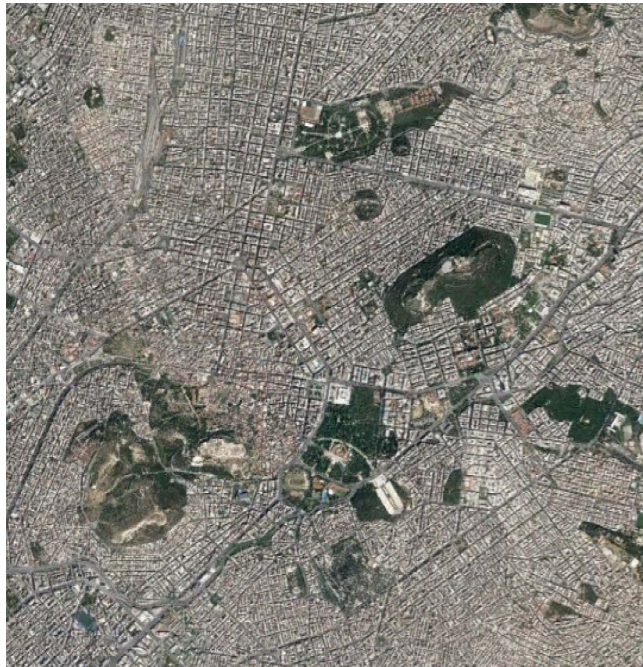
2. “*According to some of the descriptions, especially in the Old Testament, there have been some hypotheses searching for the exact geographical location of the Terrestrial Paradise or Garden of Eden. Four rivers have been directly addressed as the elements of the Garden of Eden: Tigris (Dijah), Euphrates (Al-Furat), Gihon (Karun) and Pishon (Book of Genesis)*”. Khosravi Hamed, “Paradise” in *The City as a Project*.

3. In the painting from the renacimiento *The garden of love*, The paradise became a place where the men is free of every dogma that the city and the power imposes. This external room acts as an autonomous island, a paradise.

4. From Ancient Greek *μικρός* (small) and *κόσμος* (world), Human nature as representative of the wider universe.

5. In 1921, the city of Athens has seen its population augmented by seven (from 12300 inhabitant in 1900 to 71800 in 1921).The main reason of this growth has been the population exchanges with Turkey after the Greco-Turkish War (1919–22).

6. The Mont *Lycabettus*, The *hill of the nymphs*, The *Areopagus* hill, The *hill of Acropolis*, The *Filopappos* hill, The *Pnyx* hill, The *Strefi* hill, The *Royal garden*, The *hill of Kallimarmaro*.



sites defining and developing the city. The limits of the non-constructible areas as defined by the laws, would be soon clearly revealed as enclosed into large walls materialised by the urban fabric itself, reminding the duality between the finiteness of the protected Holly Garden with the infiniteness of the savage human condition.

Like the *Hortus Conclusus*, these gardens' paradox was their duty to highlight the cityscape in all its complexity while at the same time excluding it, leading to the generation of a liberated urban fabric which can potentially be seen as a chaotic sea defined by the archipelago of nine floating exceptions. This duality, which was already present in Von Quatz's first proposition for the new Athens in 1830⁷, became clear with the modern development of the city, highlighting the contrast between the savage urban condition and the holly presence of the antiquities. One could say thus, that the captivity of these urban islands provided to Athens the freedom of an infinite growth, without the necessity of an overall planning assuring the possibilities of its development. These urban islands, or the voids on the city's map, will continuously be disconnected and opposed to the infinite growth of Athens, making of them the inhabitants' possible escape exits from the savage condition of the metropolis, or else a possible return to the lost paradise.

7. See the project of the The German architect Alexander Ferdinand Von Quast .

fig.1 Masaccio, *Cacciata dei progenitori dall'Eden*, 1425. The painting stands on the walls of the *Branacci Chapel* in the church of *Santa Maria del Carmine* in Florence

fig.2 Pinelli Bartolomeo, *il Giardino dell'Amore o Hortus con la fontana della giovinezza*.

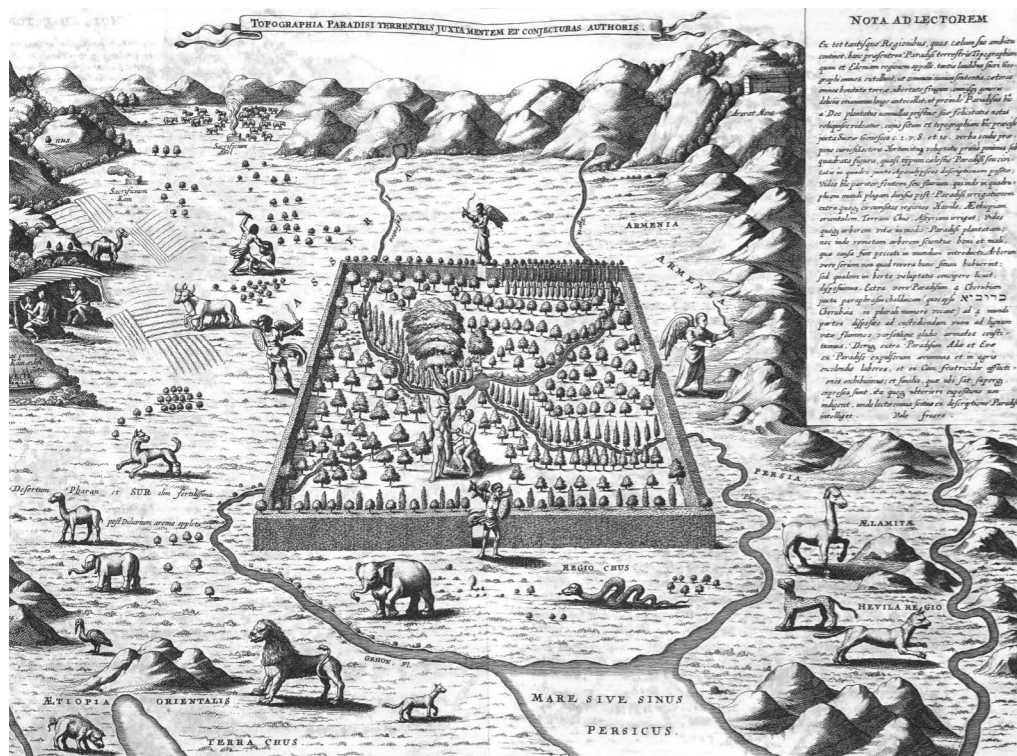
fig.3 Aerial photograph from the center of Athens. This picture shows clearly the protected areas, isolated as islands in the chaotic structure of the urban fabric.§

Meanwhile the creation of the protecting Shells was erasing the covered lands from the evolving map of the City's laboratory, the City itself persisted in its evolution towards a constantly changing body, a body in life, able to cover its face under one thousand different veils in the desperate pursuit of its identity, concealing below each one of them its cellular constitution. The Cells, autonomous as they were created to be, proved to incarnate an unseen desire: the collective dream of isolation and fragmented existence. And so profound did this desire evolve into, that the Cells begun exchanging themselves in the market of misleading desires, against individual obsessions and communal fears.

As the Cells were being sold, and bought, and sold again, new ones were formed to take their place on the shelves of the City's dreams. They were attentively organised according to their size and arranged, one aside of the other, as if parts of a surrealist composition made of intimate passion and collective reproduction. A surrealist composition in progress, whose canvas seemed undergoing a constant growth, gradually and arrogantly demanding more space to occupy. But as the Cells were carefully being reproduced and spread on the territory, the City's desired identity became more and more fragmented and hard to grasp or perceive, the outcome of a process where the Cells were gradually taking over the importance; from the whole to the unit. As, anyhow, without Cells no body can exit. But as impressing and surreal the evolving canvas of the City might have appeared to its inhabitants, it possessed of a fatal flaw, a genetic deformation traversing each and every unit: this trembling mass of desires was never offered the gift of vocabulary and was destined thus, to eternally remain silent and incapable of reciting a Poem.



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Before Graffiti

An essential fragment of a city's body, traversing all the way from the outer skin until the molecules, a wall has eternally been an important word in the vocabulary of civilizations. Its simple morphological characteristics of an artificial inclined plane don't prevent the invention of various possible architectural interpretations. Its primary definition as a dividing element applies since the antiquity to the scale of the city as well as the unit, underlining the notion of property, limits and protection. Human history has been written with, through and on walls. From the Cyclopean and Inca miracles to the contemporary border control apparatuses, from retaining walls to delimiting barriers of private property, human beings have demonstrated creativity when it comes to forms, materials and scale, but the symbolic meaning of a wall has always been charged to be followed by a notion of boundary, restriction or unattainability.

The model of a medieval city is contained inside the perimeter of a wall for the sake of its security from hostile invasion. The wall circling the town is viewed as a defensive mechanism from its inhabitants whereas in the eyes of a potential conqueror as a glorifying apparatus of entrance in the city, whose crossing would symbolise success and the fulfilment of a desire. So abstract is its form and so powerful its simplicity, that a wall can be used to symbolize simultaneously a piece of paradise and a piece of hell. Athanasius Kircher in *Topographia Paradisi Terrestriis* represents Paradise¹ as a walled domain symbolizing the moral separation of the opposing good and evil, and underlining a possible dawn of artificial prosperity within a generally savage environment. The walls mark the crossing to a guarded world of human intervention by means of a simple gesture: one line cutting in two the collective desire for Paradise. This line can be read as the effort that those desiring to enter must omit in order to enjoy the eternal security promised.

This same archetypal element of division is given the role of an intercepting obstacle in the short story collection of Jean-Paul Sartre entitled *Le Mur*, materializing the metaphorical end of a given route, the imprisonment of humans inside their creations and their incapability to flee away. The simple existence of four walls disposed in an ordered manner and the space resulting from them, is used according to its dimensions as a weapon of torture, isolation and imprisonment. A wall thus, might provide security and comfort but cannot ease the mind and the imagination from wandering outside any boundary, in search of that which cannot be seen or reached. A wall goes hand in hand with the imaginary of "the other side".

"First, a strict spatial partitioning: the closing of the town and its outlying districts, a prohibition to leave the town on pain of death, the killing of all stray animals; the division of the town into distinct quarters, each governed by an intendant. Each street is placed under the authority of a syndic, who keeps it under surveillance; if he leaves the street, he will be condemned to death. On the appointed day, everyone is ordered to stay indoors: it is forbidden to leave on pain of death. The syndic himself comes to lock the door of each house from the outside; he takes the key with him and hands it over to the intendant of the quarter; the intendant keeps it until the end of the quarantine. Each family will have made its own provisions; but, for bread and wine, small wooden canals are set up between the street and the interior of the houses, thus allowing each person to receive his ration without communicating with the suppliers and other residents; meat, fish and herbs will be hoisted up into the houses with pulleys and baskets. [...] It is a segmented, immobile, frozen space. Each individual is fixed in his place. And, if he moves, he does so at the risk of his life, contagion or punishment." Foucault Michel, "Le Panoptisme", *Surveiller et Punir*.

1. "Etymologically, the very root of the word can be traced in the Old Persian term *pairi-daëza*. It is combined of two parts: 'pairi' (cf. Sanskrit *piri*, Greek *περι*), which literally means 'around', and 'daëza' as 'pile or heap'. The second part, however, is the origin of the words [dezh] or 'diza', in modern Persian all stand for 'fort' or 'enclosure'." Khosravi Hamed, "Paradise" in *The City as a Project*.

fig.1 Engraving of Kircher Athanasius, *Topographia paradisi Terrestriis*, 1675.

fig.2 The interior of the panopticon prison in Stateville, USA, 20th century.



The wall saw its ambivalent symbolic definition be applied literally and ruthlessly within the city of Berlin in 1961. The decision to separate the city to its East and West components for political reasons, gave birth to one of the most poignant and dramatic architectural gestures of the western civilisation. This decisive line could be perceived as a mere separation of ideologies on the one side, while on the other as an obstacle to the physical or visual escape, with the attempt to satisfy the curiosity of a glimpse above it being as punishable as a crime. The incapability to perceive something creates its myth, and in this way, the two sides of Berlin continued living their parallel mythological lives during almost three decades. The creation of this physical separation of the city in two parts had various architectural consequences. The first one was the creation of an inversely proportional relation of proximity from one part to the other, that is, whereas in the West side a series of wooden *viewing platforms* was built in order to observe the events occurring on the opposite side, in the East, the zone of influence of the wall became progressively larger, absorbing the proximate layers of land and architecture in order for this augmenting thickness to prevent any possible escape to the West. A second consequence was the creation of a proportional desire on both sides, to demonstrate its respective prosperity and superiority, by the creation of landmarks visible from one side to the other, such as towers and radical urbanisation schemes, with the examples of Funkturm and Fernsehturm towers being the most indicative.

In the words of Rem Koolhaas, "*Maybe after the ruins of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and the Roman Forum, it [the Berlin wall] was the most purely beautiful remnant of an urban condition, breathtaking in its persistent doubleness. The same phenomenon offered, over a length of 165 kilometres, radically different meanings, spectacles, interpretations, realities.*"² Koolhaas was fascinated by the power of this seemingly simple gesture of the Berlin Wall throughout his architectural career, starting with the project *Exodus*³, conceived together with Elia Zenghelis. The project contains various parts in its highly radical and metaphorical general form of two parallel walls, within which episodes of life occur. The narrative wants the *voluntary prisoners* inhabiting this metropolitan structure to be offered the condition of freedom by means of their self imprisonment.

The notion of the wall, although most often referred to in a context of proximate scale, can be equally examined at the scale of the territory. In both cases however, its presence has an immediate effect on the events occurring on the one or the other side, may this be the example of the two sides of the Berlin wall or a façade wall separating a dwelling from the street. The presence of the wall creates a physical boarder line like the water surrounding an island, the area of which is finite and clearly defined. This enclosure results to a limited perspective of possibilities of spatial development, as indicates the extreme density and complexity of the urban fabric of medieval walled cities. That is, until a new alternative of expansion might appear in the horizon.

2. Koolhaas, Rem. *S, M, L, XL*. p.222

3. Exodus is a project conceived for a competition launched by Casabella magazine: "La città come ambiente significante", in 1972. The structure proposed by the two architects is designed to be superimposed over the existing fabric of London, creating a dramatic rupture inside the city. (The illustration of this project is to be found p.66 of this book).

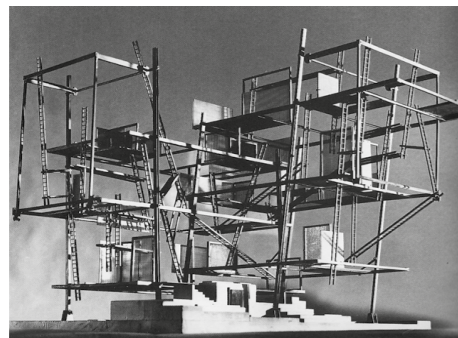
The Story of the Stagnate Waters

The city of Athens is situated in a particular territory, surrounded by hills on three sides and sea on the last one. This imposing topography has acted as a boundary, protecting the city that was developing in its navel from physical exposure and acting as a first outer skin. The ancient city of Athens was contained in a second, artificial skin, a fortification known as the *Themistokleian Wall* (Θεμιστόκλειο Τείχος), the construction of which started under the command of Themistokles between 479 and 478 B.C., and whose presence limited the city's surface during a period of almost a thousand years. During its history the city of Athens saw itself gain and lose its demographic and political importance constantly, until its nomination as the capital of the independent Greek state (1834). Since the beginning of the 20th century, Athens became more and more appealing due to social and political reasons, attracting repeatedly immigration flows and inside emigration movements and absorbing the consequences of the intense rural exodus. This unexpected concentration of people forced the central mass of the city to strengthen itself and to start a rapid and arrogant expansion towards the periphery, like a strong wave that was jettied violently and spread in circles, eventually crushing on the dominant topography of the hills only to return back to the centre more powerful, in order to restart this endless phenomenon. The wave became trapped in the topography like an echo, generating a constant reorganisation and redistribution of space, movement and noise, or else the modern metropolis of Athens.

