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Master of Architectural Composition
Department of Architecture and Design
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2026

The printed word on architecture

Analysis of five magazines
in the XXI century

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01

Introduction

This study proposes an investigation into the evolution of the language of architecture over the last quarter of a century. Recognizing the crucial role that writing has historically played in the development of the architectural discipline, this research stems from an interest in deepening the function and meaning of words within the contemporary architectural debate.

Adrian Forty in *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*¹ writes: "Architecture, as much as it is made of steel, concrete or stone, is also made of words". What is interposed between the object created by an architect and his thought can be interpreted as a proliferation of words and images. In this perspective, the word is not understood as an alternative to the depiction or observation of the work, but as an analytical tool. It is therefore a method of reading the space between visual sensation and mental perception that offers a key to interpretation which the image, alone, cannot make explicit.

Within the architectural discipline, the control over the verbal element has always been disputed between critics and designers. For the architect, the ability to procure commissions and communicate a project depends to a large extent on the ability to present it, where language is understood as a fundamental tool of persuasion in professional practice. On the other hand, the critic uses the word as a device of analysis to discuss the state of the discipline and establish the outcome of the design process.

This dialectic has its roots in profound historical changes. If in antiquity and the Middle Ages the project was mainly entrusted to the narration and the oral transmission of techniques, it is with the Renaissance that a first fundamental transformation took place. With the introduction of

¹ Forty, Adrian. *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*. Thames & Hudson, 2000. In this volume, Forty traces a genealogy of modern architectural language, demonstrating how theoretical concepts such as space, form or structure have influenced design practice as much as technical innovations.

perspective and the codification of drawing, representation became not only a means of communication, but the tool that separates the intellectual role of the architect from the practice of construction². This primacy of drawing has partly contributed to the recent tendency to identify the image as a more universal means of expression, leaving the role of the word in the background.

However, in twentieth century, a further transformation occurred. The written word and the printed image ceased to be mere supplements to the discipline and became the very engine of the development of modern architecture. In fact, the latter cannot be understood only as an evolution of construction techniques because it has been, first of all, an intellectual discourse. Without the production of essays and manifestos that defined its political and social objectives, the forms of the Modern Movement would have been reduced to a mere matter of engineering or style. This revolution, which would later influence the following decades, did not take place on construction sites but between the pages of books and the editorial offices of magazines. It was the written word that elevated architecture from a design practice to an international cultural issue³.

For these reasons, the present study on the evolution of the language of architecture in the last twenty-five years uses architecture magazines as its primary analytical tool. A rigorous selection is necessary in a publishing landscape that has been a proliferation of magazines since the Second World War. This growth has accelerated exponentially since the 2000s, with many specialized titles born in academic environments or as expressions of small avant-garde groups⁴.

² Aureli, Pier Vittorio. *Brunelleschi: Do you remember counter-revolution?*. Log, n. 2, 2004, pp. 67-76. In this essay, the author analyzes how the introduction of perspective and technical drawing in the fifteenth century allowed the figure of the architect to emancipate himself from the practice of the construction site, transforming design into an intellectual activity that separates the role of the designer from the workers.

³ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. MIT Press, 1994. Colomina argues that the revolution of modern architecture did not take place on construction sites but through the mass media. The magazines do not operate as a mere chronicle of the project, but act as the primary place of elaboration of the discipline and the printed page is thus configured as the actual space of construction in which the work is produced as an intellectual fact.

⁴ De Maio, Fernanda. Ghiraldini, Anna. Maguolo, Michele. *Architecture magazines. Trajectories*. La Rivista di Engramma, n. 188, 2022, pp. 7-14. The editorial highlights the consistent growth of magazines published in Italy, comparing Eugenio Battisti's census of the late eighties, which counted 114 total titles, with ANVUR data from 2022 recording over 350 Class A architecture magazines.

Added to this fragmentation is the advent of digital magazines. Since digital platforms are less expensive than the print, their foundation has favored the birth of numerous editorial projects. However, this ease of access has generated a much shorter life cycle for the titles than in the past, with a high number of journals remaining dormant or being discontinued after a few issues. Digital publishing projects, moreover, often tend to be configured as indiscriminate archives of projects, where textual in-depth analysis gives way to extensive photo galleries, accompanied by short captions and concise text.

Since the aim of the study is to investigate the transformations of the architectural narrative, the choice of print media is the most relevant and aligned with the purposes of the thesis. Research can thus guarantee a historical depth and cultural continuity that the digital medium cannot yet offer. This will allow us to investigate how some historical magazines, which have played an incisive role in the consolidation of the architectural discipline throughout the twentieth century, have interpreted and discussed the critical debate in the last twenty-five years. It should also be noted that the survey is not intended as a monographic study on a specific periodical, but rather on the words it contains. Limiting the observation to a single voice would mean being conditioned by a specific interpretative slant, while the intersection of different perspectives allows the evolution of the architectural language to emerge through contrast or convergence, guaranteeing a broader and more objective vision of the metamorphosis taking place.

The choice therefore falls on five editorial projects of international reference: *Architectural Record*, *The Architectural Review*, *Casabella*, *Domus* and *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*. These magazines are characterized by a deep-rooted tradition and a long history: the American and English periodicals were both born at the end of the nineteenth century, while the European ones were all founded in the late 1920s and 1930s. This selection reflects the desire to cross different editorial lines and critical approaches, in order to observe how the metamorphosis of language takes place within a complex panorama of voices that possess varying influences and perspectives in the international debate.

Architectural Record was founded in 1891 and has an approach linked to the professional dimension, where language is combined with the analysis of construction, technological and the dynamics of the North American building market. *The Architectural Review*, founded in 1896, is united by the same language but takes a different approach. The

narrative slant of this magazine appears markedly more critical, using the written word as a tool to investigate the social role of the architectural work and its relationship with the context. The Italian panorama is instead represented by two historic periodicals, both born in 1928, which then took different directions: *Casabella* and *Domus*. *Casabella* stands out for its critical and rigorous analysis using a language influenced by the historical and theoretical perspectives, which looks at the project as an intellectual fact. On the other hand, *Domus* adopts a more interdisciplinary line with a vocabulary informed by the sphere of design and visual arts. Finally, the research framework is completed by the French magazine *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, founded in 1930. The latter presents a predominantly monographic and thematic approach, with a rigorous language that is less tied to immediate current events, offering more of an observation point on the transformations of the discipline at an international level.

The aim of this selection is to verify if it is possible to trace a common trend or fragmentation in the way of talking about architecture, despite the diversity of approaches. The different critical orientations will be examined in depth by analyzing the type of articles proposed and the priorities assigned by the magazine to the topics covered. The investigation will then continue towards the graphic approach, with the aim of understanding the evolution of the subject of the magazine and the change in the relationship between the space dedicated to images and that reserved for text.

The study does not aim to offer an exhaustive reading of the contemporary panorama, but rather takes the form of an overview structured on precise samples. For the analysis, in fact, it was decided to examine one issue every five years. Specifically, the study focuses on the September issue, a month identified through a random draw⁵. This time frame allows to observe changes over the long term and provides ideas for thought supported by objective data.

To emphasize this approach, it was decided to use the diagram as a representative method. The data is thus transformed into a drawing, fulfilling both an explanatory and suggestive function. In a research focused on words, it is particularly interesting to use a form of communication almost independent of the linguistic code. The diagram is a durable and transversal tool, capable of adapting to any medium

⁵ The sampling method was adopted in order to maintain a purely pragmatic approach in the first part of the quantitative analysis.

and field and as Rem Koolhaas suggests, "the diagram is not a simplification, but a way to reveal what complexity hides"⁶. In this perspective, the graphic tool is used for its ability to generate new interpretative possibilities and further considerations.

In addition to the sample of magazines selected for the quantitative analysis, the archives of the journals examined were used in the second part of the research, as a framework to compose a reflective survey on the change in priorities of the discipline⁷. In this step, the support of editorials has often been used, as these are usually the place where the magazine speaks directly to its audience. Especially at the beginning or end of their tenure, editors tend to offer an overview of current events, analyze the problems of the moment and reflect on how the magazine, or architecture itself, should respond. Analyzing these texts has made it possible to understand the theoretical intentionality behind the choices of the editorial staff, revealing how the way of writing and publishing is itself a form of architectural thought.

Investigating the words of architecture means, in the final analysis, investigating architecture itself. Through magazines, their language and their images, this thesis aims to observe how the architectural discourse has transformed in the last twenty-five years, providing a critical reading open to new interpretations.

⁶ Koolhaas, Rem. *Diagrams – A project by AMO/OMA*. Fondazione Prada, 2025. The catalogue accompanies the exhibition of the same name presented at the Venice Architecture Biennale and collects essays and conversations on the role of the diagram as a tool for reading and constructing reality.

⁷ The articles were mostly collected through the digital archives of the periodicals to facilitate their use in the analysis.

02

**The anatomy of
five architecture
magazines**

Editorial identities and tradition of criticism

To fully understand the role that these magazines play in defining contemporary architectural discourse, it is necessary to reconstruct their history, editorial transformations and critical trajectories. To this end, this chapter reconstructs the anatomy of the five titles in the last century, examining the publishers, the structure of the issues, the main themes addressed and the evolution of the graphic design. This analysis allows us to understand not only what the magazines say, but the way they choose to say it. This approach reveals the internal logic that guides the production of architectural discourse. Only through this interpretation is it possible to consciously read the words they produce today.

The sample of periodicals selected for the research represents a panorama of historical landmarks for the architectural debate rather than just a geographical variety. Choosing the journals with the greatest editorial continuity in each country means analyzing the language through institutions that have built, consolidated and questioned their own critical vocabulary over time. This provides a solid basis for analysis to observe the evolution of lexicon and narrative over the past twenty-five years.

Architectural Record (1891-) was created under the direction of Henry W. Desmond, in response to the growing interest in the architectural discipline aroused by the planning of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago⁸. In the late 19th century, before the advent of radio and television, magazines enjoyed great influence in the United States. Industrialization, advances in education, and the expansion of the postal service, which made the delivery of periodicals widespread, helped fuel

⁸ Stephens, Suzanne. *The Formative Years – Architectural Record, 125 years*. Architectural Record, 2016, pp. 44-45. In studying the editorial history of the journals, the archives of the magazines themselves were used. On the occasion of the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of Architectural Record, the author retraces the main events that have formed her critical slant.

their growth. Furthermore, the expansion of the railroad, steel, and oil industries created vast wealth. This was followed by the emergence of new building types and skyscrapers, made possible by the invention of the elevator and steel structures. In this scenario, architecture was initially covered in magazines along with other arts. The publisher Clinton Sweet took the opportunity to found a specialized journal that could address both a professional and a more general audience. From the very first issue, the desire to establish a new cultural scope emerged, capable of oscillating between historical references and technical details, driven by the need to define an authentic American style. In the years that followed, the magazine stood out for its markedly critical tone. This was particularly evident in the biting reviews against eclectic architecture published in the anonymous column of *Architectural Aberrations*. Over the succession of decades and the succession of new publishers, the magazine has progressively moved towards design practice and commercial dynamics. This evolution has consolidated *Architectural Record's* identity as a magazine with a markedly pragmatic and practice-oriented approach. Today the journal acts as an operational documentation tool, where the narrative of the project is closely linked to its feasibility, technological innovation and to the dynamics of the North American construction market.

The Architectural Review (1896-) was founded a few years later with a radically different approach. Among the pages of the magazine⁹ we read that the year of William Morris' death, "a group of bearded gentlemen with moustaches, in their early forties, met at the Charing Cross Hotel in London". They were Reginald Blomfield, Mervyn Macartney, Ernest Newton and Henry Wilson, the first editorial board of *The Architectural Review for the Artist and Craftsman*, published by Percy Hastings. The name, not by chance, reflects the magazine's identity in its early years, deeply rooted in the Arts and Crafts movement. Articles included arguments about stained glass, furniture, architectural sculpture, interior decoration and garden design. It was not until 1927 under the new editorship of Hubert de Cronin Hastings that the magazine found its

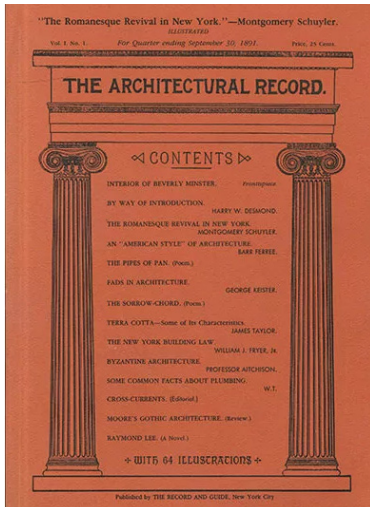
⁹ Glancey, Jonathan. *120th*. *The Architectural Review*, no. 1437, 2016, pp. 13-32. The article is included in an issue dedicated to the celebration of the 120th anniversary of the magazine. Glancey, in particular, traces the historic campaigns of *The Architectural Review*, such as *Townscape*, *Outrage* and *Manplan*, highlighting how the magazine has used words, photography and photojournalism to influence the debate, acting as a real political and social actor, capable of generating new terms and critical visions to counter the degradation of the landscape and the sterility of urban planning modern.

militant voice, outlining the line of thought that would later guide some of the most effective architectural campaigns ever fought. The magazine did not limit itself to reporting the debate of the time, but provoked it: an example of this is the *Outrage* campaign of 1955, still active today, or the *Townscape campaign*, an emotional and visual sequence developed by the cartoonist Gordon Cullen, which privileged the citizen's experience by proposing a humanization of high density. The narration of the projects in the pages of *The Architectural Review*, therefore, is never an end in itself. It inherits a tradition of civic commitment that stretches from the nineteenth century, through the influence of William Morris and John Ruskin, to contemporary challenges.

Moving the research to the Italian context, *Casabella* (1928-) represents one of the longest-lived and most relevant publications for national architectural culture. Founded in Milan by the publisher Gianni Mazzocchi, the magazine was initially directed by Guido Marangoni, under the name of *La Casa Bella*. It was originally conceived to educate and update the tastes of the upper bourgeoisie¹⁰. At the end of 1932 the editorship was taken over by Giuseppe Pagano, who marked the transition of the magazine to a new tool for the dissemination of technical and design knowledge. Renamed *Casabella*, it was aimed at specialists, cultural readers and the elite of future clients. After the World War, the magazine was reborn in 1953 under the direction of Ernesto Nathan Rogers, with the idea that the project was part of a historical continuum, influencing a generation of young architects who would dominate the architectural debate for decades to come. After years of debate focused on ideological and sociological issues, Vittorio Gregotti brought attention back to construction and drawing. He focused on the architectural craft, composed of rules and formal coherence, using the magazine as a tool to actively influence the design quality of the time. The legacy of these figures is consolidated today by Francesco Dal Co, who has directed the magazine since 1996 with a markedly historiographical and selective approach.

The *Domus* magazine (1928-) is another Italian phenomenon that accompanied architectural history throughout the twentieth century. Founded in Milan in 1928 by Gio Ponti, the magazine was born with the ambition to define and promote the ideal of the "Italian home", a concept that went beyond the mere building dimension to become a real cultural

¹⁰ Baglione, Chiara. *Casabella 1928-2008*. Electaarchitettura, 2008. On the occasion of the celebration of the magazine's eightieth anniversary, a volume is published that traces the main historical periods of the magazine, attaching the most salient articles.

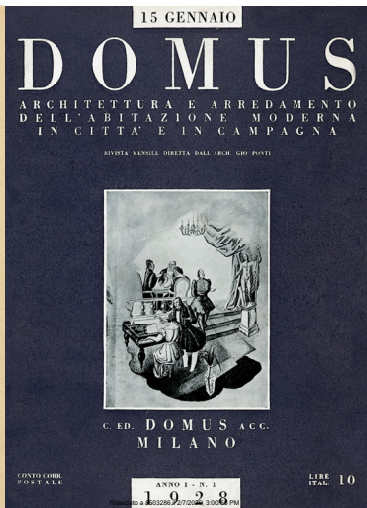
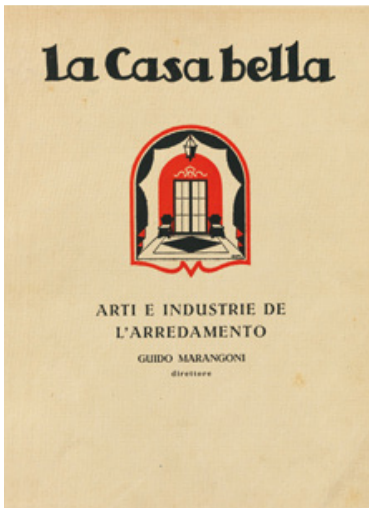


Architectural Record
 founded in New York
 in 1891
 by Clinton Sweet

Architectural Review
 founded in London
 in 1896
 by Reginald Blomfield,
 Mervyn Macartney,
 Ernest Newton,
 Henry Wilson



Casabella
founded in Milan
in 1928
by Guido Marangoni



Domus
founded in Milan
in 1928
by Gio Ponti

L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui
founded in Paris
in 1928
by André Bloc



manifesto¹¹. For Ponti, the house was not a simple functional container, but a spiritual space, capable of combining the rigor of European modernity with the harmony and warmth of the Mediterranean tradition. The magazine therefore assumed a pedagogical role towards the bourgeoisie of the time, acting as a guide to "living well", where architecture was never separated from the applied arts, furniture or decoration. The identity of *Domus* has been profoundly marked by the changes in direction, each of which has redefined the language of the newspaper in response to the urgencies of the time. In the second half of the twentieth century, under the title *Domus: the house of man*, the magazine shifted its center of gravity towards the social and civil responsibility of reconstruction. In the following decades, with the succession of different directions, it consolidated its international vocation as an institution for the dialogue between Italian industry and the avant-garde. In addition, the editorial strategy of a discontinuous editorship has transformed this alternation of directions into the main engine of critical renewal of the journal. This process found its highest theoretical expression in 2018 with the launch of the "10x10x10" project, which on the path towards the magazine's centenary, provides for the rotation of ten masters of contemporary architecture, alternating in directions of one year each. In this scenario, *Domus* acts today by considering the architectural fact no longer as an isolated object, but within a complex network of dynamics including urbanization, digital technologies and environmental sustainability.

Another reading of the European architectural scenario is provided by the magazine *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, founded in 1930 by the architect and sculptor André Bloc¹². From the first issue, its influence extended internationally thanks to the prestigious editorial board that included Le Corbusier, Robert Mallet-Stevens and Auguste Perret. Bloc's approach was based on the "Synthesis of the arts". An emblematic episode of this vision was the creation in 1951 of the Groupe Espace, born in the pages of the magazine to promote the integration of architecture and plastic art in post-war reconstruction. After the death of André Bloc in 1966, the editorial line of the magazine was characterized by various figures who brought other disciplines related to architecture, such as sociology, design and art, to the pages of the magazine, keeping alive that intellectual and political laboratory capable of connecting the

¹¹ De Fusco, Renato. *Domus: Facts and Interpretations*. Domus, no. 821, 1999, pp. 4-13.

¹² Abram, Joseph. Critical openness and modern commitment: *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* in the thirties. Casabella, no. 605, 1993, pp. 46-51.

French avant-garde with the international scene. In 2007, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* was in danger of disappearing due to serious economic difficulties. The architect Jean Nouvel therefore took a stand to save what he considered a monument of contemporary architecture. The publishing house Archipress & Associés was founded to relaunch the magazine, entrusting its curation to an editorial committee that included personalities such as Shigeru Ban, Renzo Piano, Patrick Bouchain, Frank Gehry and Winy Maas. Under this new impetus, the magazine abandoned the structure of professional newsletters to adopt a monographic format, where the project is analyzed as a political and social act.

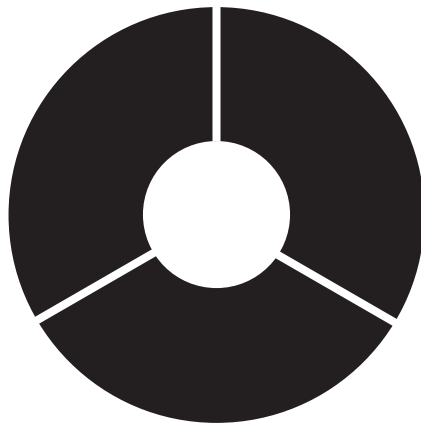
The panorama outlined by the sample of journals selected for the research allows us to investigate how the architectural language responds to divergent and often complementary purposes. Having defined the historical framework and cultural premises that gave rise to these editorial identities selected for the study, it is necessary to investigate how this critical legacy has been translated into the editorial practice over the last twenty-five years. In this context, the figure of the editor-in-chief emerges not only as a content manager, but as the main interpreter of the intellectual line and critical slant of the magazine. This aspect is outlined through three different editorial postures: the journalist, who favors reporting and professional service; the critic, who transforms the magazine into a place of theoretical and historiographical debate; the architect, for whom the pages of the magazine become an extension of the design laboratory. The choice of directors and scientific committees, therefore, becomes an emblematic act that sanctions the critical approach of the magazine towards the architectural discipline.

This tripartition between news, criticism and project is clearly manifested in the comparison between the two English-language periodicals, which, although sharing a nineteenth-century origin, reflect different cultural and professional priorities. *Architectural Record* continues to be a reference point for industry news and the practice of the U.S. profession, focusing on the analysis of construction trends, technological innovation and sustainability issues. The magazine was led into the new century by the figure of Robert Ivy, an architect who dedicated his work mainly to writing and criticism and was then succeeded by Cathleen McGuigan and Josephine Minutillo, both specialized journalists. This journalistic editorial line has guaranteed maximum continuity for the magazine's pragmatic slant and has strengthened its identity as an information

Architectural Record editors

architects

journalists



critics

1996



Robert Ivy | architect

2011



Cathleen McGuigan | journalist

2023



Josephine Minutillo | critic

The Architectural Review editors

journalists



critics

- 
- 1980 Peter Davey | critic
 - 2005 Paul Finch | journalist
 - 2010 Catherine Slessor | critic
 - 2015 Christine Murray | journalist
 - 2018 Manon Mollard | critic
 - 2024 Eleanor Beaument | critic



critics

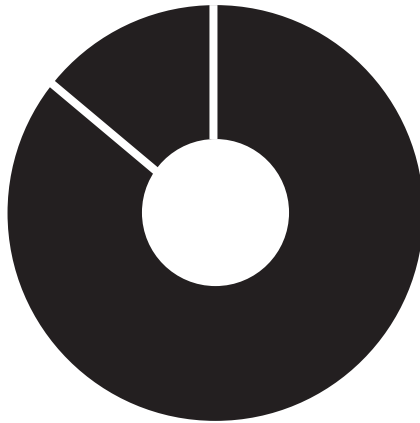
1996



Francesco Dal Co I critic

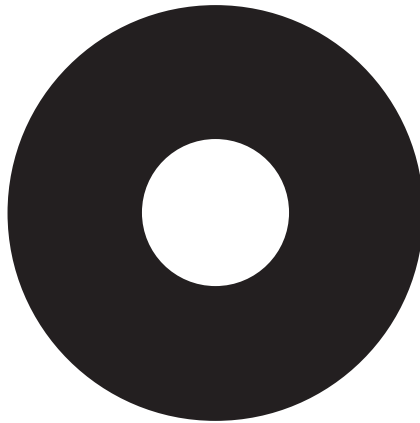
Domus editors

critics



architects

- 
- 2000 + Deyan Sudjic | critic
 - 2004 + Stefano Boeri | architect
 - 2007 + Flavio Albanese | architect
 - 2010 + Alessandro Mendini | architect
 - 2011 + Joseph Grima | critic
 - 2013 + Nicola Di Battista | architect
 - 2018 + Michele De Lucchi | architect
 - 2019 + Winy Maas | architect
 - 2020 + David Chipperfield | architect
 - 2021 + Tadao Ando | architect
 - 2022 + Jean Nouvel | architect
 - 2023 + Steven Holl | architect
 - 2024 + Norman Foster | architect
 - 2025 + Bjarke Ingels | architect



critics

2000



Jean-Michel Place | critic

2007



Axel Sowa | critic

2008



Jean-Louis Cohen | critic

2014



Emmanuelle Borne | critic

2021



Andrew Ayers | critic

organ with a narrative linked to the feasibility of the project and the dynamics of the North American market.

This approach is radically opposed to the British model of *The Architectural Review*, which is instead positioned on a more speculative level. The rotation of figures closer to criticism in the development of the magazine has fueled an intellectual dialogue within its pages regarding the ethical and social role of architecture in the contemporary world, maintaining the magazine as a space for open debate and often in contrast with the logic of the market. While Peter Davey was the guardian of the magazine's tradition in the early 2000s, the subsequent alternation between the journalistic slant of Paul Finch and the militant posture of Catherine Slessor, brought the focus back to social criticism. This trajectory culminated under the editorships of Christine Murray and Manon Mollard, when the magazine underwent a strong graphic and conceptual restyling in an attempt to adapt to the digital age, returning to a curatorial vision where each issue an in-depth thematic essay.

Moving the discussion into the Italian context, the almost simultaneous birth of *Casabella* and *Domus* immediately created a dialogue and critical division that shaped the country's architectural intellectual identity over the past century. The theoretical, academic and rigorous debate which can be found in the pages of *Casabella*, is contrasted with the much more aesthetic and multidisciplinary approach of *Domus*, which interprets architecture as part of a broader cultural system, open to contamination with design, lifestyle and the visual arts. In the last twenty-five years, this divergence has been consolidated through opposing and emblematic directional choices. *Casabella* has maintained a strong critical, almost monumental continuity, under the guidance of Francesco Dal Co who has guaranteed a historiographical and selective editorial line, acting as an academic counterweight to the speed of contemporary changes. Conversely *Domus* has made editorial discontinuity its engine of renewal, experimenting with a rotation of directors, a deliberately fragmented language. In this intellectual laboratory, different figures followed one another, quickly passing from the global historiographical vision of Deyan Sudjic, to Stefano Boeri. Under the editorship of Joseph Grima, the magazine opened up to a new digital version, with an experimentation in open source and a the digitization of processes. After a succession of different editors, it arrives at the definitive formula of the Guest Editor, totally renouncing a homogeneous editorial line in favor of a plurality of authorial visions in a unique experiment on the international scene.

The comparison is completed by the title of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, whose title itself reflects the historical ambition to break with the academic past to open up to current events, becoming one of the first publishing ventures to give international prominence to developments outside the borders of its own country. In the last twenty-five years, after a period of uncertainties under purely journalistic management, following the acquisition of the magazine by a group of architects, the figure of the publisher has evolved further into a real editorial committee that acts as an intellectual guarantor. The operational editorial staff was, however, entrusted to the journalistic figures of Maryse Quinton and Emmanuelle Borne, ensuring a balance between critical vision and informative rigor, in the monographic format.

The data therefore highlight a geographical and methodological polarization: while British publications progressively rely on the figure of the journalist to ensure objectivity and adherence to the facts, the Italian and European panorama reaffirms the role of the architect-director, transforming the magazine into an extension of the design laboratory.

Through the lens of these different periodicals, this study will analyze the contemporary lexicon with the awareness that it does not represent a neutral datum, but the result of editorial traditions that continue to shape the perception of the architectural project.

Analysis of the structure and the contents

The analysis of editorial profiles and their declarations of intent is only the first level of investigation, necessary to define the theoretical objectives of the publications. In order to verify the real impact of these promises on critical production, the next phase of the study focuses on the systematic cataloguing of indexes and the analysis of the table of contents over the twenty-five years examined. This quantitative mapping makes it possible to understand and confirm the editorial lines outlined so far, transforming the journal's schedule into an analyzable datum capable of detecting the gap between the declared identity and the contents actually published.

In this perspective, the methodology adopted refers to the concept of *Distant Reading* theorized by Franco Moretti¹³. Moving away from the close reading of the single article to embrace a macroscopic analysis of the journal system, the research shifts the focus from the detailed reading of the individual contributions towards an overall theoretical synthesis, built through the processing of aggregate data¹⁴. Through the use of diagrams, the editorial program is treated as a field of forces, where general trends become visible only at a higher scale. The aim of the research is not only to highlight new phenomena, but also to provide an analytical and documentary basis for trends that are often considered established in the architectural debate. These trends have never been statistically verified through such a large and heterogeneous sample of data. In this sense, the investigation intends to lend scientific rigor to

¹³ Moretti, Franco. *Distant Reading*. Verso, 2013. Although theorized in the literary field for the analysis of large narrative systems, Moretti's *Distant Reading* proposes to replace the reading of the single text with the analysis of aggregate data, maps and graphs. This approach makes it possible to identify morphological trends and long-term changes that would remain invisible through a traditional critical reading.

¹⁴ The systematic cataloguing of the articles took place with the support of Zotero software, for bibliographic archiving, Excel, for the structuring of the quantitative database, and RawGraphs, for the subsequent visualization of the data.

common critical intuitions, while trying to identify those exceptions and unexpected drifts that can offer useful analytical insights the metamorphosis of language.

As already specified in the introduction, the research is configured to offer a panoramic analysis through a sample of issues selected every five years in September, or in the autumn issue in the case of bimonthly publications such as *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*. This timeframe is sufficient to isolate the structural changes in language. The cataloguing took place through five taxonomic categories considered relevant to capture the complexity of contemporary journals: *typology*, *boundary*, *chronology*, *geography* and *priority*.

Typology refers to the types of articles found while leafing through a journal, such as *case studies*, *critical essays*, *interviews* and *reviews*. The case study is intended as a contribution dedicated to the complete description of a single project, often accompanied by technical drawings and photographic essays. The frequent presence of fact sheets or synthetic data at the beginning of these articles, moreover, accentuates their documentary character, shifting the language from a purely narrative level to a technical and performative one. On the contrary, the essay represents an opportunity for speculative reflection, where the work becomes a pretext for a broader theoretical argument on the contemporary debate and the political and social context of the discipline. The interview, on the other hand, allows the voice of the protagonists of the field to emerge, while the review, usually placed in the liminal sections of the issue, returns an immediate chronicle of products, books, exhibitions, events and competitions, reflecting on current professional events.

The *boundary* category focuses on the scale of intervention, verifying whether the magazine's interest revolves around the architectural, urban planning or design dimension. Chronology investigates the temporal horizon of the narrative, classifying the contributions between the twenty-first century for current events, the twentieth century and its legacies, and the strictly historical context, meaning everything that precedes the twentieth century, as an indicative category of a historiographical approach. At the same time, it was considered interesting to map the geographic context of reference on the basis of the contents, categorized by continents (Australia, Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, South America), or labeled as *Global* for those articles with an international approach that go beyond the borders of the country of the magazines analyzed.

Finally, the *Priority* category attempts to isolate the intellectual priorities and dominant topics that orient today's narrative. For each contribution, the semantic areas considered most relevant to the current debate have been selected: *Composition, Construction, Economy, Materials, Reconstruction, Sociology, Sustainability, Theory*. Each article was assigned one to three of these labels, weighted according to word count and graphic prominence dedicated to each theme. This methodological choice makes it possible to trace the evolution of keywords over time. It also highlights how the vocabulary of architecture is progressively moving towards new centers of gravity, making the graphic data a tool capable of detecting the complexity hidden beneath the surface of the printed page.

The process of decomposition and cataloguing of the contents finds its final synthesis in the graphic restitution. Translating the data into diagrams does not respond to a purely illustrative need, but represents a method to clearly visualize the relationships between the different themes and their change over time. Through this visualization, numerical data are transformed into an immediate reading tool, capable of visually highlighting the convergences and discrepancies that characterize the architectural debate of the last twenty-five years.

Looking at the sequence of diagrams for *Architectural Record* from 2000 to 2025, it can be seen that the magazine stands out for its markedly pragmatic and documentation-oriented approach. The graphs show a systematic prevalence of the case study, which constitutes the narrative backbone of the periodic. There is also ample space dedicated to the review, which constantly monitors professional and market news. The structure remains faithful to an informative editorial line that favors contemporaneity and the architectural scale. However, the analysis reveals an interesting ambivalence: although the magazine is a technical documentation organ for the North American market, the data show a clear international openness, with a frequent analysis of European and global projects. This suggests how the magazine can offer a reading of projects from different contexts under a different lens, interpreting them with the criteria of efficiency and clarity typical of American professional culture.

