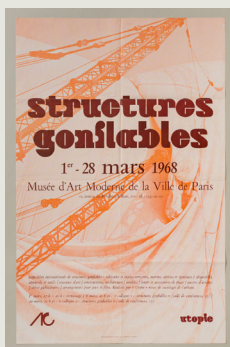


## 02

## Notes half a century (and several exhibitions) later

Patricio Mardones

An exhibition entitled 'Structures Gonflables' was held from the first to the thirty-first March 1968 at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris's (at the time) new ARC (Animation, Recherche, Confrontation) Division. A few weeks after the detonation of the social movements that turned the streets of Paris into a platform for debate and confrontation, the multidisciplinary community 'Utopie', whose members were architects Jean Aubert, Jean-Paul Jungermann and Paul Stinco, together with Isabelle Auricoste, Catherine Cot, René Loureau and sociologists Jean Baudrillard and Hubert Tonka, curated an exhibition commissioned from Pierre Gaudibert.



According to the programme, it aimed to exhaustively review 'art, technology and fantasy around inflatables in all realms, including land, seafaring, airborne and space vehicles, works of art, buildings, architecture, furnishings, toys, merchandising and recreational devices'. Many of the broad selection of objects on display were sourced from catalogues. The curators' objective was to identify possible inter-industry technology transfers between, among others, the (especially U.S.) military-industrial complex and architecture. Along with these products, visitors could view drawings and photographs of the mock-ups for the bachelor's dissertations defended the year before by Aubert, Jungmann and Stinco<sup>1</sup> in the workshop headed by Edouard Albert at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris. Respectively entitled Un podium itinérant pour 5.000 spectateurs, Dyodon, habitation pneumatique expérimentale and Un hall itinérant d'exposition d'objets de la vie quotidienne, the three proposals were inquiries into huge removable and reusable structures built with plastic membranes<sup>2</sup>. The mobile, lightweight architecture they represented was intended for a mobile, lightweight world. Entirely at odds with the physical and social inertia of stone and concrete architectures so beloved of fine arts tradition, it was no closer to the radicalised revolutionary premises of the young Maoist and Trotskyist agitators who populated European university campuses at the time. As a tribute to Aubert<sup>3</sup> himself, the hardest core factions of the student movement despised objects (even inflatable ones) as the materialisation of output associated with capital and class conflict.

One of the last series of projects implemented at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts prior to its overhaul in

the wake of May '68 student demands, the bachelor's dissertations by the three young 'Utopie' architects were displayed alongside technical developments such as aerostats and Zodiac rescue boats. The aim was to distance architecture from the bourgeois and formal sphere with which it was associated while strengthening its bonds with the material world. Their drawings and mock-ups could be deemed museum architecture insofar as they were exhibited in an institution that appeared to further public debate. They were nonetheless a far cry from the museum piece itself as defined by Rossi, who invoked Cézanne<sup>4</sup> to claim it to be the highest form of architecture, independent and open, designed by experts for its subsequent adaptation to a possible use or implementation, for its 'insertion in reality'. In contrast, the A.J.S. drawings and mock-ups displayed at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris were explicitly associated with certain technological developments, in turn positioned in a very specific social and political context. Their independence of context and the museum purity to which Rossi appeared to aspire were therefore compromised by cultural engagement. And whereas some of these items were planimetric, they also seemed to stray from the notion proposed by Jean Nicholas Durand, who regarded architectural drawing as a means for describing an object in another domain, the anticipation of something else (probably a building). So viewed, Durand's approach stresses the dichotomy announced by Rossi, distinguishing between pure, independent and to some degree introspective architecture and the mundane version stemming from it and informed by contextual demands or economic or technical considerations.

Viewed from that perspective, the architecture in 'Structures Gonflables' seems contradictory, impure and grey, perhaps because it failed to engage with the sort of chronological linearity in which drawing is the mere projection of a reality meant for materialisation a posteriori. That feature associated it fairly naturally with the production of other nineteen sixties and seventies authors subsequently grouped under the epithet 'radical architecture', initially coined by Alessandro Mendini to refer to a series of young Florentine architects and designers<sup>5</sup>. The same (and necessarily broad) spectrum that includes the Italians working out of Superstudio, 9999, Archizoom and UFO could also encompass a number of Japanese metabolists, Constant Nieuwenhuys, Archigram, Wolf Vostell and Haus Rucker. All produced works that for their materiality, scale or nature ended up as museum pieces, except for one characteristic: their reality as architectural objects was ultimate and definitive. They represented themselves only and presupposed no later stage of development; rather, they seemed to be finished entities. The liberating view of design (and its tools) as an architectural end product that began to circulate in the late nineteen sixties spawned new methods for teaching architecture and prompted a number of celebrities and institutions to shelter and cultivate that outlook<sup>6</sup>. Its exemplary implementation by Alvin Boyarsky during his chairmanship of London's Architectural Association (1971-1990) harmonised particularly well with the written and pictorial production authored by Archigram, Hans Hollein and Cedric Price in the late nineteen sixties. Another example can be found in the educational model first introduced by John Hejduk in 1975 at New York's Cooper Union, an institution that embraced Lebbeus Woods's pedagogical experiences (and dense drawings).