The demographic expansion of the city during the 20th century¹ had a concrete architectural consequence, the invention of a typology known as *polykatoikia*. This term refers to a type of building located inside the urban fabric of the city and destined to accommodate multiple dwellings using a vertical spatial division, as its etymology literally indicates². The earliest examples of this type make their appearance in the begging of 1930s, and in an architectural context of two or three floor neoclassical constructions³. The few architects of that period, generally well educated and intellectually active, tried to give a solution to the rising numbers of population of the city, while at the same time they were preoccupied by the spatial and social concerns linked to the innovations of technology related to housing. These concerns, tightly linked to the influence of the modern movement already thriving in Europe, were further shaped as a result of the *CIAM* of 1933 held in Athens and directed by Le Corbusier. The precocious experiments of production of the first multi-dwelling examples had a decisive importance for the architectural future of the country and the latter frenetic reproduction of *polykatoikies* as a generic type.

1. The demography of Athens before the population exchange of 1921 was consisted of 473'000 inhabitants, attaining its maximum value in 1971 with a total of 867'023 inhabitants, to drop slightly again as a result of the suburban evolution at the end of the 20th century. In 2011 the city of Athens was consisted of 664'046 inhabitants, included in a total of the urban population of 3'090'508 Athenians.

2. The etymology of the word *polykatoikia* (πολυκατοικία) lies in the synthesis of two words: *poly* (πολύ) and *katoikia* (κατοικία), the first one meaning multiple and the second residence in the Greek modern language.



The years preceding and directly following the second World War found Greece in the unstable political and social position of a civil division, and thus, the organised urban planning of the developing and overcrowded capital did not seem to be a priority for the concerned authorities. Instead, the law of *antiparochi* came to replace any official responsibility by facilitating and promoting the construction in a small scale⁴. The term *antiparochi* describes a legal procedure where a property owner puts his or her terrain in the disposition of an entrepreneur without monetary exchange, in order to obtain a percentage of habitable surface after the end of the construction. This term became extremely common in the Greek vocabulary during the decades of fifties and sixties, and whereas the mechanism of the *antoparochi* functioned excellently for small construction companies and landowners⁵, the result of the buildings produced can be characterized as modern industrialized vernacular, and the city that resulted from their accumulation, as disordered and chaotic in its overall texture. The application of contemporary building techniques using reinforced concrete and the constructive system inspired by Le Corbusier's diagrammatic *maison Dom-ino*, fulfilled the conditions for simple and rapid constructions and together with the demographic explosion taking place, led to a heroic period of reproduction of the *polykatoikia* type and a historic decay of the architectural profession, as the *Dom-ino* could be and was constructed more or less by anyone⁶. This "modern" way of living vertically soon came to be regarded as a precious status indicating object, not only needed by the conditions and the general public but also desired.

Even though the side effects of this constructive fever are currently evident in the urban landscape of Athens and become regularly the target of criticism by architects and inhabitants, the system itself is often glorified as resulting to a bottom-up procedure, where the economically weak could finally become a part of the dream of ownership and active parts in the determination of living conditions. This idealization of the Greek city approaches the utopia of Constant Nieuwenhuys for a *New Babylon* built by New Babylonians, a nomadic city where the way of life would depend on the specific needs dictated by the specific times, and whose structure deprived from fixed partitions, would be able to accommodate freely any kind of content and expression. This freedom provided by *New Babylon's* structure, had a potential for existing as well in the *polykatoikia's* primary structural reference, the *maison Dom-ino*. Athens however, bound to its limited surface as dictated by the natural walls enclosing the city, should be seen more as the result of a flood in the desert. Its first drop, the *polykatoikia*, might have enjoyed an enthusiastic public reception, it was followed nonetheless by an uncontrolled storm, unable to be absorbed or evacuated, leading to an accumulation of stagnate waters.

4. The first references to the law of *antiparochi* coincide with the birth of the *polykatoikia*, that is in 1931.

5. "During the decades of 1960 and 1970 the percentage of landowners was ranging between 20% and 30%. During the decade of 1980 it corresponded to 30 and 40%. Today (2015) it is estimated around 50% and 60% in some case." Definition from Wikipedia. Free translation from Modern Greek.

6. "Architecture in Greece the last decades has been replaced by civil engineering; the contemporary Greek city, lacking any overall planning or vision, expands towards every direction through the endless repetition of *polykatoikia*, the realization of *domino* system in apartment blocks. Obstinate urban planning regulations, combined with the small scale investment and the omnipresent demand for maximum profit have guaranteed the absence of exceptions and have rendered architects superfluous." Point Supreme Architects in "Made in Athens".

fig.1 Satellite View from Athens, 2014.

fig.2 Nieuwenhuys Constant, *New Babylon* model.

fig.3 The typical profile of a *polykatoikia*, PAULO, ATHENS. REVIEW NO. III, Anupam Bansal, Emanuel Christ, Christoph Gantenbein, Victoria Easton, and Philippe Simon.



Laissez-Faire Fire-Walls

The current reality of the city of Athens, naive as it might seem, is read by the architects and theoreticians Plato Issaias and Pier Vittorio Aureli, as possessing an encrypted DNA, the result of a politically driven system where working class mass gatherings in the form of labour or housing units were to be avoided¹, and the population was to be distracted by an aura of well-being. Greece went through a painful civil war right after the second World War, and the communist fear left its shadow visible all through the fifties and sixties. The authorities had thus only to benefit from adopting a system of self-planning, a generalised *laissez-faire* sourced by a desire of social separation rather than social unity aiming at the fragmentation of political determination, resulting to an accumulation of private properties, within which any communal ideal was dispersed in the explosion of personal effort for construction. The urban construction authorities concentrated their interest to the detailed legal documents and endless regulations concerning the limits of the individual terrains rather than the limits of the city, and the automatic extrusion of the plot combined with a few regulations concerning the height of the buildings, shaped the fragmented city of today, where individualism is under its own structure, a structure rhythmmed by thick, anti-seismic fire-walls.

The word *chaosmos*² as conceived by James Joyce, conceals behind its letters a coexistence of two antithetical concepts, that of the *chaos* in the sense of disorder including the part of freedom removed by its absence, and the *cosmos* as the ordered and ordinary whole. The two components of the word are considered contradictory (at least in our western culture), meaning that no other alternative is available but to choose between all or none, yes or no, order or disorder. The composition of a term in order to shelter their coexistence becomes in this case a possible alternative of freedom in an ordered manner.

According to the myth describing the *Tower of Babylon*, God punished the humanity for its disrespectful behaviour of desiring a tower tall enough to reach Paradise, by confounding their speech in different languages. As a result, humans could no longer understand each other, and the *Tower of Babylon* arose to become a fragmented construction of misunderstanding and personal interpretations, destined to never be completed. When referred to a politic of *laissez-faire*, the term is generally stigmatized by an aura of immobility and negation both by those who decide to *laissez-faire* and by those who are chosen to *faire*. This passivity and negation of organisation is highly contrasting with an ideal image of free chaos resulting by the liberty of production and individual expression. According to the architect Avissar Ido, "We may also mention

1. According to the article "From Dom-ino to Polykatoikia", published in Domus 962 (October 2012), "In the Dom-ino model, flexibility is not only a positive quality, but also a fundamental apparatus of social engineering that controls the economic development of supposedly spontaneous settlements [...]. First of all, while it exploits the cheap informal labour force, Dom-inos are also based on industrially produced raw materials that drive the profit back to larger scale corporations.[...] In this way, the possibility of social unrest is tamed by building a class of home-owners and micro-entrepreneurs who, while economically not privileged, are however sceptical towards the possibility of corporatism, sharing, and the demanding of social equality."

2. "Chaosmos is a portmanteau word invented by James Joyce to simultaneously evoke chaos and the organised world (or cosmos in greek), disorder and order, movement and immobility. In his novel Finnegans Wake, these notions are not opposed but are part of a long continuum. The book, known for being one of the most difficult, even unreadable, works of fictions of the 20th century, leaves to the reader to do his own work and establish his own connections. The novel does not make sense, but a multiplicity of sense." Avissar Ido, "Tranquility in Disorder".

fig.1 Yerolympos Yorgis, *Athens Spread*, 2012.

fig.2 Bruegel Jan, l'Ancien, *La tour de Babel*, circa 1600. Huile sur toile 49.5 x 66.5 cm. On the contrary of the Myth of Babel, "there is an old story of how the cathedral of Chartres was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. Then thousands of people came from all points of the compass, like a giant procession of ants, and together they began to rebuild the cathedral on its old site. They worked until the building was completed -master builders, artists, labourers, clowns, noblemen, priests, burghers. But they all remained anonymous, and no one knows to this day who built the cathedral of Chartres." Bergman Ingmar, 1960.





a spatial *Laissez-faire*. This notion refers at the same time to the impact of economic *Laissez-faire* upon physical environments as well as the attitude that seeks to reduce planning to a strict minimum. Spatial (or urban) *Laissez-faire* usually results in extreme fragmentation of urban space, in widespread discontinuity, in a dissolution and disappearance of public space³, whose illustration could possibly be the city of Athens. In its case, the *laissez-faire* is actually a fact, as well as the fragmented reality of the urban experience. This particular *laissez-faire* however, is restricted to what is permitted by the thorough regulations and rigid laws framing construction, so the ideal freedom of an orderly chaotic situation is erased by an illusion of it, excluding any possible individual expression apart from that of profit. This illusion together with the absence or prevention of any collective initiative, prevented a plausible *chaosmos* from being successfully realised.

Further investigating the relation between individual expression and collective existence, with a closer look to the unit composing this urban fragmentation, Hannes Meyer's photograph of *Co-op. interieur* could be read as the depiction of an individual space, displaying objects which represent the industrial and standardized production. Up until here, the photograph could have been taken inside any room of a *polykatoikia* type of building. The enclosure of this room by walls made of fabric however, makes evident the nomadic, active condition in which this room subscribes and indicates that its functioning would be plausible only as being a part of a bigger system. The room can thus now be viewed as a place to rest temporarily rather than as an autonomous repeatable cell, while the remaining important parts of living condition, such as cooking, working or socializing, are somewhat forced to take place in an outside sphere, implying probably the existence of bigger communal facilities as parts of this system⁴. This image underlines the strong interdependency of the room and its inhabitant to the rest of the exterior world. Contemporary western architecture, illustrated as well by the example of Athens and ordered by mass production provoking standardized needs, has shifted the importance of *Co-op. interieur* room's fabric walls, to the walls delimiting an apartment, generating autonomous, immobile units in a very small scale, promoting a comfortable enclosure and enjoying as its major relation to the city, the apartment's connection to a broader infrastructure system and its shared but dividing fire-walls.

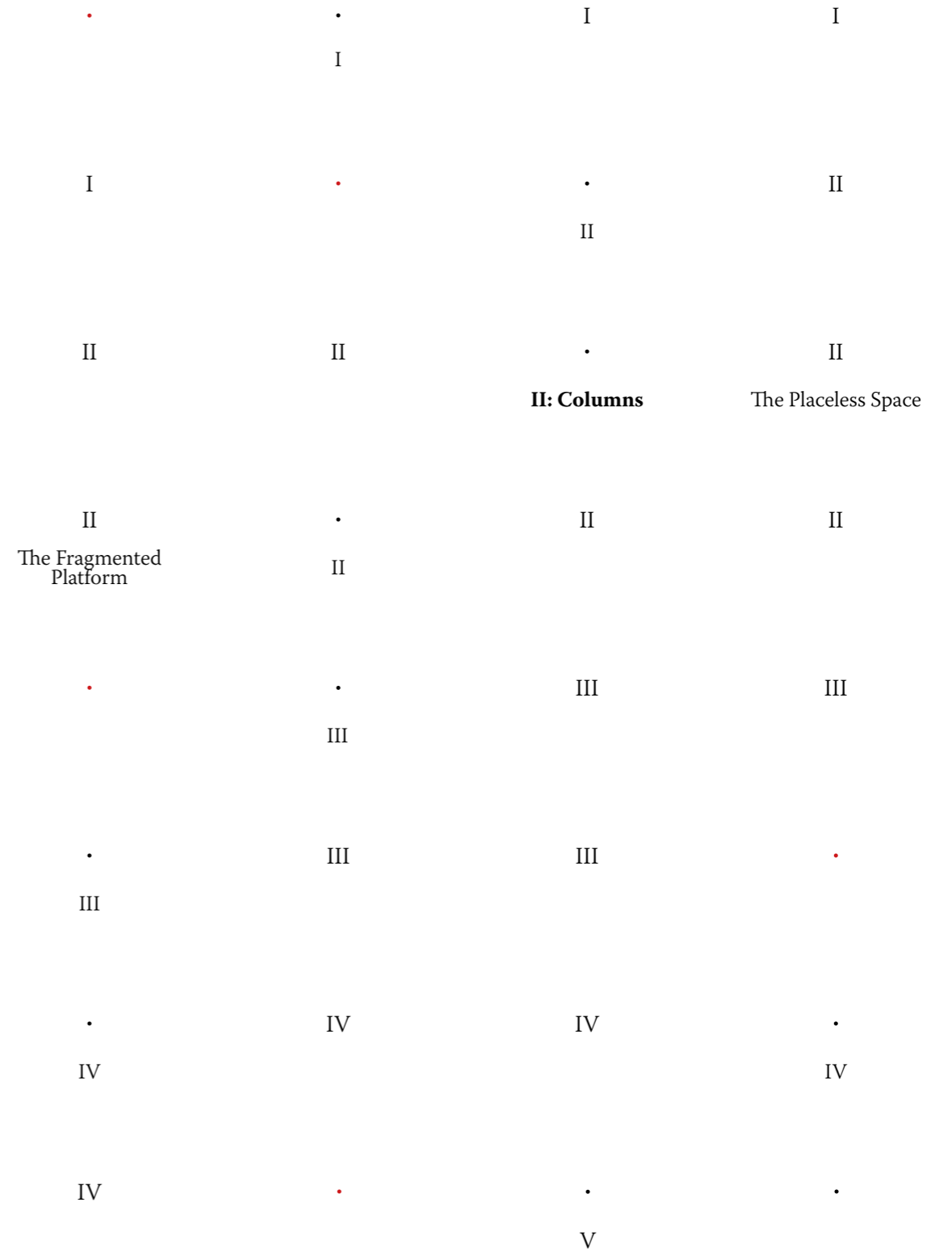
3. Avissar Ido, "Tranquility in Disorder", p.1

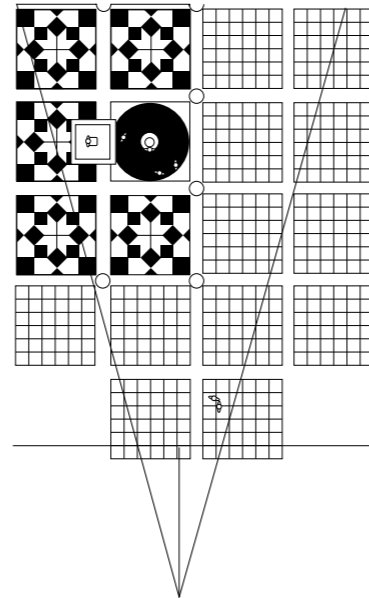
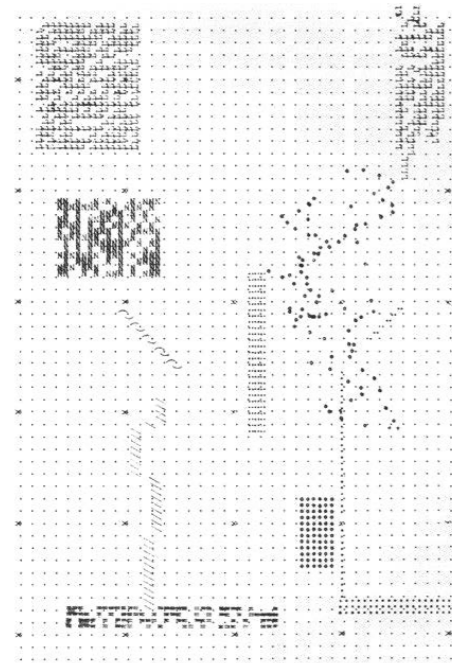
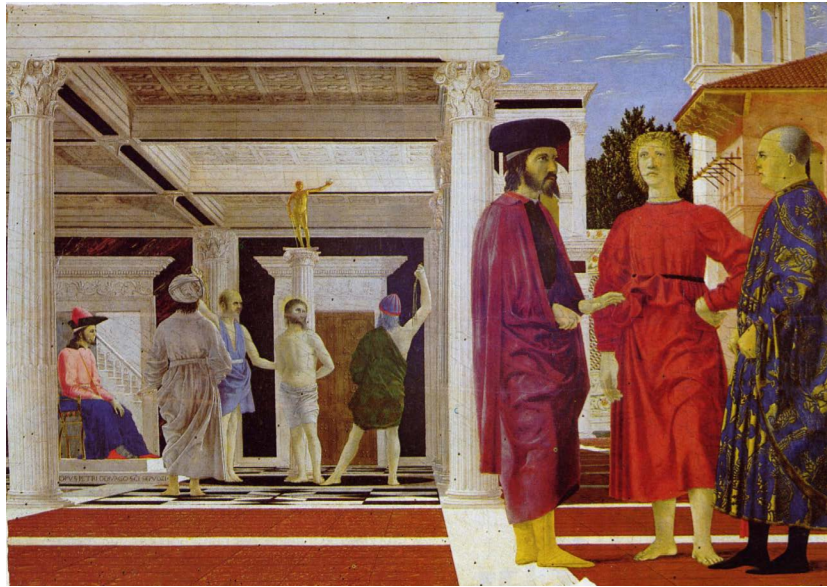
4. "In "Die Neue Welt" Hannes Meyer does not differentiate between an exterior and an interior; moreover he describes the exterior as an extension of the interior".
Antonas Aristide, "The Unhomely Bed".

