

COM(IC)ONIC ARCHITECTURE IN THE COMICS

Michela De Domenico¹, Paola Raffa², Fabio Testai²

¹University of Messina

Department of Engineering

²Mediterranea University of Reggio Calabria,

Department of Architecture and Territory

michela.dedomenico@iislafarinabasile.edu.it

img journal

interdisciplinary journal
on image, imagery
and imagination

08
APR 2023

Imaging and Imagery in Architecture

ISSUE 08

04/2023

IMAGING AND IMAGERY IN ARCHITECTURE

EDITED BY

Alessandro Luigini

ESSAYS

Luca Armellino

Justyna Borucka

Fabio Colonnese

Salvatore Damiano

Michela De Domenico

Victoria Ferraris

Carla Ferreyra

Giancarlo Gola

Alessia Garozzo

Roberto Gigliotti

Pieter Greyvensteyn

Gaia Leandri

Francesco Maggio

Domenico Mediati

Asma Mehan

Sandro Parrinello

Francesca Picchio

Paola Raffa

Michela Rossi

Anna Sanseverino

Jakub Szczepański

Fabio Testaì

ISSN 2724-2463

ISBN 9788899586362

DOI 10.6092/issn.2724-2463/v4-n8-2023

www.img-network.it

<http://img-journal.unibo.it>



PUBLICA

img journal
Interdisciplinary journal
on image, imagery and imagination

IMAGING AND IMAGERY IN ARCHITECTURE

Issue 08

April 2023

EDITED BY

Alessandro Luigini

ISSN 2724-2463

ISBN 9788899586362

DOI 10.6092/issn.2724-2463/v4-n8-2023

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Alessandro Luigini, Chiara Panciroli

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Demis Basso, Stefano Brusaporci, Enrico Cicalò,
Roberto Dainese, William Grandi, Massimiliano Lo
Turco, Valeria Menchetelli, Matteo Moretti, Antonella
Nuzzaci, Elena Pacetti, Antonella Poce, Daniele Rossi,
Daniele Villa, Franca Zuccoli

JOURNAL MANAGER

Vincenzo Cirillo

Michele Valentino

EDITORIAL BOARD

Vincenzo Cirillo, Alessandra De Nicola, Alexandra
Fusinetti, Elisabetta Caterina Giovannini, Anita
Macauda, Giovanna Ramaccini, Michele Valentino,
Marco Vedoà

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Fabrizio Apollonio, Paolo Belardi, Andrés Benedek,
Emma Beseghi, Giorgio Camuffo, Eugene Ch'ng, Pilar
Chías Navarro, Alessandra Cirafici, Manuel de Miguel,
Agostino de Rosa, Antonella Di Luggo, Edoardo Dotto,
Francesca Fatta, Maria Linda Falcidieno, Roberto
Farnè, Franz Fischnaller, Marco Gaiani, Fabrizio Gay,
Andrea Giordano, Nicole Goettschi Danesi, Nicolás
Gutierrez, Robert Harland, Ricard Huerta, Elena
Ippoliti, Pedro António Janeiro, Francesco Maggio,
Stuart Medley, Raffaele Milani, Andrea Pinotti, Paola
Puma, Fabio Quici, Ana Margarida Ramos, Michael
Renner, Pier Cesare Rivoltella, Pier Giuseppe Rossi,
Rossella Salerno, Maurizio Unali, Tomaso Vecchi,
Carlo Vinti, Ornella Zerlenga

PUBLISHERS

> on line version:

Department of Education studies "Giovanni Maria Bertin"

<http://www.edu.unibo.it/>



> print version:

PUBLICA. Sharing Knowledge

www.publicapress.it

PUBLICA

SHARING KNOWLEDGE

SPONSORSHIP



Freie Universität Bozen
Libera Università di Bolzano
Universitè Lìedia de Bulsan

img journal is a on line, open access and peer reviewed interdisciplinary scientific journal.

Articles, excluding keynote essays, are subject to double blind peer review.

img journal publishes manuscripts in English and, optionally, in mother language (published in only-text format on website), and use APA citation style.

The linguistic editing of articles is the responsibility of the authors.