Post-war social reappraisal and the ambition to communicate and engage urgently with ever larger audiences informed much of the creative momentum of so-called radical architecture in the northern hemisphere. Most of the time its enthusiasts worked on the fringe of the discipline, with restricted access to commissions and consequently often exempt from the negotiation that characterises conventional professional practice, although that freedom also limited the resources available to produce their works. These groups' penchant for self-construction, 'do-it-yourself' reproduction<sup>7</sup>, plastic membranes, inflatables and graphics (posters, fanzines

and post cards, for instance) can be partially explained by that circumstance, with both worldly and ideological implications. It was the type of production they could afford, removed as they were from the political and economic power they purported to elude but which often furnishes the means to practise architecture. For Aubert that constituted the 'impracticable practice of architecture': to produce objects while at the same time attempting to critique the financial and political systems that govern production.

The aversion to the link between architecture and traditional power structures prompted the development of resources with which to transfer ideas and knowledge to the masses. While producing manifestos that summarised premises and ideologies not readily accessible to the public at large (and which eventually circulated in more or less narrow intellectual confines), so-called radical architecture movements were clearly aware of the value of visual communication as a tool for attracting attention and building a following. Their extensive use of drawing and the proliferation of practices such as collage or détournement applied to films, comic strips and advertising attest to those generations' esteem for visual media, a tendency that has had a significant impact on contemporary architectural culture and discourse. They deemed the most effective vehicle for communicating ideas to be an object or image, in keeping with Walter Benjamin's assertion in *Passagenwerk*: 'I have nothing to say, only to show'. The migration from textual to visual discourse and the effusive production of graphics and small objects as the primary output of architectural endeavour favoured the circulation of radical countercultural ideas in galleries, museums and the mass media. At least two extreme cases of this attention to the communicational capacity of architectural production merit mention. One is Matta -Clark's oeuvre and the practical difficulties it posed around exhibiting in a museum. In connection with the value and interest of his interventions in abandoned structures, he claimed<sup>8</sup> that the determining factor was the degree to which his intervention could transform structures into an act of communication. The second example lies in architecture's incursion in the world of cinema (and collaterally of advertising) in the short films planned by Superstudio for its five 'Atti Fondamentali', only two of which were produced. The project storyboards nonetheless ultimately became a work in themselves. A *Monumento Continuo* film never produced met with the same fate: many of the illustrations in its storyboard, published in 1971 by the journal *Casabella*, were later converted into collages and photomontages in a variety of formats. The resources and procedures involved in those visual items heralded the transition from aerial photographs and photocopies to layered images and pixels several decades before digital design became routine practice in the production and reproduction of today's architectural projects.

Nineteen sixties and seventies radical projects and the concomitant broadening of the idea of architectural production have had a significant impact on the present scenario. The undeniable continuities in critique, contradictions and revisions seem not to have yet come to an end and Rossi's thoughts on the theory of architectural design set out in '*Architettura per i musei*' echo loudly and may even be distractedly or provocatively amplified if the word 'museum' is replaced with for 'school'.

Those two institutions, cross-implicated in transferring ideas and knowledge to the masses, share a growing awareness of their political power and responsibility as well as spaces such as biennials and triennials (through their validation systems). They are co-sponsoring the debate on a profession in crisis in its attempt to stave off enfeeblement in a cultural context where mathematics is progressively gaining the upper hand. Worth remembering in the context of the dichotomy between professional architects and theorists is the border-line insolent reply given by Gordon Matta-Clark, perhaps the most 'museum-ish' of all museum architects, to a question posed by Donald Wall about his divorce from professional practice<sup>9</sup>. Wall asked whether Matta-Clark was concerned about

assuming an ideological position diametrically opposed to the one defended by practising architects and out of touch with the profession's role in solving humanity's problems. The answer, not long in coming, abruptly narrowed the gap between the two, *in which the interviewee doubted that most practitioners solved anything besides making a living, noting that as a big and enormously costly business, architecture like government has access to a whole arsenal of propaganda*.

