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«The fragments composing the digital collage belong to a common popular imaginary: the same references are continually used, quoting artists such as Hockney, Hopper, Rousseau, Vettriano and so on.»

#COLLAGE: A CATALOGUE OF FRAGMENTED ARTWORK

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Youth. Reflecting this term invariably leads to one major theme: the ubiquity of social media. Influencing and defining today's trends, lifestyle, consumer behaviour, ways of dressing, colors, ways of eating, it is a global networking system where one performs and shows up. Social media channels also open pathways for emulation, envy, competition. Today human behavior is not only influenced by the body and its entourage but also by numerous databases, leading to an uber-consumption that we absorb and that influences us; «This globalized hyperculture, its inexhaustible and seductive repertoires of stories and images provide individuals with essential elements of identification [...] Indeed, we are in hyperconsumption in the sense that we consume almost everywhere [...] at any time (Internet), and globally in a thousand ways ».[1] One question that arises here is to what extent the architectural practice is affected by these new and universal social media networks and channels, and the plethora of digital tools they are working with.

As soon as new tools of architecture production and social networks like Instagram emerged, architecture offices were confronted with an unexplored type of æsthetic; having suddenly a new dimension to represent their buildings, there was a jump from the printed/drawn image to the online representation. Due to the visibility given by these media, a lot of effort is put into the æsthetic composition of websites and blogs. Above all, an office has to be more alert to the images it produces, as they often become trademarks. This also influences the type of images posted online. One notices that not only the plan and the section appear, but an embodiment of today's æsthetics and trends accompanies them: the illustration and the collage.

The phenomenon of collages, illustrations and rendering seems to have grown dramatically since the appearance of these said media, being omnipresent in almost every online platform used by offices. The collage in particular, seems to have an aesthetic appeal that was not so widespread before but is now used extensively. Although these images are mostly utilized as a way to express the idea and also as a step in the development of the project, they are nowadays put online.

We could say that the image or even architecture has evolved; «If architecture is not just built matter, but the embodiment of values, ideologies, and affects, then the production of images has to be understood as a substantial aspect of the production of architecture in its real form. This becomes especially true within a condition in which communication, representation, and affect are fundamental assets of contemporary political economy »[2].

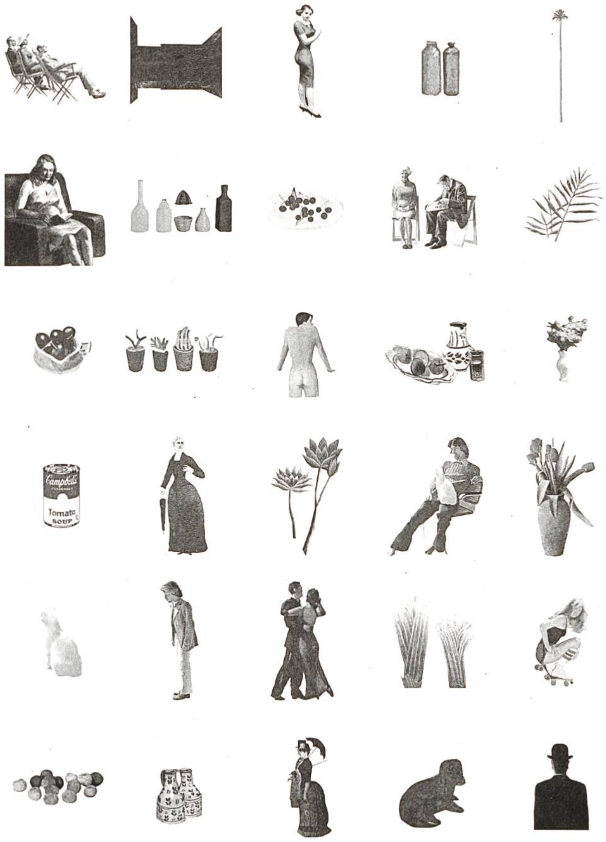
With this shift from conventional representation to today's tendency, drawings can be distinguished into two types: the basic drawing (the plan, section, elevation) and the illustration drawing.

The classical way of referring to the drawing as we know it, starts in the Renaissance, with architects such as Alberti and Brunelleschi. The historical shift occurs when there is a change from the status of master mason/builder from the Middle-Ages to the architect, giving more importance to the drawing, and consequently power through the drawing. The architect now works in his studio. The way of designing a building today derives from the Italian word ‹disegno› (drawing), explaining how, through the movement of the hand, the building is created/designed. This happens through the orthogonal drawing. Although the ultimate tools of the architect (plan/section/elevation drawings) have remained the same since the 15th century, today's focus is put on the image. The image helps us understand the three dimensions of a building and the atmosphere of the inside. It is accessible to all and does not require particular skills to read a plan. We can see prototypes of this type of image in many works of Renaissance architects; Serlio's and Bramante's drawings used to show patrons and other instances of what future buildings were meant to look like.