fig.3 Hannes Meyer, *Co-op. interieur*, 1926. "[...]By constructing a radical image of up-rootedness and use, Meyer's room challenges the most enduring condition in which human dwelling has taken place: that is, the condition of private property in the form of the estate [...]" P. V. Aureli "A Room Without Ownership: Notes on Hannes Meyer's Co-op. Interieur".

fig.4 In 2009 Yorgos Lanthimos received outstanding recognition and international awards for his film, *Dogtooth*. The setting of the story takes place in a family house located in a suburban area of the city. The family that inhabits it is an abstract for the decayed society of which it is a piece, the Greek middle class. The narration is based on the invented life that the parents have prepared for their three adult children, a life enclosed in the limits of the house's courtyard. Their children are bound to live inside this controllable and fabricated environment until the moment when the fictional event of loss of their dogtooth might occur. By means of this invented way of walled living depicted in a shockingly realistic way, Lanthimos' film can be seen as a caustic comment on the contemporary lifestyle and the social introversion which, as in the case of the adult children, nobody dares to question.







The Placeless Space

Far dissimilar from the enclosure of the wall, a dot repeating itself through the landscape, a simple vertical segment formally and structurally reinterpreted repeatedly, the columns are interpreting the words of Roland Barthes, the icons of our cultural mythology¹. Columns always work in pairs to cover a distance, while in order to define the pair's specific emplacement a rational grid is often utilized. A grid however, could theoretically be repeated infinitely, indicating the column's fundamental paradox of swaying between an extreme, dual rationality and the formless definition of a space potentially repeated infinitely regardless of its context. This duality between formless and rationality, can be illustrated within the early Renaissance painting the *Flagellation of Christ* by Piero della Francesca, in which the Cartesian grid regulating the entire composition, permits the free disposition of the characters in an irrational or almost chaotic way. As the plan of the painting indicates, the primary condition of the space is dictated by its columns' placement on a rigid grid. The grid's expansion beyond the covered space characterises the entire composition, providing the premises of an infinite system of formless expansion, upon which precise incidents occur. The generic stricture of the grid defines a *milieu*. Within this painting, the viewer witnesses the potentiality of the freedom of composition, here permitted by the rationality of a structural system generating a grid, offering a character of neutrality and thus erasing all trace of specificity, forming an automatic and flexible space, where the disposition of the different and antithetic events is more important than the grid itself².

Since the industrial revolution the column has been the new symbol of the capitalist society bringing to life the *typical plans* used for new typologies like supermarkets, parking-lots or factories³. This new reality of plan could be seen as a structural element for the city, as depicted by the radical group Archizoom with their famous publication in the Magazine *Domus* in 1971, under the name *No-Stop City. Residential Parking. Climatic Universal System*. This project is the result of a research initiated in 1969 within the congress *Utopia e/o Rivoluzione* held in Turin, marking the debut of the group's revolutionary reflection concerning the evolution of the city. The foundation of this project lies on the group's critical position against their contemporary society, a society permitting the economical and political imposition of regulations on the buildings' conception and form: from their dimensions to the invention of typologies. Questioning severely these regulations and their limits, the group started producing a series of radical projects, denouncing the potential end of design in architecture. During the process of this experimental research,

1. A Myth, According to Roland Barthes, is a "mode of signification" that dilates concrete reality: "Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society."

2. The men talking in the front of the composition are completely stranger to the action taking place in the background, introducing the idea of independent events acting on the same neutral surface.

3. "Rem Koolhaas starts with defining the Typical Plan as an American invention which is built on the American imperialism of 20th century and the powerful New World. Koolhaas calls it "zero-degree architecture". An architecture which has stripped of all traces of uniqueness and specificity. He claims that this new architectural style is the end of old-atypical planned-architecture and also the end of architectural history which is sickly interested in atypical plan. It is a new architectural future and a realization of an utopia that includes one of the greatest search of American architecture." From "About a Typical Plan" Ebru Dinc

fig.1 Piero della Francesca, *Flagellation of Christ*, Circa 1455.

fig.2 Plan of the *Flagellation of Christ*.

fig.3 Andrea Branzi, *Habitational Diagram. Hypothesis of non-Figurative Architectural Language*, 1970

the Archizoom designed the plan of a space using the limited possibilities of a typewriter machine, by writing diagrammatically a new syntax for architecture. Its pattern is based on two characters [x] and [·], the first representing columns, repeated on a square grid of 50m, while the second, plugging infrastructure, following a tighter pattern of 5m. The combination of these two elements on their grid symbolizes of a continuous space without a clear limit, which is colonized by additional typing characters, them overlapping within the initial rational structure. The homogeneous sequence of columns in this infinite plane, limitless as indicates the absence of define façades, is presented as a catalogued system of various situations in which the project shows flexibility, incorporating different programmes such as teaching, residential, administrative, recreational and natural elements. The group claimed their volitions to “*refuse to design an object, and prefer to design its use instead. [...] In this sense, there is no formal difference between a productive structure, a supermarket, a residence, a university, or an industrialized agriculture sector*”⁴. The project aimed to propose a generic habitat without precise function or location, developed inside an orthogonal structure containing a system of columns which connects the different continuous slabs. Using only these seemingly simple elements, architecture was reduced to a zero ground of design, producing solely a neutral space where anything can occur, offering to technical elements their entire liberation. There, the notion of a real and specific geographic *place* (or *topos*) is erased for the apology of an infinite neutral space or *non-place* (*ou - topos*), where the human condition could be expressed freely.

This unlimited condition of liberty claimed by the *no-stop city*, could represent a metaphorical projection of the metropolis, in which, all of its characteristics are exaggerated, paradoxically generating a radical criticism of itself while at the same time making a fantastic apology for the metropolitan condition. The possibility of realisation of a *utopia*⁵ is evoked if considering this term in its etymological sense of a *non-place*, where the inhabitant could be liberated from the traditional dogmas and live disconnected from the henceforth useless reality, in a eternally changing panorama. Nevertheless, this condition was to be provided under the requirement of declaring oneself a prisoner of the fully artificial interior environment.

4. Archizoom “Città, catena di montaggio del sociale. Ideologia e teoria della metropoli”. *Casabella* 350-51, July-August 1970, p. 50

5. The term utopia was coined from the Greek by Sir Thomas More for his 1516 book *Utopia*, describing a fictional island society in the Atlantic Ocean. The word comes from the Greek: οὐ (“not”) and τόπος (“place”) and means “no-place”, and strictly describes any non-existent society.

The Fragmented Platform

In 1911, Le Corbusier visited the Acropolis during his famous *voyage d'orient* (1910-1911). There, he was able to contemplate what Auguste Choisy had carefully measured and drawn for his *Histoire de l'Architecture* in 1899, the irregular composition of objects disposed on the Acropolis' platform, forming an entity by means of a uniting architectural promenade. This free composition of elements would later be described by Le Corbusier as the essence of architecture: “*Architecture is the masterful, correct and magnificent play of volumes brought together in light*”¹, a phrase consisting the theoretical base for the formation of his argumentation concerning the *free-plan* in *Vers une Architecture*, 1923. Indeed, the Acropolis' composition represents the disposition of ideal objects over a neutral platform, a concept that would lead Le Corbusier to the canonical drawing of the *maison Dom-ino*² in 1914. This diagram of a proto-architecture intending to remove any ornaments or any superfluous element in order to reduce the dwelling into a neutral and flexible platform, suggested the possibility of a new way of life in an artificial and continuous environment within which any concept of the natural would be erased by the extraordinary force brought by industrial technological innovation³.

With the rise of the industrialisation, the need to produce spaces permitting the rapid changes of a factory layout brought in the Architectural theory new strategies that Le Corbusier would use in order to set the principles of the modern Architecture. The application of a mass-production strategy and the flexibility brought by the Fordist industry into housing, produced a strong attack to the classical architecture which was until then restrained by the production of the walls' enclosure⁴. This attack could be seen as a *tabula rasa* of the classical principles (symmetry, enclosure, ornaments), as well represented by the importance of street elevation⁵, for the rise of an architecture where the *plan* takes over the priority of composition by means of the emptiness of the *pilotis* system and its infinite possibilities of occupation. The plan becomes the tool for the management of the programs filling the dwelling, which has itself been reduced into a primary empty structure whose walls and façades are the result of an additive process.

Furthermore, this *tabula rasa* of the traditional way to conceive a dwelling was reinforced by the condition in which the *dom-ino* system negated its natural ground, by a vertical multiplication of artificial platforms inside of which could potentially be located not only a free-standing dwelling, but also places for social gathering, implying an extreme flexibility. Reducing thus, the design of internal programs or façades into a secondary state of interior

1. “*L'architecture est le jeu savant, correct et magnifique des volumes assemblés sous la lumière*” Le Corbusier, 1923.

2. From the latin *domus* meaning the house and the *in* of innovation.

3. “*Developed between 1912 and 1916, Le Corbusier's Dom-ino model gained momentum at the beginning of World war I when the destruction of villages in Belgium and France made clear that housing would be a high priority for many European governments after the war. Le Corbusier sought to seize this as the opportunity to promote large-scale reform of housing conditions, thus making clear the link between destruction and uncertainty and the possibility for establishing new living conditions*”. Pier Vittorio Aureli, “The Theology of Tabula Rasa: Walter Benjamin and Architecture in the Age of Precarity”. 2015.

4. “*Le premier but de l'architecture est la clôture de l'espace; la plus simple forme d'un bâtiment sera donc une seule pièce. La pièce est le noyau et le point de départ de la composition architecturale*”. Curtis Nathaniel, *Architectural composition*, Cleveland, 1923, p.104. (published the same year than *vers une architecture*, showing the profound opposition of what Le Corbusier thought and the accepted way to do architecture.

5. Pier Vittorio Aureli in *AA PhD Open Seminar Series-Part 2 AA School of Architecture*, where Aureli explains how Alberti used the orders as ornaments to produce street façades and not as structural system like it will be in Le Corbusier's *Dom-ino*.



arrangement. This concept of *non-designing* promoted by Le Corbusier's *dom-ino* would soon come to be the protagonist of informal cities, whose primary quality is a profound liberation against over-designed architecture, similarly to Archizoom's *no-stop city*, and where the creativity of the inhabitant is permitted or even celebrated.

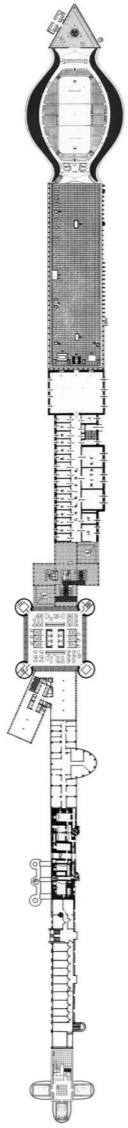
In Athens, the automatic application of the *dom-ino* system was implemented in order to respond to the rapid growth of the city, and constitutes one of its most fundamental conditions for the comprehension of its contemporary image. One could see in *dom-ino*'s frenetic repetition the possible realisation of "A society freed from its own alienation, emancipated from the rhetorical forms of humanitarian socialism and rhetorical progressivism: an architecture which took a fearless look at the logic of grey, atheistic and de-dramatized industrialism, where mass production produced infinite urban decors"⁶. However, the simultaneous presence of fire-walls, the second fundamental element composing Athens for the realisation of its typical *polykatoikia*, made impossible the metaphorical continuity of the platforms, fragmenting the city to an infinite number of different indoor cosmos, and making of what could have been a collective experience, a purely individual one. Thus, one could reduce the corporal constitution of Athens to two antithetical artefacts, one dividing the urban fabric, and one expanding it, or else to its walls and columns carrying out a contradictory collaboration, or a *Cadavre exquis*.

6. Branzi Andrea, *No-Stop City*, p.149

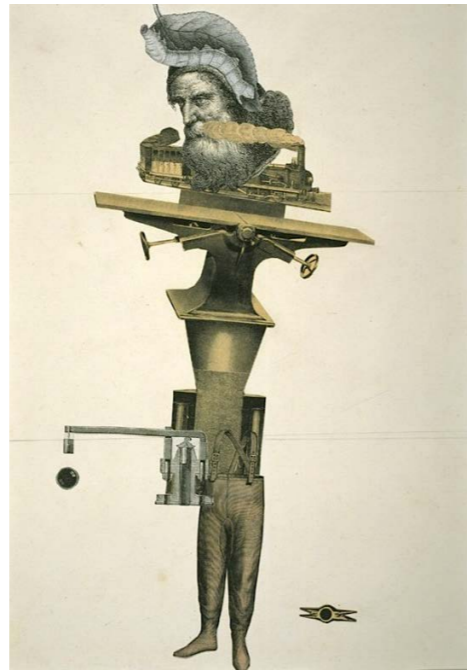
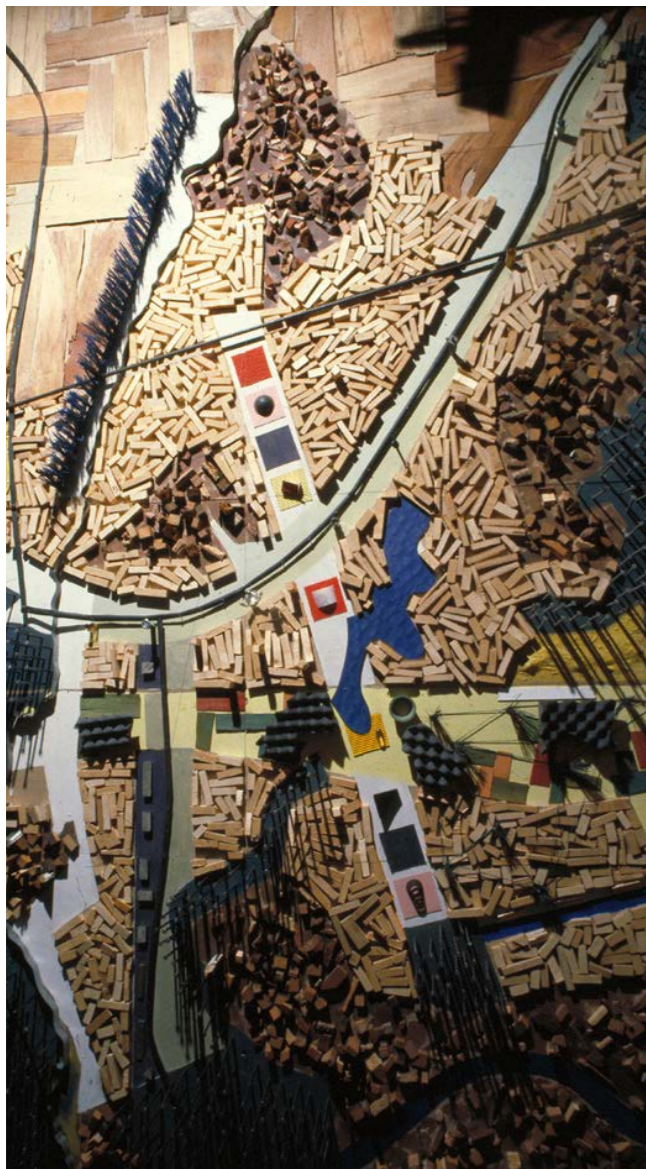
fig.1 Workers on the top of a polykatoikia taking their lunch break, at this moment of the construction the walls are not yet present, offering a collective connection with the landscape.

fig.2 typical fire-wall of a polykatoikia, photograph by Charalambos Louizidis, Aikaterini-Niki Glinou, *Athens Archive*, 2012.

fig.3 Archizoom 'No Stop City', 1969



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II	II	•	II
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II	•	II	II
	II: Cadavre-Exquis	Observing the Process	Observing the Difficult Whole
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	III		
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Observing the Process

A surrealist operation deriving its rules from an old parlour game, the *cadavre exquis* inspired the artistic avant-garde in the beginning of the 20th century, producing through its liberating principles, radical works of art in the form of drawing, collage or literature. The procedure of creation is characterized by its collective nature, requiring more than one person for each piece produced, resulting to an irrational juxtaposition of personal fragments. The personal creativity and expression of each participant influences the result as well as its final form and meaning.