**Acknowledgements:** The author wishes to thank Christian Kerez and Philip Ursprung, of the ETH Zürich Department of Architecture; Cristóbal Molina, of the Chilean Ministry of the Arts, Culture and Heritage; and Patricio Mardones Precht, Andrea Monsalve and Erwin Weisse, of Hunter Douglas Chile for their support in implementing the project at Zurich and Santiago.

### Patricio Mardones Hiche

Patricio Mardones Hiche (Antofagasta, 1973) Architect from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (1999); During 1993 he studied Art at the same University. Since 2000 he has combined professional practice, teaching and editorial work. Since 2007 he has collaborated with media and magazines such as *Icon* (England), *Mark* (Holland), *Dwell* (USA), *2G* (Spain), *The Plan* (Italy), *AU* (Brazil), *Casabella* (Italy), *Azure* (Canada), *Oris* (Croatia); *T* magazine / *NYTimes* (USA). He has participated as curator in architecture exhibitions in Chile, Switzerland and the United States. Between 2011 and 2015 he was director of ARQ Editions at the School of Architecture of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. He is co-author of the second stage of the Library of the SLGM Documentation Center of the School of Architecture of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, (associated with Cecilia Puga, 2007) and of the new Crypt and presbytery of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Santiago (associate Rodrigo Pérez de Arce and Sebastián Bianchi, 2006). His latest projects include the Public Use Infrastructure of the Queulat National Park in Aysén (1st prize, 2016 contest) and the Cruise Terminal of the port of Punta Arenas (1st prize, 2017 contest), both associated with Cecilia Puga and Paula Velasco. In 2007 he was a visiting professor at The University of Texas at Austin. He currently collaborates in the study of Smiljan Radic, is a professor at Andrés Bello University and the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile and is a member of the board of the Fragile Architecture Foundation in Santiago.

## Notes

**01.** The three architects chose their initials for the acronym A.J.S. - Aérolande to introduce their architectural studio to the public. They later found professional fulfilment and sustenance in inflatable furniture.

**02.** Jean Albert's design was a kind of inflatable ribbed dome spanning over arched bleachers intended as a temporary pavilion. Jungmann's design proposed an inflatable structure several storeys high intended as homes apt for different geographies, very likely inspired by the extra-planetary colonies associated with the space race. Stinco's design envisaged a vast cover comprising huge spheres that when inflated would overlie the lorries in which they were shipped to form a spacious exhibition hall.

**03.** According to Craig Buckley's interview with Aubert in Paris in 2007, re-edited in 2010 by Actar in Clip, Stamp, Fold: *The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines, 196X to 197X*; Colomina, B., (ed.).

**04.** In the 1960 essay 'Architettura per i musei' in which he discussed possible relationships between architectural theory and design, Rossi wrote: "E ancora potremmo avere per divisa la celebre frase di Cézanne, "io dipingo solo per i musei". Con questa frase Cézanne, in modo chiarissimo, dichiara la necessità di una pittura che prosegua un suo sviluppo logico rigoroso e che si pone all'interno della logica della pittura che, appunto, viene verificata nei musei." Y declara en el párrafo final: "L'architettura, nata dalla necessità, è ora autonoma; nella sua forma più elevata essa crea dei pezzi da Museo a cui si rifaranno i tecnici per trasformarli e adattarli alle molteplici funzioni e esigenze a cui devono essere applicati. Così dobbiamo educarci sull'analisi dei caratteri costitutivi di un progetto; ed è questo che deve proporsi un corso di teoria della progettazione."

**05.** The expression 'radical design' appeared (in English) in the summer of 1972 on the cover of issue 367 of the journal *Casabella*, of which Mendii was editor-in chief. The expression was written across a photo of the torso of a gorilla (drawn from a post card portraying the Afri-

can mammals on display at New York's American Museum of Natural History). On the inside, the issue carried an extensive review of the five 'fundamental acts' defined by Superstudio just a few weeks after the exhibition 'Italy: the new domestic landscape' opened at the MoMA. For critics such as Peter Lang, the Italians' ambitious exhibition in New York attested to the successful appropriation of their ideas by the very system they attempted to rebuff.