Today, drawings are much more about transmitting an idea. «The production of images as material entities liberated from their role as mere simulacra of reality.» Nowadays architectural representation has lost its initial aim of pure technicality. Imagery is not only about mathematical correctness anymore; a new type of drawing seems to have evolved; the representational image, which sometimes can be seen as the embodiment of the architectural concept. This concept is featured not only in the sketching process, but also in the collage. «Our projects wouldn't be the same if we used 3D renders.» Hence, conceiving the project through chosen points of view, and thus through collage and illustration, hugely influences the built work.

When the topic of the image is brought up today, and therefore the embodiment of the contemporary concept, we must refer to the original meaning of the term ‹concept›, when the images detach themselves from the 16th century plan, section and elevation. This evolvement of the concept was hugely influenced by the German writer and philosopher August Schlegel (following Kant's meaning of purposiveness), talking about ‹Zweckmässigkeit› in architecture: «We define architecture as the art of designing and constructing beautiful forms in things without a definite model in nature, but freely after a suitably original idea of the human mind. Because its works, however, make visible none of the great eternal ideas that nature impresses on its creations, it must define a human idea, that is, it must be directed toward a purpose. From this at the same time comes the demand for utility that is made upon architecture, and to be sure in such a way, as we will see, that it can never yield to that of beauty. Beauty can exist here only on the condition of purposiveness [Zweckmässigkeit]... Beauty... must reside first and foremost in the appearance of this purposiveness».

Seemingly self-evident from modern to today's architectures, the architectural idea / concept and expression of the concept through the building was a completely new discovery at Schlegel's time. Earlier on, architecture was perceived in terms of quality when it referred to ancient codes, for example following Vitruvius was for a long time considered one of the keys to achieving good and beautiful architecture. This shift influenced all following representational images, particularly modern drawings. We could say that Schlegel, and one of his fellow readers, Schinkel, were the precursors of the modern movement: «to many later modernists Schinkel's strong emphasis on techtonics and his inventive willingness to experiment with non historical

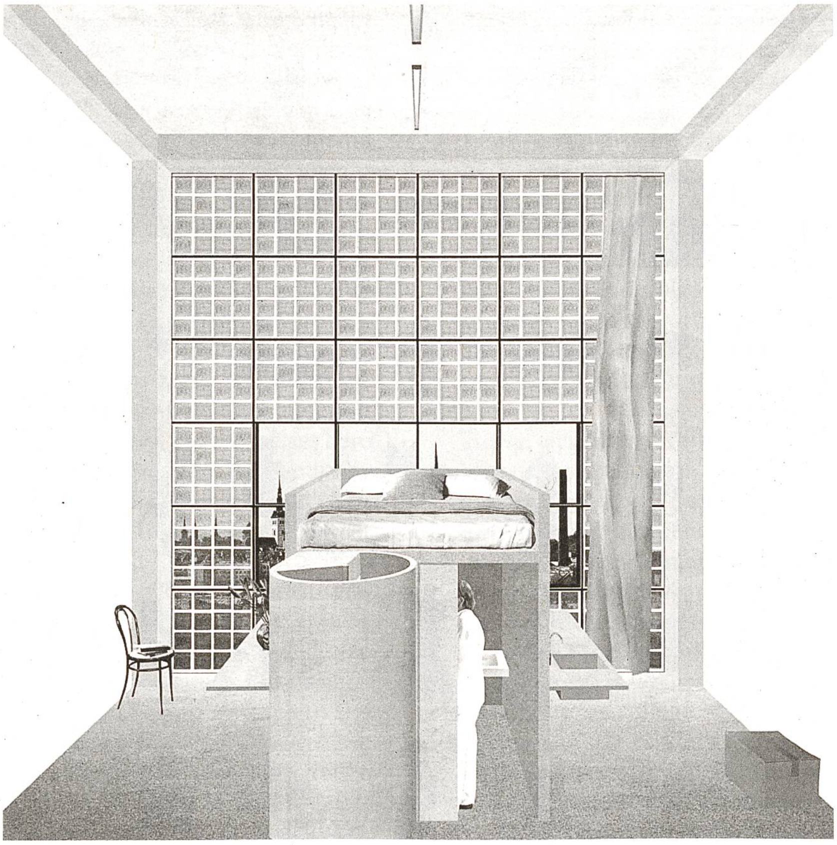


Cut-outs from Hopper, Anderson, Hockney, du Pasquier, Sherenberg, Rousseau, Magritte, Warhol, Vetriano, Blake, Cézanne, Vallotton, Seurat & Bonnard's paintings