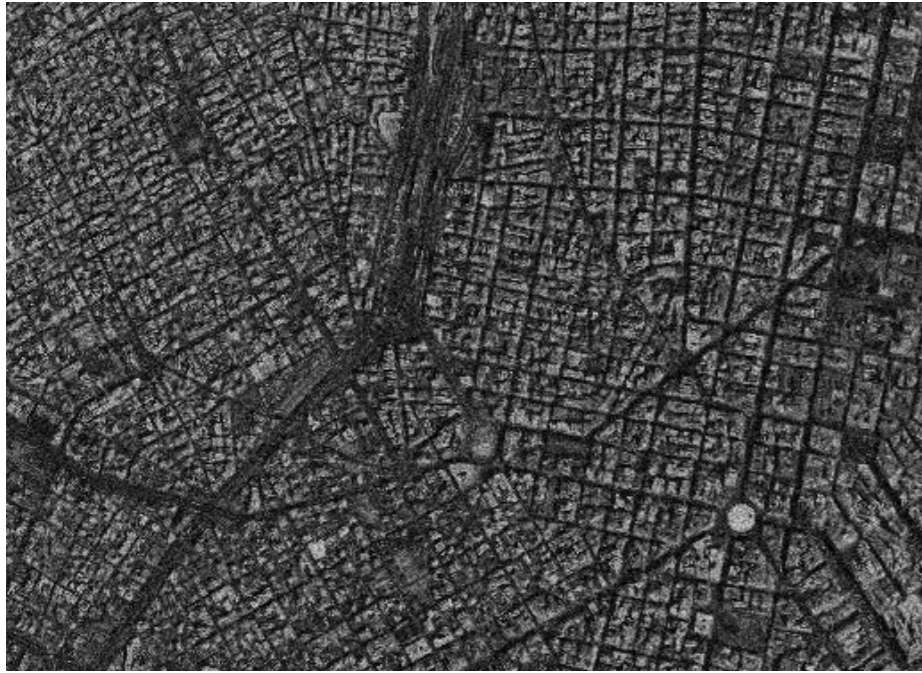
The principles of *cadavre exquis* were directly applied to architecture by Rem Koolhaas -profoundly fascinated by the freedom of expression taken by surrealist artists- together with Elia Zenghelis and Zaha Hadid, in their participation to the competition for the Dutch Parliament extension in 1978. Each architect was to develop separately one of the three different parts of the project, employing a straight forward application of the game's rules. In a later project of OMA however, a different interpretation of this principle could be perceived. In the master plan developed for Melun Senart in 1987, and especially in its representation by the large-scale model, two possible interpretations are of a major interest concerning the principles of *cadavre exquis*.

The first one is materialized by the clear, linear gestures structuring the empty public space, which permit a chaotic development for the hypothetical latter growth of the urban texture, containing dwellings or other programs insignificant for the form of the city. This principle of a clearly defined and planned gesture permitting an external chaotic development, is perceivable in the city of Athens, the parallel being between the "void" as planned by Koolhaas and the "void" of Athens' artificial islands, the latter lacking the clarity of a clear structure and identity. Further extending this parallel, the chaotic texture of Melun Senart, represented in the model by wooden piles disposed irrationally, could be interpreted as the chaotic urban background of Athens, its structure deprived from any logic. The project of OMA, composed by antithetical elements of order and disorder could eventually be read as an attempt to put together the irrational coexistence of chaos and cosmos, formal and formless, finite and infinite, or else, to create a balanced *chaosmos*.

The second possible relation of OMA's project and the game of *cadavre exquis* should be found inside the schematic, chaotic disposition of the "full", represented in the model by pieces of wood. Their homogeneity and lack of structure emphasizes the importance of the main, public intervention which

fig.1 André Breton, Jacqueline Lamba, Yves Tanguy, *Cadavre Exquis*, 1928.

fig.2 OMA, *Ville Nouvelle Melun Senart*, competition entry, model, 1987.



indicates that the urban development could proceed freely, given the initial unifying gesture in the scale of the city. Investigating closer this undetermined texture, a potential existence of the principles of *cadavre exquis* is perceived, as each building, represented in the model by a wooden block, could be the result of a personal fragment of creativity, a unity thus, adding itself to the chaotic totality. As indicated by the repetition of similar blocks, the expression of each building would not have an influence on the principal, public gesture and thus the general urban image. Instead, each block would simply coexist with its neighbouring blocks, forming a kind of collage by their aggregation. The *cadavre exquis* can here be played under one condition: the strict planification of the “void”.

Even if the project of Melun Senart was never realized, we could recognize Athens as the realisation of its ideal, where the plan at the scale of the neighbourhoods, appears as a collage of heterogeneous structures linked together in the way of a *cadavre exquis*, and whose chaotic existence is possible because of the prior definition of the “void”, artificial islands, fragments of land meant to remain untouched, lacking though a clear structure and definition. Viewing the general image of the city of Athens, one tends to conclude that the city is a complete chaos composing a uniform texture. Examining closer however, in the scale of the neighbourhoods, one can actually distinguish the different components of the fabric: the city is composed by several small-scale plans, each following its own rules according to topography, context and fashion. These individual pieces composing the urban fabric, demonstrate that the approach adopted to structure the city’s expansion was that of a regional urban design, piece by piece, following the city’s growth. They also demonstrate that the *laissez-faire* policy adopted, was not addressed to the general public of citizens, but rather to certain authorities or a specific elite, and whereas we could think that the city’s texture is the result of *non-plan*¹, its potential spontaneity seems constrained in the hands of minorities, designing rigid structures in a small scale, which produce unfortunate accidents when colliding.

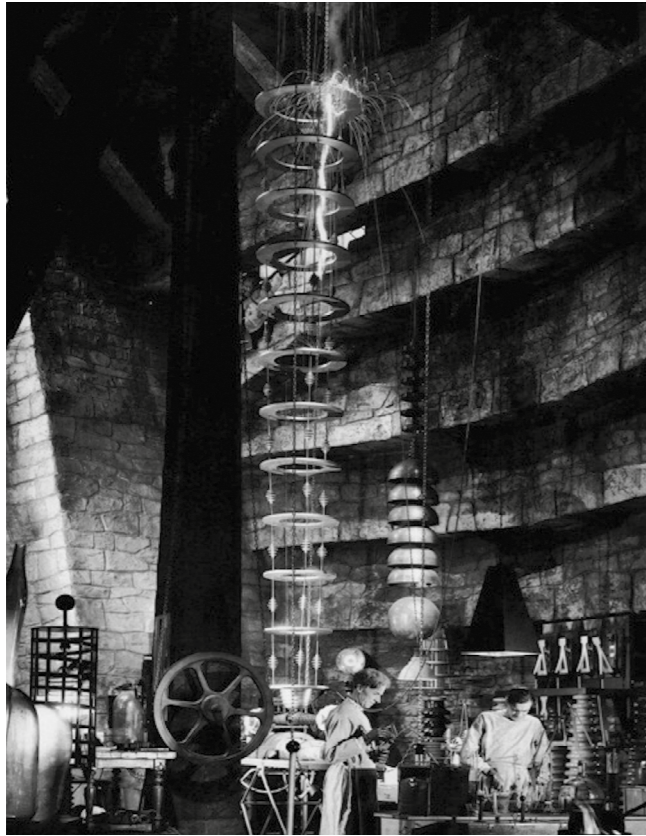
In the article “Non-Plan: An experiment in Freedom”, the authors ask a simple question: “*Why not have the courage to let people shape their own environment?*”, as opposing to the oligarchic methods of city planning currently applied. The article proposes a radical experimentation, the adoption of what the authors call *non-plan*, a negation of urban planning opting to the collective anarchic creation of an over-all pattern directly responding to people’s necessities². The risk acknowledged is that once achieving their dream of ownership, people would start desiring more space and trying to control their properties by strict limitations. This obsession to control would turn against the collective initiative of the proposition and should thus be prevented, or it would lead again to the vicious circle of rigid planning. What should be pursued, is the constant frenetic and immediate obsolescence, influenced by Pop culture.

The ideal of constant changing should -according to the authors- if achieved, result to the destruction of social inequalities. In the example of Athens, although the approach adopted prevented the potential qualities of self-decision, the risk foresaw by the theorization of the *non-plan* was actually materialized: the growing class of those achieving ownership and their developing need for controlling space, resulted to the small-scale fragmentation, achieving a certain unity through the method of exclusion, and to a dramatic social introversion in the scale of the city, the neighbourhood, the building, the apartment.

1. Developed by Reyner Banham, Paul Baker, Peter Hall and Cedric Price in the text “Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom”. In *New Sobriety*, 1969.

2. “*At least, one would find out what people want; at the most, one might discover the hidden style of the mid-20th century.*”
Ibid, p. 14

fig. 3, 4, 5 Contemporary satellite view of Athens. Hellenic Amateur Radio, Attica.



Observing the Difficult Whole

The product of a *cadavre exquis* procedure can be interpreted in infinite ways according to the viewer's perception. Intending to identify the structure composing the peculiar image of Athens, we can recognize a hybrid situation where the city in all scale is consisted, physically or metaphorically, of two antithetical entities: walls or limits and columns or infiniteness. The physical wall determines in its fire-wall utilisation the fragmented texture of the city and the concrete emphasis on individual property. The columns in the scale of each *polykatoikia*, permit a certain flexibility to install between the rigid limits of their fire-walls, while their unlimited metaphorical condition relates to the possibility of freedom and individual liberation at the scale of the city. This paradoxical coexistence of contradictory concepts overlapping, creates the body of a monster like the creature resulted by the experiments of Frankenstein, promising as well as frightening in its deformed reality.

In the story of *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* written in 1818, Mary Shelley describes how Victor Frankenstein, a student in science, started collecting members from multiple corpses in order to create a body that he would be the one to reanimate, using a combination of chemistry, alchemy and electricity during an ambitious technological experiment. The *monster* resulting from it could be characterized as a literal *cadavre-exquis*, whose collective principles were reversed in order for the scientist to create by himself one body in life, but a body made as a collage of multiple pieces. As the collectivity during the process of creation of the city of Athens can be questionable, the city's image could be more easily comprehended as this kind of reversed *cadavre-exquis*, a collage of different urban schemes held together with Frankenstein's improvised patches, forming nevertheless a uniform body, or else a difficult whole composed by autonomous elements. Athens' hybridism is present as much in its urban body as in the molecules which constitute it, the *polykatoikies*, themselves a collage of antithetical elements: walls and columns.

The contemporary image of Athens has been the result of certain moments of exponential growth of its metropolitan condition, a growth concerning all the components of the city, from its inhabitants and its infrastructure until its architecture, this last marked by the automatic and massive reproduction of the *polykatoikia* type. Indeed, from the early 1920's until the 1990's, the Greek capital experienced a series of these moments, resulting to an intense development of its urban fabric, regulated only by the zoning laws of *antiparochi*. In certain cases, this unstoppable impulse of growth provoked a certain

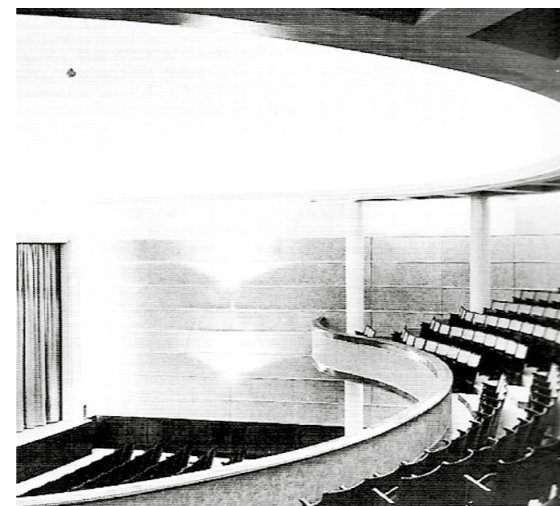
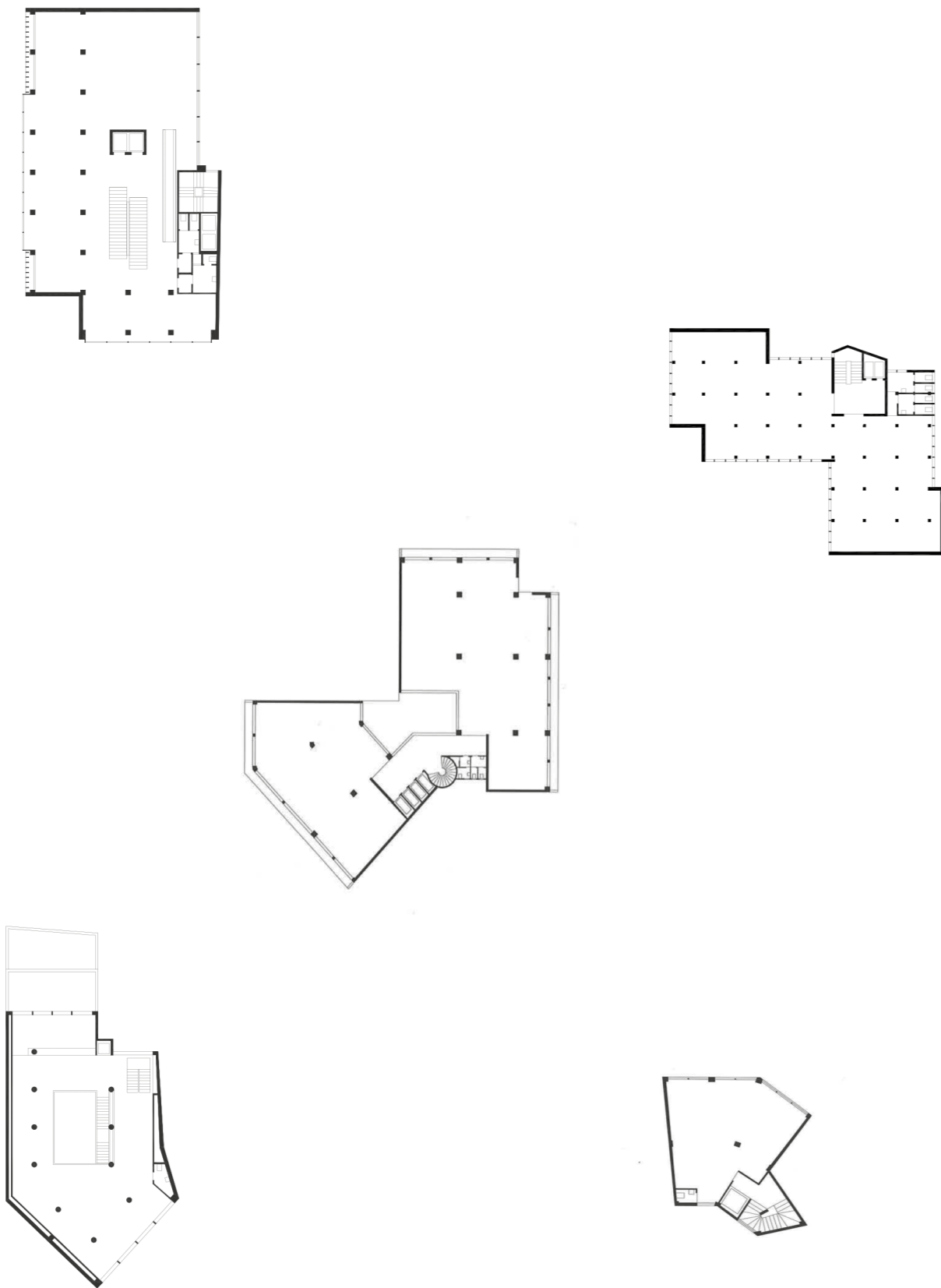


fig.1 Victor Frankenstein using the technology to animate his monster. From the movie made in 1931, based on the original book.