Open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license.

img-network ©

<https://img-journal.unibo.it/>

www.img-network.it/img-journal/

journal@img-network.it

Imaging and Imagery in Architecture

edited by
Alessandro Luigini

ESSAYS

Luca Armellino
Justyna Borucka
Fabio Colonnese
Salvatore Damiano
Michela De Domenico
Victoria Ferraris
Carla Ferreyra
Giancarlo Gola
Alessia Garozzo
Roberto Gigliotti
Pieter Greyvensteyn
Gaia Leandri
Francesco Maggio
Domenico Mediatì
Asma Mehan
Sandro Parrinello
Francesca Picchio
Paola Raffa
Michela Rossi
Anna Sanseverino
Jakub Szczepański
Fabio Testaì

ESSAY 126/08

COMICS

ARCHITECTURE

DRAWING

SKYSCRAPER

NEW MEDIA

The city and architecture are often the protagonists of drawn narratives in which spatial connotation wants to be an element of contextualization and recognizability, but also of externalization of existential places. They appear in comics reshaped on real and fantastic lifestyles that combine narrative invention and architectural representation. The research takes into consideration three large stylistic/expressive groupings of comics, to then carry out a parallel

analysis of three large cities, coinciding with the same contexts of origin of the comics. To identify new scenarios in the field of architectural representation and visual communication.

In the narrative layout of comics, architecture assumes the role of iconic figure, whose meaning is expressed through the separation and cohesion of the sign and refers to a place understood as a defined space-time element.

INTRODUCTION

There is a close correspondence between architecture and comics, this relationship goes through the mediation of the sign, a privileged communication tool. Because of their visual rapidity, comics have always been considered an exceptional vehicle of communication, for complex themes and concepts, for social, political or simply fantastic messages, aimed at a large and diversified audience.

In his essay *Comics and sequential art* (1985), the creator of the graphic novel, Will Eisner, defines comic as 'sequential art' meaning it as the medium that uses the proper apposition of image and text in an ordered sequence. The comic thus becomes an expression of concepts, abstract and not, that through graphic representation make tangible the narrative dimension of the sequences and the introspective of the author.

The topic of architectural representation in comics is widely treated in various disciplinary fields, in particular it concerns the fields of semiotics and visual communication. The aim of this work is to identify future scenarios in the field of architectural representation and communication. In consideration of the evolution of new immersive media, through the analysis of the structure of comics, which the drawing phase has in common with architecture, how it is possible to propose new ways of representing architecture to make it, through visual codes more expressive and understandable than the comic strip more understandable to its users.

The city and architecture appear in comics reshaped on real or imaginary lifestyles, moving between narrative and representation of an invention. Since comics are a very common *medium*, they make the language of architecture more accessible and sometimes charge it with iconic meanings and dreamlike seductions. The detail of a famous architecture or an urban view is enough to make a city recognizable, whether they are fantastic, utopian or impossible stories, or tales about existing places.