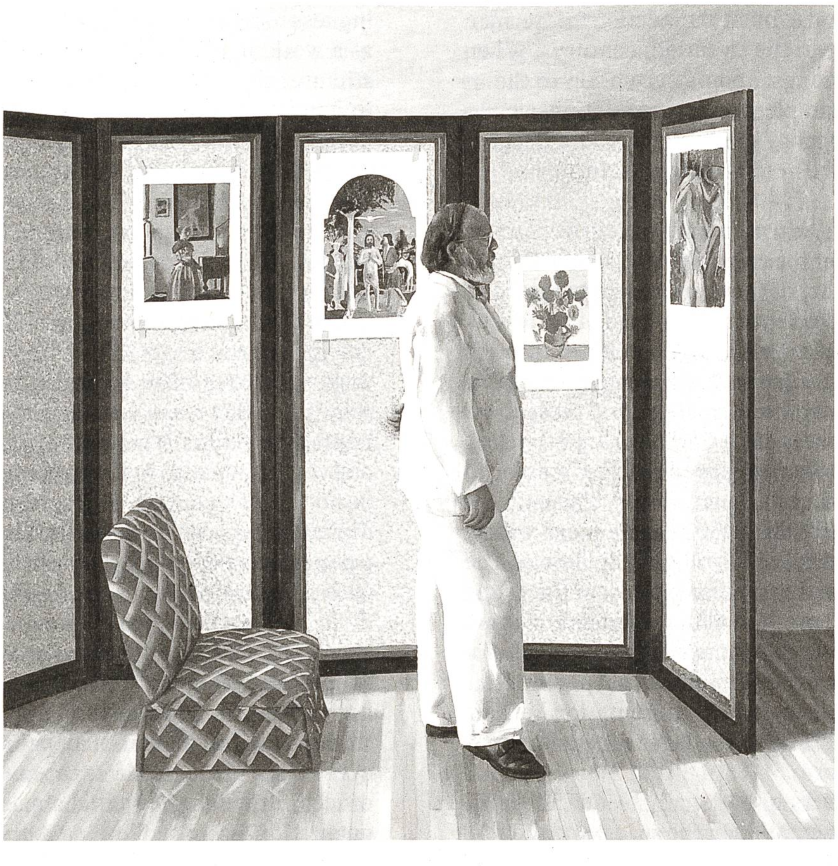
forms constituted the first explicit articulation for German modernism, a precursor to the twentieth century». When we look at modern drawings, and pay attention to the influence Schlegel might have had on representation, we can see many forerunners of today's images in modern imagery, such as Mies van der Rohe's collages, for instance..

The collage representation earns the title of artistic practice in the 20th century under the creativity of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. The art of fragmentation emerges, consisting in relating artistic creations to a form of reality, using everyday objects. The art of collage developed through the periods of German Dadaism. It was employed mainly for political propaganda by the Surrealists, and subsequently used in the design process of Le Corbusier's. In the early 20th century architects also employed collage in order to experiment with spatiality and materiality. The concept of collage in the architectural field became more widely known and implemented in 1987, through Colin Rowe.. The following years showcased a peculiar interest of the young generation for an artistic purpose of the architectural drawing. Since then they have experimented with collage for both its material, formal, and representational potential, as well as its conceptual dimension.. Representation became a fully endorsed practice, and the collage representation is now considered an art form..

Today young architects intentionally blend the aim of making a tangible representation of the space, and the willingness to create a pictorial composition that declares itself as a work of art. The digital collage we are familiar with, still uses these ‹everyday objects› to take place in a reality. Its concept and efficiency have not changed, contrary to its design tools. Evolving constantly in response to the technological progress, digitalisation facilitates and accelerates the process of collage. The digital collage wants to reveal an atmosphere, a feeling, more than explaining the technicalities of a project; it communicates messages more than a concrete reality. The image becomes a process which illustrates the architects' intentions. This type of composition emerges in the early 2000s, after the initiation of Italian ‹avant-gardistes›. The architectural office of Pier Vittorio Aureli and Martino Tattara, DOGMA, develops a technique which initially consisted in a very rough trimming of objects, in response to the realistic representations of that period. This ‹montage of fragments› as we could call the digital collage, is characterized by frontal views, central perspectives with unique vanishing points. Depth is shown with a plain soft color panel. The fragments composing the digital collage belong to a common popular imaginary; the same references are continually used, quoting artists such as Hockney, Hopper, Rousseau, Vettriano and so on. Digital collage tends towards an appropriation of art pieces, through the fragmentation of paintings, pulling pieces out of the compositions. These cut-outs are used by numerous offices, although the spatial aims and concepts are consequently different. Following Aureli's previous quotation