fig.2 and 3 Extremely banale façades containing unsuspected programs. Façades and interior of a *polykatoikia*, Papadiamantopoulou St, Athens (1954-57) by the architect Ioannis Liapis.



disregard for the relics of the past dispersed in the entire city's underground, as well as for the more recent architectural production, destroying and covering their remnants by the only type the metropolis validated: the *polykatoikia*. The city thus, erased the ancient and the recent history of architecture found in the way of its expansion, during a cannibalising process of consuming itself. In all these conditions of delirious growth, mass production, contradictory composition and replacement of culture by a new condition, one can diagnose the symptoms of a culture of congestion, defined by Koolhaas as "a state of congestion on all possible levels, [that] exploits this congestion to inspire and support particular forms of social intercourse that together form a unique culture of congestion."¹

At the scale of the *polykatoikia*, its unity is given by the automatic repetition of the *free-plan* of the *maison dom-ino*, renamed *typical plan* by Rem Koolhaas in *S, M, L, XL*, where he claimed that the *typical plan* implies a mass repetition and indeterminacy in order to exist². This indetermination of the *free-plan* of the Greek *polykatoikia* allowed a fantastic congestion of programs among the floors, producing phenomenal vitality behind its mute façades, and permitting for paradoxical encounters to take place, such the co-habitation of big theatres with offices, bars and dwellings. The result of this programmatic congestion could be interpreted as city fragments present in all of its buildings, the urban condition existing down to the molecules of its image, generating the incubator of the metropolis itself. Moreover, the automatic production of the *polykatoikia* type did not require the presence of architects neither for its conception nor for its realization³, a condition reinforcing the necessity of a *free-plan* in order to be realised, ultimately producing an architecture "without qualities, [or else as] a zero ground of the architecture."⁴

Athens is composed by a series of juxtaposed microcosms, contained inside each one of its buildings and constrained by their thick fire-walls. The autonomous universe found inside a *polykatoikia* type is not rooted solely to Athens, instead, as a result of the disconnecting walls dividing the interior and the exterior sphere, it does not have strict geographical restrictions. Consequently, intending to apply the principles of Michel Foucault's *heterotopia* according to which "un morceau flottant d'espace, un lieu sans lieu qui vit par lui même"⁵, Athens, by means of its autonomous *polykatoikies*, ceases being a *place* to become a *condition*.

1. Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New-York*, 1972.

2. "Typical Plan implies repetition — it is the *n*th plan: to be typical, there must be many — and indeterminacy: to be typical, it must be sufficiently undefined. It presumes the presence of many others, but at the same time suggests that their exact number is of no importance. Typical Plan x n = a building (hardly a reason to study architecture!): floors strung together by elevators of incomprehensible smoothness, each discreet "ting" of arrival part of a never-ending addition." OMA, Rem Koolhaas, Bruce Mau, *S,M,L,XL*, 1995, p.341

3. 85 % of the city of Athens is not made by architects and 99 % of its urban fabric is composed by *polykatoikies*. Point Supreme x Elia Zenghelis ; The Difficult Double lecture, EPFL, March 2014.

4. OMA, Rem Koolhaas, Bruce Mau, *S,M,L,XL*, 1995, p.341

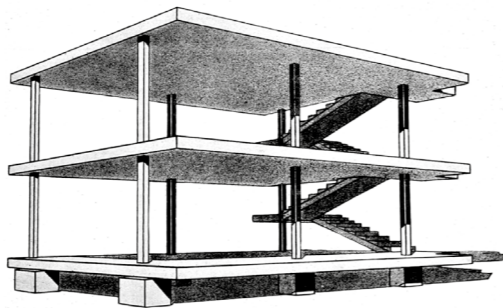
5. Foucault Michel, *Des espaces Autres*, 14 Mars 1967, lecture in circle d'études architecturales.

fig. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 Plans of different *polykatoikies* of Athens. Plans from the typological research by the Design studio Emanuel Christ and Christoph Gantembein, ETH Zurich.

But as the City continued its intimate inquiry, the urban body became progressively stronger and more aggressive, and the land which it was given to explore, occupy and cover with its canvas, seemed increasingly shrinking, becoming incapable of accommodating the urban expansion or nourishing the City's hunger. The limits of the City were then happily destroyed by its own inhabitants and creators, and the compressed urban body spread over the land like a thick layer of ink, leaving only the steep, unfertile exceptions untouched and marking its way with indelible traces. The individual dream of what had appeared as a collective desire was now out of the control of the City, a City having to struggle simultaneously with an incomplete present and a torturing past.



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	III: Experiments	New Point of Reference	The Ongoing Tempest
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New Point of Reference

An eternal point of reference, a precise assemblage of marble stones, or a type of construction that is made to resist to time and storms¹, the ancient Greek temple has been one of the most influential types in architectural history. Its orders, proportions and the way it is assembled, invoke an expertise, a sensibility for construction and a cultural *savoir-faire*, that has fascinated the whole architectural scene until today². Indeed, in order to understand the methods of construction and composition hidden behind the Greek temple, a series of theoretical research was initiated during Renaissance, resulting to the well-known narrative of the *primitive hut* enunciated by Vitruvius in his *Ten Books on Architecture*. The metaphor of the *hut*, which was reinterpreted by Laugier in 1755 producing his book's explicit illustrations, has been a way to narrate the quest towards the origin of architecture.

As a consequence of this research, the Greek culture of construction was explicitly related to the first examples of architecture, making of the temple the symbol of the tradition of construction, a tradition evolving throughout the centuries. Within the image of the *primitive hut*, Vitruvius claims to have encountered the architectural ancestor, or the foundation of the Greek temple. The primitive hut could be thus seen as a retroactive theorisation of the Greek temple, where one is to find, in the sophisticated assemblage of the stones, the traces of its primitive construction in wood. This mythology around the temple had no archaeological proof, and constituted a self-evident narrative drawing a continuous line between the constructions of our primitive ancestors and the ancient Greek civilisation. Therefore, this metaphorical narrative made of the construction and the assemblage techniques the symbols of an inherited *savoir-faire*, placing the culture of construction in the centre of architecture.

The *maison dom-ino* developed by Le Corbusier in 1914 could potentially be interpreted as in the continuity of the primitive hut, due to its primitive appearance of an archetype. In the drawing representing this diagram however, all trace of sophisticated assemblage is erased, turning the structure into an elementary, abstract and self-referential object giving the impression of an artefact deprived from any trace of human creation, as if not built but rather created *ex-nihilo*³. Indeed, if the methodology used to comprehend the temple was applied for the *dom-ino* diagram through the analysis of its structure, it would become evident that the *maison dom-ino* projected by Le Corbusier is not the metaphorical inheritance of the *primitive hut*, but constitutes instead, the starting point of a new narrative, whose only reference would be the *dom-ino* itself.

1. "Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm itself manifest in its violence. The luster and gleam of the stone, though itself only glowing by the grace of the sun, yet first brings to light the light of day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of the night. The temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air. The steadfastness of the work contrasts with the raging of the surf, and its own repose brings out the surge of the sea. Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are... the temple, in its standing there, first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves." Martin Heidegger, *On Technology, Ecology, and the Arts* by A. Lack, p.43

2. Affirmation of Jacques Lucan in his Conférence d'honneur, EPFL 2015.

3. "The history of Architecture unfolds itself slowly across the centuries as a modification of structure and ornament, but in the last fifty years steel and concrete have brought new conquests, which are the index of a greater capacity for construction, and if an architecture in which the old codes have been overturned. If we challenge the past, we shall learn that (styles) no longer exist for us that a style belonging to our own period has come about; and there has been a revolution." Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, 1923, p.269

fig.1 Allegorical engraving of the Vitruvian primitive hut. Frontispiece of Marc-Antoine Laugier: *Essai sur l'architecture* 2nd ed. 1755 by Charles Eisen (1720-1778).

fig.2 Allegorical engraving of the Vitruvian primitive hut that is becoming a wooden temple. Frontispiece of Marc-Antoine Laugier: *An Essay on Architecture* 2nd ed. 1755 by Mr. Wale.

fig.3 *Maison Dom-ino*, Le Corbusier, 1914

4. Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, p.249

5. "The poetic image is not subject to an inner thrust. It is not an echo of the past. On the contrary: through the brilliance of an image, the distant past resounds with echoes, and it is hard to know at what depth these echoes will reverberate and die away. Because of its novelty and its action, the poetic image has an entity and a dynamism of its own; it is referable to a direct ontology." Gaston Bachelard, *The poetic of Space*, 1994, p.xvi

The way in which Le Corbusier configured the implementation of this system, possesses indeed an archaic dimension where, unlike the temple, the workers' labour does not require any specialized knowledge or training for its construction. Moreover, any trace of a technique of construction is absent from the abstract diagram, detaching it from any historical reference. The reinforced concrete construction which the diagram wants to represent though, has nonetheless as its primary characteristic the traces of the process of its creation, the traces of its formwork, attaching it to a certain culture of construction. As Rem Koolhaas suggests in *Delirious New York*, the method of conceiving a reinforced concrete structure is a highly metaphorical operation, proceeding as follows: "First, the conjectural structure of shuttering is erected -the negative of the initial thesis. Then steel reinforcements dimensioned strictly according to the rational principles of Newtonian physics - are inserted: the reinforcing process of paranoiac calculation. Then a mouse-gray liquid is poured into the empty speculative counter-forms to give them permanent life on earth, an undeniable reality, especially after the signs of the Initial madness - the shuttering - have been removed, leaving only the fingerprints of the wood's grain. Infinitely malleable at first, then suddenly hard as rock, reinforced concrete can objectify vacuity and fullness with equal ease: it is the architects' plastic"⁴. This paranoiac process, further enforced by the rationality of the imprints left by the wood's grain, is erased in the *dom-ino*, abstracting completely its image and making it comprehensible without requiring any constructive knowledge or *savoir-faire*. Le Corbusier's system thus, could be seen as an anti-temple researching its fulgurant poetic before the thoughts, before the knowledge⁵, or else an a-historical new point of reference, that would liberate the architecture from any dogma imposed by the temple.

The Ongoing Tempest

An architectural experiment took accidentally place in the Athenian laboratory of urban fabric, providing the possibility of observing the coexistence of two antithetical architectural symbols, one being that of the architectural continuity history and a direct descendent of the *primitive hut* and the second one being the lobotomy¹ of this history. The encounter of the temple and the *maison dom-ino* occurred in Athens. However, once implemented in the city, the *dom-ino* diagram suffered an evolution in order to become the new point of reference of the Greek urban landscape, the *polykatoikia*. As a result of this mutation, the initially naked structure was dressed with fire-walls, blurring the presence of its initial body into an Athenian type incarnating the *dom-ino*'s main characteristic: its rupture with tradition.

Thus the city found in the apparition of *polykatoikia* the tool of liberation from the traditional principles inspired by the temple, applied until its creation (1930's) by the architects for their neo-classical constructions. Indeed, what used to be a city made of references to its ancient constructions or a glorification of the temple², became an artificial urban storm, composed by the infinite repetition of an abstract skeleton enclosed in fire-walls, offering to Athens a brutal character, an informal uniformity or an urban hurricane, reminiscent of Heidegger's interpretation of the relation between the temple and the storm: "Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm itself manifest in its violence"³.

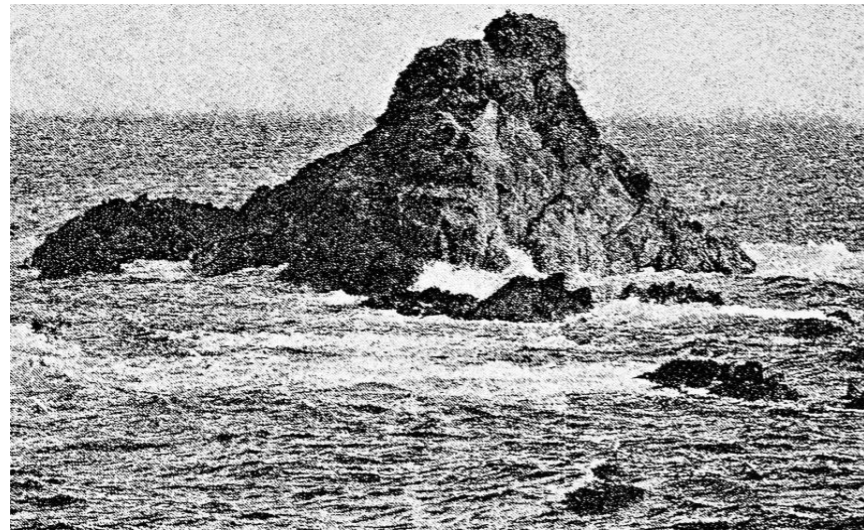
This conflictual relationship between the temple, the Acropolis, and the *polykatoikia*, visible at the scale of the city, is also present at the scale of the unit. In contrary to the temple which is meant to be understood already when perceived by its exterior, revealing every detail of its construction, the *polykatoikia* symbolises a culture of the instant, of the consumption, of the eternal changes, or else a culture of congestion. This type of architecture is understandable only once crossing the curtain wall façade, producing thus a reversed temple, where the columns are hidden inside the building's own body. Contrary to the Greek temple where the public space surrounding it is fundamental in order for its understanding, the *polykatoikia* focuses almost entirely on the interior, producing an infinite number of residual spaces as a result of its repetition.

The imposing presence of the Acropolis eternally gazing above the city, resulted to an unexpected strengthening of the subordinated city's body, bound to remain anonymous and homogeneous, deprived from new cultural references. This urban condition of contradiction and fragmentation, led its inhabitants to a desperate desire for new horizons.