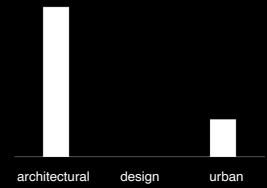
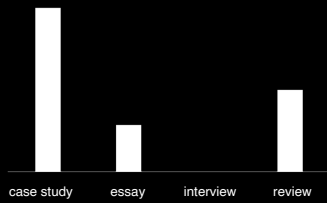
The Architectural Review, despite the alternation of different editorial figures, maintains a constant and rigorous physiognomy, focused on the balance between monographic articles and critical essays. A macroscopic fact that emerges is the almost total absence of interviews

typology

boundary

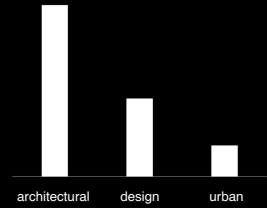
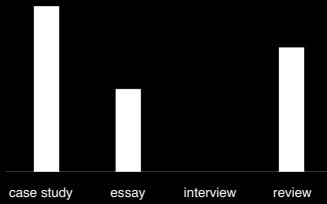
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September 2000
Robert Ivy



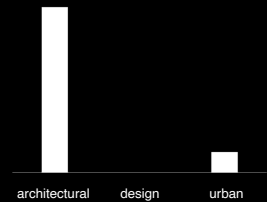
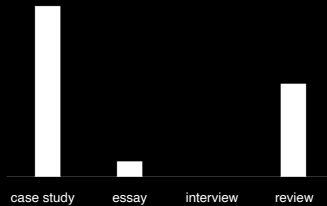
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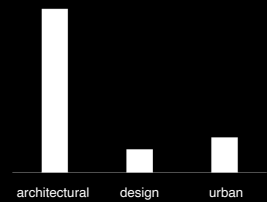
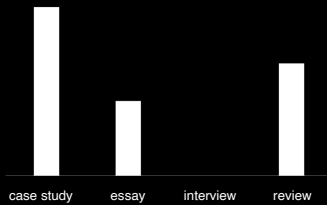
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September 2010
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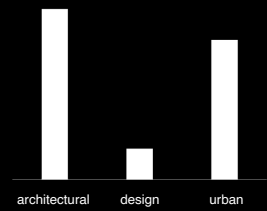
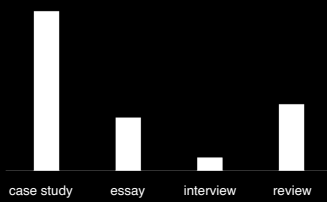
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September 2015
Cathleen McGuigan



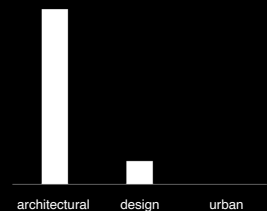
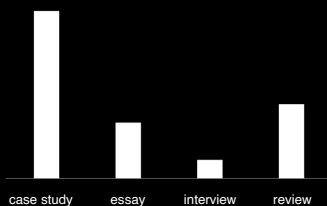
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September 2020
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Record

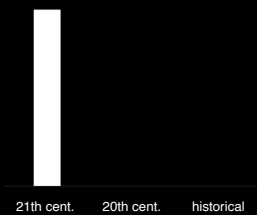
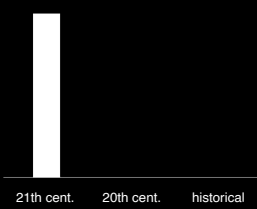
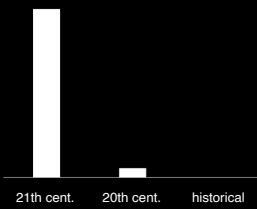
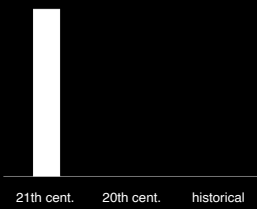
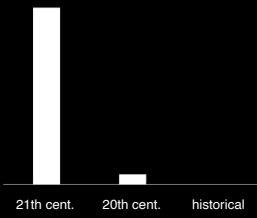
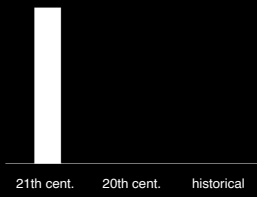
September 2025
Josephine Minutillo



typology

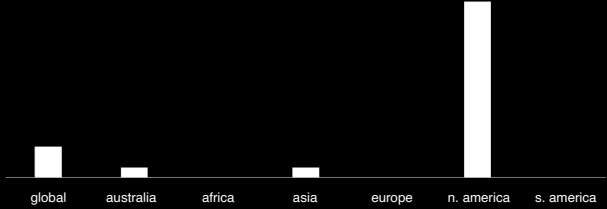
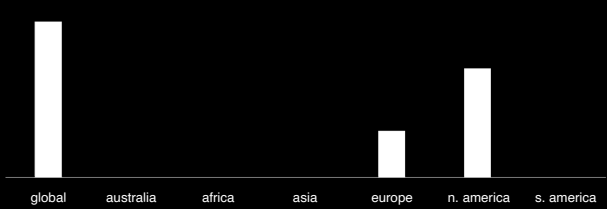
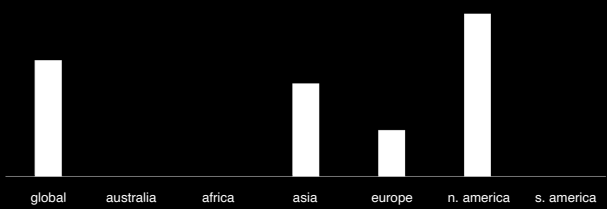
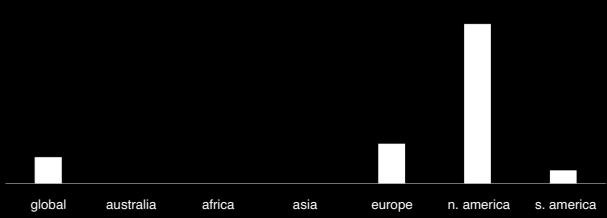
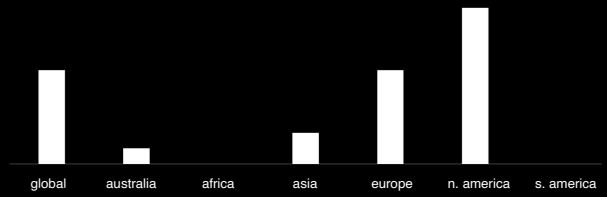
boundary

chronology



chronology

geography



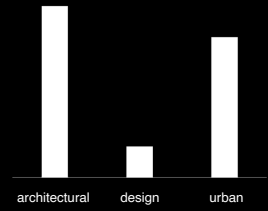
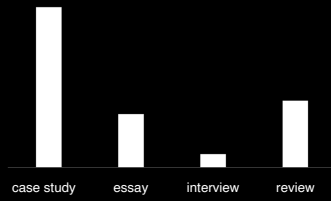
geography

typology

boundary

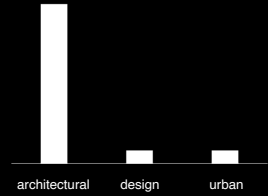
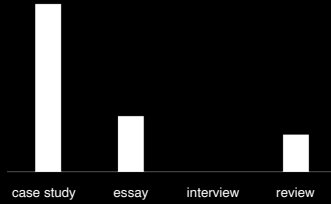
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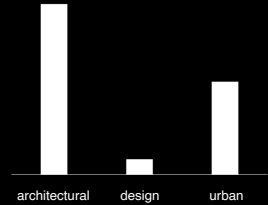
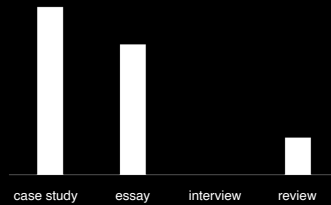
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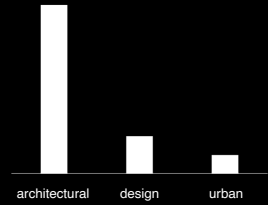
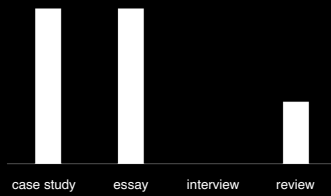
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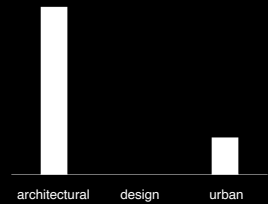
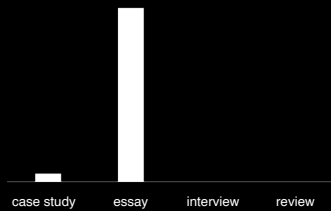
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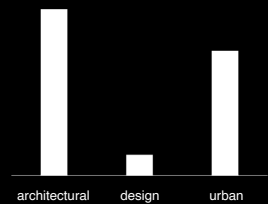
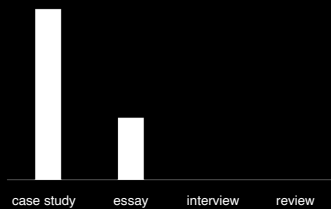
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September 2020
Manon Mollard



AR 1524

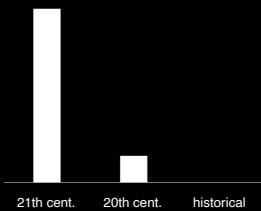
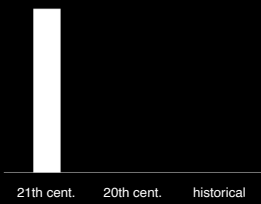
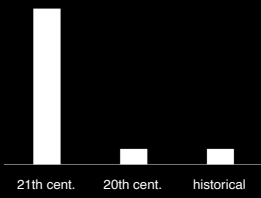
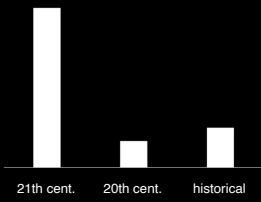
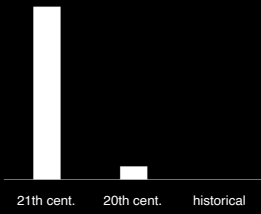
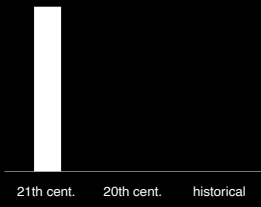
September 2025
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typology

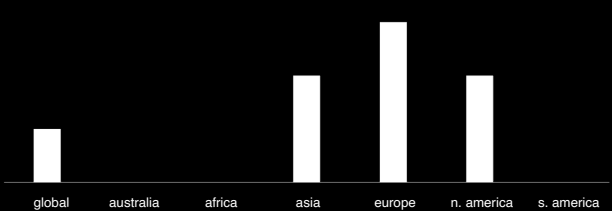
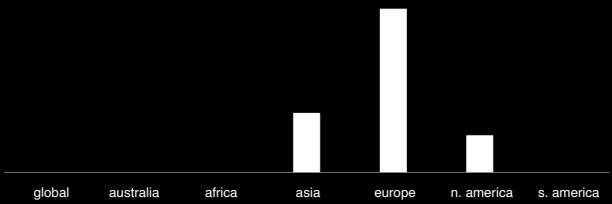
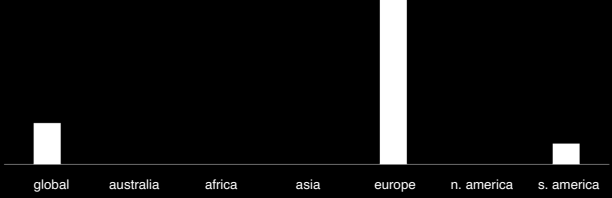
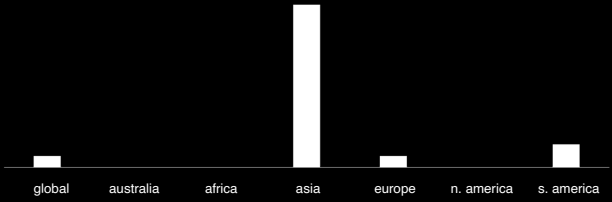
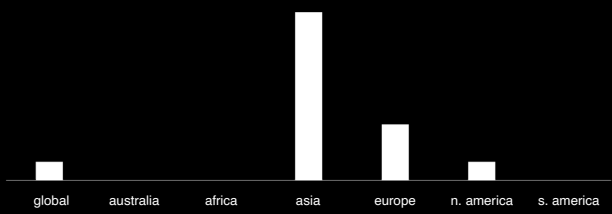
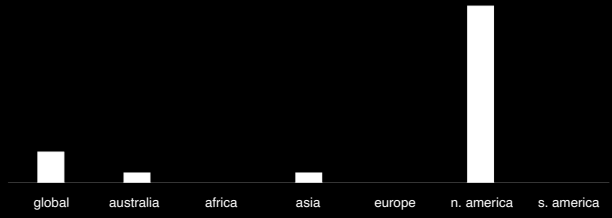
boundary

chronology



chronology

geography



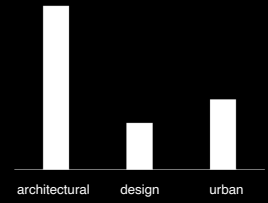
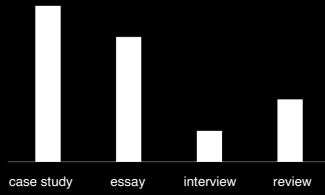
geography

typology

boundary

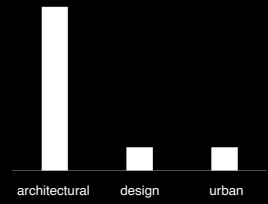
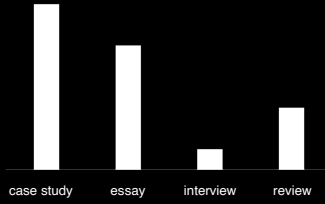
Casabella 681

September 2000
Francesco Dal Co



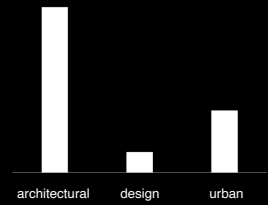
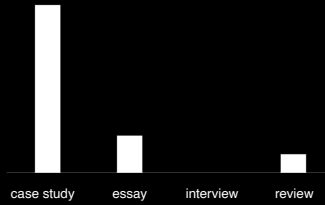
Casabella 736

September 2005
Francesco Dal Co



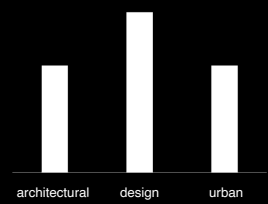
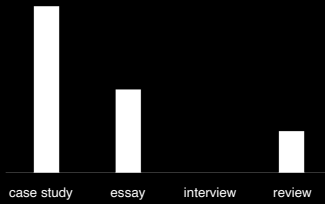
Casabella 793

September 2010
Francesco Dal Co



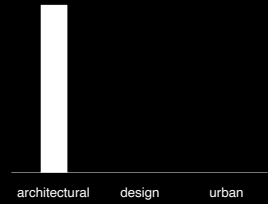
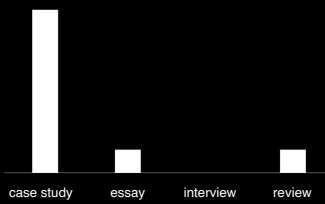
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September 2015
Francesco Dal Co



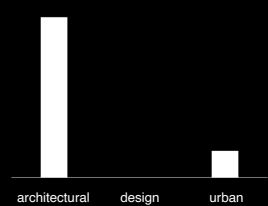
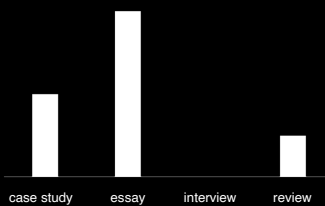
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September 2020
Francesco Dal Co



Casabella 973

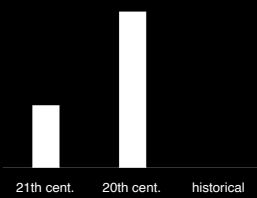
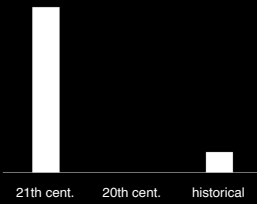
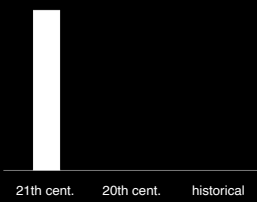
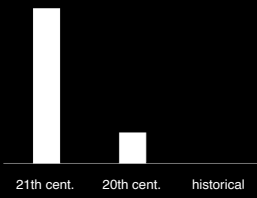
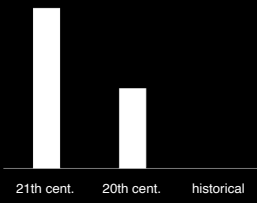
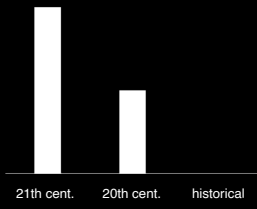
September 2025
Francesco Dal Co



typology

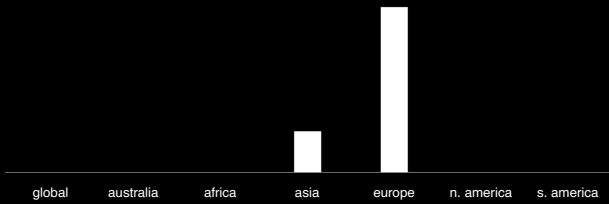
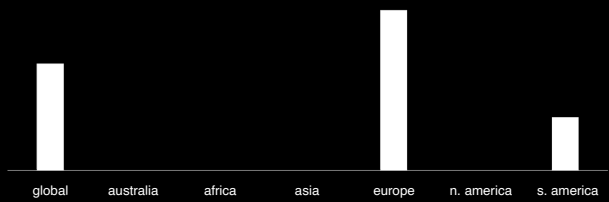
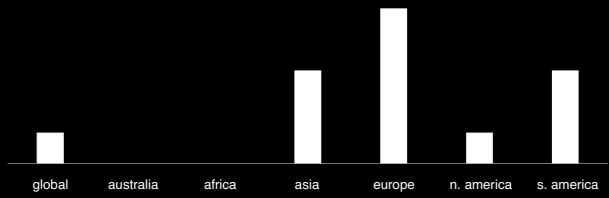
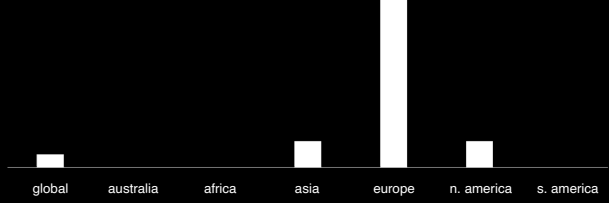
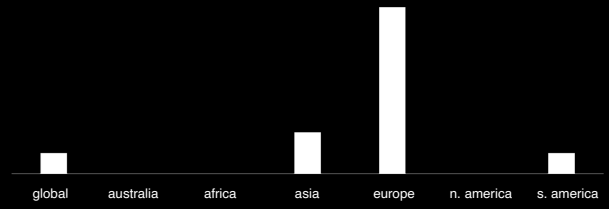
boundary

chronology



chronology

geography



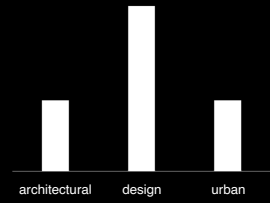
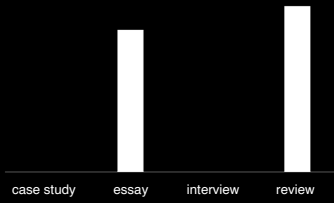
geography

typology

boundary

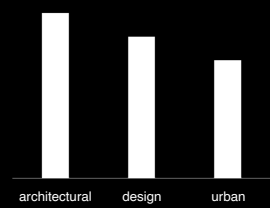
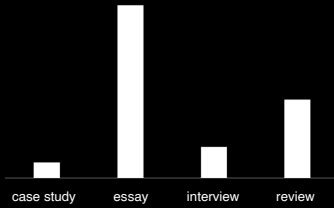
Domus 829

September 2000
Deyan Sudjic



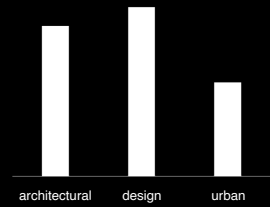
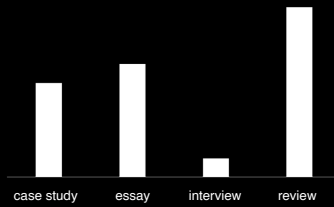
Domus 884

September 2005
Stefano Boeri



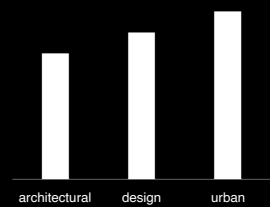
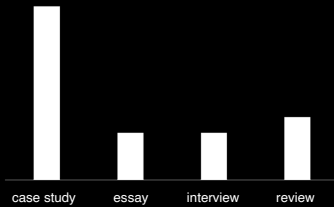
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September 2010
Alessandro Mendini



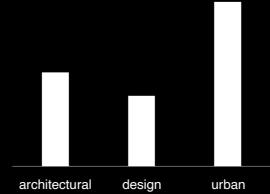
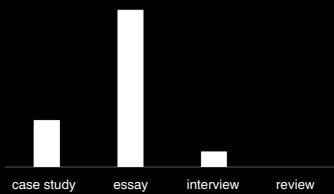
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September 2015
Nicola Di Battista



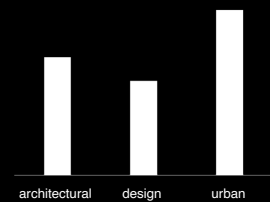
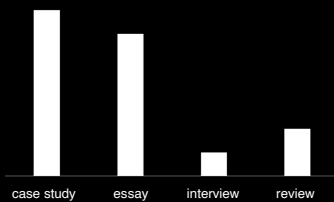
Domus 1049

September 2020
David Chipperfield



Domus 1104

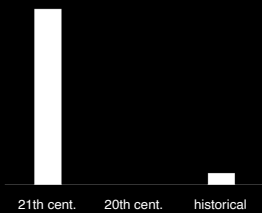
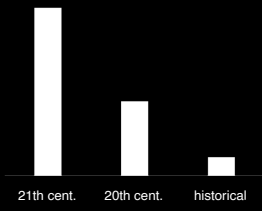
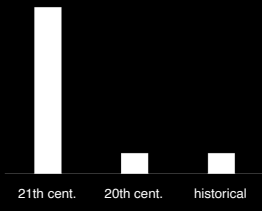
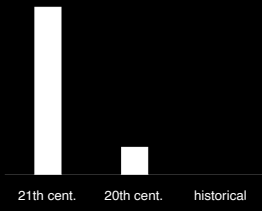
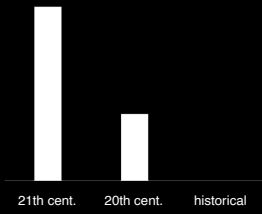
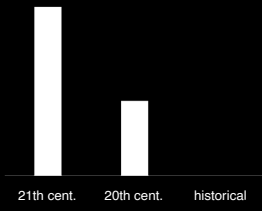
September 2025
Bjarke Ingels



typology

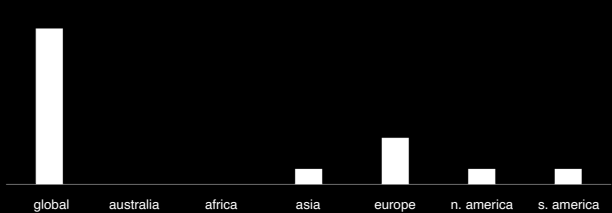
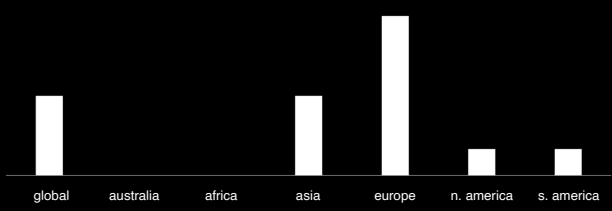
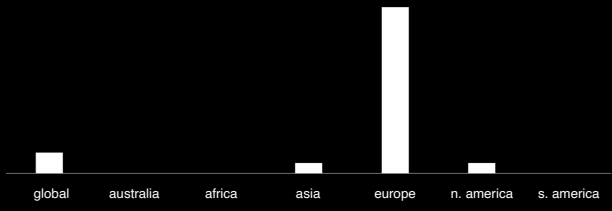
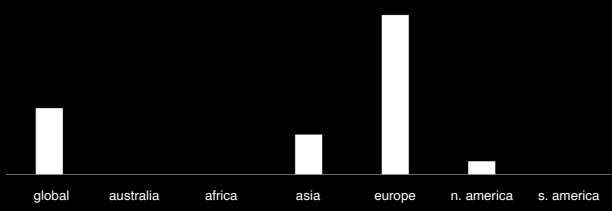
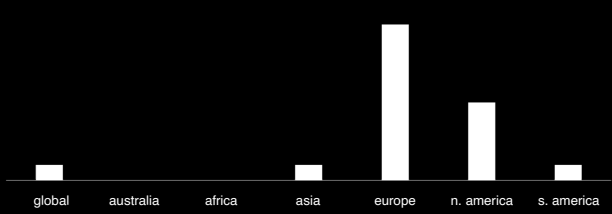
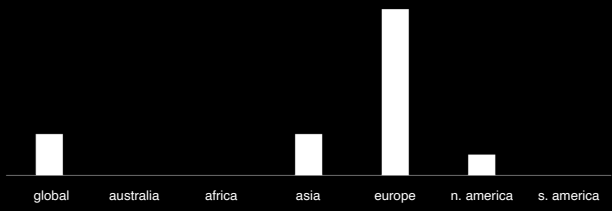
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chronology



chronology

geography



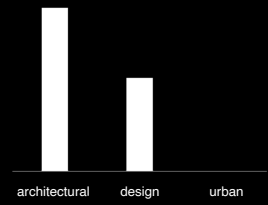
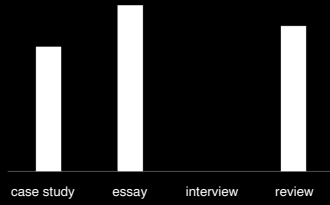
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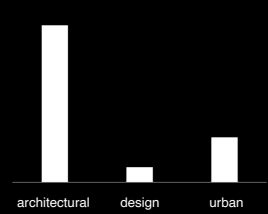
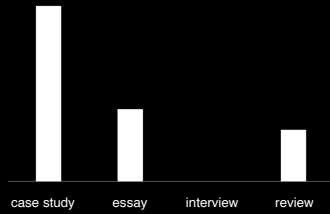
'A'A' 330

September 2000
Jean-Michel Place



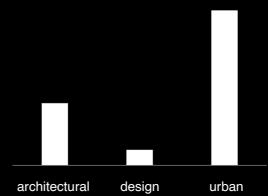
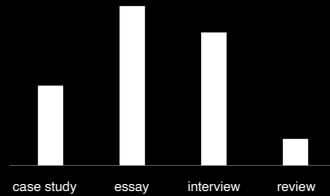
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September 2005
Jean-Michel Place



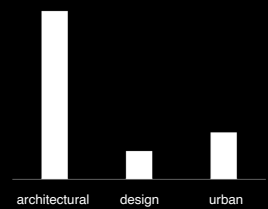
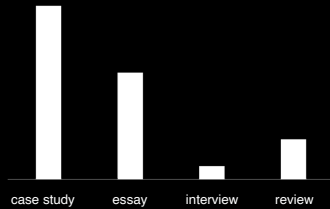
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September 2010
Jean-Louis Cohen



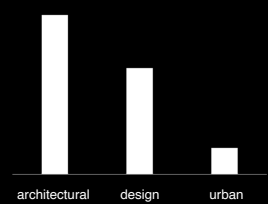
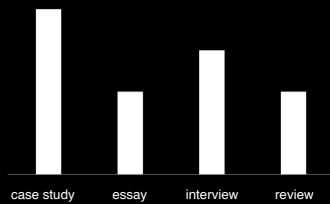
'A'A' 408

September 2015
Emmanuelle Borne



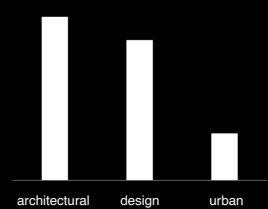
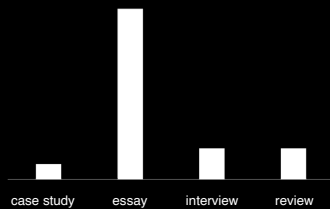
'A'A' 438

September 2020
Emmanuelle Borne



'A'A' 466

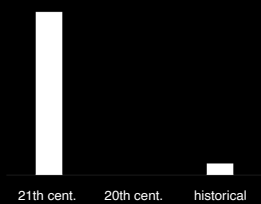
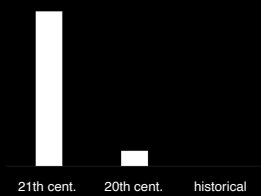
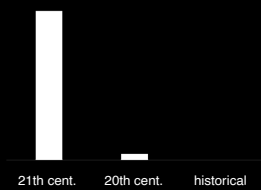
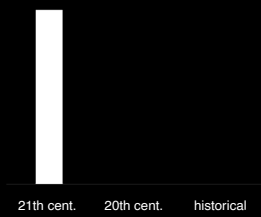
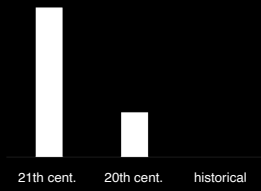
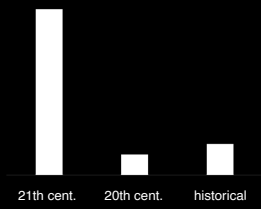
September 2025
Andrew Ayers



typology

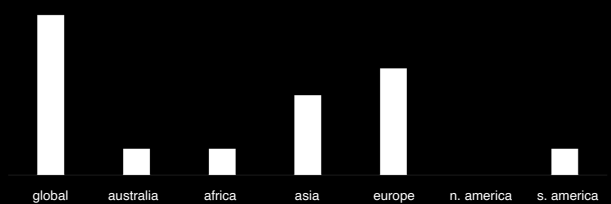
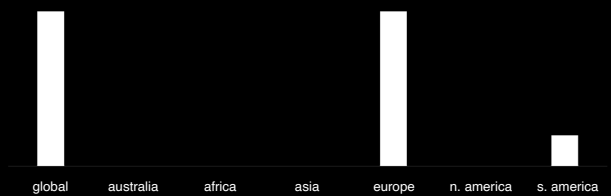
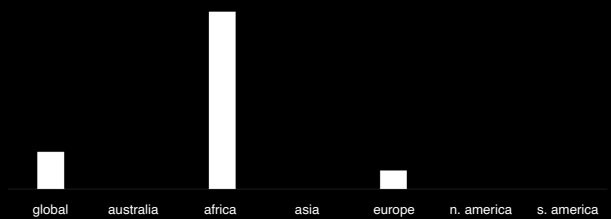
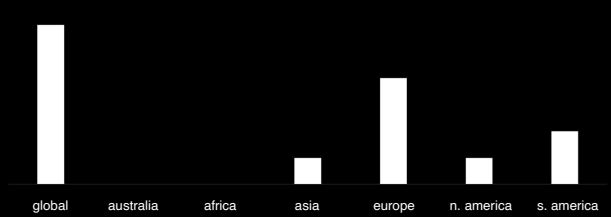
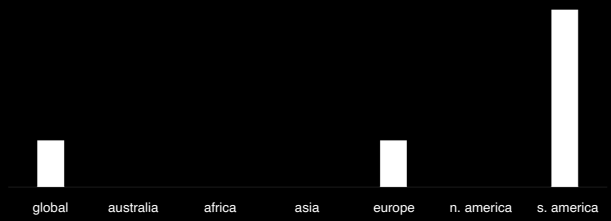
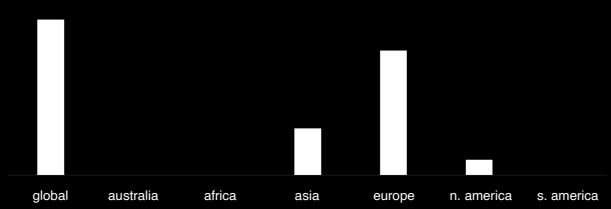
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chronology



chronology

geography



geography

and short reviews. This choice outlines how the publication avoids information fragmentation to focus on a descriptive and in-depth narrative. The distinctive character of the magazine is represented by its thematic nature, which transforms each issue into a cognitive journey, often entrusted mostly to a single critical voice. The geographical variety detected demonstrates a desire to engage with different parts of the planet and their cultures, for targeted insights. This is visible in the diagrams from the analysis of the Hanover Expo (2000) to the interpretation of the Small in Japan (2005), up to the Indian identity (2010). Particularly significant is the exception of the September 2020 issue, that in response to the pandemic stasis, published forty-four letters addressed "to a young architect", overcoming the obstacles of total lockdowns. For the magazine, therefore, the written word is not a simple support for the image, but a pedagogical and political act, capable of adapting to the demands of contemporaneity.

Casabella presents an editorial structure that, in some ways, is similar to that of *The Architectural Review* in its alternation of case studies and critical essays, but distances itself from it through a marked historiographical orientation. A constant that completes the intellectual identity of the magazine is the column "The architect's library", which elevates the editorial review to a moment of fundamental debate, around the idea that books constitute a founding element of the architectural discipline. Although the diagrams confirm a Eurocentric trend and an almost exclusively architectural scale with theoretical reflections linked to the tradition of the twentieth century, there are exceptions to this rigid editorial line. The 2015 issue dedicated to the design of Aesop stores represents a singular case, where the language of the magazine yields to a smaller scale. This demonstrates that a historiographical publication can recognize remarkable architecture quality in the commercial details of interior design.

On the contrary, *Domus* confirms itself as the most varied and reactive structure of the entire sample, capable of radically changing its approach with each new director. Its article types are extremely heterogeneous, interweaving essays, interviews, and a vast section for product reviews. The scale of the cases treated also reproduces this interdisciplinary approach. This variety in issues reflects a vision of architecture as a permeable discipline constantly contaminated by design and current events. Despite this formal openness, the diagrams reveal an unexpected point of contact with *Casabella*, namely a Eurocentric approach and frequent recourse to historical references. This suggests

that while the format is modern and dynamic, the cultural focus remains firmly anchored in European culture, using the past as a filter to interpret the speed of the present.

The framework is completed by the analysis of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, whose structure reveals a different approach from other periodicals, due to the prevalence of large monographic issues. There is a constant balance between critical essays and case studies, with extensive use of the interview as a tool for direct investigation to dissect the specific topic. The magazine maintains an architectural focus inserted in a contemporary context, although there is no shortage of historical digressions on the twentieth century. Compared to Italian magazines, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* keep its international vocation by frequently opening up to non-European territories, with particular historical attention to South America. This configuration confirms the magazine's desire to build a broad and geographically widespread theoretical discourse around different themes of the architectural discipline.

If the analysis of the editorial structure and geographical distribution has made it possible to define the methodological framework, it is through the *priority* category that the study begins to get to the heart of the architectural narration, investigating the contents that constitute it. This section reveal how the intellectual priorities of the discipline have changed over the last twenty-five years. By mapping the prevailing topics, from composition to sustainability, from technology to sociology, the data offer a clear visualization of the shift in critical interests. The goal is to verify whether there is a common tendency or if each magazine has reacted independently to the challenges of the contemporary world.

In the case of *Architectural Record*, it can be seen that under the direction of Robert Ivy, while maintaining the technical identity that distinguishes the magazine, there is an unprecedented attention to compositional aspects, accompanied by important theoretical references. With the change of direction, however, the magazine returned to mirroring the North American socio-economic landscape. This resulted in a pragmatic approach and a gradual increase in attention to environmental sustainability, which has now become an essential construction parameter.

The Architectural Review, on the other hand, follows a different line. Here, the technique of materials and construction constantly remain in the background compared to the critical narrative. Also in this case there is a progressive interest in ecological issues, but the most relevant

aspect is the constant and growing attention to the social repercussions of the project. Although it is a fundamental aspect for the British journal, architecture in recent years seems to have become less of a formal issue for *The Architectural Review* and more a device for civic engagement.