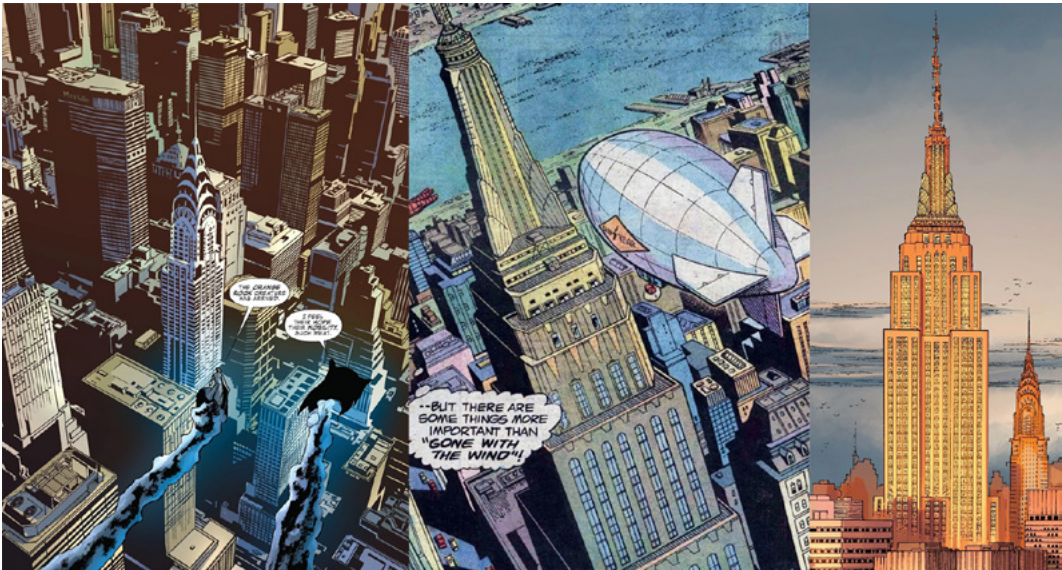


Fig. 1 Millar M. and Ahearn J. (writers), Hitch B. and Edwards N. (pencilers), Currie A. and Smith C. (inkers), Mounts P. and Sotomayor C. (colourists), Wooton R. (letterer), Chrysler Building, New York, 2009 (in: *Fantastic Four*, Vol. 1 #568); Conway C. (writer), Andru R. (penciler), Giordano D. (inker), Serpe J. (colourist), Saladino G. (letterer), Empire State Building, 1976, New York. (*Superman vs. The Amazing Spider-Man*, Vol. 1 #1); Williams R. (writer), Walker B. (penciler), Livesay J. (inker), Sotomayor C. (colourist), Caramagna J. (letterer), Empire State Building, 2012, New York. (*Avenging Spider-Man Annual*, Vol. 1 #1).

The city and architecture are often the protagonists of drawn narratives, in which the spatial connotation wants to be an element of contextualization and recognizability, but also of externalization of existential places.

The identity of a place passes, among other things, through the recognition of its figurative characteristics and architecture represents an important point among all. "The operation of symbolization does not require that the city be physically known: it is the point of view that determines the physiognomy of the object described" (Corti, 1987, p. 52) ¹. It is the collective memory that attributes a meaning to reality and defines its symbolic value.

Skyscrapers and the tallest buildings in cities represent a significant symbolic-figurative element in urban space. Their considerable size ratio between the base and height makes them easily identifiable and recognizable; from a distance, they become landmarks for cities; from interior, the view dominates large parts of the panorama.

In comics, they play an identifying role for real places and evocative fantastic locations that are nonetheless connected to the real world (Figure 1).

FROM CONCEPT TO THE ARCHITECTURE IN THE COMICS

The process of drawing is an act of translating the visual world that surrounds us, codified in shapes, lines, surfaces, colours, but also an expression of an inner world through which a new vision is created, whose roots lie in the imaginary.

For Vasari (Vasari, 1991) the drawing originates in the mind and then passes to the hand, it is the expression of an intellectual fact that clarifies an idea and then deliver it. In the drawing, as in art, the representation of a scene or object reflects the research for an abstraction of the essential characteristics and qualities of the objects, which unconsciously mimics the function of the visual brain. Artists such as Cezanne, Mondrian and Kandinskij, in their artistic research, they look for translation codes to identify the essential elements of the forms, using mechanisms similar to our visual brain.

Even in architectural representation, drawing is expressed through a codified language, that orders lines, surfaces, colours in conventional views such as plans, elevations, sections, axonometric views, perspectives to define otherwise invisible places that become architectural substance through drawing.

The recent evolution of architectural language towards a semantic form that is close to the language of communication has also shifted the research for the representation of architecture towards new forms of contamination with other media, such as music, design, virtual reality, cinema, comics and the visual arts in general, a link that the progress of digitalization is becoming more and more distinct. Among these media codes, architecture and comics have a strong attraction, not only because they share the language of the 'pencil' but also because both are interested in the city in all its representations, realistic or dreamlike.

BETWEEN DESIGN AND COMIC

Architects' interest in comics developed simultaneously with Pop-Art trends, beginning with the English group Archi-

gram which in the 1960s to express a radical image of architecture, they contaminate their utopian visions with graphic codes from science fiction comics.

Rem Koolhaas has also repeatedly drawn on the codes of comics, among others the magazine *Content* 1996, or Eurallille project for the city of Lille in France, illustrated as a novel to make it more understandable to its users.