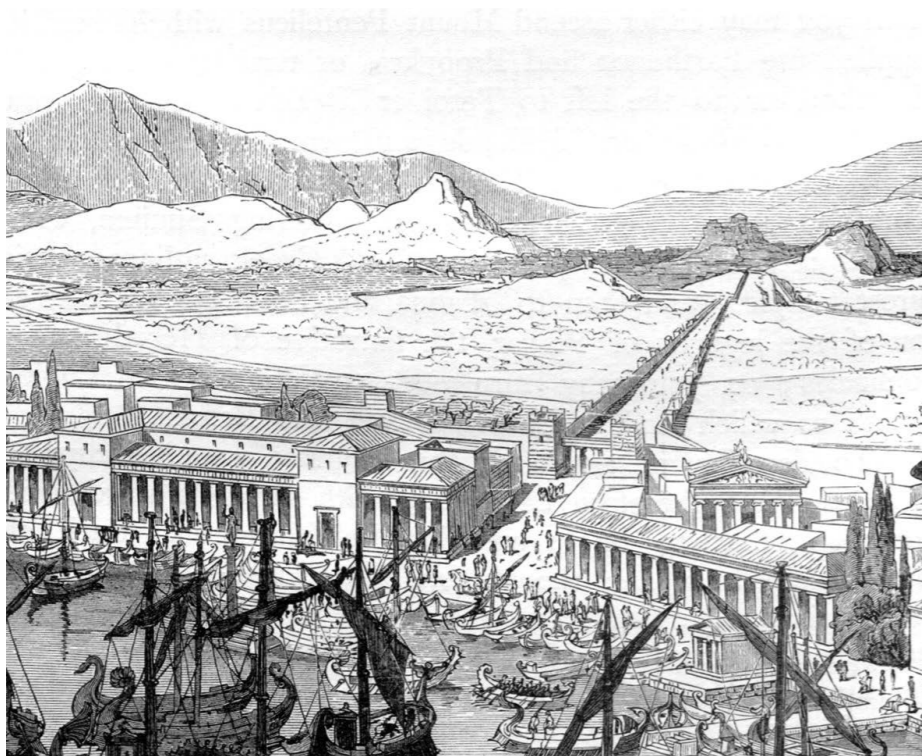
1. "Lobotomy (Greek: λοβός lobos "lobe (of brain)"; τομή tomē "cut, slice") is a medical operation in which cuts are made in or near the front part of the brain, used in the past for the treatment of severe mental problems" Online definition from Cambridge dictionary

2. See all the university and public buildings constructed in Athens during the 19th century.

3. Heidegger Martin, *On Technology, Ecology, and the Arts* by A. Lack, p.43



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III: Landscape	The Poet's Sigh	Glitter and Rhinestone	
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The Poet's Sigh

The ancient city of Athens had its limits well defined by its surrounding *Themistokleian Wall*, and was isolated and protected from possible enemy threats as a result of its inland position. During the 5th century BC, the Athenians started negotiating the limits of their town, realizing the strategic importance of a maritime access and started the construction of what came to be known as the *Long Walls*, two parallel walls of a length of 6km each, connecting Athens to its neighbouring town Piraeus, uniting thus two urban conditions instead of separating and superposing them, as in the case of Koolhaas' metaphorical project *Exodus*¹. The political and commercial relations between the two cities were further developed thanks to the *Long Walls*, which gradually disappeared through the centuries. They left behind them however, the strong relation between the two cities and the definitive incorporation of Piraeus to the Athenian metropolis after the 1950's, and as a consequence the arrival of the strong metropolitan condition at the shores of the Aegean sea.

The capital's connections to the Aegean islands were further reinforced during this period, mainly due to commercial development. Another reason might as well be that the rural exodus taking place at the same time, drove big numbers of originally island inhabitants to Athens for economical reasons, reinforcing the need for bilateral connections. The facilitation of maritime transportation thus, brought progressively the Athenians in touch with a worthless treasure: the Aegean landscape. Meanwhile, an accidental² and extremely inspiring artistic movement was producing some of the country's most emblematic artistic pieces, in the form of poetry, literature, music, theatre, painting and architecture. The artistic production of this period is characterised by a common pursuit for a contemporary Hellenic identity, coloured by a romantic belief in its interdependence with history and specific geographical characteristics, the climate, the sea, the sun. The poet Odysseas Elytis, a leading figure of cultural emancipation, production and promotion whose work came to be considered as an idyllic and sensible ode to the Greek landscape, wrote in his poetic collection *Axion esti* (1959): "*Praised be Myrto standing/ on the stone parapet facing the sea/ like a beautiful eight or a clay pitcher/ holding a straw hat in her hand*", or again: "*The straits for birds from the opposite shore/ a citron from which the sky spilled out/ the blue hearing half under the sea/ the long-shadowed whispering of nymphs and maples*", images stubbornly excluding the reality of Athens from their poetic configuration and reflecting a generalised reaction to the city's saturated image. Elytis' poems reached a more general public thanks their orchestration by the composer Manos Xatzidakis in



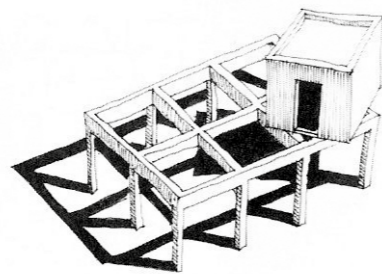
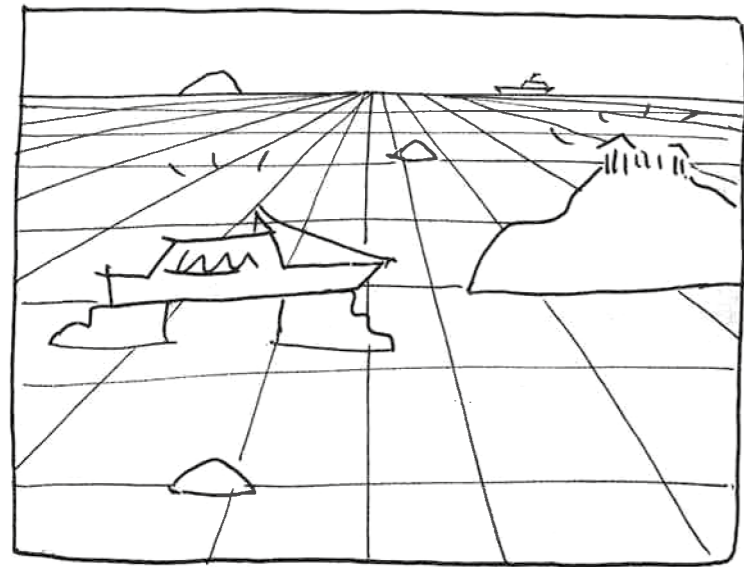
1. Exodus is a project conceived by Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghelis for a competition launched by Casabella magazine: "La città come ambiente significante", in 1972. The structure proposed by the two architects is designed to be superimposed over the existing fabric of London, creating a dramatic rupture inside the city.

2. The group of artists, although inspired by and in contact with one other and often interdisciplinary collaborations, was never categorized under the name of one artistic movement, apart from their overlapping generations. Among the pioneers of this improvised movement based on common concerns are: M. Theodorakis, M. Xatzidakis, K. Koun, N. Gatsos, Y. Tsarouchis, A. Fasianos, D. Pikionis and O. Elytis.

fig.1 Rem Koolhaas, *Exodus or the voluntary prisoners of architecture*. Collage together with Madelon Vreissendorp, Elia Zenghelis, and Zoe Zenghelis, 1972.

fig.2 J. P. Mahaffy, drawing of Piraeus with the Long Walls restored, 1890, Benaki Museum Library.

fig.3 Photograph depicting V. and D. Fotopoulos with M. Theodorakis and O. Elytis in Epidauros, watching the rehearsals for Aristophanes' play "Ippis", 1979, source: Lifo.gr



the 60's as well as Mikis Theodorakis in 1974, with his album *Μικρές Κυκλάδες* (Small Cyclades).

This reaction against the urban condition coincides with the heroic era of expansion of the metropolis, mainly during the 60's, when Athens saw itself produce building after building in the repetitive rhythm of a factory its emblematic creation, the *polykatoikia*, which was accorded a profound desire of ownership, leading to the city's fragmentation. This frenetic chain production of concrete, together with the absence of a general planning, led to an urban jungle that was hard to deal with, and provided a sentiment of enclosure to its inhabitants³, who willingly found comfort in the poetic production referring to nature, tradition and ideals. The tradition-less way of living in the contemporary metropolis had a side-effect reaction, the birth of another form of desire: the ownership of what came to be the typical *maison grecque*, related to a desire for escape towards the view, the horizon and the liberty. A *maison grecque* as dreamed by the urban inhabitants, was to be located outside the direct zone of influence of the city, searching to reproduce the image of tradition and become a part of the sublime landscape.

This second dream of ownership was to massively be realised during the years following the re-establishment of democracy in Greece in 1974, and the country's incorporation in the European Union in 1981, a period characterized by an economic euphoria that dictated the country's development all through the 90's. This favourable economic stability and the asphyxiating urban condition of the capital made the Athenians search their escape exit towards the nearby islands, where two basic conditions were met: the existence of the eclipsed in the metropolis "traditions" and the openness of an untouched landscape. This discovery whose premisses were present in the poetic production of the 50's and 60's, evolved ironically into a kind of colonization of the islands, mostly the neighbouring Cyclades, and the entrance to a new period of mass-construction, the one materializing the *maison grecque*: the house with the view. The architectural language employed for this new type of construction is directly analogous to that of the Athenian *polykatoikia*, although hidden below a façade of the corresponding tradition. That is, below the white papier-maché of contemporary Cycladic constructions, one is to find a derivation of Le Corbusier's *maison dom-ino* denying any traditional technique potentially related to the appearance and the form of the so desired *maison grecque*⁴.

Although the initial motives of these constructions might have been related to the escape from urban congestion towards a liberated condition and the belief in a Hellenic identity, the desire for metropolitan comforts as well as the absence of subsequent legislative regulations concerning construction on the islands, led to an urban scheme reproducing ironically that of Athens, leading in some extreme cases to the impossibility of contemplating the natural landscape because of its dense suburban-like condition. The collective desire of obtaining a poetic view towards the horizon was never to be obtained, because of its collective nature. This new condition of asphyxiating landscape and its primary constructive protagonist of reinforced concrete create a new suspicion, that of the islands being regarded as suburbs of the city of Athens which eventually succeeded to surpass its physical barriers spreading its metropolitan condition in the horizon like another *Exodus*, paradoxically leading to Greece's contemporary most diffused image of white traditional constructions, being that of Athens' chaotic suburban development.

3. "[...] While the real guilt lies in town planning irregularities; inadequate street plans; [...] everything, without fail, is blamed to the polykatoikia." Philippidis Dimitris, "Polykatoikias", published in *Made in Athens* for the 13th Venice Biennale of Architecture, 2012.

3. Zissis Kotionis defines metaphorically *la maison grecque* in his book *La Folle du Lieu*, as "the house of Elpinoras" (mythical character of the Odyssey), a two-level house deprived from a staircase. It is a dangerous construction offering an excellent, hedonistic view to the landscape but depriving the inhabitant from communication and articulation with the other parts of the house. The title refers to the constructions commonly encountered in the Greek landscape, which use a contemporary constructive vocabulary but intend a "traditional" finishing and appearance. They are often built using multiple levels in order to enjoy the best possible view to the landscape.

fig.4 Photo of a construction in Paros island, 2016

fig.5 Point Supreme architects, *Ferry Boat*, sketch indicating the Athenian urban condition spreading towards the horizon, "Projects for Athens", in *Made in Athens*, for the Venice Biennale of 2012

fig.6 Zissis Kotionis, *proposal for la maison grecque*, "La folle du lieu", 2004



Glitter and Rhinestone

The arrival of the metropolitan principles on the Cycladic islands provoked fundamental changes on the organisation of these enclaves. Indeed, the urban storm applied its rules within the labyrinthic streets of the villages, bearing with it the principles of the *polykatoikia*, which came to eventually surpass by far the number of the once called traditional constructions. In counter to the evolution happening in Athens where the application of the model was made in a chaotic and liberated way, this colonisation was realised in the shadow of the traditional constructions, producing the hybrid existence of the *maison grecque* gradually strengthening and multiplying in the landscape.

From an architectural point of view, the encounter of the morphological flexibility of the *polykatoikia* type and the traditional constructions made of thick stone walls painted white and pierced only by small windows, offered a fertile ground for the proliferation of the metropolitan congestion. Indeed, behind the contemporary brick façades of the constructions, material that has replaced the original construction with stone, and beyond the thick layer of stucco covering them, one can find all kinds of programs installed, from luxury houses, dwellings, hotels, bars and restaurants, to bookshops, banks, travelling agencies, schools, spas, supermarkets or souvenir shops, where one can now purchase archaeological treasures, ancient mythologies, statues of the gods or the bust of any ancient philosopher.

These artefacts made of cheap wax, kitsch in their soul, are the result of an uncontrolled and frenetic mass production of objects, reproducing original pieces of art without taking into account the *savoir-faire* or cultural origins behind the copied authentic, thus proclaiming the kitsch as an ethos¹. The process of creation of kitsch souvenirs is astonishingly close to that of the contemporary Cycladic constructions, the wax being replaced by concrete, poured to produce the image of a hand-crafted authentic. And even though the copies are in some cases seemingly extremely faithful to the originals, both in architecture and in art, the reproduced and the reproducing suffer from one essential difference: the first one was created as a time indicator meant to resist to the passage of time, while the second ones are conceived according to the pricing demands of the market, whose choice of the cheapest material is destined to a predetermined decadence. This culture of mass production stands for a desire of the instantaneous effect and the consumption, where the idea of resisting in time is erased by a *planned obsolescence*² as a product of the metropolitan sprawl of values, or their absence.

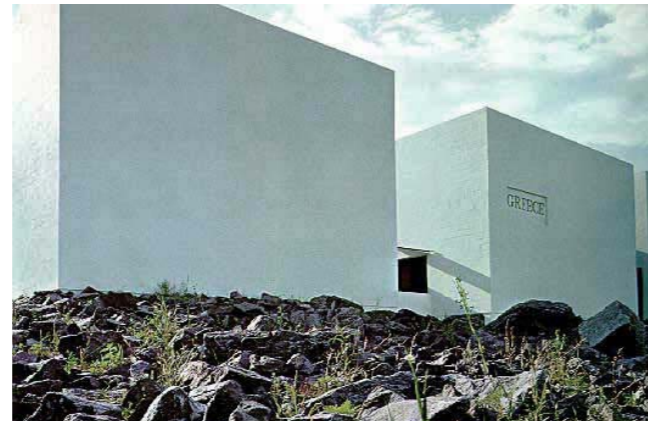
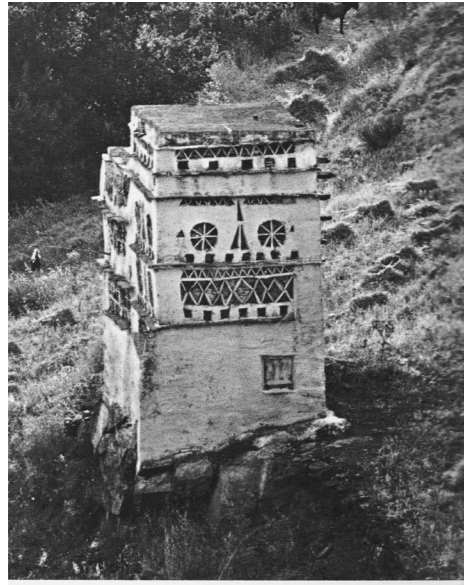
1. "Ethos (plural: ethea) is an appeal to the authority or credibility of the presenter, as well as the moral values that the members of the audience share in relation to the subject of the presentation or conversation. If the presenter knows or assumes that the members of the audience share certain moral values, the presenter then can appeal to those values to support their idea. In order to do that, the presenter has to demonstrate how their idea will agree, promote, or is connected to those moral values. It is also how well the presenter convinces the audience that he or she is qualified to present (speak) on the particular subject." Definition by wikipedia.

2. *Planned obsolescence or built-in obsolescence in industrial design and economics is a policy of planning or designing a product with an artificially limited useful life, so it will become obsolete after a certain period of time. Producers that pursue this strategy believe that the additional sales revenue it creates more than offsets the additional costs of research and development and opportunity costs of existing product line cannibalization. In a competitive industry, this is a risky strategy because when consumers catch on to this, they may decide to buy from competitors instead.* Definition by wikipedia.

fig.1 A Caryatids of the Erechtheion temple, displaced into a museum in order to protect it from any damage. This strategy of conservation implies a production of *fake* reproductions on site.

fig.2 series of bust of the Greek heroes, symbol of a tradition absorbed by the metropolis.





This research of the immediate effect by amplifying the original outlines, could be seen as the invented manner of the metropolis to absorb and appropriate itself the myths and the traditions. This caricaturist appropriation of the construction techniques and traditional ornaments, produced a new kind of vernacular built according to its planned obsolescence, the association of the *free-plan* and the white abstract façades, or else a *decorated shed*³ that, like the wax busts, is destined to fall in decay.

This inevitable decay is strongly manifested on the Cycladic acquisitions, where the overwhelming production of the *polykatoikia* type interpretations, led to a contemporary layer of unfinished structures, simultaneously exposing their constitutive skeleton and their exclusively metropolitan provenance. Their reinforced concrete skeletons are sprawled, artificial and foreign to the Cycladic landscape and the nature surrounding them, initiating a peculiar dialogue based on their contrasting natures, generating a dramatic, sublime new composition of brutality.