At the opposite pole is *Casabella*, whose configuration of contents appears almost monolithic. The magazine maintains a meticulous dedication to the compositional aspects of the project, understood as a disciplinary foundation, and it is interesting to note how, in contrast to the global panorama, the ecological component is almost completely absent in the selected issues. It seems that for *Casabella*, sustainability has not yet undermined the primacy of composition and history as the engines of the project.

Domus shows a progressive departure from purely compositional aspects in favor of sociological ones. In the first decade of the new century the topics appeared balanced within the issue, but the most recent diagrams show very radical thematic peaks, influenced by individual curatorships. In 2020, for example, under the direction of David Chipperfield, the social dimension strongly emerges, while in 2025, with Bjarke Ingels, it is sustainability that saturates the debate, confirming how the magazine acts as a seismograph of the current urgencies.

Finally, the analysis of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* reveals a peculiar synthesis because the thematic priority is almost never entrusted to a single technical aspect, but to an integrated vision of the project, maintaining a strong presence of the *sociology* and *theory* categories. An interesting aspect is the progressive growth of attention to the issue of architectural reconstruction, which together with ecological aspects, is not considered by the magazine as a simple performance parameter, but as an ethical necessity of contemporary design.

The analysis of the data collected shows how, in the last twenty-five years, the architectural discourse has progressively integrated environmental crises no longer as marginal technical elements, but as central issues of design. This trend is explicitly confirmed in the September 2025 releases, where different editorial profiles such as *The Architectural Review* and *Domus* converge on the same theme: the first through an issue entitled *Forest* and the second with an issue entitled *Plant*. The issue of *Domus*, edited by Bjarke Ingels, starts from the assumption that if architecture has historically removed man from his

natural habitat, today landscape design can and must return him to it¹⁵. At the same time, *The Architectural Review* addresses the issue of wood as a building material, raising a crucial critical issue: the current pace of construction, dictated by the logic of profit, risks fueling unsustainable consumption¹⁶. The editorial emphasizes how the design act should no longer be understood as a deforestation operation, but as the continuation of a practice of cultivation and care of the territory. This thematic convergence indicates that ecology is now an essential parameter and it is necessary for the architectural discipline to relate to the environmental problems of the planet.

The shift in content priorities suggests that the environmental issue is closely interconnected with the social one. The comparative analysis of the diagrams reveals a morphological development almost common to all the magazines, which can be defined as a "butterfly" structure. This graphic configuration makes evident a radical change in priorities: if in the early 2000s the core of the debate was firmly anchored to compositional and constructive values, the temporal evolution shows a systematic expansion towards social issues. The designed space, therefore, is no longer measured only by materiality, but also by its impact on the social context.

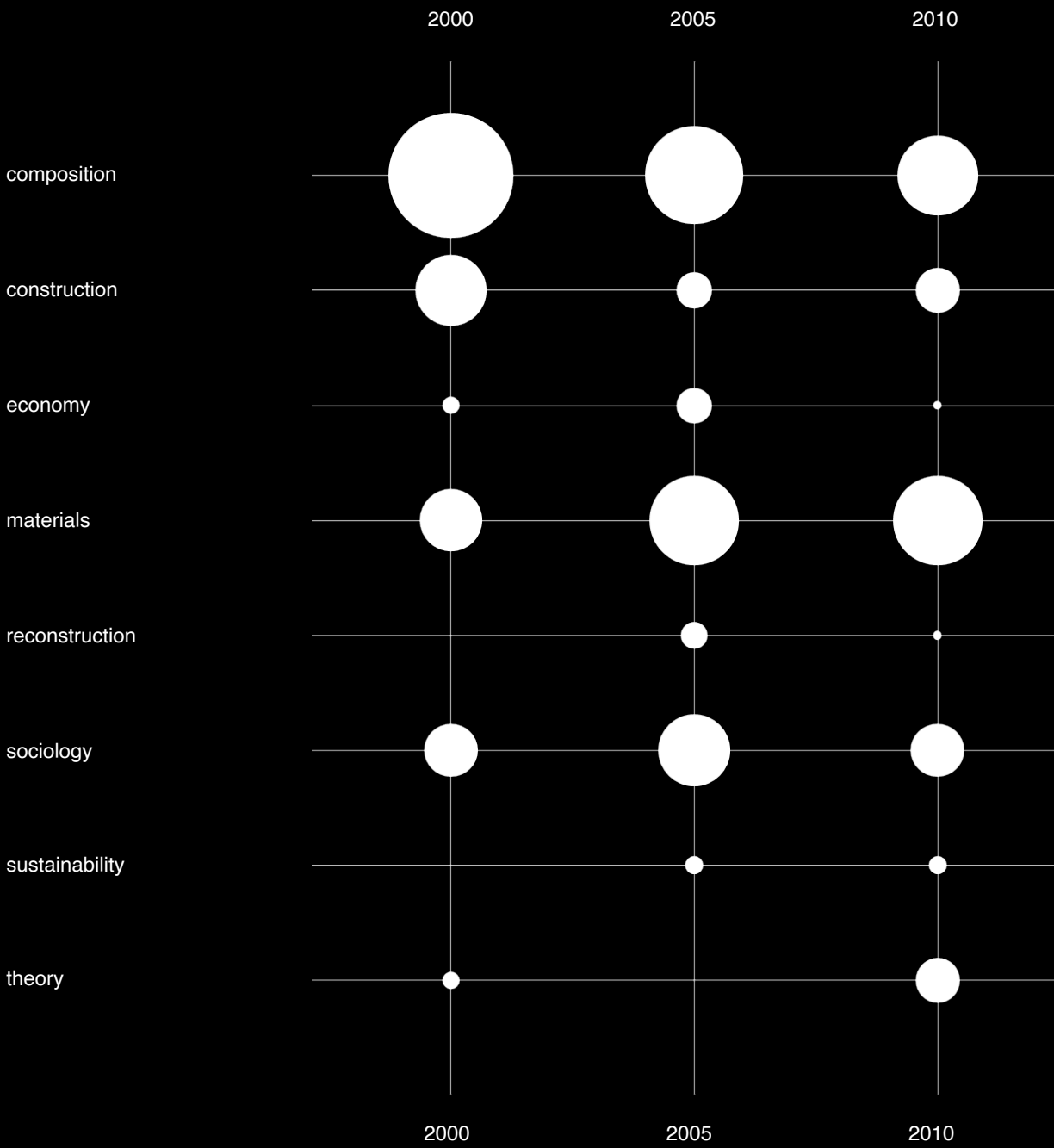
In this scenario, Nicola di Battista's reflection in his farewell editorial from the editorship of *Domus*¹⁷ is emblematic. His text provides a theoretical motivation for this phenomenon, starting from the assumption that today there is a "widespread, strong and generalized disappointment" in society regarding the balances of the current world. The intent of his editorial work was to search for alternatives to the "bad way" with which we inhabit the planet, proposing solutions appropriate to the time, resources and needs of man. Against the "city of customers", described as a sectarian model at the service of market logic, Di Battista places the construction of the "city of man" as his primary interest. The latter is understood as an open and hospitable alternative, where the act of planning returns to putting the individual before profit. Under these conditions, the magazine does not limit itself to presenting projects, products and ideas. It focuses on the concrete stories that make them possible, showing the "flesh and blood" people who work behind the scenes of the profession. In a world pervaded by homologation,

¹⁵ Ingels, Bjarke. *Plant*. *Domus*, n. 1104, 2025, p. 1.

¹⁶ Mollard, Manon. *Forest*. *The Architectural Review*, n. 1524, 2025, p. 3.

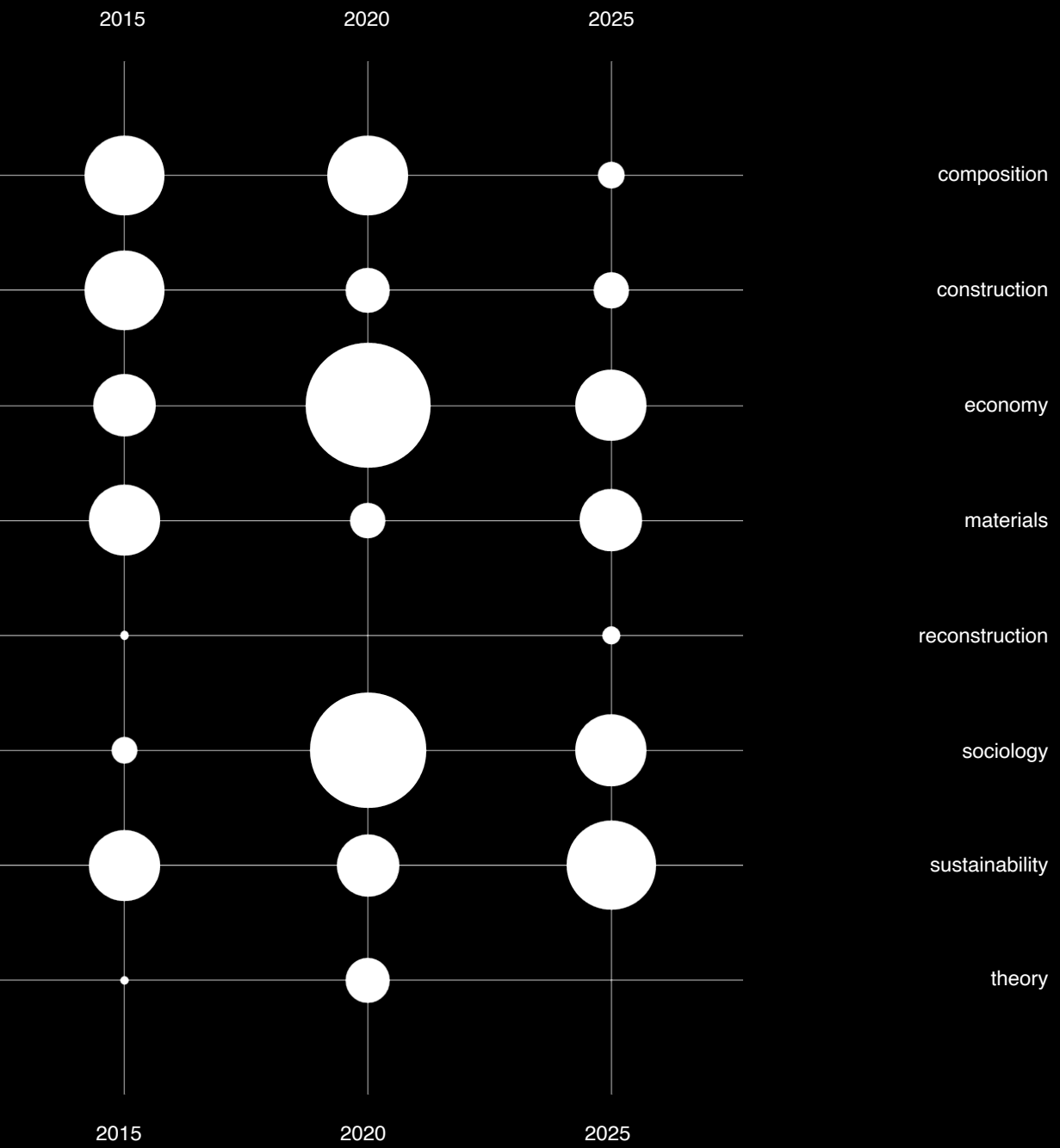
¹⁷ Di Battista, Nicola. *Farewell from Domus*. *Domus*, n. 1019, 2017, pp. X-XI.

Record

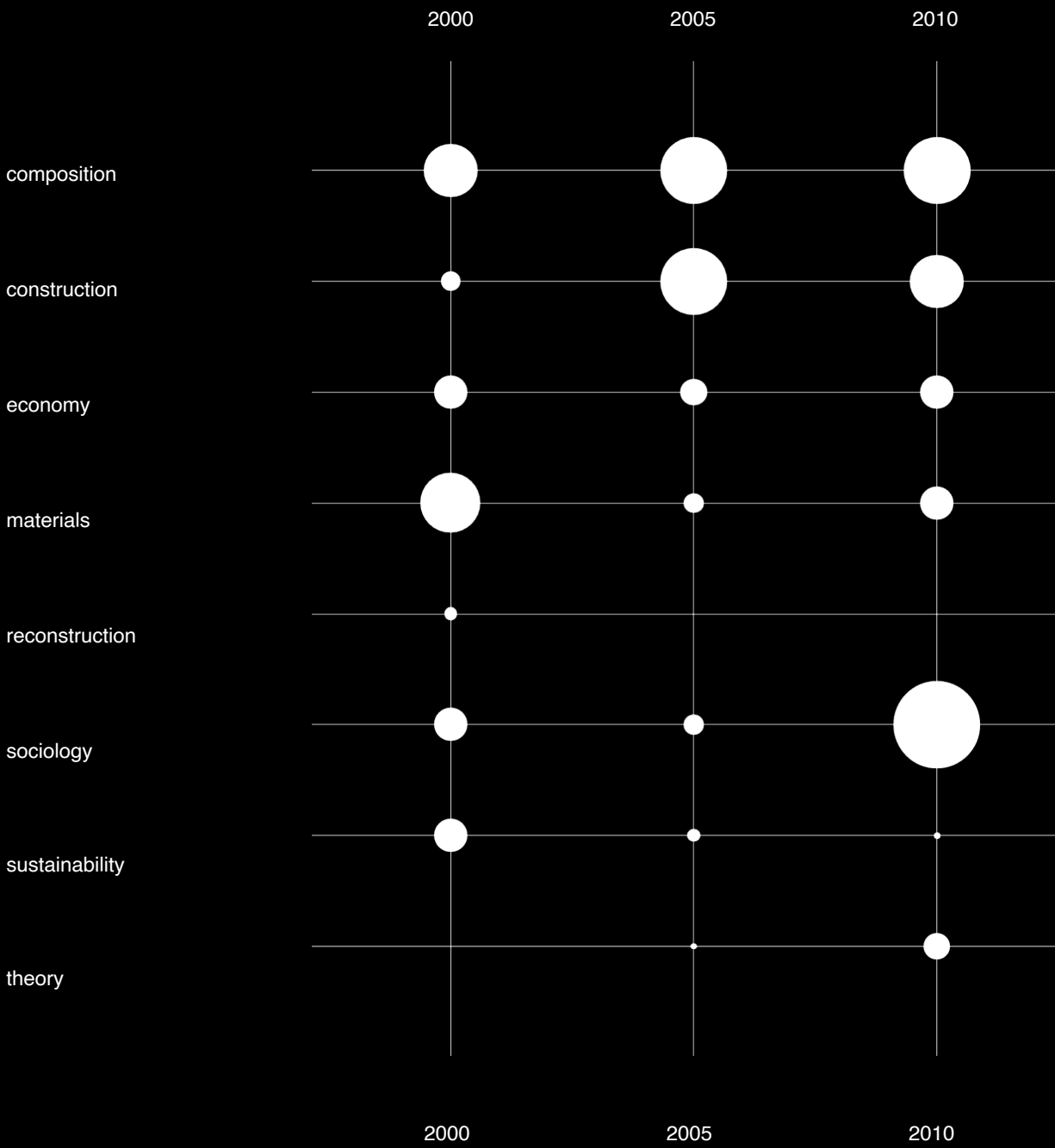


priorities

priorities



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priorities

priorities

2015

2020

2025

composition

construction

economy

materials

reconstruction

sociology

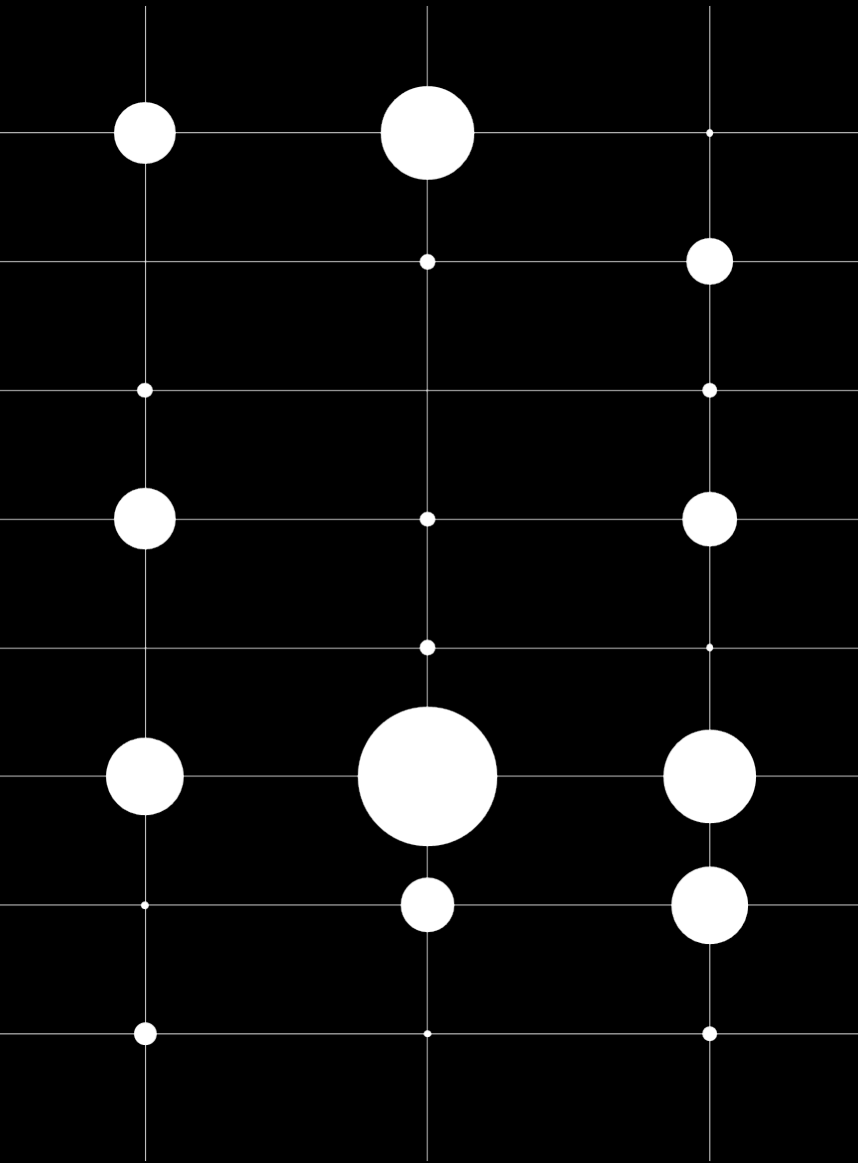
sustainability

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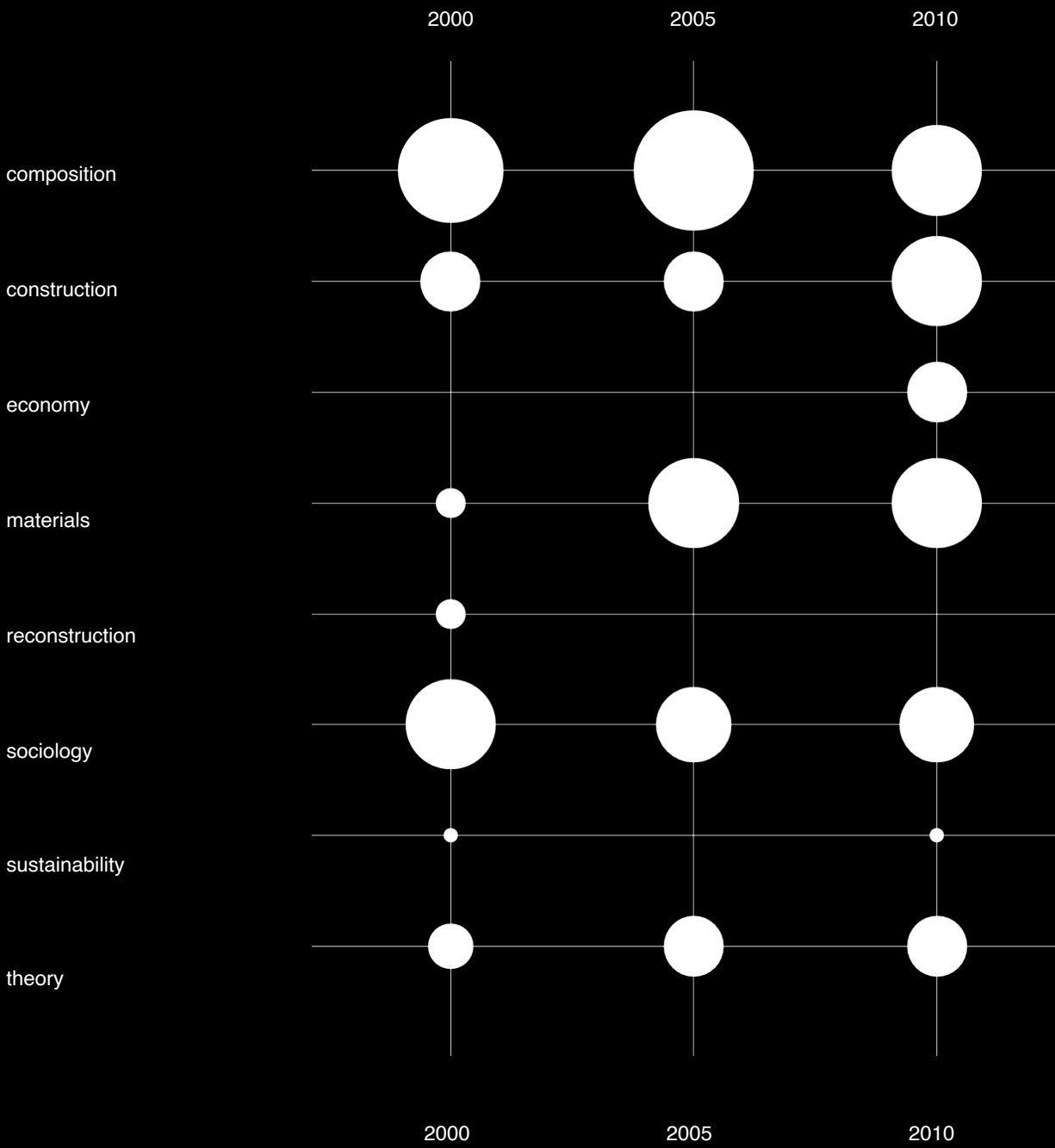
2015

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2025



Casabella



priorities

priorities

2015

2020

2025

composition

construction

economy

materials

reconstruction

sociology

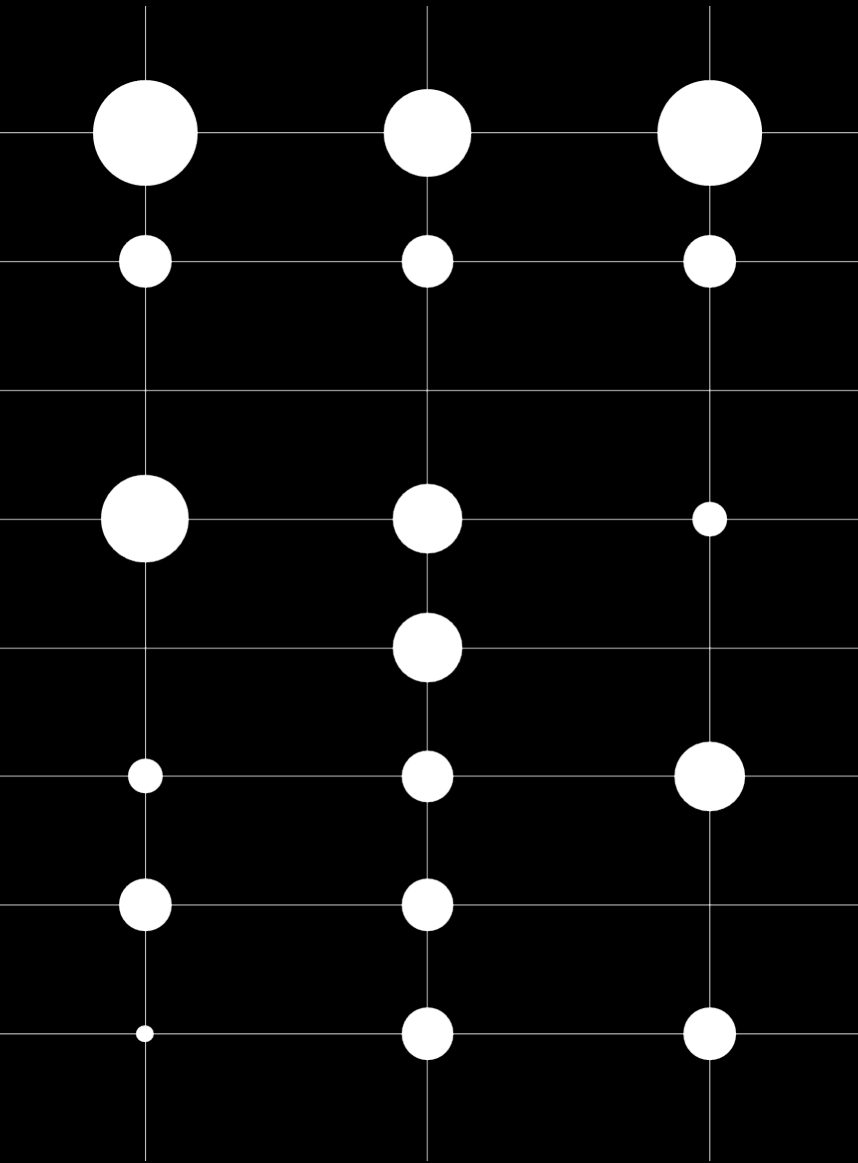
sustainability

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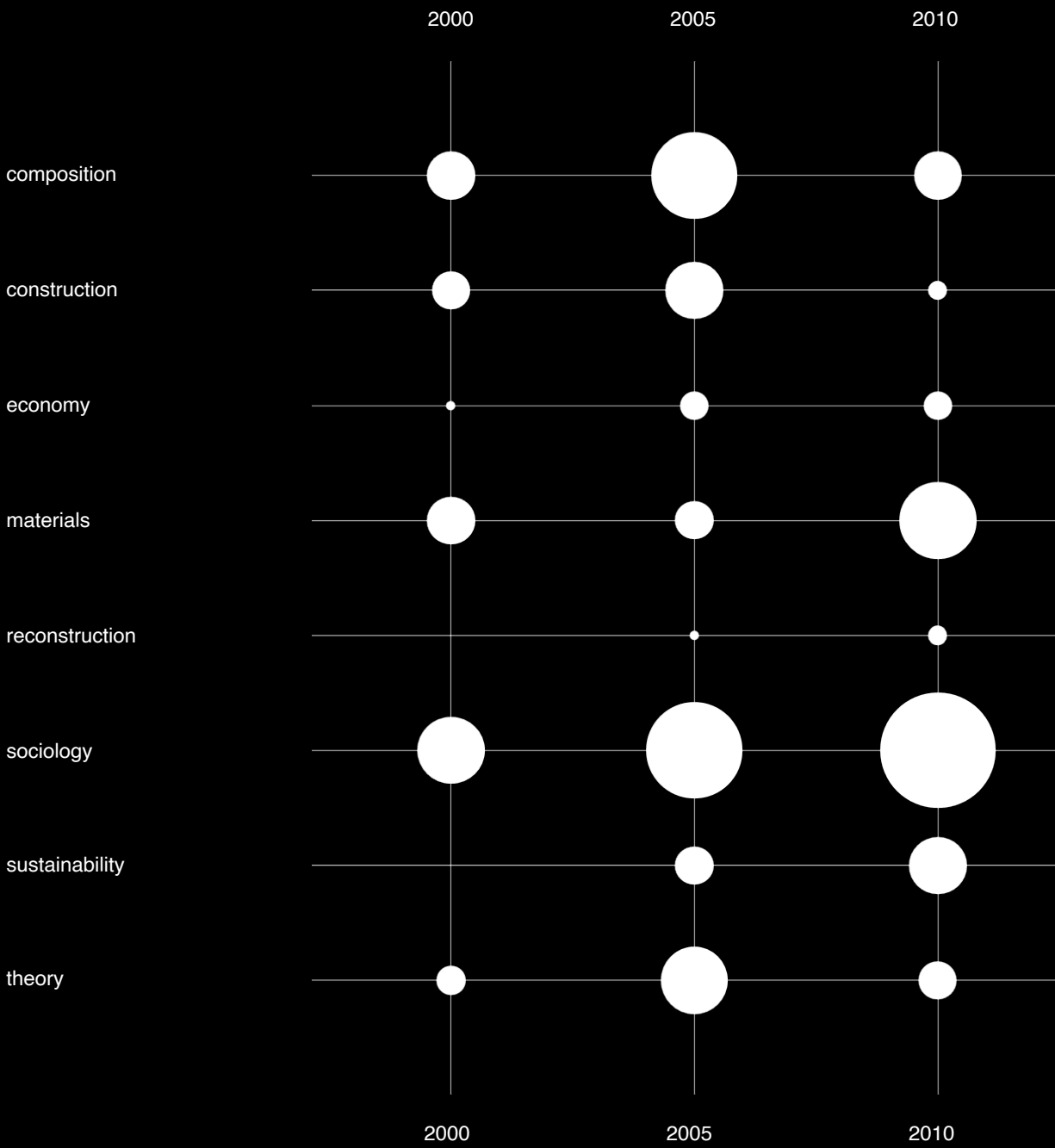
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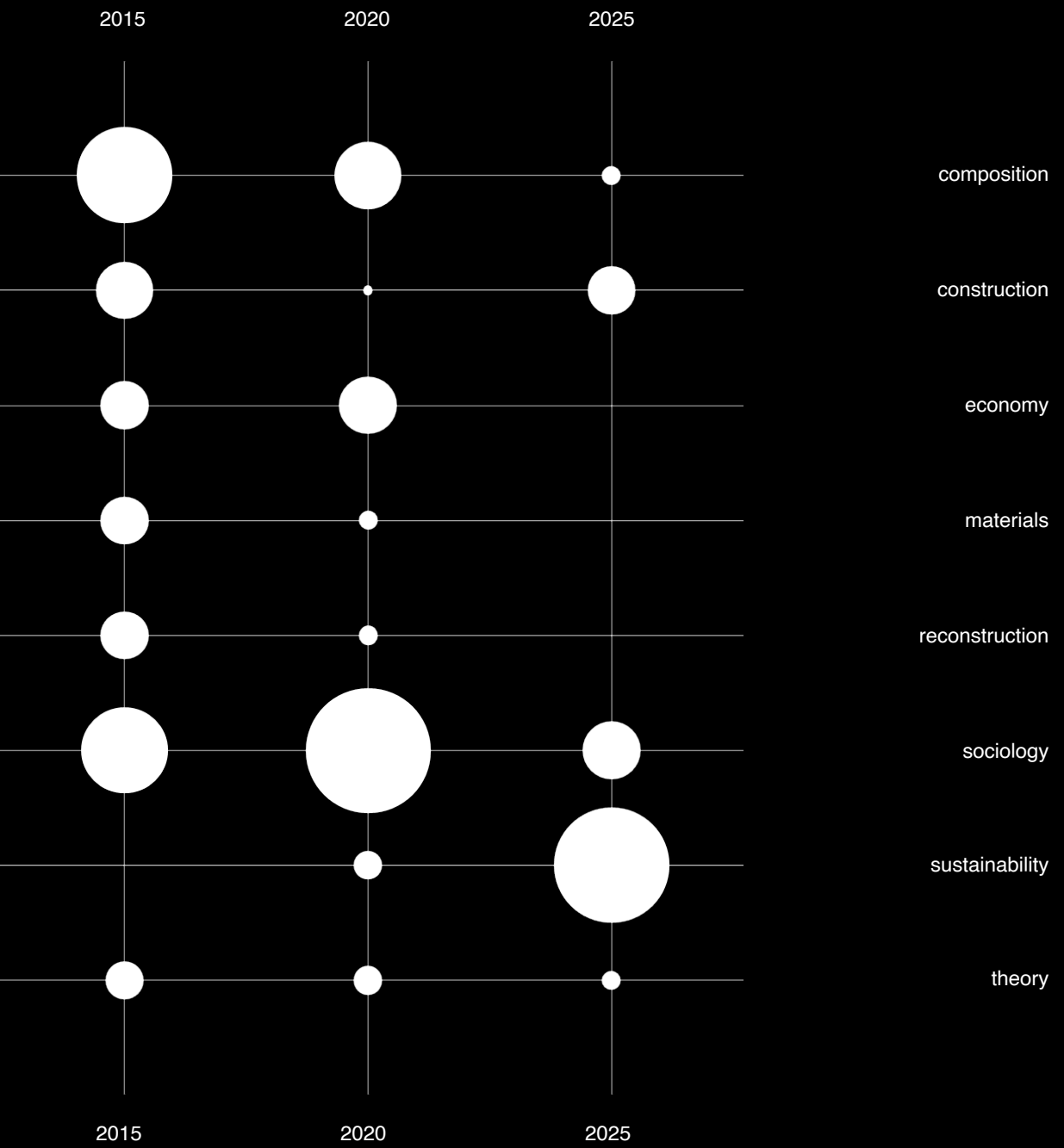