In 2005 Jean Nouvel set up the exhibition *Louisiana Manifesto* at the Louisiana Museum, Copenhagen, in which he chose to dematerialize his work, narrating it through printed paper and drawings on the wall. The exhibition catalogs are piled up like sheets of newspaper on the ground floor, and in the other rooms a sequence of drawings and comics along the entire length of the walls tell the author's manifesto.

Afterwards, with mainly communicative values, architectural comics are developed; real comic books useful to show future users of the project how the transformation of places, uses and habits will happen.

These include the work of the architects Jaques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, who publish the *Metrobasel* (De Meuron & Herzog, 2009) mixing the visual codes of comic strips with montages on maps and photographs, or those of the Danish group *BIG*, which uses the image of its founder, Bjarke Ingels, in the book *Yes is more* (Ingels, 2009), to represent the birth and development of their pragmatic-utopian projects, through renderings, photos, infographics, schemes and balloons, thus mixing the codes of the comic with those of the representation of architecture (Figure 2).

Other architects have tried to renew the conventional language of architectural representation, through contamination with styles, colours, point of view, and the same presence of characters from comics, to encourage greater interaction with the user. also through the use of a semantic code typically of comics, such as the closure, i.e the interactive mechanism activated in the reader's mind to reorganise the missing elements between one strip and another, according to a space-time reconstruction proposed by the author but

Fig. 2 Avril F, de Loustal J., Juillart A., Gotting J-C., *La Maison de Verre*, 2007-2008; Ingels B., *Yes is more*, 2009, pp. 26-27; de Meuron, P., Herzog, J., *Metrobasel*, 2009, cover.



implemented by the reader: “space is to a comic what time is to a movie” (McCloud, 2006, p. 15), which brings the representation of architecture closer to the realm of storytelling.

These include the experiments carried out in 1995 by Joost Swarte, Danish illustrator and comic artist, for the integrated design of the *Toneelshuur Theater* building in Harlem, near Amsterdam, together with the architect Henk Döll of the Dutch group Mecanoo, or those of Rem Koolhaas, who uses the codes of comics in some of his projects, such as the Eurailille, or the Chinese CCTV Tower, with the aim of making it easier for the citizens who will use it, the understanding of the city on the net, still very conceptual and abstract.

The interest of architects in comics is contrasted with the presence of architecture in comics, which has been an essential element since its birth. It assumes different functions and roles both at the compositional level, and according to the type of stories. It is interesting to observe how, in these contexts, the representation of architecture assumes ‘narrative’ contents, thanks to the presence of two elements usually excluded from the conventional figuration of architecture: man and time.

Many authors have been fascinated by architecture and often, in their works, the settings, from a simple background to the stories, become the undisputed protagonists.

Just to name a few, the Japanese Katsuhiro Ōtomo, creator of *Akira* and *Domu*; the American David Mazzucchelli, author of the graphic novel *Asterios Polyp* and of the transposition into graphic novel of *Glass City*, taken from the New York trilogy by Paul Auster; the Belgian Francois Schuiten, together with Benoit Peeters is the author of the series of *Les Cites Obscures*; Jean Giraud Moebius, starting from the *Incal* and *Meta*-baron sagas, is able to influencing much of the imagination of science fiction cinema; Jimenez Ai, creator of *Citizens of no place*. An architectural graphic novel; the Dutch Johan Swarte, author of *Is that all there is?*; Milo Manara, author of *Escape from Piranesi*, inspired by Giovanni Battista Piranesi architectural atmospheres.

To give some examples of comic works in which architecture becomes iconic within the narrative, between 2007 and 2008 the French illustrators François Avril, Jacques de Loustal, Andre Juillard and Jean-Claude Götting published *La Maison de Verre*, a collection of serigraphs with which they illustrate the building built between 1928 and 1931 designed by Pierre Chareau.

All the rooms are animated by the presence of characters, placed in the middle of the frame, but distant from the interest of the designer and from the eye of the observer. In the narrative scheme of comics, architecture assumes the role of an iconic figure that refers to a place understood as a defined space-time element. It is the 'cultural-mental' imagination, not direct knowledge, that determines the role of the figure. The framing plane, the result of the narrative invention of the comic strip, transcribes the figure, and therefore the architecture, in scenic settings in which the reproduction of real space becomes a representative and interpretative model, not only functional, but also emotional and cultural (Figure 3).