**06.** *Shortly after the end of World War II, a group of PhD. students at Princeton University authored 'Radical Pedagogies', collaborative research co-supervised by Beatriz Colomina, Britt Eversole, Ignacio G. Galán, Evangelos Kotsiorkis, Anna-Maria Meister and Federica Vannucchi. That endeavour contributed to the visibility of a series of experiences on architectural education in pursuit of alternative models that formed part of the spirit of the radical avant-gardes, many of which shared an interest in moving away from the inertia and formality that characterised architectural education in the first half of the twentieth century.*

**07.** That trend comprised widely diverse initiatives. One example, *Proposta per un'autoprogettazione*, was a tiny manual for building wood furniture authored by Enzo Mari in 1974. Another, *Inflatocookbook*, self-published by its Ant Farm authors Chip Lord, Curtis Schreier, Andy Shapiro, Hudson Marquez, Doug Hurr and Doug Michels in California in 1970-71, included patterns for the DIY assembly of large inflatable bubbles. Both designs were, sensu stricto, compilations stemming from their authors' personal research.

**08.** Gordon Matta-Clark interviewed by Donald Wall in *Arts Magazine*, May 1976.

**09.** Ibid.

## Images

**01.** Poster of the exhibition Structures Gonflables, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1-30/03/1968.

**02.** 'Cloud '68 - Papeles y Voces' [papers and voices] was the name of an exhibition prepared from 2016 to 2018 by Fundación Arquitectura Frágil, with the support of ETH Zurich's gta Exhibitions, the Chilean Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Heritage's Architecture Area and Hunter Douglas Chile. With the architecture produced by a series of radical European movements in the second half of the twentieth century as its leitmotiv, it interwove objects dating from those years from two collections.

**03.** The first, belonging to Chilean Smiljan Radic, was the source of the 173 paper items on display, including both ephemera and original lithographs, drawings and engravings. The second consisted in 13 videos of interviews with the authors of those radical movements filmed at different times by Swiss art critic and curator Hans Ulrich Obrist.

**04.** The name of the exhibition, proposed by Hans Ulrich Obrist, alludes to the radical architectural thinking that arose in Europe in the nineteen fifties and sixties and orbited rather nebulously around the May 1968 uprising in Paris. Most of the production attributable to those groups literally never got past the drawing board. Far from detracting from its value, that status was ultimately advantageous, for it facilitated dissemination and inspired the infringement of disciplinary bounds by fostering links with artists, poets, designers and engineers. Those are the coordinates that chart the printed materials on display: manifestos, post cards, posters, maps and drawings where their authors' voices reverberate.

**05.** The material was exhibited from March to May 2018 in the ETH Zurich Department of Architecture's ArCHena Gallery and in October and November in the Patricia Ready Gallery at Santiago. Thirty-three 240x120 cm<sup>2</sup> acrylic showcases were arranged in five parallel friezes spaced at 2.40 m, suspended from a vividly coloured 20 m long steel ceiling beam.

**06.** The works and voices of Constant Nieuwenhuys, Guy Debord, Asger Jorn, Haus-Rucker-Co, Archigram, Utopie, and Superstudio, among others, were secured

to those transparent bands. The layout aimed to emulate the multiple, non-linear readings afforded by the panels in Aby Warburg's *Atlas Mnemosyne*, while building choral, polyphonic and at times contradictory imagery in the exhibition hall. The sensation was a cloud of images and undertones generated fifty years ago. The exhibition was designed to guide the viewer's gaze toward that 'back bench' of the history of twentieth century architecture, powerfully influenced by the modernist movement. 'Cloud '68 - Papeles y Voces' focused on a handful of authors who worked on the fringe of predominant discourse, almost beyond the bounds of architecture. They did not build the last century's cities and buildings. On the contrary, they worked on the periphery of the discipline to produce manifestos, drawings and images that repudiated negotiation of any sort while accommodating direct materialisation with fairly modest means. That immediacy, so rare in architecture, was one of the features spotlighted in the exhibition.

**07.** Headquartered at Santiago, Fundación Arquitectura Frágil was founded in January 2018 to further the study and dissemination in Chile of experimental or improbable architecture, of the kind that blurs the limits of the discipline. Here, the access to architecture in all its representations continues to be accessible to only a few architects. Chile is still far away.

**08.** By encouraging the import of ideas, the foundation aims to enhance the debate with new resources or at least afford it visibility, for its very existence would spawn educational attributes that would be particularly inspirational for young Chilean architects. With those targets in mind the foundation created a national board with seats held by Tomás Müller Benoit, Alberto Sato, Enrique Walker, Patricio Mardones and Smiljan Radic as well as an external advisory commission on which Julia Peyton-Jones, Erwin Viray, Moisés Puente and Giorgio Mastinu serve.

**09.** In 2017 and 2018 the foundation sponsored two activities. The first was the exhibition 'Other people have dogs', in conjunction with Barcelona's Fundació Enric Miralles shown at D21 Gallery in Santiago. Zurich and Santiago were the venues for the second, 'Cloud '68 - Papeles y Voces', while a third, presently in preparation, will open in 2021.