Domus

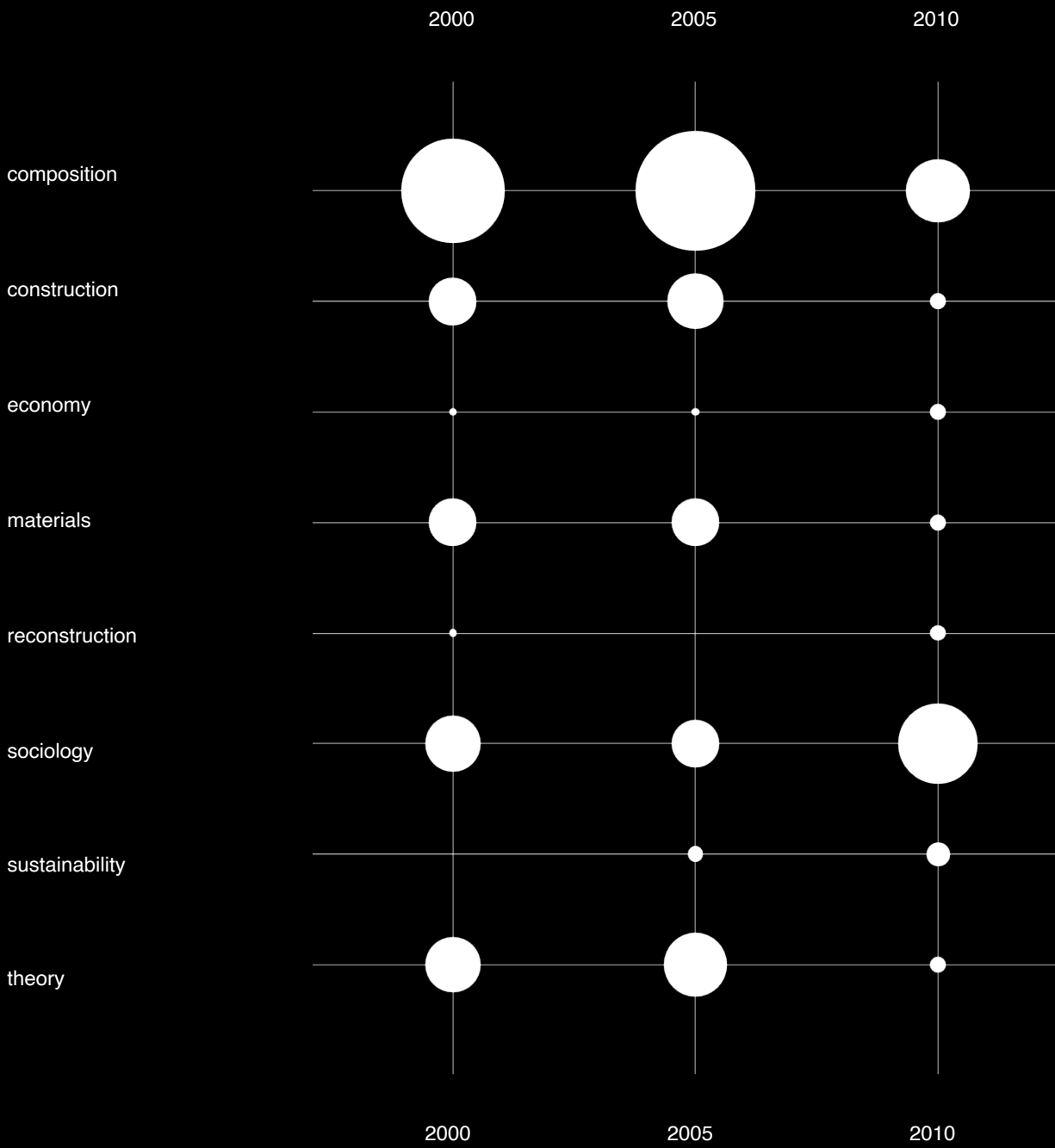


priorities

priorities



'AA'



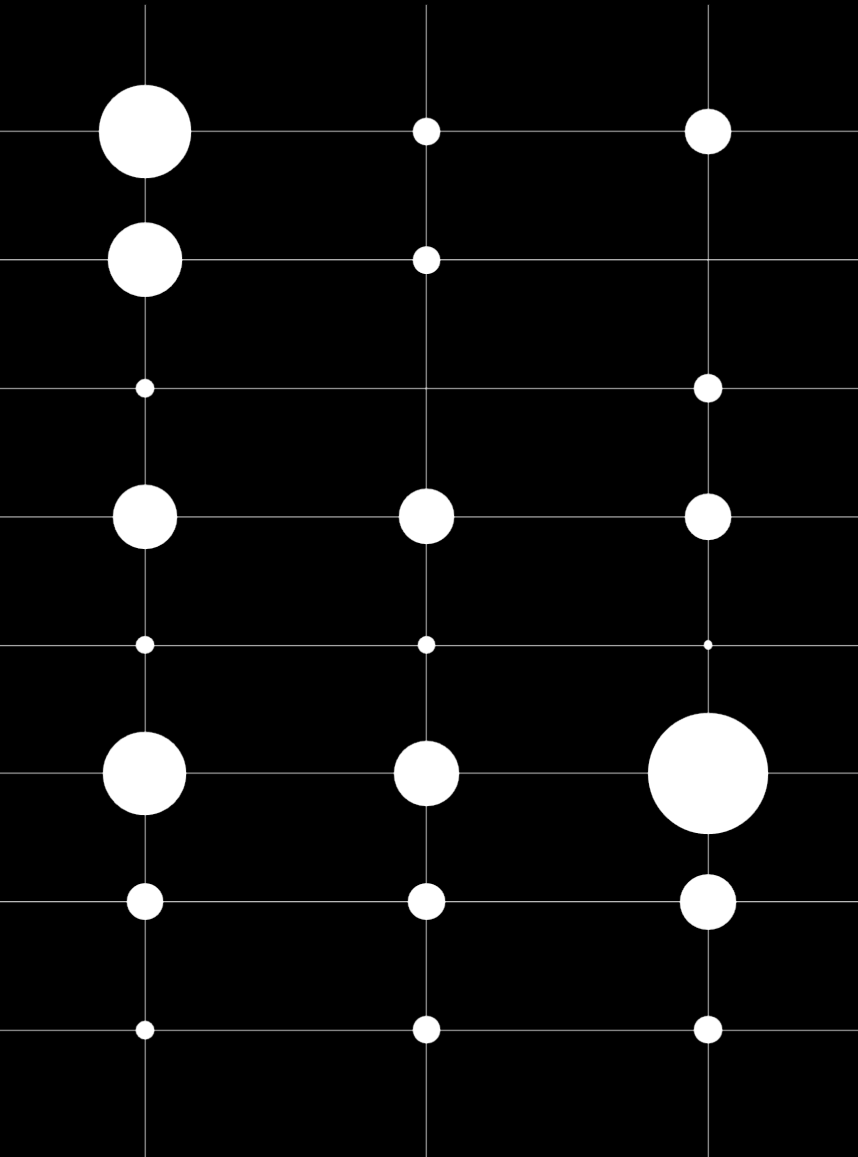
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therefore, the work of the journal is configured as a "powerful action in defense of man".

This ethical shift appears even clearer when compared Vittorio Gregotti's editorial of 1984 in *Casabella*¹⁸. Here, the author argued that "architecture has as its own specific condition that of having to be built; it is not a technique, but a set of techniques aimed at building: and it is precisely in this clash with matter and its resistance that its disciplinary truth lies." A total contrast with the words read in *Domus* is evident. While for Gregotti the truth lies in the clash with matter, for Di Battista the truth lies in the subject that inhabits the architectural space.

This passage can be said to reflect the evolution of the debate on the discipline in recent decades: the quality of the project is no longer measured exclusively through its compositional coherence. Instead, it is measured by its ability to act as a mediation device between the limited resources of the planet and the growing needs of the community. This invests architectural practice with a political responsibility that goes beyond the perimeter of the construction site. The city of man that we read about in the pages of *Domus* so, becomes a common goal for all the magazines, regardless of their different origin and approach. If the analysis of the article typology and the architectural scale revealed a structure still linked to consolidated professional models, it is in the study of the contents and priorities of the architectural discourse that the real break with the previous century was finalized.

The emergence of a "butterfly" structure in the distribution of themes confirms that the center of gravity of the architectural debate has shifted from the compositional and constructive values of the twentieth century toward a predominance of social and environmental issues. This quantitative mapping is more than a statistical report; it provides the empirical evidence necessary to support the critical analysis in the following stages of the research. Having established that the "city of man" and sustainability have effectively replaced the autonomy of form, it is now possible to investigate how this mutation has redefined the rhetoric of architecture.

¹⁸ Gregotti, Vittorio. *Modification*. Casabella, no. 498/499, 1984, pp. 2-7.

Composition of the printed space

The analysis of quantitative data conducted so far finds a necessary integration in the study of the material and visual dimension of the periodicals. If the previous chapter focused on "what" magazines say, this one questions "how" they say it, starting from the assumption that the magazine should not be considered a neutral container, but an architectural project in itself. The choice of paper, the layout grid and the hierarchy between text and images, are to be understood as real constructive elements. The physical support of the editorial line and its logical structure inevitably condition the reception of the critical message. The layout is understood as the spatial and tactile organization of the page. The journal is therefore similar to an organic structure and the task of the editor, much like that of an architect, is to organize heterogeneous elements in a synthesis that expresses an idea of the discipline.

For this reason, even before proceeding with an in-depth analysis of the words, the study of the layout can suggest the intellectual priorities of the magazine. Observing the evolution of editorial architecture in the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century allows us to understand how not only the way of communicating architecture has changed, but also the very idea of what an architecture magazine should be.

Leafing through an architecture periodical from decades ago, one immediately realizes it was an artifact conceived for a decidedly different use than the contemporary one. The materiality of the paper itself constituted a declaration of intent: the surface was often less satin, thicker and characterized by an ivory tone. This porosity of the paper support was not accidental, but it was functional to the optimal reproduction of technical drawings and project sketches, while appearing less effective for the nuances of color photographic reproductions.

This material datum established a clearly legible hierarchy of editorial interest, positioning architecture to be communicated first and foremost as a logical and constructive process. In this configuration, the technical drawing represented the truth of the project. The photograph was only accessory documentation and was often presented in small formats at the margins of the layout.

Another evident aspect of last century magazines is the density of the page. This was likely a reflection of a narrative urgency that favored the informative content over visual impact. Text took up the dominant portion of the available space, images were compressed, and white space was reduced to the bare minimum. Today, also thanks to the transformation of printing processes and the lower cost of paper, periodicals are much more voluminous. Contemporary content is presented in a more dilated form. Rich photographic presentations and a greater percentage of white space become fundamental compositional elements, aimed at creating an almost museum-like and exclusive atmosphere around the architectural object. This visual rarefaction suggests that the magazine is no longer just a tool for technical updates, but an aesthetic device that transforms the building into an icon to be contemplated.

To understand this evolution, it was necessary to make a diachronic comparison that systematized the variations in visual weights within the page. For this reason, the research involved the production of graphic samples processed through the systematic scanning of the selected issues. These images have been subjected to a process of chromatic abstraction, aimed to isolate and quantify the different components of the layout through a coded legend. In the creation of these visual maps, the constituent elements of the page were identified and each one was associated with a conventional color: white space, indicated with the color black to highlight its role as a structural "void"; the photographs, marked with the color red; technical drawings, highlighted in purple, and illustrations or various graphics, indicated in yellow. The latter are considered a secondary aspect in the study of graphics, but it became necessary to differentiate them from a more architectural representations. The choice of white to indicate the text is particularly

important, as it identifies the verbal content as the fulcrum of the entire investigation and the primary element of analysis¹⁹.

In the study of the composition of the issues, the pages containing advertising inserts, considered irrelevant to the objectives of this survey, were voluntarily discarded. However, it should be noted that print advertisements historically represent a significant percentage of income for magazines and, for this reason, they can occupy more than half of the total volume of a periodical. Given the commercial nature of the print medium, it is common for these to coexist within the same page as editorial content. In these cases, since it is not possible to eliminate the physical footprint of the advertisement without compromising the integrity of the layout analyzed, it was decided to recolor these inserts in dark gray. The use of this neutral shade responds to the desire not to disturb the chromatic composition of the analysis or to alter the data relating to the contents, while keeping track of the real saturation of the page. This allows for a clear distinction between what belongs to the narrative of architecture and what responds to the logic of profit. The exclusion of advertising inserts here is dictated by the need to isolate exclusively the space of editorial curatorship, that is, the space where the editor and art director exercise full control over the graphic design to convey the critical slant of the magazine.

The adoption of this chromatic decomposition makes it possible to immediately visualize, almost like a scan, the balance between the different languages and their spatial distribution on paper. To maximize the clarity of this investigation, the research focuses on a direct diachronic comparison between the complete issues of 1990 and 2020. This thirty-year leap is intended to provide a high-contrast snapshot that emphasizes the most radical structural differences, isolating the two polarities of the transformation. While these integral scans offer a deep qualitative immersion into the layout, the broader evolutionary trend, conducted from the 1980s to the present day, is subsequently supported by a second layer of analysis: a systematic sampling conducted every five years and represented through pie charts. This quantitative synthesis allows for a clear visualization of the gradual shifts in visual

¹⁹ The color mapping of the layouts was done manually to ensure maximum control over graphic details and editorial nuances. The calculation of the percentages of the visual weights, on the other hand, was entrusted to a script in Python language, developed with the support of artificial intelligence systems. This procedure made it possible to process the data analytically, extracting exact numerical values based on the recurrence of the previously assigned color codes.

weights. It is not limited to recording an aesthetic variation, but documents a profound mutation in the fruition of the editorial object. The progressive expansion of red to the detriment of purple and the expansion of the color black mark the transition from a magazine intended as a tool for technical in-depth study to a conception of the periodical as an experiential device. Through the analysis of the individual magazines, it will be possible to observe how each publication has declined this transformation, maintaining its own historical identity, or giving in to the allure of contemporary visual culture.

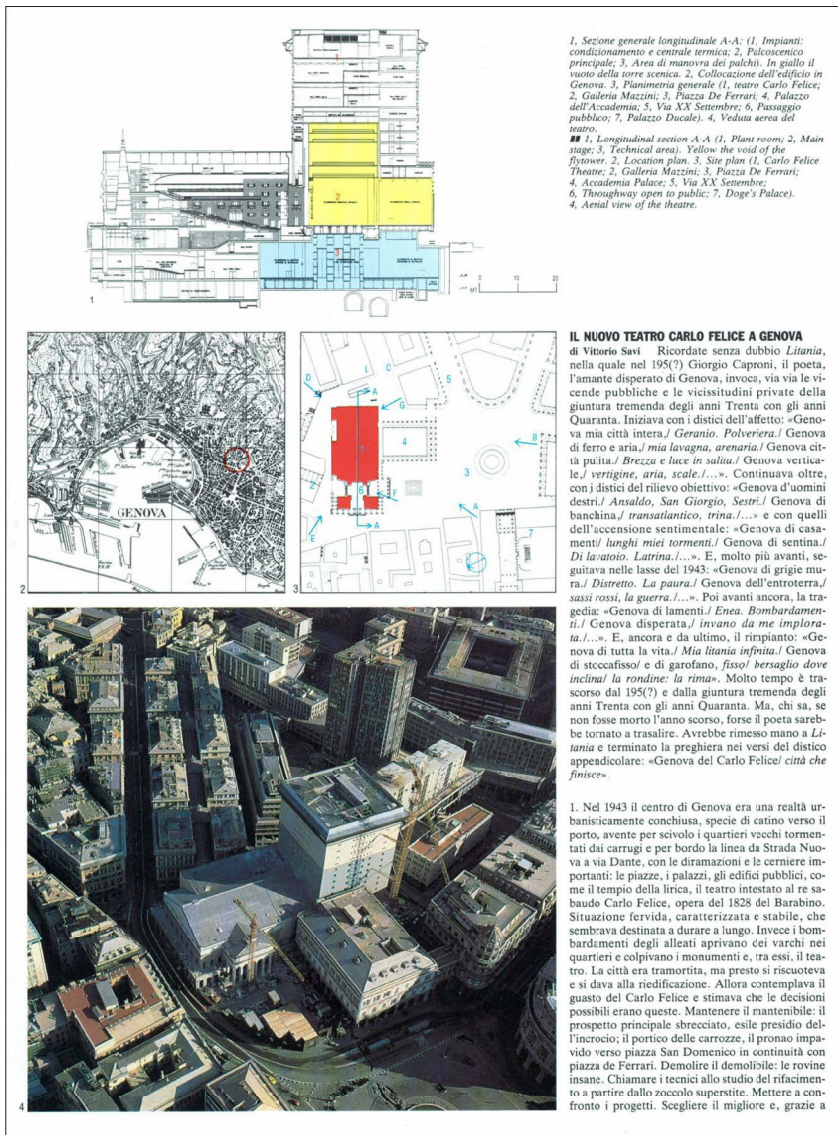
Architectural Record stands out in the panorama of the publications analyzed, for its fidelity to its mission as an information organ for the American architectural profession. Unlike European periodicals more inclined to graphic experimentation, *Architectural Record* maintains a pragmatic approach, characterized by the massive presence of advertising. Editorial content coexists with commercial ads, occupying side portions or entire pages alternating with articles, sometimes making it difficult to distinguish between what is part of the issue and what is an advertisement. Leafing through the pages of the magazine in the issues of the end of the last century, the layout appears extremely dense. The chromatic mapping of these years highlights a strong presence of descriptive picture since the end of the last century. Unlike European magazines, even during this period it begins to make extensive use of full-page photographs. Thirty years later, a more rigorous graphic approach is evident, organized in a three-column grid. The white space, slightly increasing to facilitate legibility, remains functional and never purely decorative, confirming an approach that eschews aesthetic rarefaction. Moreover, unlike the magazines in the study sample, yellow in the pages of *Architectural Record* is usually used to highlight technical and informational tables and not for illustrations. In the most recent issues, however, photography becomes more immersive and graphics less dense, yet cohabitation with advertising remains a distinctive feature. Another interesting aspect that responds to the logic of extreme pragmatism is the format, which corresponds to an A4, in order to have a compact volume that is easy to ship, to handle on site and to store in standard folders or bookshelves.

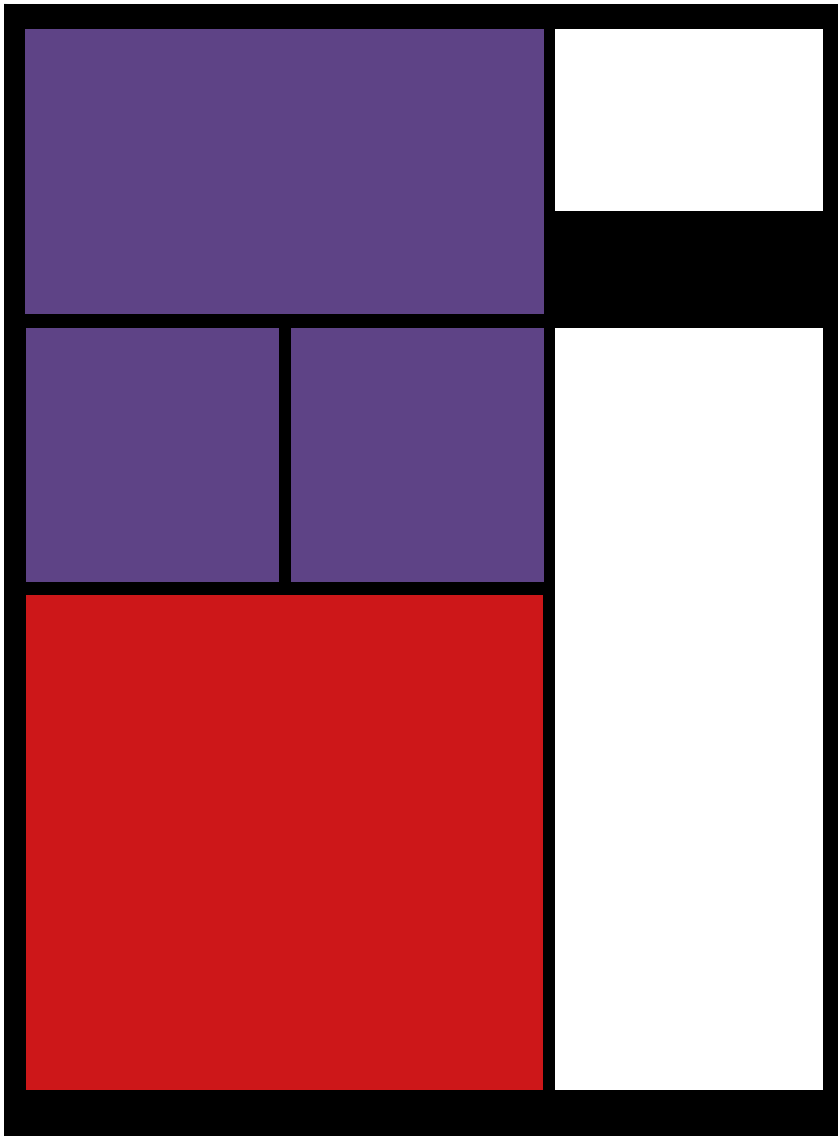
If the layout of *Architectural Record* embodies professional pragmatism, that of *The Architectural Review* represents the opposite side of the editorial spectrum, taking the form of an intellectual and scenographic project. Since its origins, the graphics of the magazine have reflected its

theoretical content of architecture. Images follow an almost cinematographic approach to accompany the narration of the social campaigns typical of the magazine. In the 1980s and 1990s, the editorial line already used large photographs to complement the article, arriving at a very high percentage in recent years. What is more evident in the transition to the new millennium is the exponential increase in white space, which becomes to be the protagonist element, isolating the argument and giving even more strength to the content. Furthermore, in addition to particularly rigorous graphics, the English magazine has kept a matte paper to support the presentation of technical drawings, which are still considered an important aspect of the project's presentation. It is interesting to note how the September 2020 issue represents an exceptional case in the entire analysis. The issue, as mentioned previously, publishes a wide series of letters, minimizing the use of images. This peak of white in the analyses of more recent years confirms the experimental nature of the magazine.

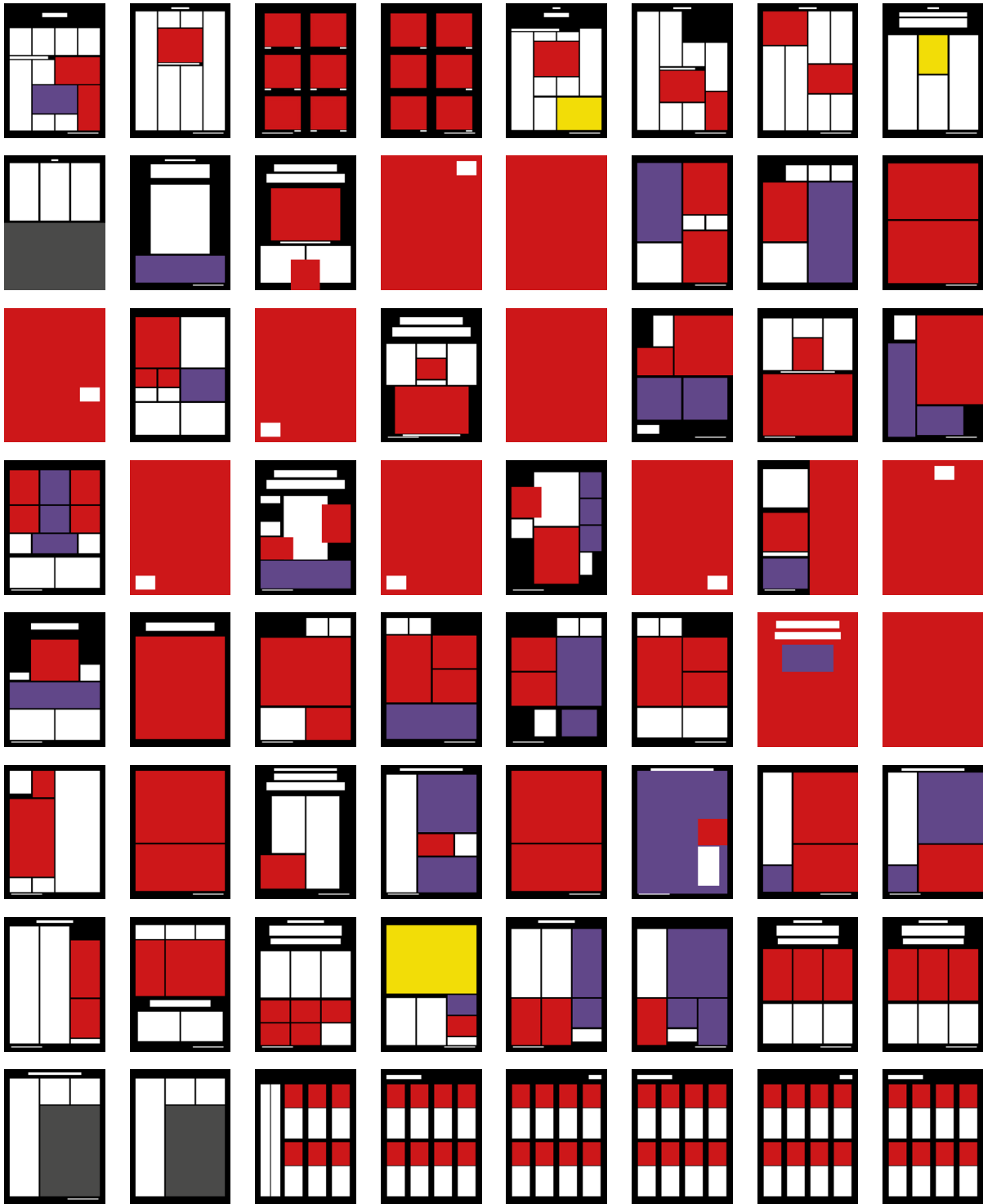
Analyzing *Casabella's* magazine now, it can be said that the change of direction from Vittorio Gregotti to Francesco Dal Co is the most emblematic of the selected titles. Under Gregotti, numerous articles published were compressed into a small number of pages, ample space was dedicated to the text and the use of technical drawings exceeded the percentage of images, that were always placed in the borders of the written part. With the direction of Dal Co, the magazine returned with a completely new image, coming back to the almost square format conceived by Persico. This, combined with a radical increase in white space, makes it possible to give prominence and breath to the publication of study sketches, drawings, construction details and large photographs, which almost monumentalize the projects presented. To emphasize this aspect, contributes the definitely reduced number of articles published compared to Gregotti's direction, perhaps symptom of absolute attention to the care of content. It is interesting how in an essay published in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, George Sebbag compared *Casabella* with *Content*, the magazine produced by Rem Koolhaas, as opposite poles of the case history of architectural publications²⁰: To the "noisy communication in spaces saturated with signs and the "aesthetics of chaos" of *Content*, Sebbag contrasts "luxury, calm and virtue" on an

²⁰ Sebbag, George. *Burning chapel and bonfires of Saint-Jean*. *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, n. 356, 2005, pp. 90-91.





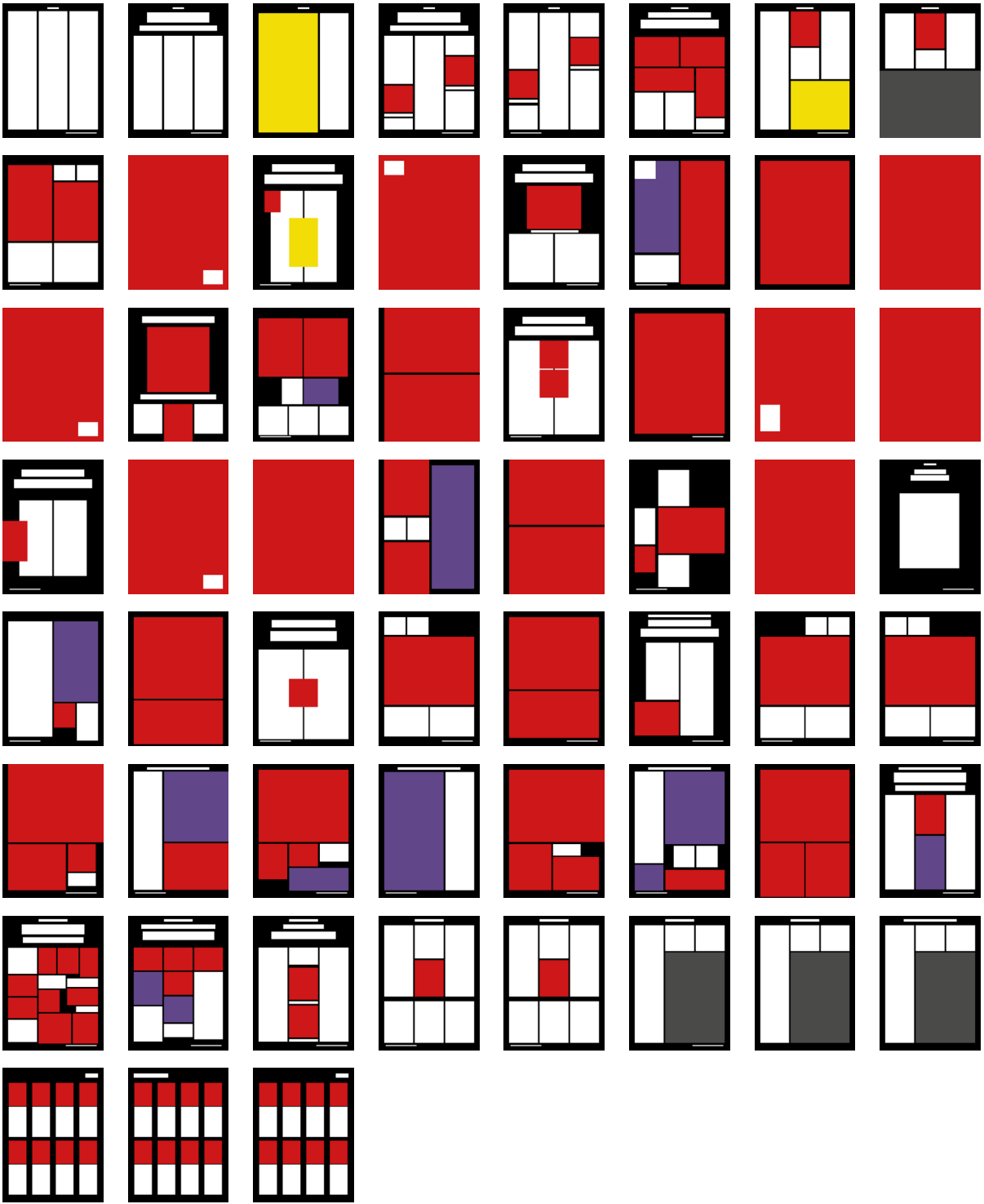
■ empty space □ text ■ picture ■ architectural drawing ■ illustration