However, apart from being the products of a deteriorated economic condition, one could interpret these dispersed naked structures as pieces of a liberated architecture, freed from the Athenian genetic hybridisation of walls and columns. They are the products of a paused process of construction, destined to rise in ruins, or be born in decay, manifesting however the truthful constitution of the Cycladic built landscape. These errors of the exponential process of production, do not pretend to be something different than they actually are, contemporary concrete ruins. Although, as they are now liberated from the walls which used to conceal their real constitution, they are bound to negate the primary condition of congestion, the disconnection of the interior and exterior spaces, ultimately rising as the architectural objects that constitute the closest realised examples of Le Corbusier's diagram, the *maison dom-ino*. The Cycladic ruins have accidentally succeeded in "*the replacing of natural materials by artificial ones, of heterogeneous and doubtful materials by homogeneous and artificial ones (tried and proved in the laboratory) and by products of fixed composition. Natural materials, which are infinitely variable in composition, must be replaced by fixed ones. [...] A house will no longer be this solidly-built thing which sets out to defy time and decay, and which is an expensive luxury by which wealth can be shown; it will be a tool as the motor-car is becoming a tool. The house will no longer be an archaic entity, heavily rooted in the soil by deep foundations, built "firm and strong," the abject of the devotion on which the cult of the family and the race has so long been concentrated.*"⁴

3. "Where systems of space and structure are directly at the service of the program, and ornament is applied independently of them. This we call the decorated shed." Venturi Robert, Scott Brown Denise, Izenour Steve, *Learning from Las Vegas*, p.87

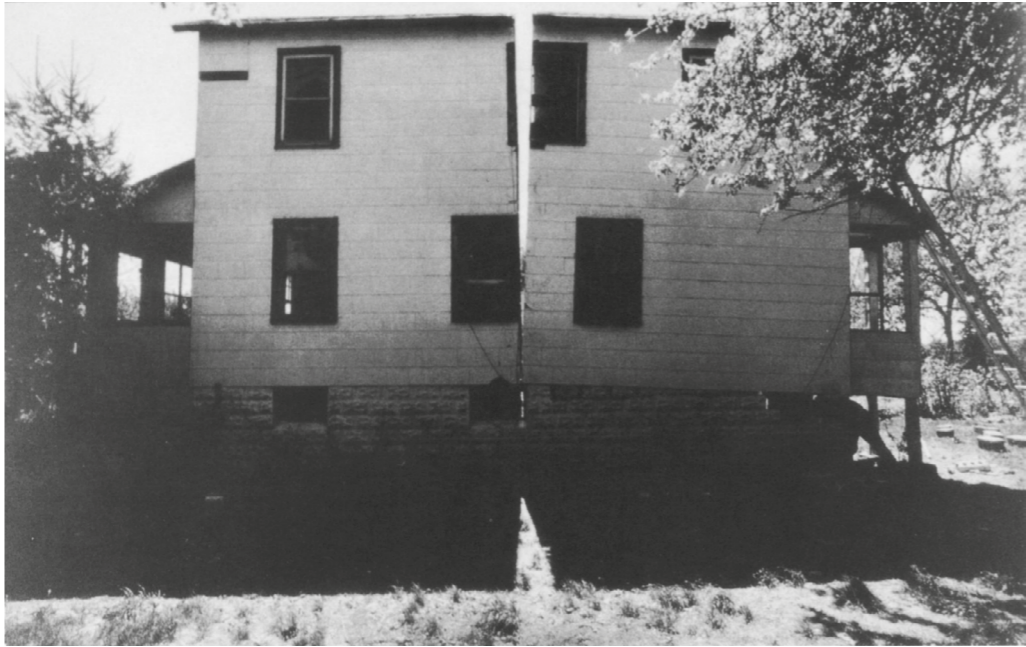
4. Le Corbusier, *Vers une Architecture*, p.192-193

fig.3 Vernacular construction from the Cycladic Island. This architecture of stone can't be reduce only by monolithic white cubes.

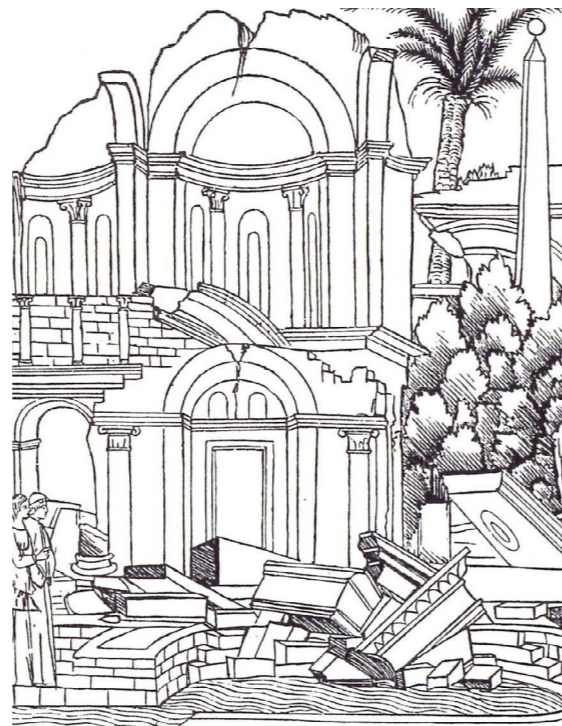
fig.4, 5 Greek pavilion for International and Universal Exposition of 1967, Quebec, Canada. The traditional *maison Grecque* is turned into an exhibition hall, or else a decorated shed.

fig.6 Skeleton of the new *maison Grecque* abandoned, contrasting with the landscape. Photographer, Maximilian Pittner.

The protecting Shells which had initially been constructed for the inquiry of the city's memories, were momentarily forgotten by the rush of the evolving City, and were ignored together with their imprisoned content. They had come to be deserted, frosted islands of past floating on a contemporary sea. The creation of the continuously evolving urban body proved to become the tragedy of itself and its creators, themselves eternally destined to remain trapped inside the body of their creature, who, losing the control of its possessions entered its circle of decay and decomposition, looking nothing alike the initial composition of the canvas. And as in the myth of king Midas, wherever its creators went and whatever they touched became a part of what they had once thought to desire: an urban condition, ironically and diametrically antithetical to the initial inquiry for the City's lost memories. Everything, apart from the protected lands located below the Shells made of glass. There, one can now find the rare coexistence of the silence of absence and the loudness of desires, while in the rare occasions when the inhabitants secretly enter their precious, dusted Shells to breath some fresh air of freedom, they still have to try hard to remember what they protected their possessions from, or what the form of their city used to be.



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•	IV	IV	•
IV: Ruins	The Monument of the Everyday Life	Ars Memoriae	IV
IV	•	•	•
		V	



The Monument of the Everyday Life

A great fascination observed in the course of the history of art, present from the great narrations of ancient victories or losses, to the *Capricci* of the 17th century¹, ruins have established a fertile ground for metaphorical interpretations during centuries, arising as a nostalgic reminder of the past, affecting, nevertheless, the present. The pleasure of observing an architectural expression in its decay provokes an ambivalent state of mind, where the impression that the ruins make on the observer, “*by their beauty, or their strangeness, or their shattered intimidations*”², varies from a sentimental admiration of beauty until a profound intimidation of its decay. The natural and the cultural coexist simultaneously on the body of a ruin, provoking a mysterious pleasure, a pleasure that has led to the adoption of a romantic attitude towards these fragmented existences. Art history has continuously been fascinated by the sublime liberation and the intriguing beauty provoked by these unused and useless structures.

In 1467, Francesco Colonna wrote the first known full-length literary rhapsody of ruins describing the ecstatic feelings provoked by them, in his fictive oeuvre named *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (*The Strife of Love in a Dream*)³. During the narration, the reader enters in a delirium of multiple dreams where Poliphilo, the main character of the novel, encounters mythical animals in various architectural sceneries. In one of these dreams, Poliphilo is walking with his lover, Polia, in a ruined landscape constituted of fallen columns, broken sculptures and abandoned temples. When they arrive in front of the ruin of an ancient building along a river bank, Polia experiences the need to explain her melancholic admiration for the great past of what used to be a temple: “*Admire, my dearest Poliphilo, this monument all in ruins and upset, an immense heap of broken stones. Once it was a magnificent temple, where great solemn rites were performed before a multitude of spectators. But now it is annihilated and ruined and totally abandoned. Its name was Polyandrion.*”⁴ After this episode, Poliphilo started exploring the abandoned monument, where he found several fragments of ruined objects. He wandered with pleasure from one fragment to another, delighted to stroll among that many ancient relics which provoked to him a certain nostalgia for a glorious past.

The importance of ruins becomes, until today, often the subject of inspiration and interpretation in architecture, painting or literature. During the second half of the 20th century, a different type of ruins appeared in the metropolitan outskirts related industrial production. This type of ruins would be the subject of several artistic researches and experimentations, most significantly

1. The *Capriccio* is a style appeared in the 17th century, defined by an architectural fantasy, placing together buildings, archaeological ruins and other architectural elements in fictional and often fantastical combinations.

2. Macaulay Rose, *The pleasure of Ruins*, p.XV

3. Ibid, p.15

4. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, translated in English, found in *The pleasure of Ruins* by Rose Macaulay, p.15

fig.1 *The Ruins of Polyandrion*, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, Woodcut, (Venice, 1499)

fig.2 Smithson Robert “*The Great Pipes Monument*” (1967).



5. Robert Smithson defined in Passaic five types of monuments: Type A: “memorials to exhausted meanings” or “what the-man-in-the-street considers to be a monument”; Type B: “Old Suburbia”, composed by abandoned buildings built before the Wall Street crash of 1929; Type C: “New Suburbia” defined by certain post WW II buildings; Type D: “Dead spots” like dry swimming pools or parking lots that “seem to exist for a limited duration of time”; and Type E: “Ruin in Reverse”, any unfinished new construction.

6. *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic*, 1967, p.72

7. *ibid*

8. «Instead of causing us to remember the past like the old monuments, the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the future. Instead of being made of natural materials, such as marble, granite, plastic, chrome, and electric light. They are not built for the ages, but rather against the ages. They are involved in a systematic reduction of time down to fractions of seconds, rather than in representing the long spaces of centuries. Both past and future are placed into an objective present. This kind of time has little or no space; it is stationary and without movement, it is going nowhere, it is anti-Newtonian, as well as being instant, and is against the wheels of the time-clock. Flavin makes “instant-monuments”». Robert Smithson, *Entropy And The New Monuments*, 1966

the one effectuated by the American artist Robert Smithson (1938-1973) in New Jersey. The intention of this research was to legitimize these contemporary ruins which remained invisible from the map of the city. In September 1967, the artist made a bus trip from New York to Passaic, New Jersey, carrying only his camera and a science fiction novel, with the intention of documenting the road side *monuments* of the Passaic landscape⁵. Through the essay related to this journey and illustrated by a series of his photographs, published on the same year, he explained the beauty found in the reality of the imperfect and ruined suburban landscape. He claimed that the monuments of the Passaic such as “*the great pipes monument*”, should be considered as the right symbol for the city, as they represent the real traces of human work on earth, traces produced by the unexplored and contemporary *everyday life*, traditionally not considered to be part of the landscape. During his exploration in this man-made landscape, the artist declared to have felt a sensation of euphoria and an extreme joy walking around all these elements, reminding of the feelings *Poliphilo* in the relic of the ancient monument.

During his wandering in this artificial landscape, the artist came at some point, to the discovery of an artefact which “*explained everything*”. Behind a big sign of a construction site, there was a building whose construction had never been completed, making the artist realize that a different kind of ruin was emerging within the *monuments of Passaic*, a ruin unable to be compared with its classical predecessors, or a “*zero panorama* [that] *seemed to contain ruins in reverse, that is – all the new construction that would eventually be built. This is the opposite of the «romantic ruin» because the buildings don’t fall into ruin after they are built, but rather rise into ruin before they are built*”⁶. Within this new type of relics, Smithson found the conditions for the definition of a culture of the present, of the everyday life, where time and history are swept away for a new kind of art to rise, an art never experienced before, inspired by “*the artificial landscape without cultural precedent*”⁷.

The *ruins in reverse* are falling in decay at the same time that they are being built, symbolizing according to Smithson, the arrival of a new way of thinking about art, where the result of the process should neither be referring to a great past nor an ideal future, but should rather bring together the past and the future in an objective present⁸.

Ars Memoriae

The modern city of Athens has built its contemporary identity under the supervising presence of ruins. In order to fully understand the relation between the city and its relics, one can refer to an ancient technique developed around the 6th century BC in Greece, before spreading in Europe by the Romans, the *Art of Memory*. This term refers to an ancient technique which consisted a fundamental tool for the transmission of philosophical rhetoric, allowing the theoretical reflections to transcend the passage of time, while maintaining the precise order of each argument in the way it had been established. This method consisted of the mental impression of metaphorical “places” and “images”, places and images which carry their own symbolic and references in order to be able to reconstruct the narrative¹. This unusual way of building an imaginary world where one is to find the exact words of a speech, was accomplished by using architecture as a stock of symbolic elements which would, by the according proportions, ornaments or lighting, reproduce the argument thoroughly. The example most often given for this art, also called *mnemotechnic*, was that of a house, imagined with its articulations and series of rooms, but the technique could potentially find its way through public buildings, religious complexes or urban sequences such as long roads or even fragments of cities². These artificial memories, shaped by their creators as invisible cities, were composed by a series of symbolic fragments, each one independent but indispensable for the formation of a complete and coherent argument.

Starting from one restricted room for the simplest facts to be remembered, up to portions of an entire city for the more complex ones, the orator had to *walk* his way precisely through the imaginary city, in order to reach for the symbolic pieces which were placed in a specific order, and succeed narrating the memorized story. At the same time that the story was being told, the narrator was mentally passing through the imaginary corridors of his own constructed memory. Hence, after the story had been narrated the imagined constructions initiated the process of their decay, executing the memory’s destiny to progressively decompose if not revisited.

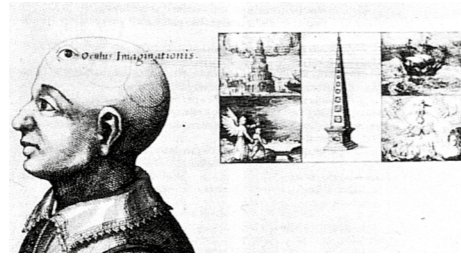
An important aspect concerning the imaginary city’s built environment through the art of memory, is the process itself of the construction of different memories. The orators used to refer directly to the way in which the real cities were constructed, initially creating a frame for the latter instalment of specific spaces and objects⁴. More specifically, they would start building their argument as if it were an actual construction site, first creating the structural

1. “The first step was to imprint on the memory a series of loci or places. The commonest, though not the only, type of mnemonic place system used was the architectural type. The clearest description of the process is that given by Quintilian. In order to form a series of places in memory, he says, a building is to be remembered, as spacious and varied a one as possible, the forecourt, the living room, bedrooms, and parlours, not omitting statues and other ornaments with which the rooms are decorated. The image by which have been memorized in the building. This done, as soon as the memory of the facts requires to be revived, all these places are visited in turn and the various deposits are demanded of their custodians.” Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1966, p.3

2. Marot Sébastien, “*Sub-urbanism and the art of memory*”, p.12

4. Marot Sébastien, “*Sub-urbanism and the art of memory*”, p.14

3. “Crucially, the configuration and relations between the places are in each case established and governed by one or several fixed itineraries. This seems from the outset to eliminate less structured spaces - spaces man is less likely to have organized- where the relation between places are not determined in advance. In short, artificial memory calls for a landscape that itself is relatively artificial.” *Sub-urbanism and the art of memory* by Sébastien Marot, p.12



elements defining the overall size and proportions necessary to nest the symbols of the speech, them corresponding to specific ornaments, atmospheres or objects, created during a second phase of the construction. Before the pieces of evidence were precisely positioned and after the completion of the structural works, there exists a precarious moment during which the imaginary city is constituted by *ruins in reverse*, or unfinished structures, patiently awaiting for a story to bring them to life.