DOGMA, Live Forever: The Return of the Factory. Proposal for a living/working unité d'habitation for 1600 inhabitants at the Balti Station area, Tallinn, 2013



Looking at pictures on a screen
David Hockney, 1977

that «architecture is an embodiment of values» when it comes to building and technical drawings, architects are very cautious with their decisions. But when the "collage" technique is brought up, architects have a tendency to show far less precision and coherence in their choices.

The greed of the young generation for images changes the perception of projects and representation. The vulgarisation and popularity of image and publication access offer youth more visibility with digital reviews and online platforms. As ‹A Bigger Splash› becomes a trivial painting in a living space or ‹le Rêve› a simple background behind a pool, this unlimited access to images leads to a different valorisation of artworks. Fala Atelier explains these paintings as a practical tool to achieve the character they want to give their building. Furthermore, they find the art works themselves not relevant enough in terms of meaning to use them in a more ‹conscious› way. When using these old master paintings, there is undoubtedly a certain feeling of nostalgia that can be detected; trying to bring a certain texture and feeling to a flat digital world. The computer offers us almighty tools to build whatever product we desire, but instead one can observe a constant return to paintings. This brings up a certain paradox that can almost be compared to an impossibility to detach ourselves from traditional forms of representation.

Today the architecture image sits in between renderings and collages. If the render tends to reach the most realistic representation and by this a ‹perfect› future building, it often also lacks the ability to represent the building in different situations of its future life stages. Manipulating light, shades and reflections at a certain set time fixes this image in a forever-unique reflection of what this building will become. "The proliferation of form-making enabled by new computational tools quickly revealed its own limitations, and the recession that soon followed provided the opportunity for reflection on these limitations. A number of practices emerged in the following decade that disavowed adventures with hyperboloid surfaces etc. in favour of a renewed interest in the fundamental properties of space and construction. It became obvious that advocating for the 'infinite possibility' of the oddly-shaped room with its hairy wall was less interesting than exploring the very precise and limited possibilities of the dimensions of a room, or the size of opening into the room. Moreover, the repertoire of digital tools was limited and the quest for novelty doomed to diminishing returns."

These images often do not tell us more than what they show, and pit themselves against the standards of a living object or even a photograph. If renderings are hiding the abstractness they produce by their uncanny resemblance to a real building, the collage acknowledges it, leaving space to our imagination. "The practices who were moving away from digital form-making realised that the rendering software necessary to capture the types of bizarre forms entirely conceived within the virtual realm was no longer required. A fundamentally simple arrangement of rooms and openings could be much more easily and quickly represented, freeing the architect from the monotony of complicated rendering interfaces and hours spent elaborating wall junctions or tweaking light levels."

Unlike the render, the collage is not only a reproduction, because by adding things it loses that status and becomes less loyal to the future reality of the building. The freedom in the collage helps us challenge our own understanding of the concept. This graphic representation emerges in a generation that uses images as a discourse and aims to touch a large public. It is successful because it attracts, it is efficiently built, and it is understandable which is less the case with technical drawings such as plan and sections.
«A city is never seen as a totality, but as an aggregate of experiences, animated by use, by overlapping perspectives, changing light, sounds, and smells. Similarly, a single work of architecture is rarely experienced in its totality (except in graphic or model form) but as a series of partial views and synthesized experiences. Questions of meaning and understanding lie between the generating ideas, forms, and the nature and quality of perception.» As an architectural work, only fully understood and conceived through the experience of the body, collages can be used as a representational analogue by offering spatial and material possibilities. This technique has the ability to capture the atmospheres of the built environment but usually represents a fragment or a very small scale of the project which risks non-representation of architectural detail and complexity of a project.

If in the end social media dœs not influence the core elements of built architecture, we can ask ourselves how it is affecting the imagery of a generation, our relation to fine arts and the architectural representation as we know it.

We would like to thank DOGMA, Fala Atelier and Other architects for answering our questions and allowing the use of their imagery.