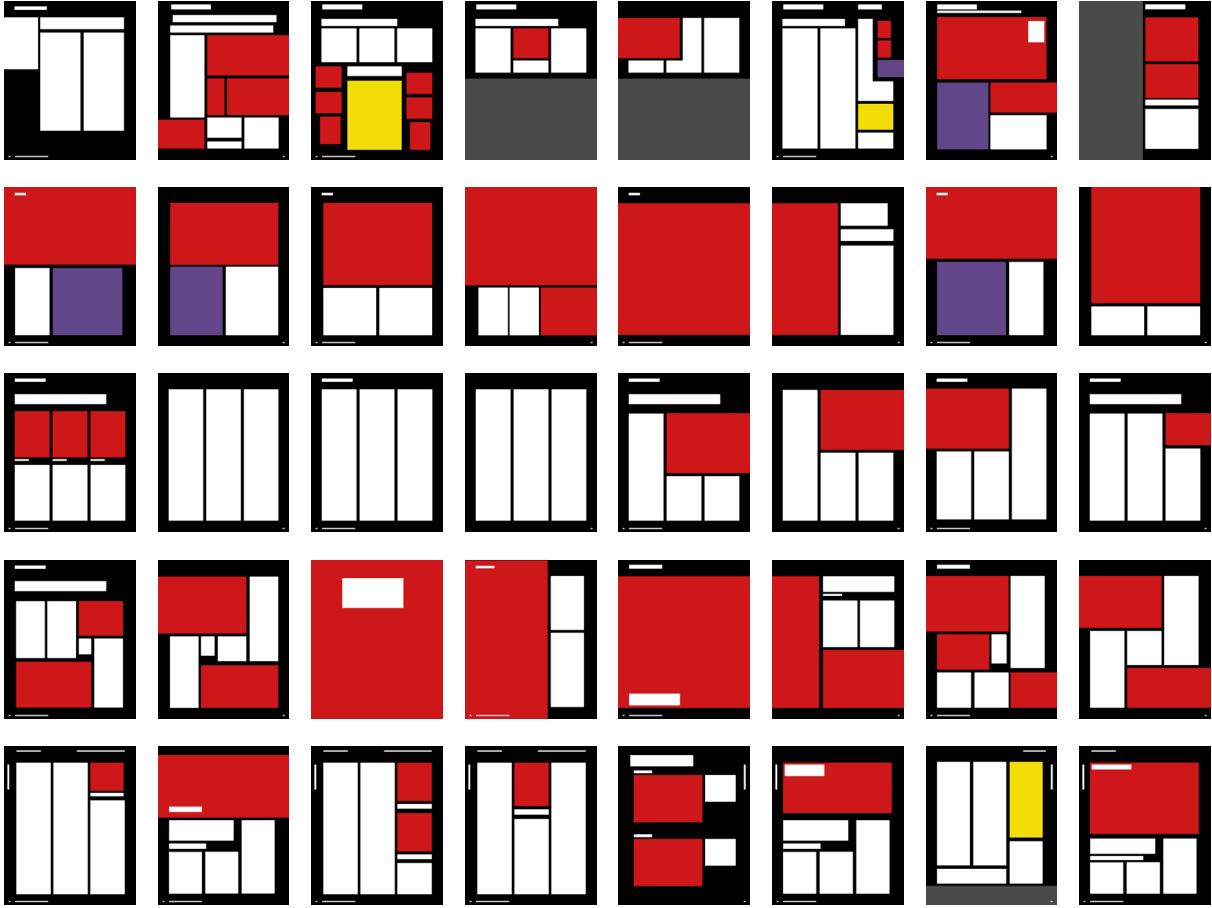
Architectural Record

September 1990

Stephen Kliment

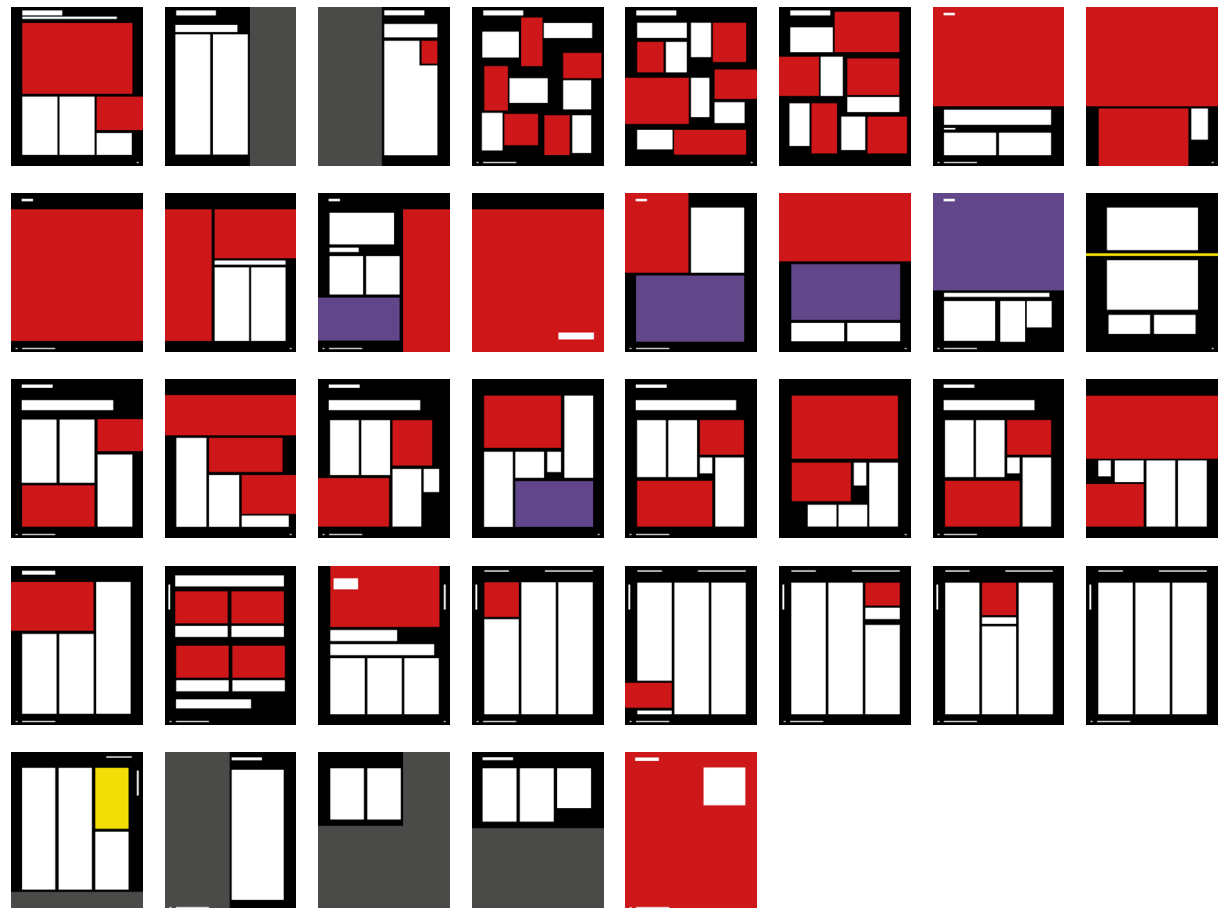


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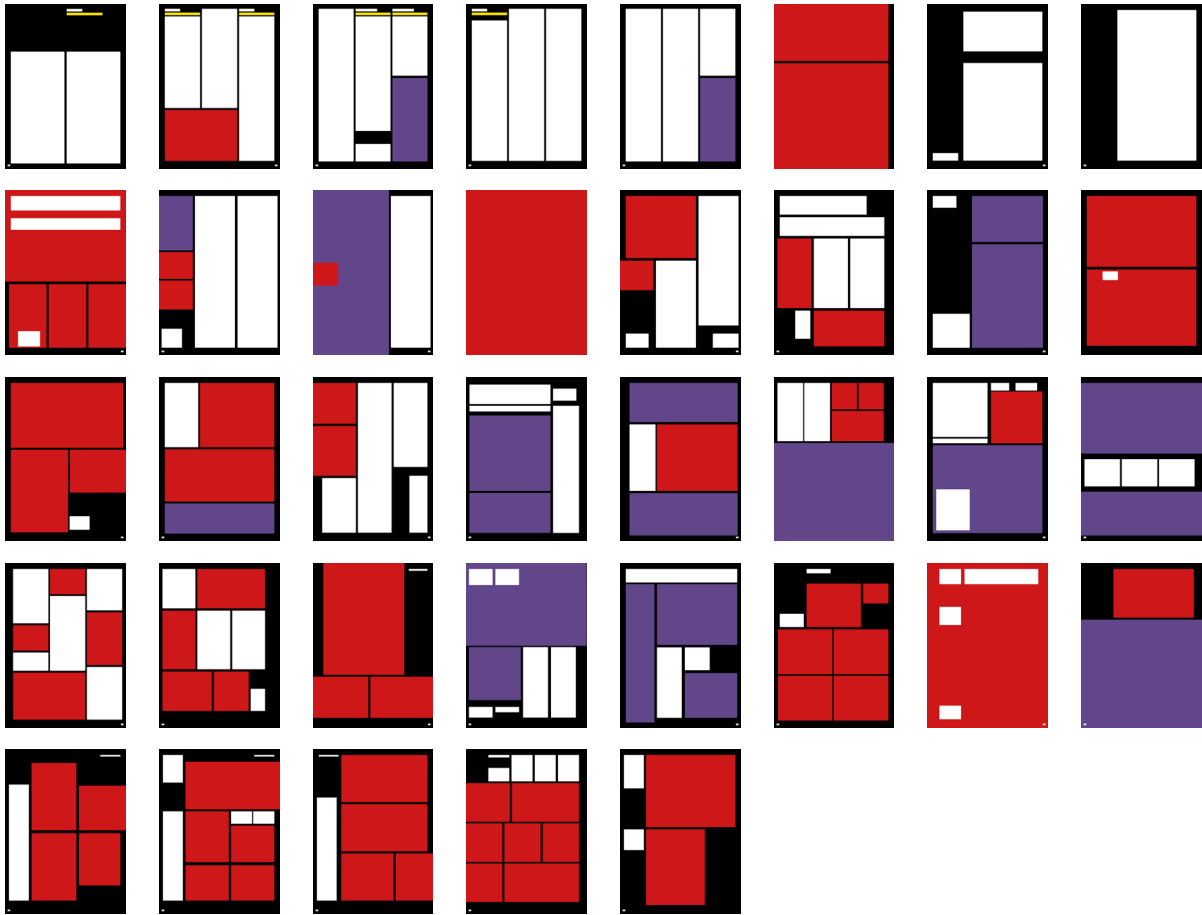


Architectural Record

September 2020
Cathleen McGuigan



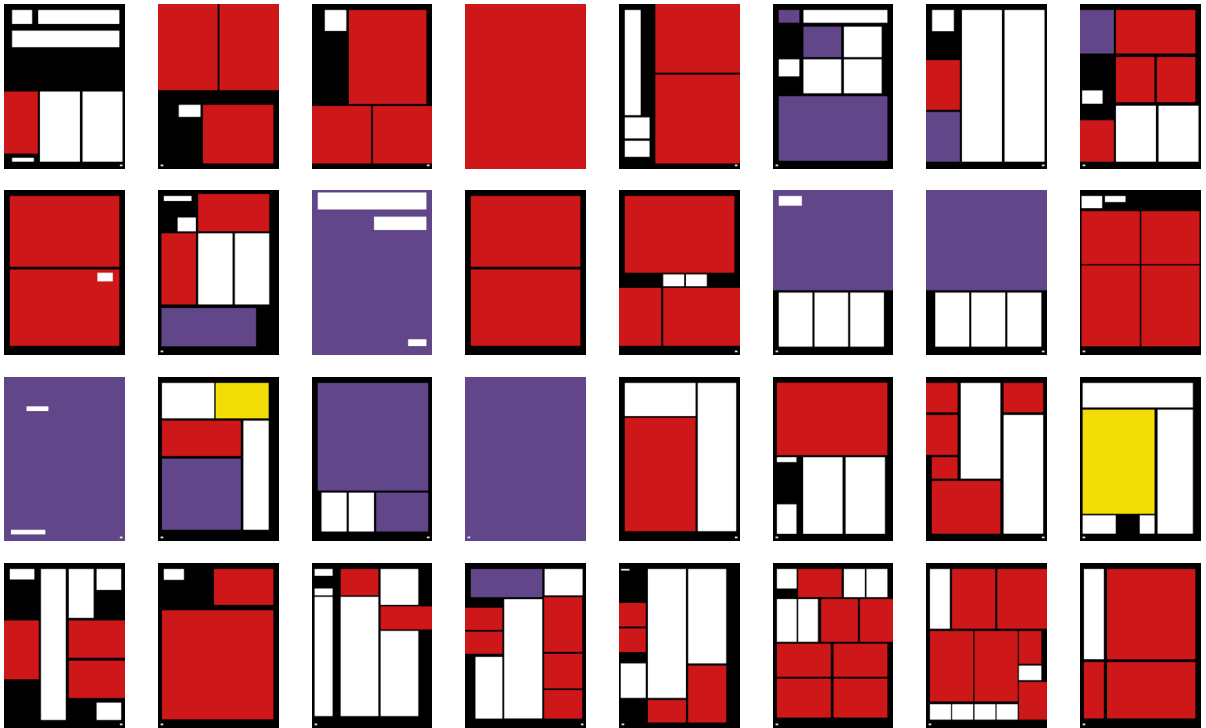
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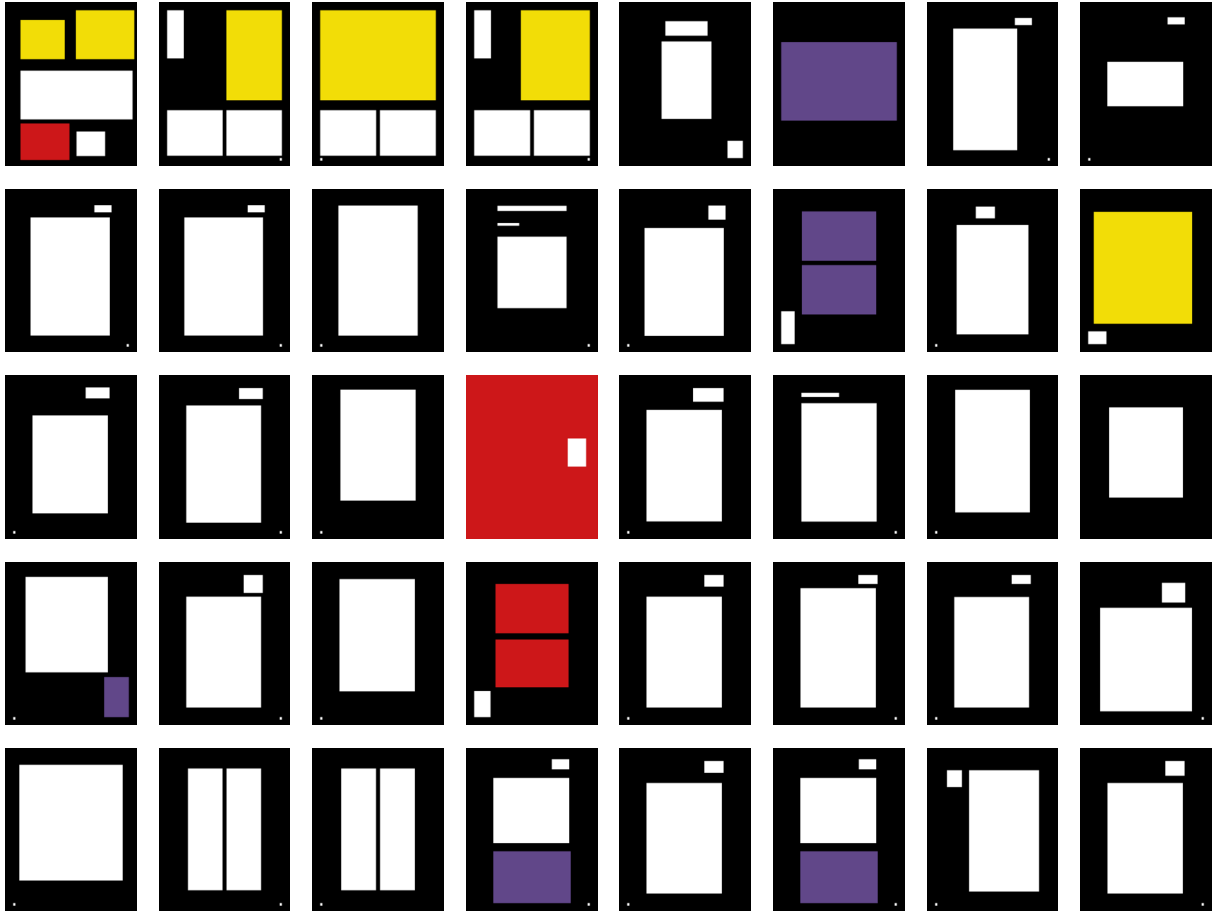
The Architectural Review

September 1990

Peter Davey



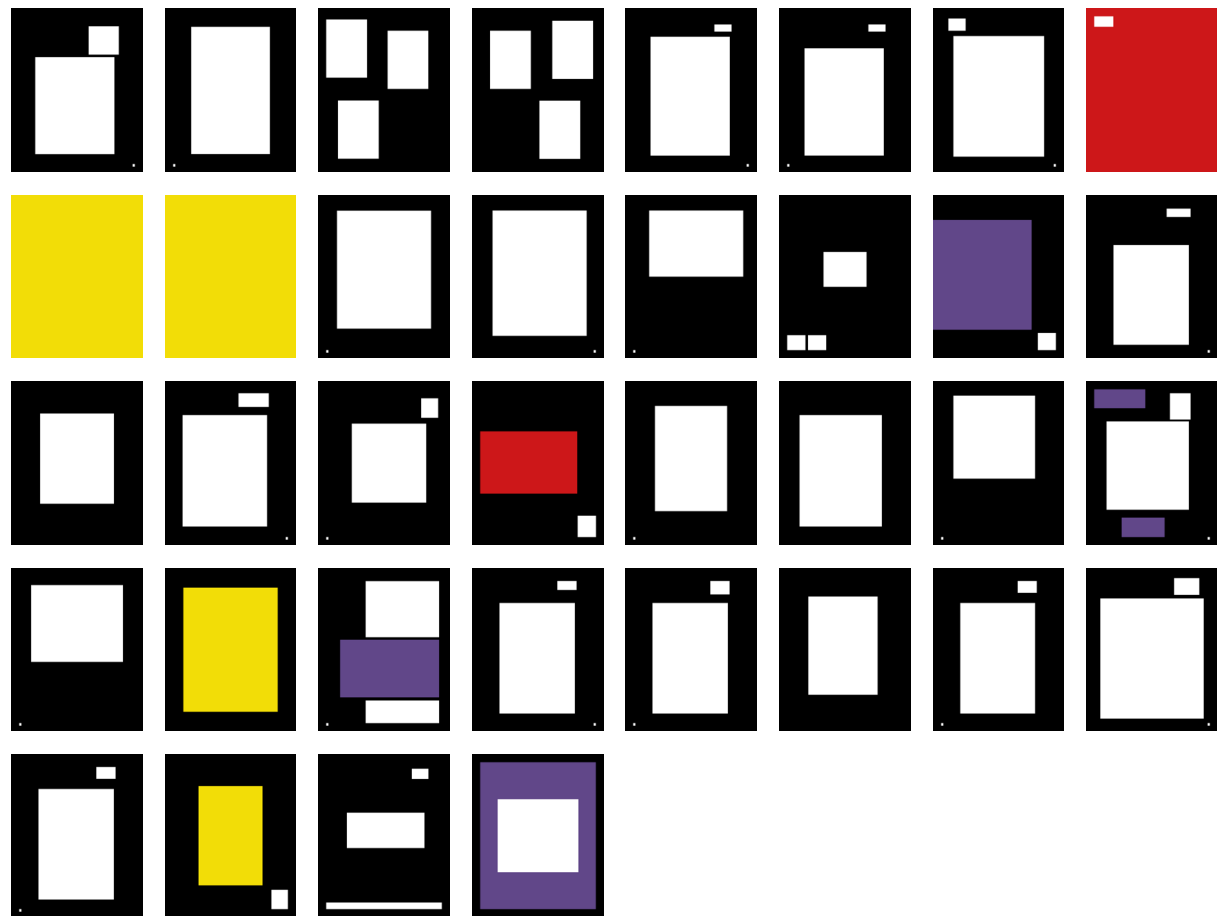
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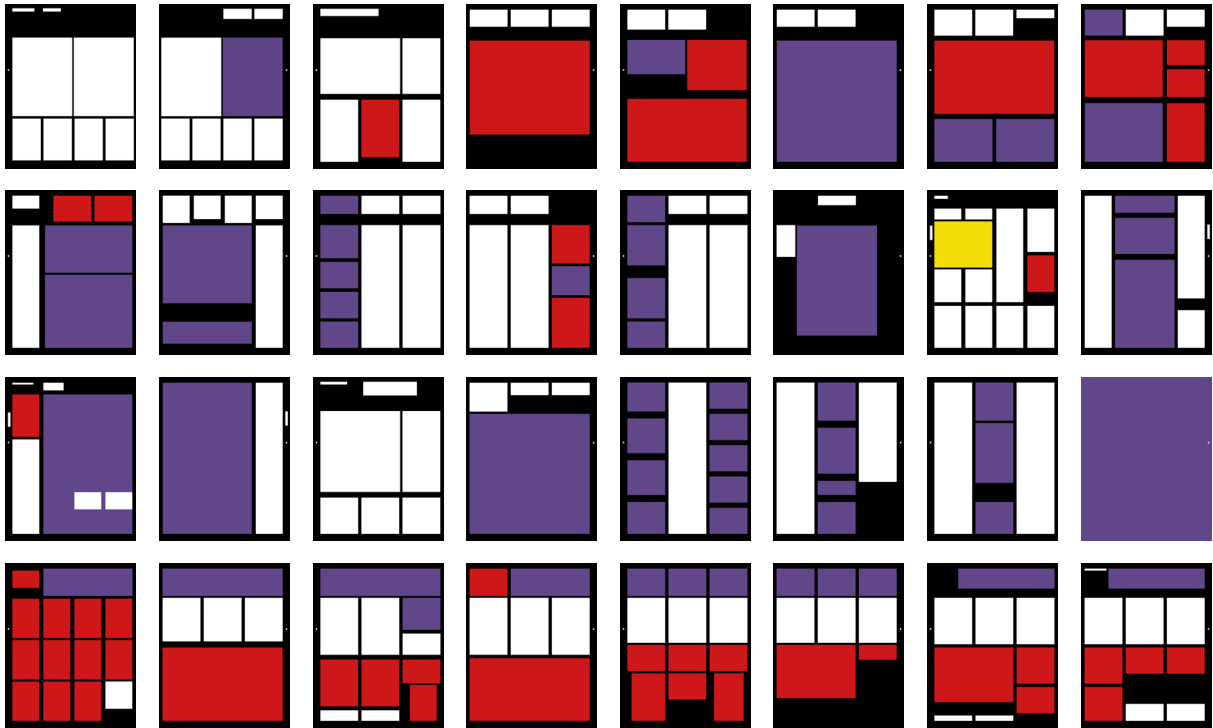
The Architectural Review

September 2020

Manon Mollard



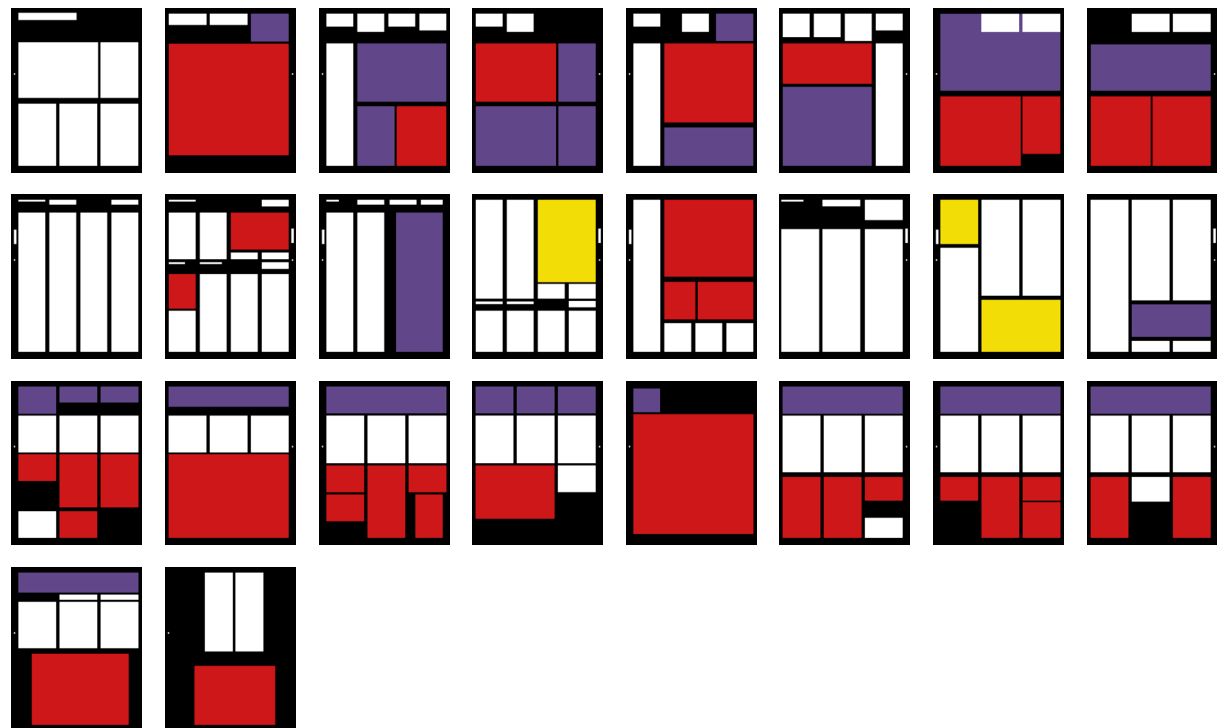
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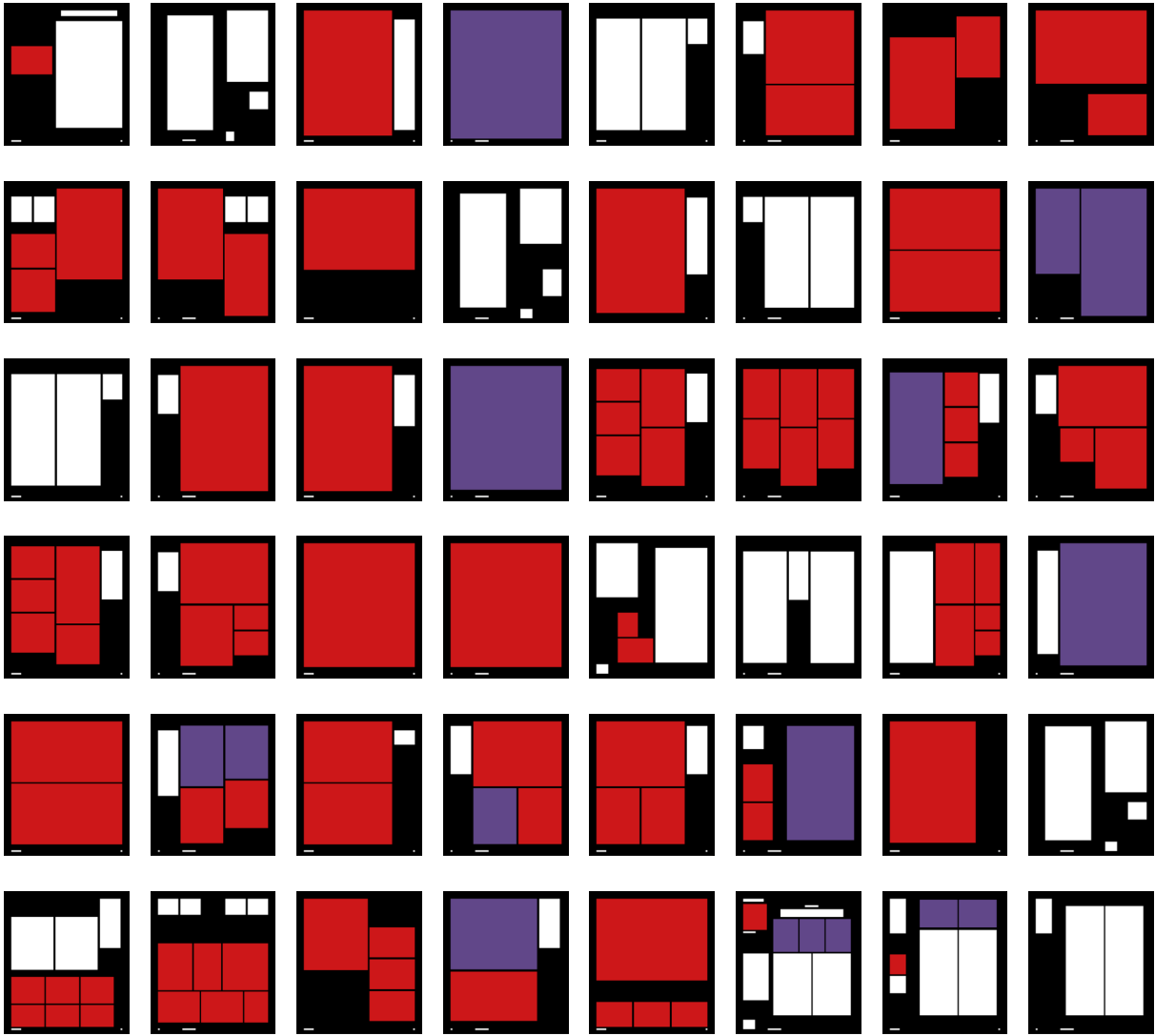
Casabella 571

September 1990

Vittorio Gregotti

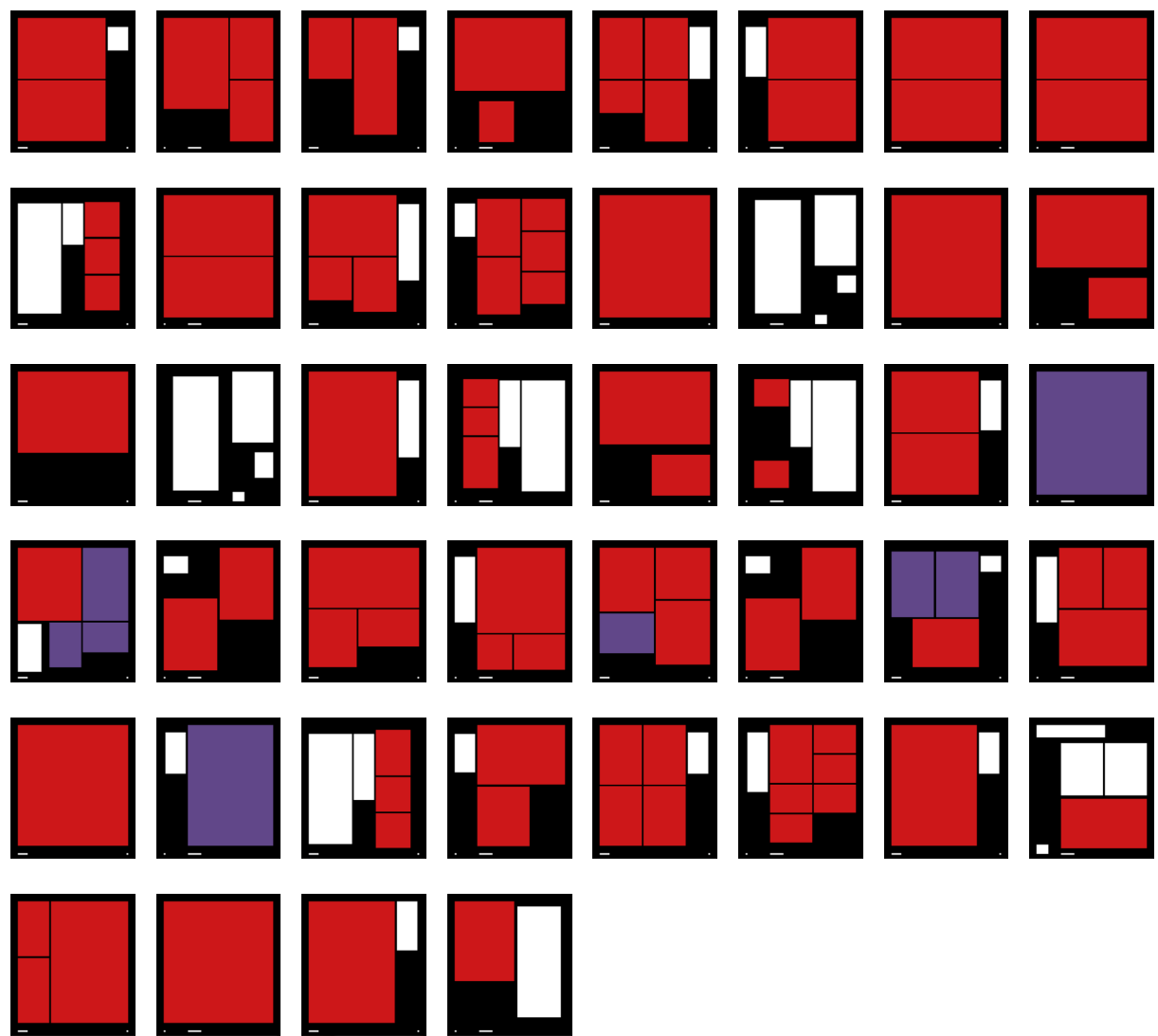


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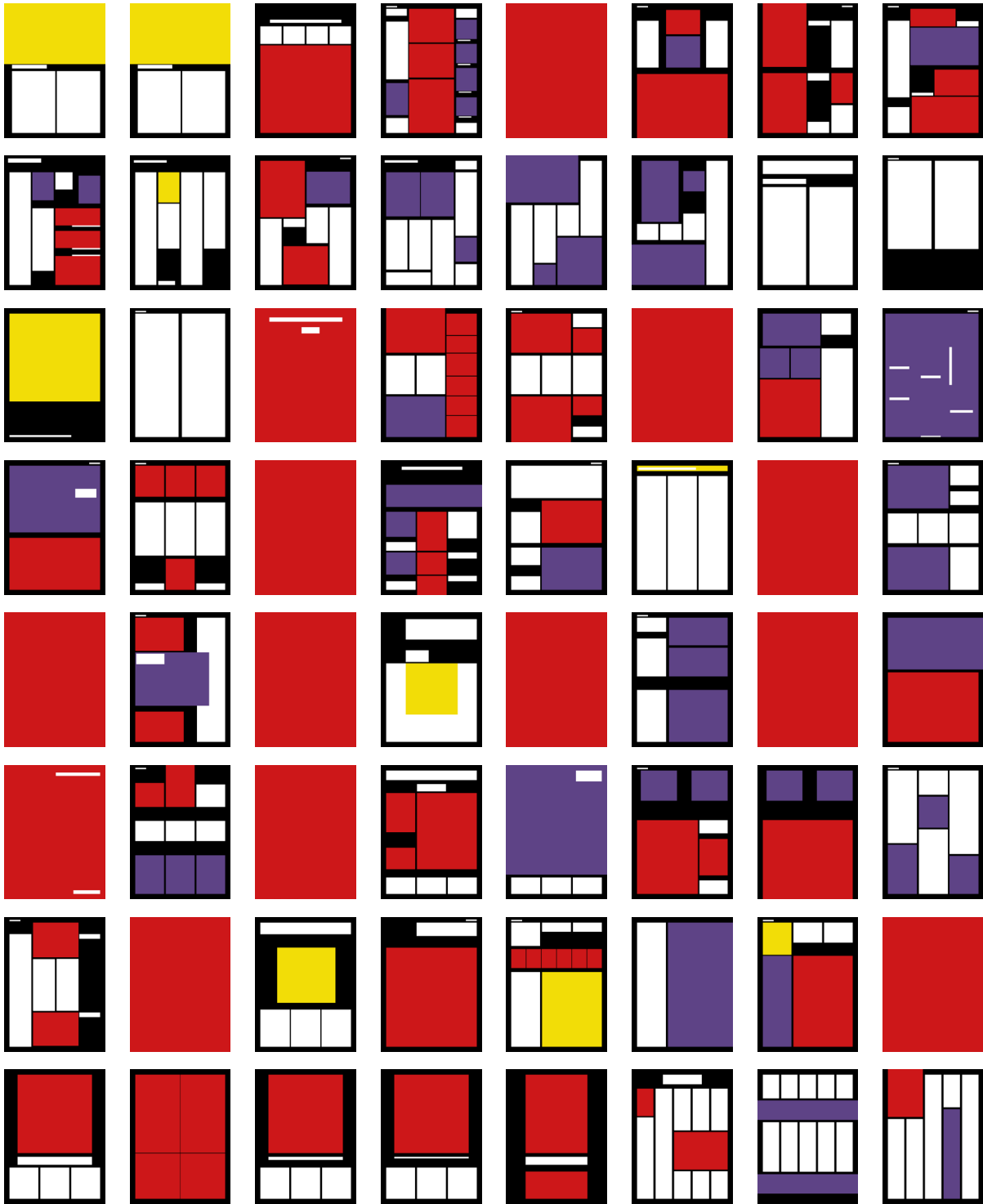