The moment that the city of Athens started its Hellenic reconstruction, after four hundred years of occupation, the ruins of its ancient past became the image of freedom reclaiming all the symbols of a glorious antiquity. The first step made after this rediscovery, was to start a precise reconstruction of every forgotten fragment in order to decipher once again the entire narrative. This process of rediscovery brought an international attention to the new born capital, attracting figures of the architectural scene, like Auguste Choisy, intrigued to discover the stories behind the precious remains. Due to the fact that the monuments were in a ruinous state, they were only fragments of themselves, each researcher was able to imagine their personal ideal Athens, perpetuating the tradition of the orators while walking around the fragments, intending to form a coherent story.⁵

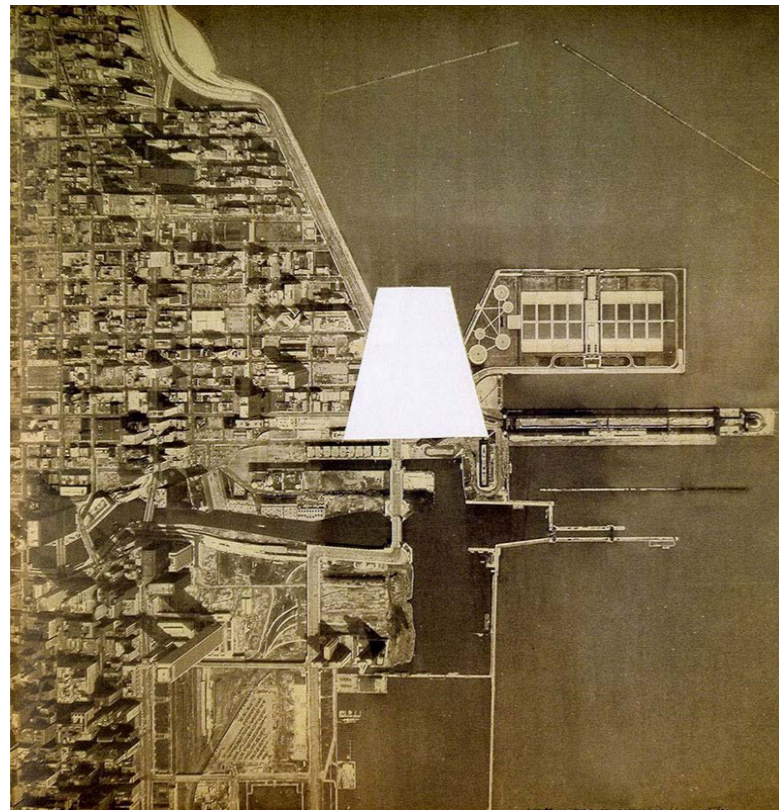
A more contemporary relation between the art of memory and the Greek capital, is to be found in its *ruins in reverse*, the unfinished buildings starting to make recently their appearance in the city, born deprived from a precise narrative. Indeed, these structures haven't yet been filled with symbols, making of them invisible fragments, blank pages for the narrative of the city, lacking a mythology of their own. The city of Athens is thus similar to an imaginary, invented image for a narration, chaotic, fragmented, and immediately in decay, but as in *ars memoriae*, a city always capable of being rebuilt and reshaped according to the stories to arrive.

5. Lucan Jacques, "Composition non-composition, Architecture et théories, XIXe-XXe siècles", p.349-356, where the author explains how the beaux-arts principles had produced a series of drawings where the entrance of the Acropolis was represented in a perfect bilateral symmetry, and how the asymmetrical plans of the same place by Auguste Choisy have changed the way to see architecture.

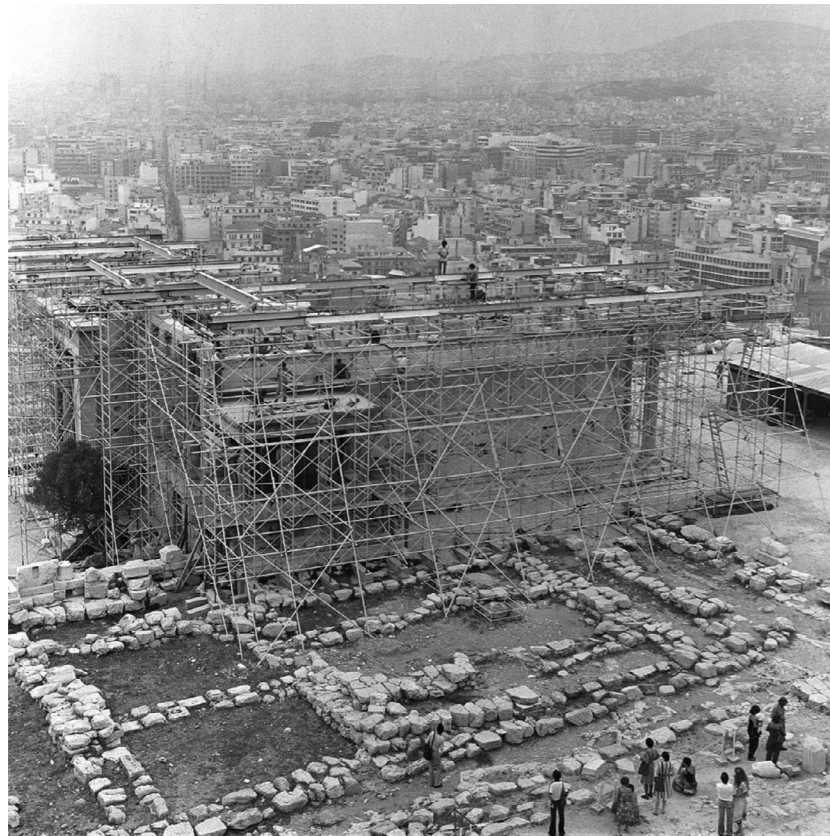
fig.1 *The eye of imagination*, Robert Fludd, *Ars Memoriae*, Oppenheim, 1619

fig.2 Restoration of the Caryatids from the Erechtheion temple, 1979, Acropolis Restoration Service Committee for the Conservation of the Acropolis Monuments

fig.3 Unfinished polikatoikia in Athens, image from *Un-finished*.



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Corpus Delicti		V	



Corpus Delicti

The present of Greece is hard to be detached from the ancient past, from the evidence evoking a civilization that flourished on the same land over five thousand years ago. Every step taken during modernity is a step over ancient inheritance, an inheritance insisting on revealing continuously its remnants. Each time the ancestral move of excavating the thin textile of earth is made, the land seems to be able to produce culture by revealing from below its surface messages and devices forgotten and re-invented a million times over the years, a time-lapse representing oblivion and materialized by this thin layer of dust and ground. The contemporary city of Athens lies its foundations upon a trembling layer of past, eternally destined to exhausting negotiations with its submerged ancient fragments, and to a humiliating and unequal comparison of what it is, and what it seemingly had been.

The emotional relation towards ruins was highly altered through the centuries, affecting their influence and importance on the urban texture. According to Antonas Aristide, we can “relate the alteration of the point of view towards ruins to the arrival of Renaissance during Middle Ages, [buildings] continue to live «the past inside their present», whereas after the Renaissance ancient ruins seem to «stand out from the totality of contemporary constructions as bearers of historic and ethical consciousness»¹. An idealisation of the past thus, prevents the renovation of ancient ruins according to present programmatic demands, while a Renaissance-like amazement leads to their restoration to a supposed state of their existence during a specific period of time, judged of a higher importance.

Even if the Acropolis has constantly been utilized ever since its completion², altering the architectural and programmatic interpretations according to time and remaining an always active part of the city of Athens, after the creation of the independent Greek state in 1830, it was decided that the ruins of the Acropolis should undergo a series of alterations, including the erasure of any Ottoman trace, in order to be restored back to their past state of glory and symbolic representation of the golden century. This choice of restoration aimed to reinforce the idea of continuity between the ancient Greek civilisation and the contemporary one, directly attributing the essence of the Hellenic identity to this trembling layer of distant past, as well as to create a new integrity and symbolic point of departure both for the newly formed state and the western civilization, that immediately embraced its newly discovered roots.

The result of this decision brought the Parthenon into a transiting



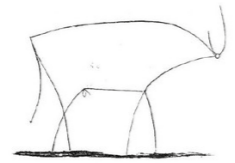
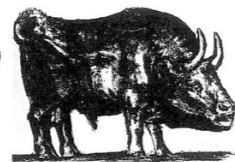
1. Aristide Antonas, *Ruin Inhabitations*, (free translation from the original text in Modern Greek), p.10

2. “In the Byzantine period, the Parthenon was turned into a church, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Under the Latin Duchy of Athens, the Acropolis functioned as the city’s administrative center, with the Parthenon as its cathedral, and the Propylaia as part of the Ducal Palace. After the Ottoman conquest of Greece, the Parthenon was used as the garrison headquarters of the Turkish army, and the Erechtheum was turned into the Governor’s private Harem”. Information from Wikipedia

fig.1 Photography of the Erechtheion Temple, Acropolis Restoration Service Committee, 1979

fig.2 Laundry hanging at the Roman Agora on the north side of the Acropolis, in Athens, circa 1925

fig.3 Photography of remains of the ancient Themistokleian Wall, inside a residual space among constructions.



state of a constant and careful reconstruction, serving as a field of archaeological satisfaction principally addressed to tourists. An unprecedented kind of cultural abandonment of the essence of the building, for the sake of its sculptural exterior appearance, towards a hedonistic regard of an inherited cultural identity where admiring is considered more than enough, and it probably is for the continuation of a sterile mythology. The central artificial island defining the Athenian constellation of “voids”, came to be isolated from the rest of the urban fabric, a kind of thematic park creating a blank space in the Athenian’s city map, too busy or simply too comforted to reinterpret, constituting it impossible for a contemporary cultural definition to emerge from the frozen ruins. In this way the Parthenon seems to be bound to eternally wear an outer scaffolding skin, silently questioning its general consideration of an ancient ruin as a result of its contemporary image of a construction site, and its active part in the economic aftermath of the tourist industry, while instead, the inhabitants themselves are destined to wander inside the chaotic mass of their city, voluntarily excluded from the “voids”. This minor incoherence can play an important role in the ironic antithesis of the symbolic image of the Parthenon under construction, gazing towards the contemporary ruins of the metropolis, themselves undergoing decay and deconstruction.

The metropolitan premature decay of its unfinished constructions, or *ruins in reverse*, is visible from the plateau of the Acropolis, but it stubbornly remains unseen. It took the background of a sublime landscape to make the symptoms of a decaying society reveal, underlying the existence of contemporary ruins in the Cycladic metropolitan acquisitions. However, the discovery of *ruins in reverse* constituted a necessary moment of reflection, an important revelation marking a change of perception, similar to the prisoners’ discovery of the real world in Plato’s allegory of the cave. Or, the important evidence of a crime, without which a future development and reinterpretation would be impossible. The metropolitan condition was obliged to undergo mutations and ultimately fall in decay, in order to reveal and reflect upon its skeleton, the *maison dom-ino*³.

The Acropolis on the other hand was never offered this precious moment of silence, continuously forced to represent and be represented, making its voice progressively harder to perceive. Although, despite this fundamental difference and the opposing cultural connotations, both the protagonists of the Acropolis and the metropolis, the temple and the *dom-ino*, are predetermined to symbolise a commencement, a return to the origin or the fundamentals. The temple, dressed in its metallic scaffolding system is heading towards the golden century, and the metropolis, revealing its cellular composition, towards its basic postulate, the liberated *dom-ino*.

In the city of Athens, as we are standing amazed by its marvellous wonders and restoring their ruined walls, the city’s own walls start collapsing. “Cities [...] believe they are the work of the mind or of chance, but neither the one nor the other suffices to hold up their walls. You take delight not in a city’s seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours.” Athens was probably never offered the necessary vocabulary to formulate an answer, or maybe a question was never really asked. But as the walls of the city start falling and the hopeful monster reveals its face, perhaps delight can still be found in “the question [the city] asks you, forcing you to answer.”⁴

3. “Mais cette phase d’abandon ou de déshérence est un moment nécessaire, il doit y avoir cette discontinuité, qui est religieusement et artistiquement essentielle. C’est ce que je veux dire lorsque je parle de la nécessité des ruines: ce sont les ruines qui engendrent l’étincelle, le désir de la restauration et du retour aux origines. Il doit y avoir (dans notre conception nouvelle de l’histoire) un intérim de mort et de rejet avant qu’il puisse s’agir de renouveau et de réforme. L’ordre ancien doit d’abord mourir afin qu’un paysage puisse renaître”. John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *De la nécessité des ruines et autres sujets*, 1979, p.156-157

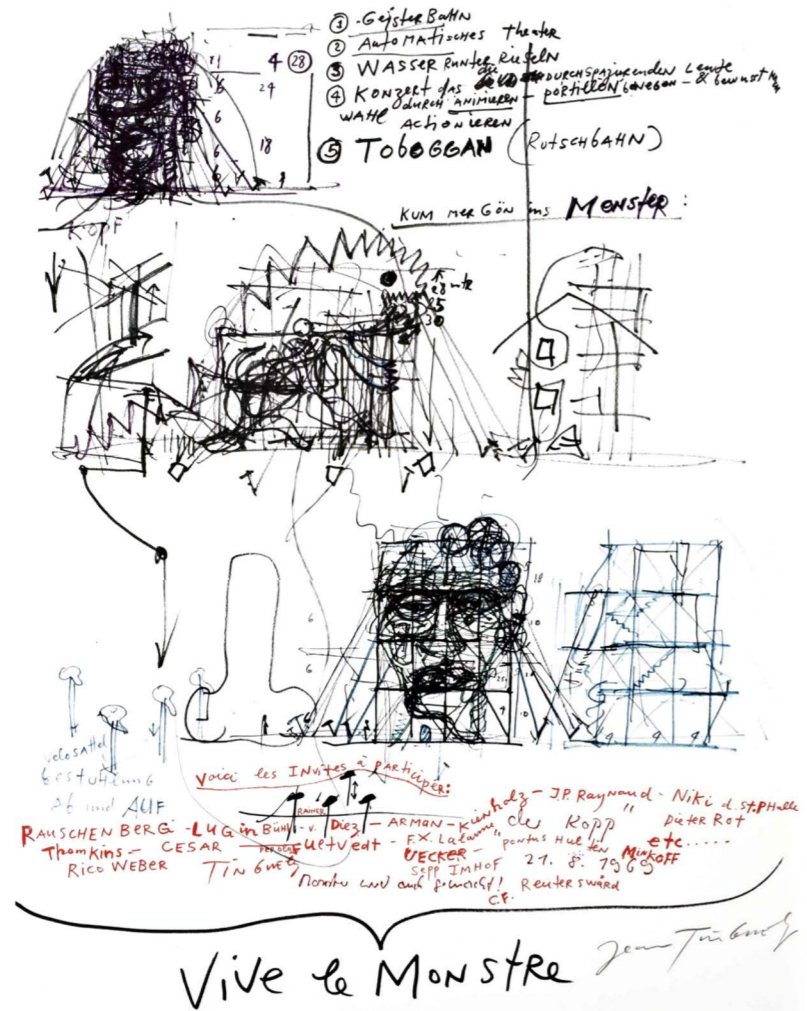
4. Calvino Italo, *Invisible Cities*, 1997, p.38

fig.4 Photography of the Parthenon Temple, Acropolis Restoration Service Committee, 1979

fig.5 and 6 Picasso Pablo, *Onze états du “Taureau”*, 1945-1946

fig.7 Photography of an unfinished construction in Athens, 2012, from un-finished collective

The silent urban body of the City, whose Cells are now wretched and torn in certain places, came to reveal the decayed skeleton of the scenery it was made to bear: the Face of a Hopeful Monster now in its vulnerable state, blamed and cursed for all the misery it gave to its creators. It is quite easy to blame the Monster, collectively mourning for something, while intentionally avoiding the individual parts of responsibility for the contemporary absence of Poets. But maybe in times to come, the body of the City and its disfigured Face will come to be regarded as the sublime dark sky, always present to underline the existence of constellations, or else, indicating the distant Shells of light floating on the black sky's sea. And now, let's face it, the eclipsing species of Poets will eternally be aiming for nothing less, but the sky.



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V: Vive le Monstre



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