Casabella 913

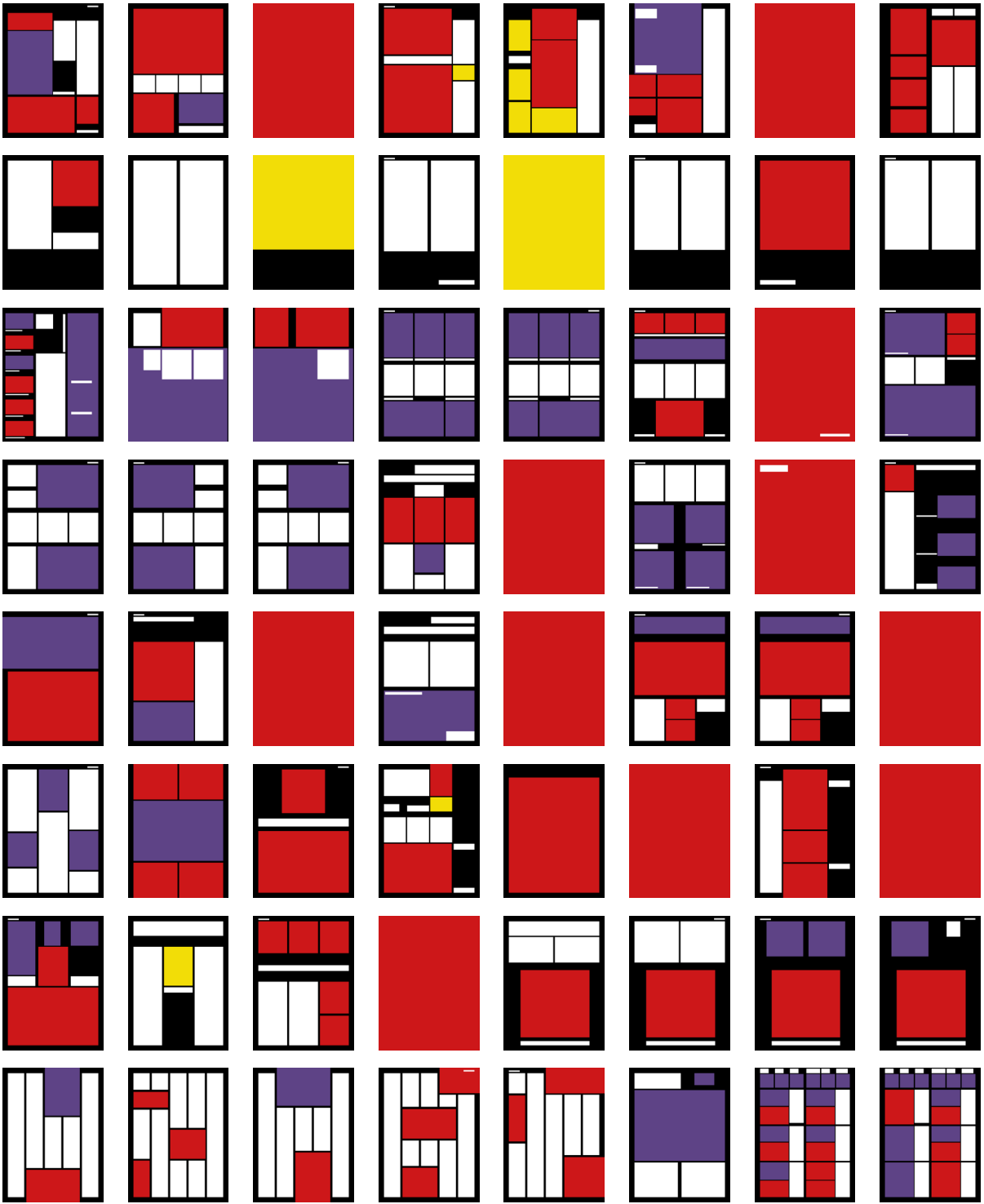
September 2020
Francesco Dal Co



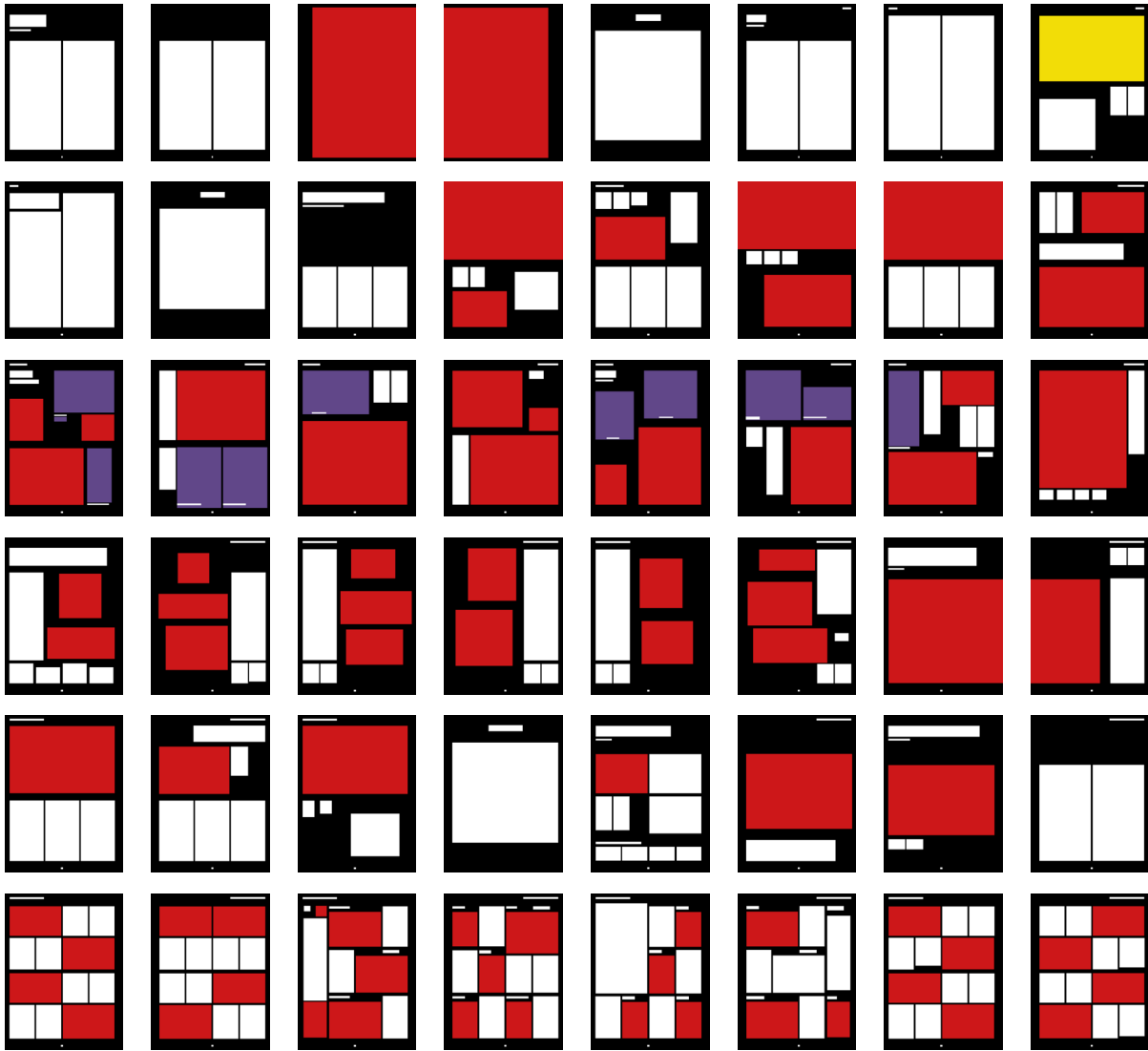
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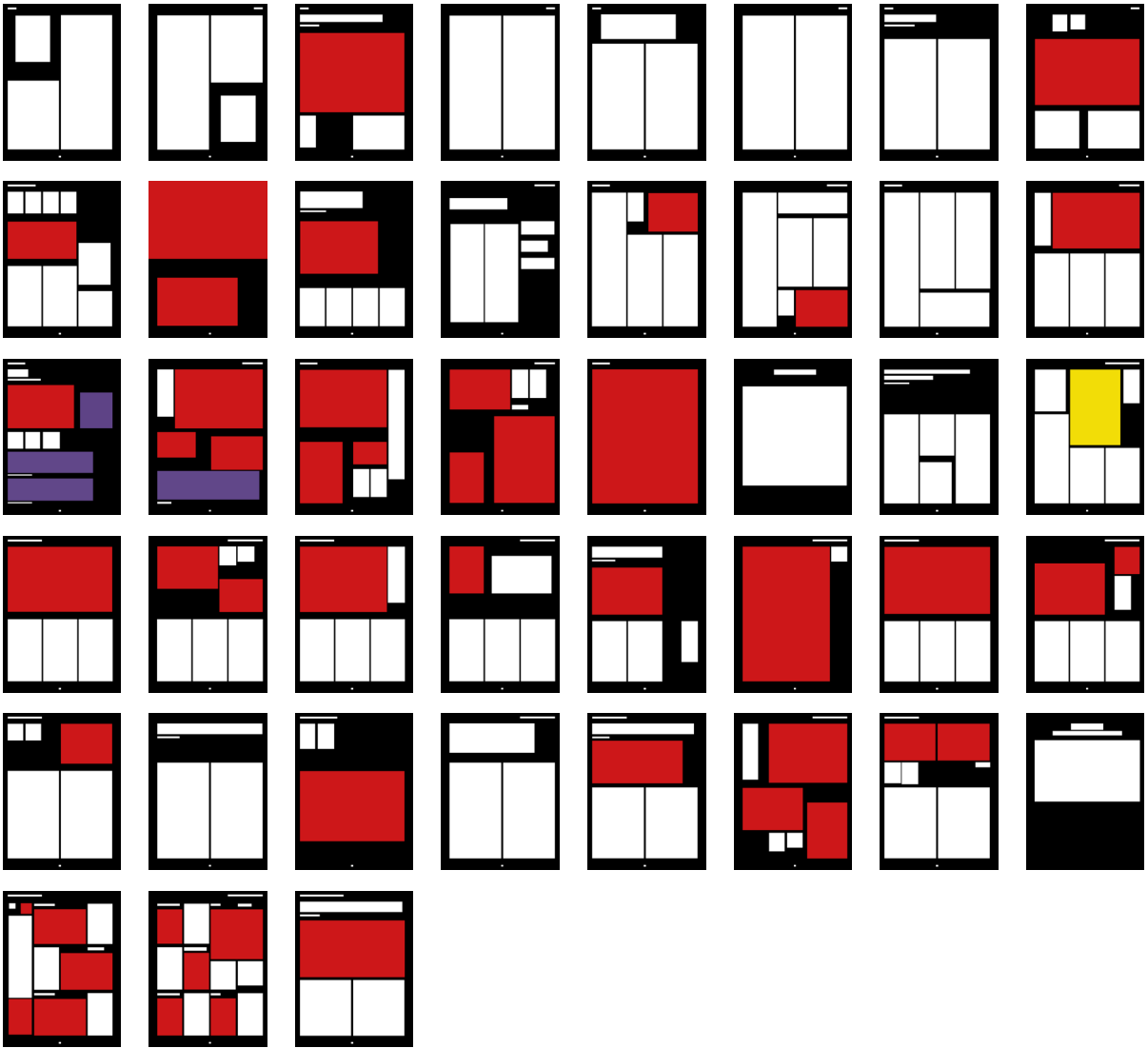
Domus 719
September 1990
Mario Bellini



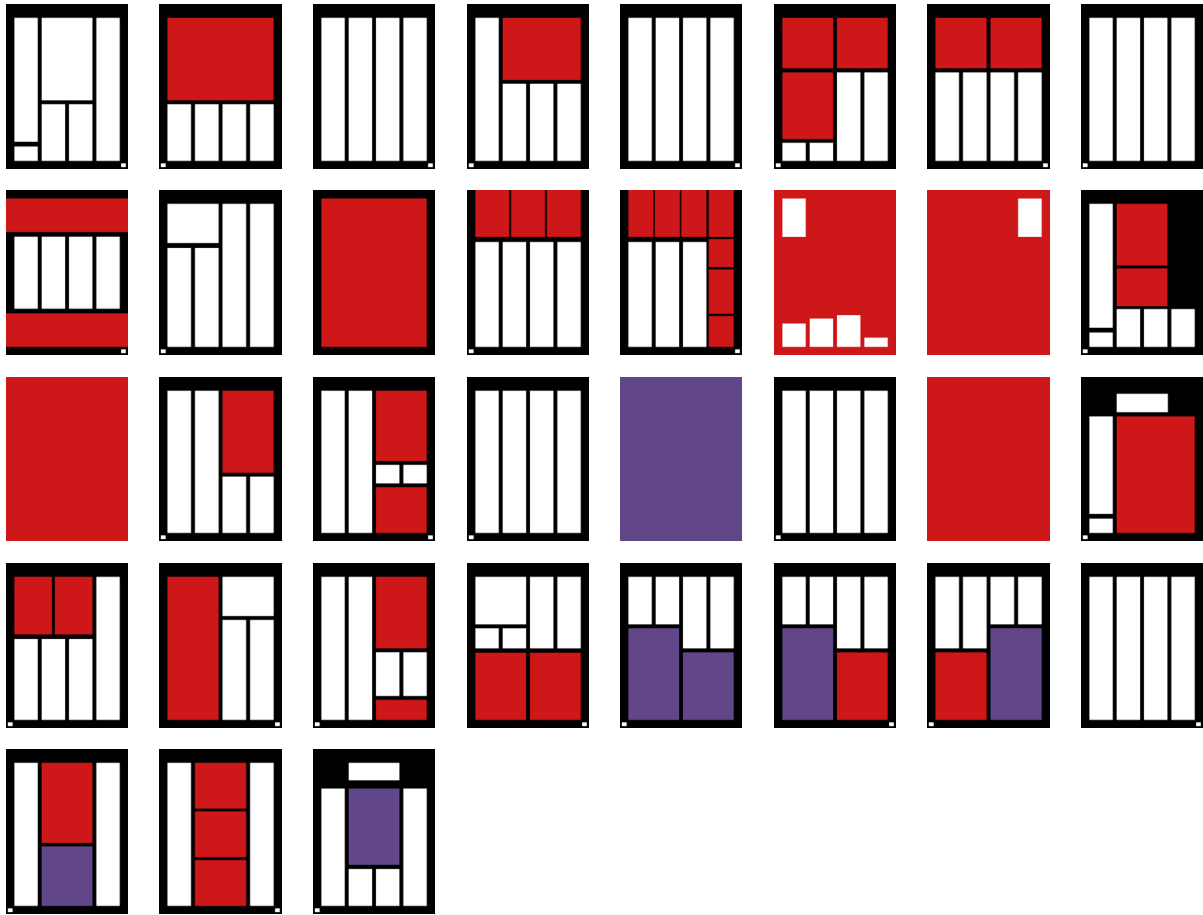
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Domus 1049
September 2020
David Chipperfield

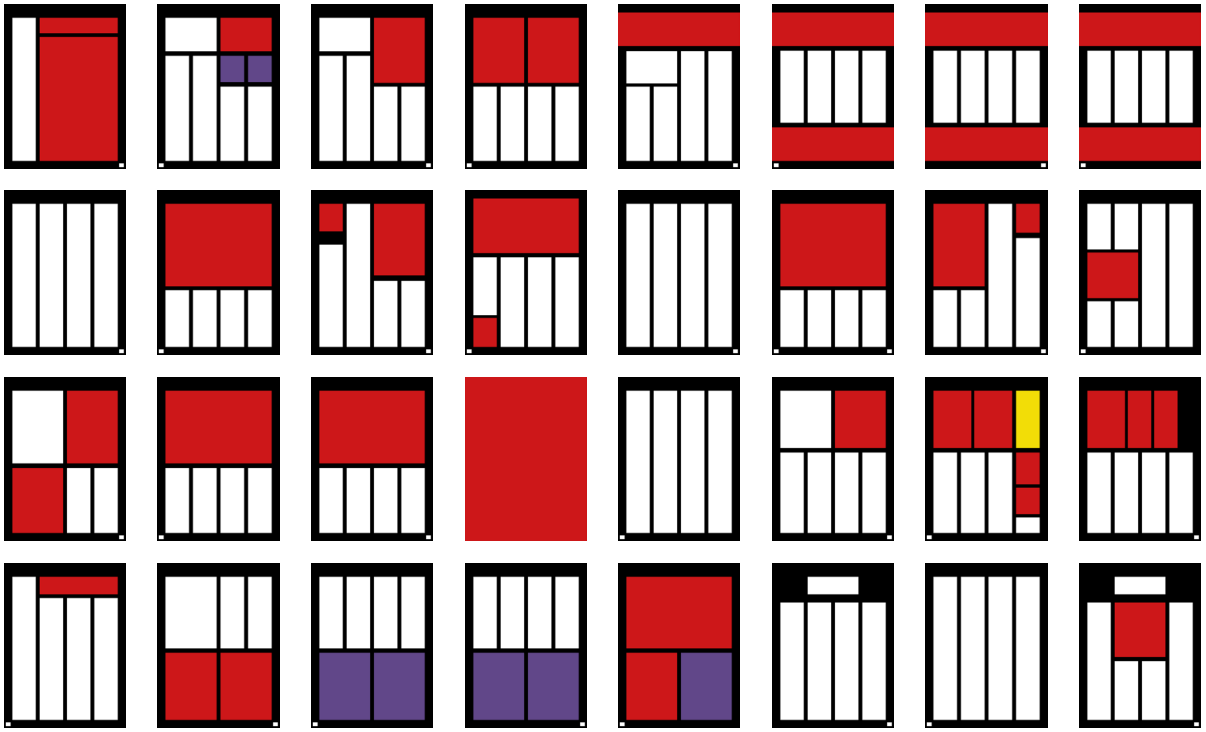


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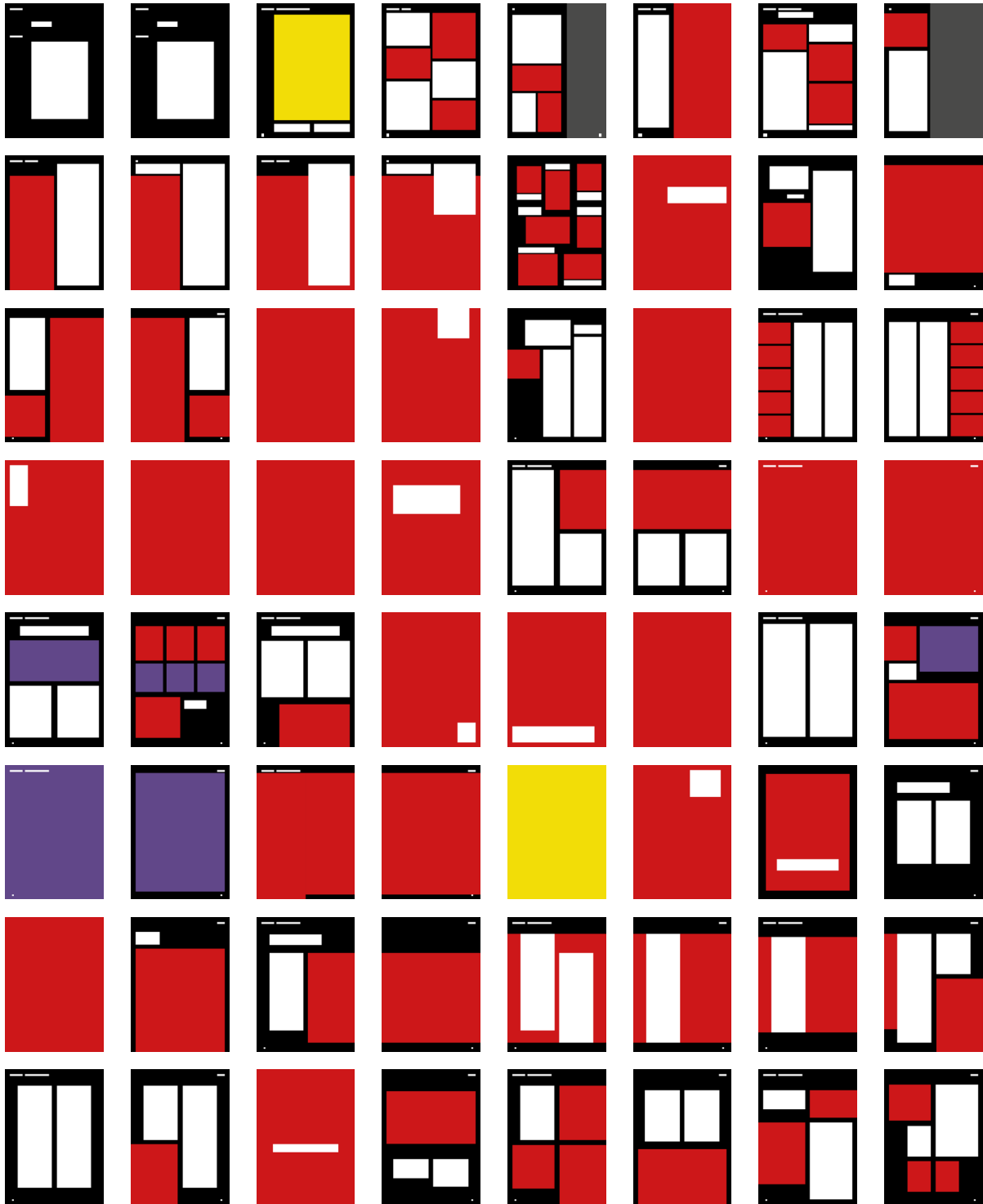


L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui 272

September 1990
Jean-Paul Robert



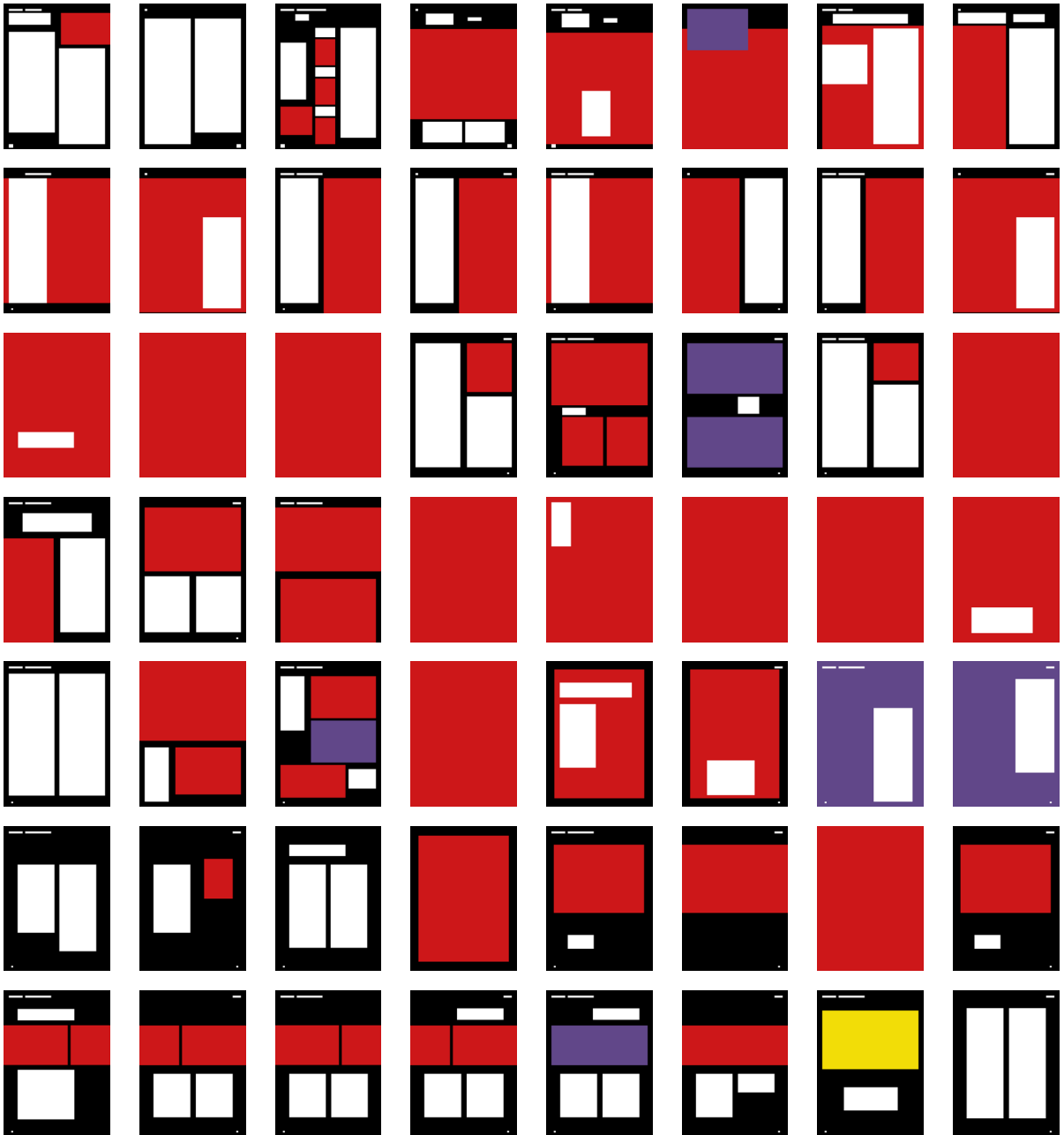
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L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui 438

September 2020

Emmanuelle Borne



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1980

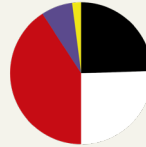
1985

1990

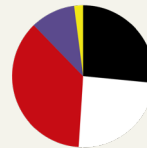
1995

2000

Record



AR



Casabella



Domus



'A'A'



1980

1985

1990

1995

2000

"incredibly glossy paper", the "framed photographs" placed on the "immaculate white background", which invite contemplation of the work. *Domus* represents the opposite case of the directional stability that *Casabella* has been experiencing in the last thirty years. Since its foundation, the Milanese publication has interpreted the layout as a field of strong visual experimentation, reflecting the different sensitivities of the directors who have succeeded one another. Its large format and coated paper immediately place it in a dimension of dialogue with the culture of the image and high-level intellectual communication. At the end of the twentieth century, color mapping reveals how photography was already an overpowering aspect, but it is also interesting to note a certain presence of illustrations, testifying to the multidisciplinary nature of the magazine. In the last two decades, however, the expansion of the use of photography is total, to the detriment of technical drawings and illustrations, which almost disappear. Images often take up the entire page, reducing text significantly. Another aspect that distinguishes the *Domus* title is the care given to advertisements, which become part of the visual narrative of the magazine. Advertisements, often linked to the world of luxury design, tend to conform to the aesthetic quality of editorial content, creating a prestige saturation, where the boundary between what is critical information and what is advertising becomes fluid, contributing to a reading experience based on atmosphere and lifestyle. Unlike *Architectural Record*, however, as in the other magazines in the selection, the advertising inserts are relegated to the marginal section so as not to interrupt the sequence of the issues' contents.

To complete the European panorama, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* occupies a peculiar place in publishing for its aptitude for dense monographic structuring. In the 1980s and 1990s, the magazine already stood out for a marked legibility of the layout grid and in the chromatic mapping there is a skillful balance between the rigid columns of text and the white space that frames them. The transition to the twenty-first century marks a significant transformation, particularly after the relaunch of the magazine in 2009. The analysis of the most recent issues shows a reshaping of the relationship between image and word, but the format of the article as an information dossier, in addition to a decisive increase in full-page photographs. The comparison between the different periods highlights how technical representation is increasingly marginalized within the page. This shift is accompanied by a clear change in the materiality of the editorial object: the paper has become heavier and the graphics more accurate, completing the new configuration of the

periodical as a volume to be kept in a library rather than a tool for quick professional consultation.

The comparative analysis of the graphics of the titles makes it possible to draw an overall balance on the transformations that affected the layout of architectural magazines at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The data collected through color mapping and the calculation of textual occurrences highlight a paradigmatic shift: the transition from an analytical and descriptive editorial model to one of an evocative and contemplative matrix.

If until a few decades ago the density of the page was the reflection of a narrative urgency that favored information over the perception, the contemporary editorial structure responds to radically opposite logics. Historically, each periodical hosted a large number of contributions, with the text occupying a dominant and almost claustrophobic portion of the available space. An average article was developed over a limited extension, usually between two and six pages, but with a large number of characters, imposing a longer time to consume the magazine. The passage to the new millennium has imposed a new balance, introducing a spatiality of the page that proceeds by dilations and subtractions. In fact, today we are witnessing a dimensional paradox, whereby the central articles of the issue are visually longer and more impressive, between twelve and twenty pages, but the verbal contents are visibly reduced. This phenomenon of rarefaction drastically shifts the center of gravity of the reader's experience from an object intended for reading to an object to be browsed.

In this scenario, the photographic narrative takes on monumental proportions, conquering the entire page. As a consequence the technical drawing, once an instrument of scientific validation, it is relegated to a marginal role or a mere iconic sign, devoid of dimensions and constructive details. The white space then ceases to be a residual void to become a fundamental compositional element, aimed at creating an exclusive atmosphere and suspension around the architectural work. This structural change finds its *raison d'être* in the inevitable confrontation with the digital age. In a context in which news and technical information travel in real time through web platforms and social media, the paper magazine has definitively lost its role as a timely news bulletin. No longer able to compete on speed, the editorial object has had to redefine itself, passing from a tool for professional updates, to a place of slow thinking and aesthetic contemplation.

To understand why photography takes up so much space in magazines, Davide Ponzini's contribution in an essay on Domus²¹ is useful, in which he explains how contemporary photography is no longer a simple neutral support for the article, but is becoming a form of independent architectural criticism. Photographers no longer limit themselves to documenting, but interpret the project, deciding what to frame and what to exclude, adjusting the perception of volumes and the impact of light, thus influencing the final judgment of the work. The dogma of glossy photography of the nineties has been definitively overcome. If before the goal was to sell architecture as a perfect object isolated from the context, today the trend is reflective. Artists such as Iwan Baan, quoted by Ponzini, have broken the pattern of the empty and abstract building by inserting everyday life and human presence. The article also mentions Michele Nastasi, a photographer who highlights the gap between the promises of the project, which can be seen in the texts and renderings, and the reality of the construction site or the impact on the context. The photos in current magazines, therefore, are so large because they are like portraits that aim to reveal how the building reacts to the city and the weather. This tool, according to the author, reveals contradictions that technical drawing cannot show. While a plan or a section defines a constructive and objective reality, today's critical photography seeks a phenomenological truth.

In this sense, the large photographic format does not merely magnify the building, but imposes a different reading pace: the reader is no longer asked to decipher a technical code, but to inhabit an image, shifting the experience from a cognitive to a sensory level.

Paper, therefore, is not defeated by digital, but has been pushed by this new reality towards a more authorial and curatorial dimension. In the contemporary magazine, the material quality of the support and the spectacularity of the layout become the last bastions of the project's communication. Ultimately, the transformation of graphics testifies to how the magazine is progressively transforming itself into an object of visual narration that privileges atmosphere over technical explanation. This new spatial hierarchy of the page suggests the hypothesis that the change is not only aesthetic, but inevitably also affects the substance and purpose of the written word.

²¹ Ponzini, Davide. *Photographers: architecture critics of today?*. Domus, n. 961, 2012, pp. 86-99.

The chromatic and spatial analysis of the layout reveals that the contemporary magazine has transitioned from an analytical tool for technical documentation, to an experiential device where white space and photography act as primary narrative agents. This structural shift is relevant for the following reflections, because it visually objectifies a progressive detachment of the editorial project, from its traditional constructive foundations. By demonstrating that the iconographic apparatus has marginalized technical drawing, the research provides the necessary framework to understand how architectural communication has increasingly favored the evocative and commercial dimensions of the building as icon.

03

The evolution of project narrative

A case study

At the end of the anatomical analysis conducted on the five reference magazines, it was considered appropriate to identify a case study that would allow to verify, the investigation methodologies relating to article typology, content structure and the graphic apparatus. The transition to this specific scale is necessary to bridge the gap between the macroscopic statistical data emerged in the previous section and the reality of the printed page. While quantitative mapping defines general trends, only the immersion into a specific case allows the research to demonstrate how these shifts manifest in the actual lexicons, registers, and iconographic choices of individual articles.

The project selected is the Tate Modern Gallery in London by Herzog & de Meuron. The double interventions on the museum, that called for contributes of the magazines in the 2000 and the 2016, allowed to analyzed the evolution of the narrative in the last decades.

The aim is to demonstrate how the narration of an architectural work is not limited to a neutral chronicle of the moment or to the presentation by the authors. Instead, it constitutes an interpretative act that is profoundly affected by the editorial context and the historical moment in which it is placed. If the architectural object remains unchanged in its material consistency, its critical reception and interpretation is configured as an open and changeable process. This aspect appears amplified in the case of the magazines, which, having to intercept the urgencies of the contemporary debate and the sensitivities of a specific audience, act as a tool that breaks down and returns divergent reflections of the same project.

In this phase of the research, the analysis therefore focuses on the collection and comparison of all the critical contributions published by *Architectural Record*, *The Architectural Review*, *Casabella*, *Domus* and *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, regarding a single architectural intervention. The study of the same work within different periodicals reveals a variability of interpretation such as to reassess the presumed

objectivity of facts. In this sense, it is interesting to recall Renato De Fusco²² who, reflecting on the nature of criticism in editorial titles, uses Nietzsche's quotation contrary to positivism: "there are no facts, but only interpretations". Considered in the field of the discipline, this reflection suggests that architecture is not realized exclusively in the designer's office or on the construction site, but continues to define itself through the intellectual discourse that surrounds it. The written word, therefore, does not limit itself to describing space, but constructs it culturally, determining its role and meaning within the contemporary panorama and the architectural discipline. This perspective translates into the study, comparative reading of the lexicons, registers and iconographic apparatuses of the five magazines.

Following these considerations, the subject chosen for the analysis is the project for the Tate Modern in London designed by the Herzog & de Meuron studio. The building, completed at the beginning of the new millennium, profoundly marked the approach to the design of museum spaces and the reuse of industrial heritage, becoming a term of comparison for the discipline in the following decades. The identification of this case was guided by the desire to examine only monographic articles entirely dedicated to the work, excluding the contributions in which the building appears only marginally mentioned within broader reflections. This methodological restriction allows us to operate with greater rigor, isolating a lexical apparatus univocally referring to a subject. Usually, in fact, magazines devote an exclusive in-depth study to an architecture only on the occasion of the publication of the project or its inauguration, and then re-propose it as a secondary reference in other arguments. The case of the Tate Modern, on the other hand, is an exception that has prompted the return of media and critical attention with the same degree of depth years later. The realization of a second expansion intervention in 2016 has in fact generated a new series of monographic articles, allowing a diachronic comparison of language over two decades.

Although the research included a systematic collection of all the contributions written on the Tate over the years, the analysis focuses in particular on the publications released on the occasion of the two main moments of transformation of the building, namely 2000 and 2016. This specific condition, the persistence of the same place and the same authorship, allows us to have a privileged observatory for a twofold

²² De Fusco, Renato. *Domus: facts and interpretations*. Domus, no. 821, 1999, pp. 4-9.

analysis: on the one hand, it allows us to bring out the different critical slants and specific editorial lines in their approach to the same subject and on the other, it allows us to observe how these narratives have evolved over time. The investigation culminates in the creation of word clusters that summarize not necessarily the most frequent terms, but those that best convey the critical slant of each publication²³.

Recognizing that the analysis of a single case represents a targeted sampling and not an absolute reflection on the contemporary landscape, the study of the Tate Modern makes it possible to map the metamorphosis of the architectural vocabulary used, observing how the same architects and the same project can be absorbed and returned through different perspectives and priorities.

The project for the Tate Modern appears for the first time in the pages of the magazines of the research, in 1995, in particular in issue 622 of *Casabella*²⁴. The article, inserted in the *News* section, is set up with an almost narrative language, where only in the final epilogue is it announced that the task has been entrusted to Herzog & de Meuron. The author, Deyan Sudjic, after an introduction on the urban and social context, devotes ample space to the argument regarding funding and the role of institutions in the design process. In the text there is no shortage of adjectives, more or less negative, which subtly express a judgment for which, in contrast to "the attempts at modern monumentalism that often degenerate into a forced originality, too self-satisfied and arbitrary, the Tate has approached the choice with great seriousness".

The article proposed by *L'architecture d'Aujourd'hui*²⁵ shortly afterwards, on the other hand, focuses on the dynamics of the competition, analytically presenting the competing projects by Tadao Ando, David Chipperfield, Rafael Moneo, OMA and Renzo Piano. At the end, the winning project is presented as "a proposal that aims at transforming the heavy opaqueness into a luminous nebula, expressing communication and perception".

²³ It should be noted that usually the generation of word clouds takes place through the use of software that extracts the most quoted terms and reports them in an image with words of different sizes depending on the frequency. In this case, the automatic method was not very useful for the purpose and it was preferred to proceed with a manual selection of terms in clusters that best represented the critical slant of the article.

²⁴ Sudjic, Deyan. *At the Tate, the swiss concept*. *Casabella*, n. 622, 1995, pp. 42-43.

²⁵ *Tate gallery*. *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, n. 299, 1995, pp. 18-21.

magazine	date	title	author
Casabella 622	1995-04	At the Tate, the Swiss concept	Deyan Sudjic
'A'A' 299	1995-06	Tate Gallery	-
Casabella 661	1998-11	Tate Gallery of Modern Art, Bankside, London	Richard Burdett Nicholas Serota
AR 1238	2000-04	South Bank Show	-
Record	2000-06	Herzog & de Meuron's Tate Gallery of Modern Art	William J.R. Curtis
Domus 828	2000-07	Tate Modern, London	Dietmar Steiner
AR 1242	2000-08	Art and industry	Catherine Slessor
AR 1243	2000-09	Letters - What's wrong with Tate Modern?	-
AR 1244	2000-10	Letters - Troubles at Tate	-
'A'A' 331	2000-11	Which style?	Bohdan Paczowski
Casabella 684	2000-12	Tate Modern: Details in the void	Chiara Baglione
Domus 853	2002-11	When sculpture eats architecture	Mark Irving
AR 1288	2004-06	Bankside revisited	Rob Gregory
AR 1301	2005-07	H&dM's de Young maturity	Rob Gregory
Domus 896	2006-10	More Tate	Lucy Bullivant
Record	2007-05	Addition to the Tate Modern	Lucy Bullivant
'A'A' 413	2016-07	Tate Modern addition, H&dM's civilities	-
Record	2016-07	Switching it up	Chris Foges
Domus 1004	2016-07	The new Tate Modern	Deyan Sudjic
AR 1434	2016-09	Modern Twist	Manon Mollard
Domus 1007	2016-11	Contemporary wood	-
Domus 1050	2020-10	Letter from Basel	Jacques Herzog

pages	characters	photos	architectural drawings
2	6.940	3	5
4	3.230	4	6
12	25.400	6	13
4	5.320	5	6
15	23.490	29	6
6	12.930	13	7
6	6.550	14	8
1	3.400	0	0
1	1.870	0	0
8	22.940	12	8
18	18.420	28	15
10	12.240	10	0
6	11.740	11	8
1	3.980	4	0
1	1.490	0	4
1	690	0	1
1	3.980	10	4
8	6.600	12	8
16	13.690	50	9
10	10.430	9	9
1	3.842	3	0
6	14.830	0	0

In 1998, during the construction phase, it was again *Casabella* that dedicated space to the work²⁶. In this case, under the new direction of Francesco Dal Co, a decidedly different approach is noticeable. If in 1995, under Gregotti's direction, the text was condensed into two pages with some images on the sides, in 1998 the editorial staff dedicated twelve pages to the Tate, tripling the number of words and giving ample space to drawings from the studio's archive. Here it is also interesting to note the authorial selection, which involves Richard Burdett and Nicholas Serota, respectively a member of the competition jury and director of the Tate, who offer a direct and institutional testimony of the project. After an eclectic introduction that cites Pink *Floyd's* album *Animals*, here too there is no shortage of eloquent adjectives to enrich the text: the Thames is described as "a physical and psychological barrier that separates the prosperous north from the less healthy south" and the Turbine Hall is heralded as "the most dramatic space in the building".

The preliminary phase was completed with the inauguration in May 2000 and was considered useful for the analysis, the reading of the intentions of the studio in the project report, to then study the interpretations of the magazines: the architects declare that the new building represents "a challenge in a hybrid of tradition, Art Deco and super modernism". Their strategy, admittedly far from stylistic preferences, aimed to "accept the physical strength of Bankside's huge mountain-like brick building and even improve it instead of breaking it or trying to diminish it", with the aim of defining "a contemporary building, a building for everyone, a building of the twenty-first century".

The Architectural Review handles the critique of the Tate Modern in a singular way, publishing an article a month before the opening²⁷ and one two months later²⁸. The magazine anticipates the new project with almost sacred terms: the "unorthodox" choice of the site for the modern Tate, the "reincarnation" of the building in a new life and the Turbine Hall compared to a cathedral. The architects' "gentle" approach to a "heroic industrial monolith" is explored in the article published after the inauguration, which discusses how discerning the existing from the new intervention is a "perceptive game".

²⁶ Burdett, Richard. *Tate Gallery of Modern Art, Bankside, London*. *Casabella*, n. 661, 1998, pp. 8-19.

²⁷ *South Bank Show*. *The Architectural Review*, n.1238, 2000, pp. 48-51.

²⁸ Slessor, Catherine. *Art and industry*. *The Architectural Review*, n. 1242, 2000, pp. 45-49

Between the pages of *Architectural Record*²⁹ there is a sharper criticism. With the expression "it must be said", William J.R. Curtis exposes the contrast between the intentions of Herzog & de Meuron and the actual success of some design choices. The American magazine also stands out for its technical lens, delving into square footage, materials and defining the Tate as a "tool" that intensifies public life in London. This is contrasted with a completely different interpretation, provided by *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*³⁰, which takes the opportunity of the new inauguration to propose a reflection on the confusion of contemporary architecture. According to the author, in a scenario devoid of dominant trends and a common direction, Swiss architects fiercely oppose the idea of style, refusing to shape the museum according to a personal brand.

Yet another approach is that of *Domus*³¹, which after an eloquent introduction on the perceptions and atmosphere of visiting the new building, reports to its readers an interview with Herzog & de Meuron. Although it is not an essay, the critical approach emerges from the interviewer's questions, focused on the social context in which the architects have worked and in which the new project is set. It deals with a cultural confrontation within English society that has previously implemented an "isolation of architecture", causing a stir over the large British public commission assigned to a foreign studio.

The review of articles on the opening of the new museum is completed by the *Casabella magazine*³², which with eighteen pages and more than thirty thousand characters, offers a rich in-depth analysis of the project. The intent is to review the building a few months after the inauguration and deal with the results of "a test under stress" caused by the immense influx of the public. The contribution is complete with compositional aspects, rendering of materials, up to the narration of construction site dynamics.

It is also interesting to note the different graphic contributions that the magazines propose. For the technical representations, *Architectural Record*, *The Architectural Review* and *Domus* use the studio's drawings,

²⁹ Curtis, William J.R. *Herzog & de Meuron's Tate Gallery of Modern Art*. *Architectural Record*, 2000, pp. 103-115.

³⁰ Paczowski, Bohdan. *Which style? The new Tate Modern in London and questions of style*. *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, 331, 2000, pp. 98-105.

³¹ Steiner, Dietmar. *Herzog & de Meuron, Tate Modern, London*. *Domus*, n. 828, 2000, pp. 32-43.

³² Baglione, Chiara. *Tate Modern: details of the void*. *Casabella*, n. 684, 2000, pp. 88-105.

architecture
through **public** seem
floors way
hall transparent
building
interior
more such **art** volume
turbine white **glass**
area work **space**
structure **surface**

unfinished exaggerations
device light
concrete
rectilinear
stripped **skillfully**
obvious oak
feeble shallowed
square - foot
hierarchy **gritty**
immateriality
puritanical glass milky
transparency

unfinished exaggerations
device light
concrete
rectilinear
stripped skillfully
obvious oak shallowed
feeble
square - foot
hierarchy gritty
immateriality
puritanical glass milky
transparency

Architectural Record

June 2000

truncated enigmatic
coherent square civic
forms veil
interaction sequel
view figuratively
lines curved skin
emptied luxury
geometry brick
wrapped

claustrophobic behemoth
ghostly
cathedral
monastic rawness
pristine game ethereal
palpitations unorthodox
reincarnation
heroic lancet
singularity
absurdity visionary hermetic
labyrinthine obsolete

meeting ziggurat bench
boulevard underwhelming
public spaces
audience
spectacle distraction
interested
seat crowd entertainment
circulation
permeability
piazza visitor
neighbour gathering
cushions

The Architectural Review 1434

September 2016

material vibrant Olympus
composition
disoriented flocks
brick mimesis
glass manager
plasticity nostalgic void
contractor
appeal understatement
envelope delicacy stress - test
functional

Casabella 684

December 2000

museum - event psychogram
contradiction roughness
tradition
perceptiveness
expressive english
stuffy technology moods
culture atmosphere
people clothing society
generation interdisciplinary
harmonios massive

character protective
pressure reassertion
mocked
clinical expressionless
heart voice
dialogue
vital symbolic
strategy motion forest
careful presence
nervous breakdown
personality bold

Domus 1004

July 2016

credibility identification
critics canyon
Semper De Stijl
acting authenticity
style enhance Reigl
architect modern diversity
congestion
contemporary
Koolhaas absence
catalysing huge **CROWN**

appearing underworld
diaphanous generous
civilities presence expetation
interstitial presence viewing
greatest lofty city
tower cultural
awsome enigmatic
skyline reinforce
underwhelming fungi

as does *Casabella*, which also attaches a series of construction details. *The Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* reinterprets the plans with colors and legends that focus on the distribution of functions. Photography also varies: *The Architectural Review* and *Casabella* both choose the work of Christian Richters, capable of enhancing both monumentality and the human aspect. *Domus* relies on Nicholas Kane, who shows how the visitor relates to the space, while *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* reports photographs by different authors, all with a less professional and more human point of view. *Architectural Record*, on the other hand, does not delve into the photographic aspect but reproduces archival material.

This divergence in interpretation between the magazines can be summed up very clearly in the way the publication define the Turbine Hall, the most iconic space of the entire intervention. If *The Architectural Review* defines it as a secular "cathedral" and *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* as a "vast canyon" that evokes solemnity, *Architectural Record* gives it a more spatial interpretation by defining it as an "eight-storey atrium". At the opposite pole, *Domus* synthetically identifies the space as a "great void" aimed at sensory experience, while *Casabella* emphasizes its technical and operational nature, speaking of a "functional heart" that has been emptied and transformed into a spectacular setting for the contemporary public.

Again in 2000, *The Architectural Review* published in the *Letters* section two epistolary texts sent to the editorial staff in which one reads in a lively tone: "When is a critic honestly going to criticize Tate Modern?"³³ and then "Would be refreshing to see someone who is prepared to challenge the orthodox opinion that Tate Modern is the best thing that's happened to architecture since Ictinus and Callicrates"³⁴. The publication of an open critique by the users of the building can be said to be a particularly sharp editorial choice, to be compared with the approach that the magazine developed in the following years.

The project returned in 2002 to *Domus*³⁵, which explored how Anish Kapoor's *installation Marsyas* created for the Turbine Hall redefined the boundaries between sculpture and architecture, questioning the roles and languages of the two disciplines. This interdisciplinary approach is confronted by *The Architectural Review's* critical analysis of the Turbine

³³ Open, Bobby. *What's wrong with Tate Modern?*. *The Architectural Review*, n. 1243, 2000, p. 34.

³⁴ Mossman, Edward. *Troubles at Tate*. *The Architectural Review*, n. 1244, 2000, p. 42.

³⁵ Irving, Mark. *When sculpture eats architecture*. *Domus*, n. 853, 2002, pp. 64-73.

Hall space³⁶ and its evolution into a dynamic covered public plaza for the city. This immense and changing space generates the phenomenon of artistic production on an unprecedented scale, which requires collaboration with engineers, security and logistics managers, for works that have construction times similar to those of a construction site. In these years, *The Architectural Review* published an article on Herzog & de Meuron³⁷, who returned to the Tate Modern for an exhibition that showcased their work, focusing on the international maturity achieved and their experimental and artisanal method.

In 2006, it was the *Domus magazine* that announced the assignment of the project for the expansion of the museum to the Swiss studio with the short insert "More Tate",³⁸ and then *Architectural Record*³⁹.

The sixteen-year process ended in 2016, with the inauguration of the Switch House, which was announced by the studio as "a new model for modern and contemporary art museums, fully integrating the museum's exhibition, learning and social functions, strengthening the links between the museum, its locality and the city". *Architectural Record* introduces it as a coherent "sequel" to the Tate Modern⁴⁰ and devotes ample words to an analytical description of the truncated pyramid shape, and then delves into the perforated brick skin and geometries of the interior spaces. On the other hand, how this volume, wrapped in itself, fits into the surrounding context is explored in a short article by *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*⁴¹. The publication points out that the new expansion of the Tate is necessary to re-establish the museum's presence in the city skyline and counter the "luxurious condominium blocks, which appear like steel fungi all around". More than an architectural project, this is defined as a project that concerns the city and culture. *Domus*⁴² tackles the subject with sixteen pages that are more than an article, a photographic review, curated by the famous Richard Bryant, which enhances the composition of forms. The images are accompanied by

³⁶ Gregory, Rob. *Bankside revisited*. *The Architectural Review*, n. 1288, 2004, pp. 82-87.

³⁷ Gregory, Rob. *H&M'S de Young maturity*. *The Architectural Review*, n. 1301, 2005, p. 24.

³⁸ Bullivant, Lucy. *More Tate*. *Domus*, n. 896, 2006, p. 2.

³⁹ Bullivant, Lucy. *Herzog & de Meuron's addition to the Tate Modern, won*. *Architectural Record*, 2007, p. 21.

⁴⁰ Foges, Chris. *Switching it up*. *Architectural Record*, 2016, pp. 70-77.

⁴¹ *Tate Modern extension, Herzog & de Meuron's civilities*. *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, n. 413, 2016, p. 22.

⁴² Sudjic, Deyan. *The new Tate Modern, London*. *Domus*, n. 1004, 2016, pp. 42-57.



Herzog & de Meuron, Tate Modern extension, London, 2016

'Art Changes, We Change': the Tate Modern's new motto, proudly emblazoned on the gallery, marks the opening of its long-awaited Switch House extension in June. Now the world's most-visited museum of modern and contemporary art, no one could have predicted, when the remodelled Bankside Power Station first opened its doors 10 years ago, that visitor numbers would so rapidly reach five million per year – the institution itself expected two million.

Art has changed. If there is one certainty about contemporary art, it is that it lacks any specificity in form, size or medium. Being a non-unified type, artworks require a diverse range of spatial conditions, from large halls and white boxes to intimate rooms and black boxes. The modern museum finds itself having to provide all sorts of configurations, all of them at once and ever-evolving. These range from the more traditional and inanimate paintings and sculptures to sound installations, video screenings, oversize experiments and live performances.

Switch House prides itself on providing the 'world's first museum spaces for live art, from performance and film to installations and interactive sculptures'. For Herzog & de Meuron, the architect behind both phases of the industrial building's transformation, part of the extension consists of unweaving and adapting previously out-of-reach spaces in the original power station. The three cylindrical tanks that used to hold its oil reserves connect directly to the Turbine Hall. Slanted concrete columns strengthen the existing structure, while these subterranean tanks become the extension's new foundations – physically and conceptually. The tanks make a spectacular addition to the gallery, both for their history and unique atmosphere.

As Jacques Herzog explains, the extension's primary aim is to create a 'building conglomerate that appears as one thing, not as a phase one and phase two'. A new north-south passage cuts across the building at street level, connecting the riverside with Switch House's main entrance and turning the previously dead-end 'balcony' of the Turbine Hall into a lively bridge where Ai Weiwei's Tree is on display. Coming in from the Thames side, Sumner Street at the other end of the gallery is almost immediately visible – a radically different impression to the previous configuration.

If the building felt somewhat lopsided before, the additional southern volumes rebalance it,

with the Turbine Hall naturally occupying the heart of the gallery – as intended by the architects when submitting their proposal for phase one. On the third floor there was just enough space underneath the roof structure to insert a bridge connecting the Boiler House to its new neighbour. Far from breaking up the hall's majestic volume or obstructing the vista from the ground, this link makes complete sense – it eases the visitor journey and offers yet another perspective of the grand hall.

The distinctive feature of the extension is the generous – borderline oversize – circulation spaces. These are, ostensibly, the prominent ingredient. The staircases differ in shape and move about on the floor plans, encouraging visitors to explore and producing a 'vertical boulevard' to which the galleries are attached. Along the route, a series of smaller nooks blur the boundary between corridor, display space and screening room. At times, the gap between floor-slab perimeters and facade brickwork creates impressive double- and triple-height spaces on the pyramid's lower levels.

When the flooring reaches the building's edge, long, flat cushions invite visitors to stop and lounge within the heavy structure's concrete frame. A diverse range of seating arrangements disseminated throughout provide an array of original spaces which cater for a slightly more intimate scale. On the lower ground floor, the concrete steps extend out to become small auditorium-like seats. When the monumental spiral staircase reaches the second floor, a circular timber bench is inserted at its centre, hugging the concrete curve.

Further up, as the surface areas shrink, programmes are more audience specific – offices, members' room, Tate Exchange – and visitors are expected to use the lifts, so the stairs are greatly reduced in size. Even so, the parapet wall curves into a simple concrete bench before hitting the floor.

Everywhere, there is space for waiting, meeting, sitting, being. While the extension effectively increases the museum's floor area by 60 per cent, most of the programmatic infill relates to the provision of public space. The exhibition spaces are concentrated in the lower half of the tower, but all levels – the ground

floor and the smaller upper six storeys – are dedicated to public gathering, commercial activities and event spaces. In the first intervention, Herzog and de Meuron's stroke of genius was to transform the Turbine Hall into a vast public piazza – and, naturally, the popularity of the Tate Modern seems closely linked to this unprecedented space for the display of art. Switch House builds on this premise, it is first and foremost a vast arena for exchange. Culture minister Ed Vaizey called the gallery an 'incredible public space', while Lord Browne, chairman of the Tate, highlighted that it is 'great public spaces' that build 'great cities' because those are where people come together, adding that 'The new Tate Modern sits firmly in that tradition. It has become a place to celebrate and share the uplifting experience of today's great art'.

The experience of appreciating great art can, however, end up being difficult amid a busy crowd. Museums are constantly attempting to 'reach out to new audiences' – as highlighted by London's mayor Sadiq Khan at a press conference

the architects' project report and an intervention by Deyan Sudjic, whose words focus again on the need for the Tate to "make its presence felt" within the neighborhood. It is interesting to note how, to describe architecture, anthropomorphic terms are used: "expressionless", "courageous", "collective nervous breakdown", "heart", "soul". *Domus'* contribution to the subject is enriched by an article published a few months later, on the design for the wooden seats by Naoto Fukasawa⁴³. Among the articles published in 2016, the most striking editorial approach is that of *The Architectural Review*⁴⁴, where the text reproduces the silhouette of the Switch House, transforming words into images. Going deeper into the terms used, it is noticeable that great attention is given to the movements of visitors within the exhibition spaces. The author notes that the interstitial spaces almost seem to prevail over the exhibition ones, addressing an audience apparently not interested in the contents on display. These critical reflections do not have a pungent tone but pose as timid and polite. The "it must be said" of *Architectural Record* of 2000 is contrasted with *The Architectural Review* with: "it sometimes feel", "the feeling is that", "slightly underwhelming", "shouldn't be". Even the graphic approach is decidedly different and if before the photographs are located next to the text and the layout was much more compressed, now it is austere and text, images and architectural drawings are divided into watertight compartments.

It is noted that in 2016, *Casabella* does not publish any articles about the Switch House project. This could be considered an impediment to study or be interpreted as food for thought. It is in fact interesting to note that in the same period, the magazine chose to publish another intervention by the Swiss studio, the one for the expansion of the Musée Unterlinden in Colmar, France, suggesting a different order of editorial priority.

The review can be said to be complete in 2020 with a letter published in *Domus*⁴⁵, written by Jacques Herzog to David Chipperfield, then editor of the magazine. Here the Swiss architect responds to a broader question about the contribution that an architect can have on fundamental issues of society, from social inequalities to "environmental catastrophe". In this context, the project for the Tate Modern is reinterpreted as a response to the demands of that historical moment. It

⁴³ *Contemporary wood*. *Domus*, n. 1007, 2006, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Mollard, Manon. *Modern twist*. *The Architectural Review*, n. 1434, 2016, pp. 44-53.

⁴⁵ Herzog, Jacques. *Letter from Basel*. *Domus*, n. 1050, 2020, pp. 20-25.

is significant to note that Herzog attributes the success of the Turbine Hall not so much to the architectural gesture of his studio, but to the artists' ability to redefine artistic production beyond the traditional exhibition format. At the same time, the Swiss architect acknowledges how the museum was the catalyst for the emergence of a radical commercialization of art and space. This international and contemporary boom for the London social scene has spilled over into the real estate sector, transforming the London skyline into a "tsunami of skyscrapers" in a few years, often unrelated to a unitary urban vision. Herzog concludes by recalling that these dynamics have to do with other issues, namely international monetary policy and investment strategies, factors that are beyond the control of designers: "we architects need clients, clients and investors, not only private individuals but also governments".

The comparative analysis between the contributions of 2000 and those of 2016 highlights a profound metamorphosis in the critical vocabulary adopted by the newspapers. If at the beginning of the millennium the narrative was strongly focused on the material consistency of the object and on an almost sacred architectural eloquence, sixteen years later the attention shifted significantly towards the urban and social dimension. The terms related to spatial composition give way to reflections on "urbanity" and "citizenship": the Tate Modern is no longer analyzed only as a work in itself, but as a "common ground" and a tool for defending public space against the pressure of luxury private real estate developments. In this scenario, the Switch House is described as a "mineral presence" that is defined first and foremost as a "piece of the city". This lexical shift, which sees people, flows and collective dynamics prevail over the description of the construction detail, marks the opening towards a new phase of the debate, in which the priorities of the architectural narrative seem to have shifted definitively from the composition of the object to the social responsibility of the intervention. The architectural vocabulary, therefore, moves away from the truth of materials, transforming the project into a field of social and political relations rather than a mere constructive achievement.

In conclusion, the application of the method to the case study of the Tate Modern has made it possible to verify in the field what emerged from the quantitative analysis in the first part: the transition from a critical and objective narrative to a more experiential one linked to the perception of space and the social context.

The application of the method to the Tate Modern case study provides the empirical confirmation of a profound linguistic shift: while the 2000 narrative was centered on the material consistency of the object and its constructive truth, the 2016 discourse repositioned the project as a social and urban 'common ground.' This finding is relevant for the following reflections because it serves as the necessary bridge to the final part of the thesis. Having objectified this lexical change, it is now possible to move from 'what' has changed to 'why,' investigating the deeper theoretical, economic, and professional reasons that have driven the metamorphosis of rhetoric.

04

The metamorphosis of rhetoric

Crisis

At the end of the last century, in 1999, Vittorio Gregotti published *Identity and Crisis of European Architecture*⁴⁶, a text that aims to take stock of a tormented century and to project our gaze towards the new millennium. In these pages, the term “crisis” is interpreted not as a traumatic interruption for its own sake, but as “that state of transition between different conditions that implies, for some of us, a particular state of discomfort and for others can be looked at as liberating, open to a future of positive possibilities”. The author's need to examine this term in the contemporary panorama shakes the reader and defines a field of investigation in which the crisis is not identified as a failure, but as an obligatory passage where the old references are no longer sufficient to guide action and, at the same time, the new guidelines have not yet manifested themselves clearly. This reading is also evident in Gregotti's directorship of the magazine *Casabella* of those years, in which there is a tension, almost a malaise, regarding the developments of architecture and an urgency to communicate a message on the destiny of the contemporary discipline.

This state of alert is not an isolated phenomenon, but reflects the very nature of architectural theory, which finds itself in a constant balance between the rigor of the disciplinary tradition and the role of interpreting reality, responding to increasingly fragmented external stimuli.

Architecture magazines represent the place where the crisis, understood as a state of transition, is documented, discussed and sometimes addressed. The journals are, as already reiterated, tools for reading the contemporary world and bearers of the concerns of the time.

⁴⁶ Gregotti, Vittorio. *Identity and crisis of European architecture*. Einaudi, 1999. The author reflects on the fragmentation of European architectural culture at the end of the century, highlighting the loss of unitary references. Gregotti proposes to interpret the crisis as an obligatory step to rediscover the critical sense and the social role of the project in the new millennium.

They make an intellectual selection in a confused situation, returning a critical analysis of reality.

In the analysis of periodicals such as *Architectural Record*, *The Architectural Review*, *Casabella*, *Domus*, and *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, it is possible to investigate different frequencies of reception of the crisis. Each publication, with its own editorial line and its own geographical and cultural sensitivity, perceives the discomfort or positive possibility of which Gregotti speaks, through different lenses. In the selected texts, the word "crisis" recurs with an almost obsessive frequency, but it is precisely by observing what this term is associated with that the change in direction between the architecture of the late twentieth century and that of the new millennium can be measured.

In the article *Crisis of complexity, crisis of quality and relational space* in the pages of *Domus* of 1996⁴⁷, Andrea Branzi investigates the influence that the fall of the Berlin Wall had on Western culture. The new political metabolism, however, according to him, originated before this event, starting in the 60s with post-industrial capitalism and the automation of the factory. The author identifies how since the fall of the Berlin Wall, society has found itself for the first time since the post-war period, acting within a complex, contradictory, discontinuous, and above all monological system, that is, based only on the laws of the market, without those external alternatives to which the *complexity* of the 70s still referred. The geopolitical turning point that took place at the end of the 80s led to the crisis of the concepts of complexity and quality, which were once capable of containing a multiplicity of models of development, behavior and identification. The decline of these aspects, according to the author, affects the culture of the architectural project, emptying its innovative drive precisely at the moment when the reformist demand makes alternative proposals to the usual models of development in difficulty urgent. Architectural composition, as a formation of expressive organisms, falls into crisis and a new conception of the project develops. The discipline has lost a recognizable language and the urgency to convey a message. There is no longer a unitary project, but rather a new way of understanding reality, of dismantling and reassembling it, with the fall of the figurative and narrative systems of architecture, where the qualities of space are no longer of an aesthetic or compositional nature, but permormative. The dimensional categories

⁴⁷ Branzi, Andrea. From the Historical Avant-gardes to the Permanent Avant-garde. Crisis of complexity, crisis of quality and relational space. *Domus*, n. 783, 1996, pp. 4-8.

of urban, architectural and design projects are outdated, in the face of processes where the small and large scale coincide without disciplinary distinctions. Finally, the discipline has lost its figurative code, to incorporate another of a commercial and informative nature: if in the past, it was possible to understand the history and evolution of a given society through the language of its architecture, in the contemporary context according to the author, architecture is static. It is unable to provide images suitable for consumption, resulting in an inexpressive, relational and widespread production.

Comparing Andrea Branzi's ideas, *Seven Points for the new millenium: an untimely manifesto* reported in the pages of *Architectural Review*⁴⁸. The article reports in full the speech given by Kenneth Frampton for the UIA conference held in Beijing in 1999, which, following a century in which "contemporary architecture has often been inseparable from the writing of manifestos" proposes an agenda for planning for the next century. If Branzi notes the fall of narrative systems and the surrender of discipline to the market and performance, Frampton proposes seven programmatic points in order to face this critical threshold, marked by the end of the socialist project and the rise of a global megalopolis dominated by the automobile and land speculation. Against the crisis of architecture as an object of consumption, the author claims the autonomous role of the discipline, defined as the creation of space for human use through the concreteness of building. He then introduces the concepts of "product-form", determined by industrial processes, and "place-form", capable of offering resistance through rooting in the soil. In this scenario, he identifies the landscape not as a decorative element, but as a redemptive strategy capable of connecting and mitigating environmental harshness where masterplanning has failed. The approach he proposes is that of "urban acupuncture", as punctual catalytic interventions to generate new civic microcosms in urban chaos. In conclusion, Frampton then argues that in an era dominated by spectacle and the media, architecture must maintain the arduous role of producing democratic spaces against environmental degradation and market logic.

In October 2008, *Architectural Record* publishes content documenting the immediate and violent impact of the global financial crisis on the construction industry. The article in the *News*⁴⁹ section reports how the

⁴⁸ Frampton; Kenneth. *Seven Points for the new millenium: an untimely manifesto*. The *Architectural Review*, n. 1233, 1999, pp. 76-80.

⁴⁹ Hughes, C.J. *Architects hit hard by financial crisis*. *Architectural Record*, 2008, p. 41.

free-falling financial markets, which had pushed many Americans to prepare for a deep recession, had already given signs of crisis in the architectural sector in the previous months. Reports show that the following year will be even more disastrous and the construction of public buildings will collapse, leading younger and unestablished firms to immediate closure. The author also notes a difference with previous economic crises: in this recession, despite the drop in demand, materials continue to be expensive, mainly due to foreign orders from Dubai, Shanghai and Beijing. Globalization has positive aspects, so studios that also work on international projects may have a better chance of survival, but at the same time, the financial crisis could also affect Europe, Asia and other countries, so there are fears that even foreign markets may not provide a reliable refuge for the architectural profession. This article, characterized by the technical tones that distinguish the magazine, is enriched by the editorial by Robert Ivy⁵⁰, who writes an open letter to architects who find themselves immersed in a crisis that "exploded in October as if someone had lit a match". The author recalls that, despite the critical moment, it is necessary to maintain the awareness that customers need designers now more than ever, because a good project and a good structure can give companies a vital competitive advantage in a time of difficulty. He also emphasizes how, more than iconic buildings designed by famous architects, a low-energy project with materials and systems that make a difference is advantageous. Good design therefore increases the value of real estate, and even at a time when the profession of the architect is changing profoundly, with more flexibility due to new evolving social norms and the digital revolution, the world remains interested in design and architecture, even in a period of recession.

Joseph Grima, in the editorial of issue 962 of *Domus*⁵¹, also delves into the global crisis of the new century, expressing frustration at the fact that he does not remember a time when the word crisis was not heard daily in the news, which has now become a daily soundtrack. The recession of the capitalist system, which saw some European countries on the verge of bankruptcy, obviously had a profound influence on architecture which, according to the author, has always been treated as synonymous with money. In contrast to this ideology, some architects have refused to understand architecture as an investment strategy, preferring to orient themselves towards the mission that this discipline has always

⁵⁰ Ivy, Robert. *Making the case*. Architectural Record, october 2008, p. 29.

⁵¹ Grima, Joseph. *Min to Max, Editorial*. Domus, n. 962, 2012, pp. II-III.

represented, which is to provide shelter. Grima argues that the crisis of capitalism, in fact, can prove to be an incredible opportunity for architecture, which in times of difficulty has always found the drive to reinvent itself through new ideas. This almost appreciative approach to the recession is also expressed in an article in the same issue of *Domus* entitled "Long live the crisis!"⁵² The authors are the young architects of the Berlin-based studio Something Fantastic who, by age, having never known a condition other than the crisis, adopt it naturally, applying positive strategies to make design a field of continuous experimentation. In a scenario in which practitioners of the profession, at the beginning of the century, often sought a more secure job, for the designers of the new generation the tension for an uncertain destiny has become a sort of propulsive energy. The authors declare that today some do not know the pre-digital era, in the same way they do not know the pre-crisis era, and as such they do not consider it negatively, but as an opportunity to set conditions and offer challenges that push one to experiment with the latent faculties of the architectural discipline. Times of crisis are therefore seen as a potential to bring about social, political and technological change.

Another interesting contribution is that of Alessandro Valenti in issue 793 of *Casabella* in 2010⁵³. He examines the results of the 2000 Venice Architecture Biennale, entitled *Less Aesthetics More Ethics*, in the scenario of the third millennium, which since the attack on the Twin Towers has opened under the banner of emergency. "Danger seems to be around the corner and architects have found themselves building emergency shelters, giving substance to the need for protection." The author recognizes how something similar happened in the fifties with the fear of the atomic bomb, which had seen the proliferation of reinforced concrete shelters to be installed under houses. Today, however, fears are more numerous and undefined, and for this reason domestic bunkers no longer seem sufficient to respond to the anxiety of the inhabitants of contemporary metropolises. It is therefore not surprising that, on the occasion of the International Architecture Exhibition, the creator of the "Final Home" clothing line exhibited clothes inspired by the concepts of survival, protection, functionality and recycling in the Japanese pavilion. More than clothes, they were extreme shelters, tools suitable for facing the urban jungle and the risks associated with it,

⁵² Schubert, Julian. Schutz, Elena. Streich, Leonard. *Long live the crisis!*. *Domus*, n. 962, 2012, pp. 29-35.

⁵³ Valenti, Alessandro. *Project me from where I live*. *Casabella*, n. 793, 2010, pp. 2-5.

including that of losing one's home and being forced to live in one's own clothes. These almost apocalyptic tones, which can be read between the pages of the article, bring back the reflection on the fact that the place where the danger is most concentrated is the city, which man has built for himself.

In parallel with the reflections matured by *Casabella* and *Domus*, there is also a need for a profound revision of the discipline in England. In 2012 *The Architectural Review* launched the campaign *The Big Rethink: Towards a Complete Architecture*, an editorial initiative that stems from the awareness that the crisis is no longer a transitory event, but the signal of an imminent collapse of the system. In the opening editorial of issue 1374⁵⁴, Catherine Slessor urges the design community to come out of their professional cocoon sheltered from the economic crisis, to become an active protagonist of change, both practical and political. The global crisis, which is both economic and environmental, thus becomes the catalyst to overcome the marginalization of the figure of the architect, transforming the project from an exercise in style to conscious action, capable of touching every aspect of human existence. To give theoretical substance to this appeal, it is Peter Buchanan's critical essay in the following pages⁵⁵, which highlights how the very nature of change has changed: with the new millennium, it is no longer the proactive push for progress, but the grip of a global systemic collapse. According to the author, contemporary architecture has fallen victim to a paradox, in that, although it has refined its technical skills, it has become a tool at the service of neoliberal capital, producing isolated objects instead of places for the community. An emblematic example of this drift is the reference to Renzo Piano's Shard in London, of which Buchanan, while acknowledging its construction excellence, describes the tower as an "incontrovertibly overbearing" presence in the urban landscape. The building becomes a symbol of a crisis of values in which the search for a "world-class" skyline and the obsession with the icon have prevailed over sensitivity towards public space and the street fabric. He therefore proposes a rethinking that puts the relationship of architecture with the context, rather than the object itself, back at the center.

In this scenario, the crisis is not considered as a failure from which to escape, but as an opportunity to rediscover a "complete" architecture,

⁵⁴ Slessor, Catherine. *Editorial view*. *The Architectural Review*, n. 1379, 2012, p. 13.

⁵⁵ Buchanan, Peter. *The Big Rethink: Taking Stock*. *The Architectural Review*, n. 1379, 2012, pp. 68-77.

CAMPAIGN



1. Designed by Renzo Piano, London Bridge Tower, nicknamed the Shard, was part of a mayoral drive to give London a 'world-class' city skyline. But though it extols its mixed-use credentials and will improve the public realm, it is an incontrovertibly overbearing presence in the London streetscape

THE BIG RETHINK: TAKING STOCK

The world is entering times of major transition. The inherent ecological and economic impacts are re-shaping the larger environment of which architecture and design forms a vital constituent. This calls for substantive reflection from the architectural profession. Setting the scene for the AR's Big Rethink and paving the way for future contributions, this first essay examines the current state of the global architectural scene

PETER BUCHANAN

which knows how to integrate ecology, sociology and history, to respond to the challenges posed by the epochal transition underway.

With a different perspective, the article *Lack of resources* in the 2019 issue 1136 of *Domus*⁵⁶, offers an approach of critical realism to the crisis, after almost a decade. The recession is no longer read as a traumatic event or as a passing parenthesis, but as a chronic condition that has forced the discipline to confront its fundamentals again. The article suggests that the scarcity of resources does not necessarily translate into intellectual renunciation, but neither does it translate into the excessive enthusiasm and spontaneous activism that characterized the first years of the crisis. The latter, moreover, is not only economic, but political: the lack of public resources and coordinated planning risks reducing architecture to a series of gestures incapable of generating real social change. Against the architecture of "urgency", the appeal emerges to return to "thinking big", claiming the value of collective aspirations. In this scenario, the discipline is called upon to strike a difficult balance between acting in the context of the crisis, but without being limited by it, trying to restore to public space that dignity and ambition that the logic of the market has progressively consumed. Design, therefore, cannot be limited to providing emergency shelters or icons of consumption, but must rediscover its nature as a political and social act, capable of giving shape to the primary needs of man.

To conclude this review of articles, David Chipperfield's editorial published in the *May 2020 issue of Domus*⁵⁷ redefines the concept of crisis in the new millennium, discussing the Coronavirus pandemic. The author begins by noting how the health crisis has shattered certainties for Western society consolidated for fifty years, after the Second World War. The crisis is no longer an abstract or economic concept, but a physical reality that has forced isolation and laid bare the fragility of a system based on unlimited growth and financial greed. Architecture must therefore stop serving only profit and start creating buildings and spaces that give solidity and quality to human life. The author asks: "if we are capable of responding decisively to an explicit crisis like the virus, why don't we do the same with climate change and social inequality?". The hope is a migration towards a system that puts the quality of life and the ecology of the planet back at the center.

⁵⁶ Maluenda, Inmaculada. Encabo, Enrique. *Lack of resources*. *Domus*, no. 1040, 2019, pp. 1136-1143.

⁵⁷ Chipperfield, David. *Staying apart, coming together*. *Domus*, n. 1046, 2020, pp. 64-65.

The analysis of the selected editorials and articles has made it possible to reconstruct a chronology of the threshold moments that have marked the architectural discipline in recent decades. The concept of crisis has evolved hand in hand with the main events that have taken place: from the loss of theoretical references after the fall of the Berlin Wall, to the loss of identity caused by globalization; from the violent setback of the 2008 financial crisis, to the urgency of the environmental, political and social crisis, up to the 2020 pandemic. Through these passages it is revealed how the term itself has undergone a semantic shift: if in the twentieth century the crisis was perceived as a conflict with the languages and ideologies of the discipline, in the new millennium it tends to take the form of a chronic and external, economic, environmental or health condition, which forces architecture to no longer measure itself against its own autonomy, but with its own social and political utility. As a result, architecture ceases to be the object of the problem and begins to act as a tool to solve it, to reconstruct a common sense of living.

In this context, it is useful to compare it with the famous editorial by Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *Continuity or crisis?*, published in *Casabella Continuità* in 1954⁵⁸. According to the author, in that given context, the state of emergency of the discipline was first of all methodological and due to the inability to confront history, making the crisis a crisis of language. Today the paradigm is inverted and the crisis no longer originates in a formal doubt, but in the impact of external factors on society that impose the need for concrete answers.

This theoretical change is directly confirmed by what was observed in the case study of the Tate Modern. If in the analysis of the contributions of 2000 a critical urgency linked to form and language still prevailed, in 2016 the focus shifted definitively to the urban and social responsibility of the work. In this transition, the architectural discourse has progressively sought a new legitimacy through its impact on the community, moving the debate from the internal rules of the discipline to its external effects on society.

⁵⁸ Rogers, Ernesto Nathan. *Continuity or crisis?*. *Casabella Continuità*, n. 215, 1957, pp. 3-4.

The crisis, therefore, has not only changed the themes of the discourse, but has redefined its priorities: the architectural narrative has renounced the ambition to resolve its internal doubts in an attempt to respond to the emergencies of reality. This shift suggests that architecture is increasingly narrated as a shared social process, where the written word acts more as a bridge toward the public than as a tool for autonomous formal investigation.

Architecture as commercial product

There is one aspect that, in the course of this investigation, has gradually begun to become more and more evident: the presence of financial aspects in the language of architecture. It became increasingly clear that terms related to the commercial semantic area were appearing more frequently in project descriptive articles. This mutation of the lexicon is not a superficial or purely jargon phenomenon, but reflects an ontological change in the figure of the architect and of the design action itself. If once the critical language focused on composition, proportions and tectonics, today the architectural narrative seems to have assimilated the values of efficiency, feasibility, performance and capital attractiveness. This lexical evolution can be read not necessarily as a systematic replacement of critical language, but rather as the sign of a discipline that is becoming increasingly aware of its indissoluble connection with the real estate world and its economic cycles.

If once the theoretical debate seemed almost to want to protect the autonomy of the discipline by focusing exclusively on compositional and formal aspects, today the architectural narrative welcomes concepts related to efficiency and the commercial sphere with greater pragmatism. As already pointed out in the previous chapter quoting Jacques Herzog, the profession of the architect strictly depends on the commissions of public or private bodies and on the logic that drives these investments.

This awareness, of a discipline inserted in an increasingly complex panorama, is also evident in the editorial discourse of the journals analyzed. Terms such as "market", "operation", "income", "real estate", "euro", begin to appear more frequently and not as intruders, but as declared variables of the project itself.

It should be noted that the emergence of these terms is not new for all magazines. In the case of *Architectural Record*, for example, attention to the practical sphere and the economic aspects of the discipline has always been an integral part of the editorial line. However, it is necessary

to devote a reflection to this aspect because it has been noted how, in the new century, this approach is progressively affecting the other journals in the selection has been noted. In periodicals historically more oriented towards theory and formal criticism, there is a presence, previously completely absent, of terms related to the real estate market, signaling a change in sensitivity common to the entire sector.

To visualize this reflection, it was decided to apply the cancellation method, inspired by the work of Emilio Isgrò. By intervening on some pages of the magazines analyzed, the critical and descriptive apparatus was removed to leave only the financial and commercial terms visible⁵⁹. This operation is intended to be an exercise in subtraction to highlight how much space words belonging to this linguistic sphere occupy within the contemporary architectural discourse. By isolating these elements from their usual context, the pragmatic structure on which much of current design rests clearly emerges, offering food for thought on the role of the architect in the current context.

In addition to the semantic analysis, the magazine survey made it possible to extract some articles that trace a timeline of the evolution of this phenomenon, highlighting the steps in the globalization and commercialization of the project. Although financial awareness emerged strongly in the new millennium, its roots lie in the last decades of the twentieth century: phenomena such as the so-called "Bilbao effect" and the role of architects are essential precursors and marked the moment in which architecture was explicitly invested with a strategic role in territorial marketing and economic regeneration on a global scale.

In the article *Forms of the Spectacle* published in *Casabella* in 1999⁶⁰, recalling the positions of theorists such as Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard who since the 1960s have denounced in apocalyptic terms the phenomena of a consumer culture guided by image, superficiality and speed, the spectacularization of the design of public spaces is now considered a fact. The much-vaunted Bilbao effect is considered a paradigm shift from the implosive "Beaubourg effect", exemplifying the ability to revitalize an industrial urban center and attract the attention of international culture through aesthetic virtuosity. The authors report how in the following period there were cases such as the new project of the

⁵⁹ Unlike the works of Emilio Isgrò, it was decided to apply the cancellations also on the spacing between the characters, in order to emphasize exclusively the object of the exercise.

⁶⁰ Ockman, Joan. Adams, Nicholas. *Forms of the show*. Casabella, no. 673, 1999, pp. 4-8.

Cincinnati Museum of Contemporary Art, for which the director expressly asked Zaha Hadid to create "another Bilbao", with the aim of preparing the ground for a future commercialization and transformation of popular neighborhoods into luxury areas. The idea of providing a surplus value to goods through aesthetics, although not new, seems to have found unprecedented success in the transition to the new century. In this context, the phenomenon of the starchitect acts as a financial catalyst, transforming the project into the spearhead of profit-driven gentrification operations. What in the twentieth century was described and criticized as a spectacle and considered an exceptional event, has therefore gradually turned into a consolidated practice, where the architectural project has become increasingly aligned with the need to generate capital.

If at the end of the nineties the debate was dominated by criticism of spectacularization, in 2013 Hans Kollhoff's reflections published in *Domus*⁶¹ show a further evolution of the figure of the architect, with an awareness more rooted in the practical dimension of the profession. The author describes how for some time now the profession of the designer has uncritically accepted capitalist dynamics, in a subtle game between public and private interests. He recognizes in the façade of a building the element that acts as a boundary between the collective aspirations of the city and the concrete needs of the clients, defining it as the threshold between political and social correctness and attention to the economic element. This reflection confirms the progressive change in the profession, whereby architecture no longer seeks to deny its dependence on economic flows, but accepts it as an intrinsic condition of its profession. In this context, therefore, the use of a language linked to the commercial sphere in the descriptions of the projects no longer appears as a violation of the discipline, but as a testimony to the fact that architecture has conceded to move in the reality of the global market, seeking a balance between the ethical value of the building, the spatial composition and the economic context in which it is inserted.

The analysis of the temporal sequence conducted in this study allows us to identify how two types of large-scale public architecture have best understood the financial mutation of the discipline: the museum and the stadium. The juxtaposition of these two architectural typologies is not accidental, as the museum and the stadium today represent the two main poles of attraction of flows and capital in the contemporary urban landscape. Both, in fact, have undergone a genetic mutation that has

⁶¹ Kollhoff, Hans. *The profession of the architect*. *Domus*, no. 975, 2013, pp. 2-5.

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transformed them from public institutions, dedicated respectively to the preservation of memory and to collective ritual, into real urban devices of land value enhancement. The reason why these categories are particularly exposed to financialization processes lies in their ability to act as catalysts for urban regeneration. A new iconic museum or a club-owned stadium by the property are not just buildings, but real estate engines capable of triggering the increase in the value of the surrounding land, transforming entire neighborhoods that are often marginal into prestigious tourist or commercial destinations. In this scenario, architecture is no longer the final goal of the investment, but the scenographic tool necessary to generate capital, transforming the cultural or sporting experience into a pretext for consumption and speculation.

In the article *Follow the money* published in *The Architectural Review* in 2023⁶², he reflects on how museums in today's narrative are political battlefields, places of culture wars, urban development agendas, the theater of environmental protests, geopolitical agreements and the production of social meaning and, only later, places for the exhibition of works of art and cultural artifacts. The article reports a study conducted by David Gogishvili and Martin Müller of the University of Lausanne on the analysis of 438 "major" cultural buildings, those with a cost of at least one hundred million dollars or with an area of at least twenty thousand square meters, opened worldwide between 1990 and 2019. The aim of the research is to demonstrate that the Bilbao effect, despite being thought to be a limited phenomenon at the end of the twentieth century, is still strongly present, outlining how more than thirty percent of the projects included in the analysis were completed between 2015 and 2019. Despite this, we recognize an evolution of the Bilbao effect, no longer based only on the iconic nature of architecture with expressive and photogenic buildings, but on the fact that today every design action must aim at generating a profit. The Swiss study also reports that more than half of the cultural buildings completed between 2015 and 2019 were built in Asia; this can be considered evidence of a considerable shift of cultural capital from Europe and North America, to China and Western Asia. The Louvre Abu Dhabi is considered an emblematic project of the new generation of cultural megaprojects. The museum, in fact, with its finely engineered dome, frequently appears in tourist and

⁶² Kafka, George. *Follow the money*. *The Architectural Review*, n. 1501, 2023, pp. 6-12.

real estate advertisements to attract investment in an area that was previously uninhabited. In addition to the economic mechanism, the museum was the first to be born out of a diplomatic agreement made between France and the United Arab Emirates in 2007, worth about \$1 billion, as part of broader diplomatic moves between the nations that also involved France's first military base in the Gulf and an international branch of Sorbonne University. The strategic benefits of Louvre Abu Dhabi transcend economic gains for both parties involved because the building provides a cultural infrastructure for artists and local audiences, while also polishing diplomatic and cultural perceptions of the country. The article also reports how the phenomenon of institutions accepting funding from external bodies with the consequent gain of reputation for them, has become so common that it deserves a special neologism: artwashing. In this case, financiers from the pharmaceutical and fossil fuel sectors benefited from the good publicity, but at the same time the construction of the museum was the subject of numerous Human Rights Watch reports for violations against migrant workers. Unlike Asian countries, European and North American museums have experienced a significant drop in state funding for the construction of new large museums, which have been replaced by private foundations and companies. In an essay also published in *The Architectural Review* in 1990⁶³, Rosalind Krauss described the experience of being inside the Musée d'Art Modern de la Ville de Paris, which became the object of experience by surpassing the works on display. The evolution that cultural buildings have had in the following decades has already been discussed, but what is interesting is to note how these iconic buildings were always museums, rather than government buildings or banks. This symbolic substitution indicates that capital no longer needs to represent itself through traditional financial institutions, but prefers to camouflage itself within the containers of culture and leisure, transforming them into full-fledged economic assets.

This process of progressive marketization of public space does not spare the architecture of sport either. In 2015 Casabella published a contribution⁶⁴ that reflects on how the world of professional football has also been invested in recent decades by an intense process of financialization, which is altering its genetic code, from a collective ritual

⁶³ Krauss, Rosalind. *The cultural logic of the late capitalist museum*. *The Architectural Review*, 1990.

⁶⁴ Biagi, Marco. *A transparent temple for Bordeaux Football Club*. Casabella, n. 853, 2015, pp. 48-62.

of popular passion to a complex of highly rationalized activities aimed at the production of utility. This change has also involved the architectural aspect of the stadiums, which in the era of televised football have seen the volumes of enormous dimensions, ready to democratically accommodate the proletarian masses, progressively replaced by facilities of smaller capacity able to meet the new safety standards and greater comfort. The article then reports how the phenomenon of the club-owned stadium is spreading, which strengthens the capital structure of the clubs and contributes to the growth of turnover. Thus, the new stadiums built in more recent years with reduced dimensions aim to retain users and maximize revenues by selling packages of personalized services to different types of consumers, such as vips, press, ordinary citizens and fans. In the construction of a football stadium, the provision of services such as sky boxes, lounges, team museum, arenas where concerts and theatrical performances can be hosted, increases the exclusivity of the facility, making the spectator more satisfied and willing to pay a higher amount to use certain services. In order for the project to be worth the real estate investment, commercial activities capable of generating adequate revenues, such as shopping centers, hotels, restaurants and multiplex cinemas, must also be included.

The comparison with these articles in which architectural design has often been put in the background compared to management logic, shows how large-scale design can no longer be separated from the confrontation with capital. This passage therefore confirms what was previously observed, namely that architecture is no longer just a response to a functional and symbolic need, but has become an essential component of complex financial transactions.

This genetic mutation of museums and stadiums reflects a profound theoretical shift that sees the building transformed from a civil space to a financial product. In *What Remains of Architecture*⁶⁵, Marco Biraghi critically analyzes the condition of the discipline in a world where use value has been completely replaced by exchange value. A central point of his reflection is the tendency of architecture to generate buildings as logos, as graphic signs that are immediately recognizable and commodifiable. Biraghi points out the fact that architecture has been reduced to a shell, a spectacular surface that has ceased to produce

⁶⁵ Biraghi, Marco. *What remains of architecture. A historic project*. Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, 2025.

critical thinking to produce exclusively real estate value. The project, according to the author, seems to have lost its autonomy as a critical mirror of reality, becoming the residue of decision-making processes that took place on the basis of administrative and financial policies. The figure of the architect, in this perspective, therefore risks being reduced to that of a refined decorator of economic operations. The theoretical void described by Biraghi, in which the architect appears as a "decorator of economic operations", finds a precise political explanation in the analysis of the system that governs him.

The discourse becomes even more radical with the work *The Architecture of Neoliberalism* by Douglas Spencer⁶⁶, in which he argues that contemporary architecture is not limited to being subjected to the market, but is itself used as an active tool to shape the neoliberal subject. If for Biraghi architecture is the residue of a process, for Spencer it is its ideological engine. The idea that a work should strike the senses with stimulating environments, without requiring any particular cognitive reflection, is seen by Spencer as a way to disarm critical thinking. Language itself can be read as a tool of control: the emphasis on terms such as "flow", "performance", "connectivity", "experience", is used to justify choices that actually increase the real estate value and to make it seem natural that a building must function as a start-up. The architectural work, therefore, becomes an asset, a territorial marketing tool that must respond to criteria of flexibility and adaptability typical of neoliberal precariousness. Quoting Foucault, the author states that terms such as "brand identity", "optimization" or "hub" are not simple linguistic intrusions, but the signs of how the project has become a "game of truth" where the only recognized validity is the economic one. The trajectory traced through the analysis of case studies and theoretical voices shows how the shift in the center of gravity of the discipline is not a simple change of style, but a structural transformation that affects the very processes of production and narration of the work. In this scenario, the cancellation exercise conducted on the pages, as well as the appearance of an *economy* column in the diagrams dedicated to the analysis of the contents of the journals, acquire full meaning. These contents, with the force of visual evidence, aim to give rise to the already suspect hypothesis that the architecture of the twenty-first century is intrinsically economic in nature.

⁶⁶ Spencer, Douglas. *The Architecture of Neoliberalism*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

Following the reflections of Biraghi and Spencer, it can be said that the architect's economic conscience reveals itself as a twofold aspect: on the one hand it highlights a necessary professional pragmatism, but on the other hand it poses the risk of a definitive surrender of creativity to the cycles of global finance. The language of magazines over the past twenty-five years has done nothing but record this slow, but inexorable, transition to an architecture of conformity.

This alignment with market logic, however, has a deeper consequence: the progressive erosion of the critical distance between the observer and the object. When the editorial project is fully absorbed by the dynamics of promotion and consensus, the space for dissent and analytical judgment disappears. This shift suggests that the metamorphosis of rhetoric is not merely a linguistic change, but the symptom of a more radical condition: the definitive eclipse of criticism in favor of a celebratory and professionalizing narrative.

Absence of criticism and the curatorial shift

Retracing the results of this survey, it emerges that in the last twenty-five years, architecture magazines have shifted from being organs of debate to becoming editorial curation platforms. Although this metamorphosis is not an unprecedented phenomenon in the contemporary panorama, the present study has aimed to investigate its actual existence through different methodological approaches. In fact, although the crisis of architectural magazines is a debated topic, it has rarely been analyzed through an empirical and quantitative verification of the transformations in language and structure. The new contribution therefore lies in the attempt, through comparative analysis on a heterogeneous sample of journals, to objectify a change that is usually only perceived or narrated. Having found similar trends in very different journals confirms that these are not isolated cases, but a change in sensitivity common to the entire publishing sector, which deserves to be analyzed as a systematic phenomenon of the discipline.

In addition to the change in textual content, the analysis showed an increase in the photographic component, accompanied by a transformation of the graphic lines and the type of paper. These elements support the thesis of the magazine's transition towards a new, more communicative dimension: the choice of high paper weights and the adoption of large formats suggest a reading experience based on visual contemplation rather than analytical reading.

Moving the analysis to the level of language, the central object of this study, we find a progressive abandonment of critical and eloquent language, in favor of a descriptive narrative. In this scenario, the writing no longer aspires to question the foundations of the project or its compositional aspects, but shifts the attention towards the subject who uses the space, the social context and the technical aspects of the work. This textual shift corresponds to a radical change in the iconographic apparatus, marking the progressive marginalization of technical drawing in favor of the absolute predominance of the image. The priority has

shifted from the analysis of the architectural object, to the analysis of the effect it has on the subject. The result is an accompanying language where the accuracy of the chronicle replaces the depth of the debate, so that the magazine ceases to be a place where the discipline is discussed, to become the space in which its impact and intended use are documented.

To understand the extent of this change, it is emblematic to compare it with the season of great twentieth-century debates, such as the one that in 1959 pitted Reyner Banham against each other in *The Architectural Review* and Ernesto Nathan Rogers in *Casabella*. On that occasion, Banham published an article entitled *Neoliberty: The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture*⁶⁷, lashing out against the BBPR group's project for the Velasca Tower. The author accused Italian architects of having betrayed the modern revolution to take refuge in a nostalgic and bourgeois style, defining the new trends as a "infantile regression" unable to face the challenges of industrial production. A few months later, Rogers responded with the editorial *The Evolution of Architecture: Response to the Keeper of the Frigidaires*⁶⁸, retorting in equally provocative language: he accused Banham of behaving like a "keeper of refrigerators", interested only in mechanical functionality and unable to understand architecture as a continuous historical project. This famous literary clash, already widely analyzed, is useful in this context because it highlights how criticism, and architecture itself, was then an exercise in political and intellectual positioning. Such a lively and direct register, where a critic labels a colleague as a guardian of household appliances to defend a theoretical vision, is rather unimaginable in the contemporary publishing landscape.

This transition from open polemics to the current descriptive caution does not represent a simple decline in critical temperament, but rather an adherence to a new value system that has redefined the very role of the written word.

In this context, it seems useful to quote Douglas Spencer again⁶⁹, who offers a precise reflection on the so-called "post-critical" turn. The author highlights how contemporary architecture has renounced the sharp

⁶⁷ Banham, Reyner. *Neoliberty: The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture*. *The Architectural Review*, n. 747, 1959, pp. 231-235.

⁶⁸ Rogers, Ernesto Nathan. *The evolution of architecture: Response to the keeper of the frigidaires*. *Casabella-Continuità*, no. 228, 1959, pp. 2-4.

⁶⁹ Spencer, Douglas. *The Architecture of Neoliberalism*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

tones of traditional criticism to embrace a performative approach, where the text no longer serves to question the meaning of the work, but to describe its ability to generate effects and sensations. The changes found in the journals, therefore, can be interpreted not as a simple change in editorial slant, but as a very precise theoretical operation. As Spencer argues, the story of experience serves to simplify the project, making it a fait accompli that the user only has to enjoy, exempting him from the effort to understand its design or political complexity. The descriptive language thus becomes a tool for an architecture to be experienced and no longer thought critically.

Another episode of particular importance, which allows us to contextualize the roots of this change, is the editorial written by Emerson Goble in July 1966 for the seventy-fifth anniversary of *Architectural Record*⁷⁰. In that essay, emblematically entitled *Criticism is dead; long live criticism*, Goble addresses a question for which the newspaper was constantly asked: why the magazine no longer appeared as courageously critical as in its early years. At that time, although critical considerations did not stop, it was more difficult to find strong words, positive or negative, about the projects. The author admitted that the change in the audience, from a base of non-experts to a purely professional one, had made the "fireworks of really negative attacks" anachronistic. The magazine, in fact, benefited more from the growing use of photographs and drawings, tools considered more effective for a technical audience, than the "more limited ideas of critics". The most disruptive aspect of Goble's argument lies in the attempt to redefine the very concept of criticism: he theorizes that the selection of projects itself constituted a better form of criticism than written judgment. According to this view, the editorial act of choosing a building, regardless of its intrinsic quality, was in itself a sufficient exercise in judgment. Here we witness the emergence of the idea of the magazine as a curatorial platform: the critic is no longer the one who analyzes and evaluates the project after its publication, but the one who, by selecting it, legitimizes it a priori. More recent analyses published by the same magazine⁷¹ show that purely pragmatic reasons emerged behind this theoretical justification: the editorial line limited to the selection of cases was dictated by a close competition between journals to obtain exclusivity on

⁷⁰ Goble, Emerson. *Criticism is dead; long live criticism*. *Architectural Record*, 1966, pp. 9-10.

⁷¹ Stephens, Suzanne. Pungent and Pithy. A brief history of architectural criticism in *Record*. *Architectural Record*, 2016, pp. 132-135.

high-profile projects. In a competitive market, it had become the architect who chose the magazine in which to be published, retaining the graphic drawings to competing media; so a review that was too severe would have led to the exclusion of the magazine from the circuit of big names. This mechanism of exchange has transformed criticism into a form of promotion, where silence on problematic aspects of the project has become the price to pay for the timeliness of editorial information.

In this sense, Goble's editorial legacy lies in having legitimized the idea that visibility constitutes a greater value than debate. If selection replaces judgment, language no longer needs to be critical and eloquent, but it is sufficient that it be descriptive. The journal ceases to be a tribunal of ideas to become a catalogue of experiences where the reader is invited to contemplate the final result rather than question its intellectual genesis.

This dynamic opens the discussion to a necessary analysis of the mechanisms that regulate the behind-the-scenes of contemporary architectural communication, where complex balances between copyright, public relations and marketing strategies come into play. Not so long ago, it was considered disreputable to promote one's work commercially, and architects were wary of hiring public relations consultants, on the assumption that the work should speak for itself.

Today this paradigm has changed radically and the media landscape appears to have been irreversibly transformed. Architects operate in a context where media coverage has become an essential condition for impressing clients, because editorial awards improve visibility, consolidate the reputation of the studio and help to obtain new commissions. Eager to maintain control over an often precarious business model, architects therefore seek assistance in communication and for this reason, business development has become intrinsically linked to public relations strategies. A unilateral management of communication channels that aims to filter unwanted attention and judgments from journalists and local communities, often allows planning or social criticalities to be omitted. Starting from this, the practice of press releases has spread, whereby it is the architectural firms themselves that control the written narrative about the project, trying to justify the costs and sometimes emphasizing the design results.

CRITICISM IS DEAD; LONG LIVE CRITICISM

On another page in this issue I have promised to comment in some detail about "criticism," for which the early ARCHITECTURAL RECORD was so famous, and which is more restrained today. We are continually being asked why we do not swing so lustily now; we are charged with not having the nerve; occasionally the charge is that we don't have the critics. At any rate, if we knew our job—so we hear—we would "give 'em hell."

Well, we *do* have the nerve. We *do* have the critics. We have the whole world to criticize, and all the means we need. We have no prohibitions. We have the interest, and we could amuse ourselves happily, and perhaps advance our personal "images" if we let go.

So why not start the fireworks?

On the sober side there are some things to ponder.

In the first place, it is not the criticism that is missing; it's only the fireworks of really negative attack. The critical faculties of the staff are at work day in and day out, supplemented by all manner of advisers, formal and informal, willing and unwilling, quiet and vehement. Very few magazines enjoy the close, really intimate relationships with their readers which are the rule in the architectural world.

RECORD editors have formal terri-

torial assignments; they are frequently in the field scooping up all kinds of information, comment, material for publication. And every note they make on the trip or in the office involves an exercise of critical judgment. Every building that is published—good, bad or indifferent—involves some element of criticism; every photograph, caption, or bit of text.

Sometimes the criticism is open and obvious, and occasionally fairly sharp criticism in the old sense, fireworks. More often it shows quietly as normal dedicated reporting.

Our concept of really valuable criticism is the analysis and possibly desiccation of some ideas or dogmatic contrivances. The RECORD through the years has done hundreds of pages of discussion of architectural trends or principles. But however architects may protest that criticism can be constructive as well as negative they don't consider discussion of ideas as criticism. Criticism must deal with one building or one architect, or what fun is it?

What is missing is treading on sensitive toes just for what editors call "impact." We tread on toes when it is necessary—we made FLLW just plain mad some years ago with some published disparagement of his public pronouncements. We are accustomed to

having architects angry at us—architects love to make pronouncements, especially to magazine editors, but they rarely agree on anything.

Legal aspects of libel or slander are not to be forgotten, of course, but they are much less of a factor than one would think. I never heard of a legal suit against the RECORD, in 75 years. There is some danger here from damage to building ownership, more than from slandering architects. And owners write more fearsome letters than do architects.

In the second place, we ask ourselves to define our functions as a magazine. What do our readers need from us?

Well, we must show them the latest, best, most significant, most exciting, most promising architecture. Must we put a rating on it? Architects always answer yes to that question, but they always make it apparent that it is *other* architects that need to be told; they themselves can judge for themselves.

Here I must make a declaration, a personal one: I believe that, generally speaking, architects do not need to be told how a building is to be judged. Or perhaps I should say, "do not profit from being told." They can, or at least do, make a personal judgment. And they should. They might be interested in the opinion of some more or less subjective observer in a magazine, but it does not sway them very much. What does sway them is publication, with or without words.

As for other functions, we must also tell architects how to plan a hospital, a school, an urban renewal project; we must also keep them up to date on

The established practice is for the studios to distribute a standardized press kit upon the inauguration of a new building. This dynamic was clearly observed in the case of the Tate Modern, particularly relating to the second intervention. This package, sent to every editorial office considered strategic, usually contains project report, technical drawings and photographs. While the most authorial magazines still select and reread the materials, online publications often feed on these press releases, re-proposing them without any critical filter. This dynamic blurs the line between newsrooms and advertising, creating a worrying shift in the power of speech that undermines the role of critics and journalists in questioning the claims produced by studios.

The narratives created by architects are therefore not only used to illustrate their project, but also to present it to planners and the general public. This essential part of the designer's profession has seen in the new millennium the development of a peculiar specialized jargon, with often a complex and self-referential syntactic construction, which seems aimed at eluding the tangible reality of the built environment in order to avoid the assumption of binding responsibilities. An article in *The Architectural Review's Outrage column*, written by Rob Fiehn, reports an emblematic episode that caused a sensation: the presentation of Newcastle Gateshead Quays⁷², which was accompanied by words such as "The expression of the buildings takes visitors on a cognitive journey through the site and provides clues to use and communicates with the visitor and the interface". The language of this excerpt, described as empty and superficial, aroused great outrage. The intent of such rhetoric appears to be to use neologisms and cryptic phrases to obfuscate the real impact of the project, witnessing the proliferation of presentations in which an ordinary office building promises to "shake up industry", a school to "redefine education", through the exponential use of adjectives such as "revolutionary" or "iconic". Fiehn harshly criticizes this common practice, suggesting that consultants should limit themselves to providing information quickly, efficiently and honestly, without fear of admitting when a project does not achieve excellence. Ultimately, the author suggests that relieving architects of the burden of incessant marketing materials could give them back the time they need to design better quality works, so as to recover intellectual honesty, learn to manage dissent and public debate, the only way to restore trust in the relationship between architects, communicators and civil society.

⁷² Fiehn, Rob. *Outrage*. *The Architectural Review*, n. 1473, 2020, pp. 66-67.

In the light of these analyses, it is possible to frame the transformation of the magazines not as an isolated case, but as the reflection of a structural change in contemporary architectural culture. As highlighted by the debate reported by George Baird⁷³, we are faced with a coexistence, and sometimes a clash, between two paradigms: on the one hand, the twentieth-century "criticality", based on the judgment and intellectual value of the text, and on the other hand, the post-critical dimension, which privileges pragmatism, efficiency and communicative impact.

This research has shown that the shift towards a descriptive language and a predominant iconographic apparatus is not a simple aesthetic choice, but responds to the need for the discipline to interface with an increasingly vast and diversified system of actors. If the register has become less sharp and more analytical and experiential, it is because the function of the journal has shifted from the formation of theoretical debate to the management of visibility and professional practice. In this new structure, the figure of the architect and that of the publisher collaborate in the construction of a narrative that must be, at the same time, technically accurate and immediately usable.

The transition from a court of ideas to a curatorial platform therefore describes an architecture that measures itself against the reality of the market and public relations, accepting the compromise of a more mediated language in exchange for a greater ability to penetrate the social and professional fabric. In the final analysis, the challenge that emerges for the future of sector publishing does not seem to be so much the recovery of a distant past, as the search for a new balance in which the precision of the description and the effectiveness of the image can coexist with a space for reflection that, even without the "fireworks" of the past, still knows how to restore the complexity of architectural thought.

In a rapidly evolving media landscape, this work therefore intends to offer a useful cross-section to understand how architecture is reconfiguring its identity between the legacy of intellectual debate and the new, essential, forms of global communication. The aim was to investigate this transformation through a pragmatic and quantitative lens in its first part and a more reflective one in the second.

⁷³ Baird, George. "Criticality" and Its Discontents. Harvard Design Magazine, n. 21, 2004.

The investigation focused specifically on the first twenty-five years of the new millennium, a time span that, having only recently ended, allows the research to join the debate on the dynamics of contemporaneity. Rather than proposing itself as a critical reading a posteriori of an already historically consolidated process, this work intends to be a current scan of a change caught in its making. Precisely because of this experimental nature, the study does not claim to draw definitive conclusions: the considerations extracted here represent only some of the possible interpretations of a complex phenomenon. The method used, by its nature modular and scalable, lends itself to being applied to new samples or to be integrated by future critical lenses. Ultimately, this research remains open to future developments and new interpretations that will emerge in the years to come.

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