The importance of some well known buildings in comics and the construction of stories that take place outside or inside them reveal a remarkable process of unveiling the potential of those spaces over time. The building returns several times in the same story, in different shots, in some fragments

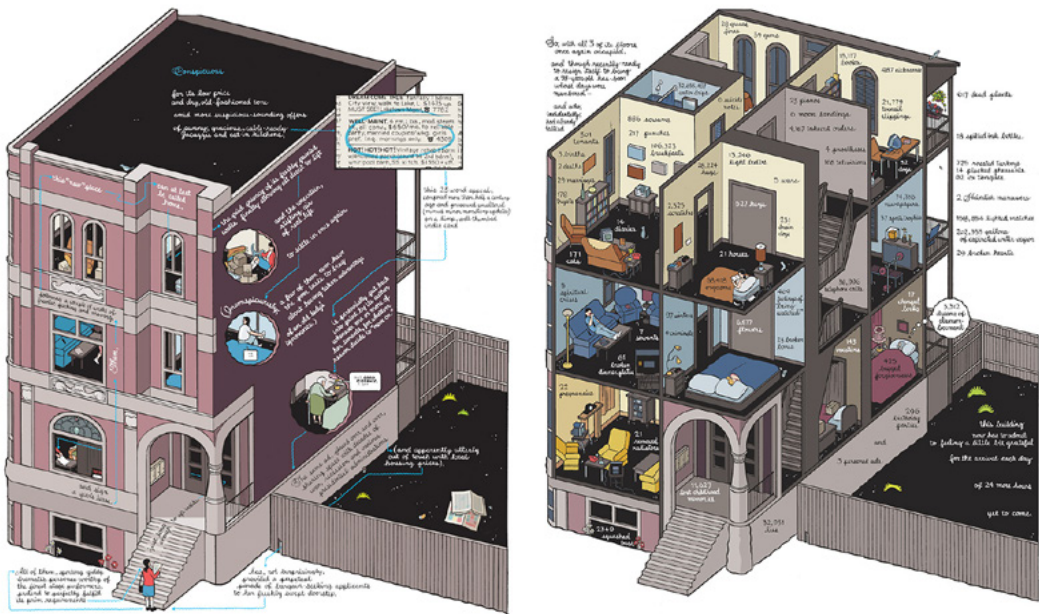


Fig. 3 Ware C., *Building Stories*, 2012.

is shown each time from new point of view, in different moments and scenarios. The comic thus becomes an expedient to put the buildings into action and to get out of the immobility of the single image. The strip give back to architecture the possibility of expressing itself in hyper-reality, enhanced by the possibility of overwriting the images with more times and more spaces.

Building Stories, by Chris Ware published in 2012 is a cardboard box which, once opened, takes the reader into the complex story of an apartment building. Books, booklets, posters, billboards and newspapers make up the fourteen different devices that the author chooses to intertwine the stories of the protagonists, leaving each element autonomous and at the same time complementary to the others.

The complexity of the reading kit is reflected in the pages of the story fragments themselves. The building is almost represented from the same point of view, an axonometry outlining its prospectus, sometimes without walls, exposing the internal life, wanting to imitate an axonometric cross-section.

In Ware multiple stories are stratified, set in different times and spaces and portrayed with different ways: scenes glimpsed from the windows are added to the image of the building seen from the outside; they spy on the interiors through holes in the walls and, again, to all this is added the story of short text extracts that seem to reproduce, in their path, the typical design of water pipes.

ICONIC ARCHITECTURES IN DRAWN NARRATIVES

It was considered useful to identify three major stylistic/expressive groups of comics, and then carry out a parallel analysis of three metropolises, coinciding with the same contexts of origin of the comics, and in particular to identify the most iconic elements of the skylines of these cities, the skyscrapers.

American comics represent one of the highest expressions of this graphic art; born at the end of the 19th century, it recognizes Yellow Kid by Richard Outcalt (1894) as the first example of modern American comics.

In the years following the World War I, superheroes are the undisputed protagonists of the main comic publishers such as *Marvel Comics* and *DC Comics*. The city of New York, since the 1960s, has become the favorite place for the heroes of the *House of Ideas*, including Spiderman, the Fantastic Four and Captain America. *DC Comics*, on the other hand, even if the settings are not in the real cities, they refer to the urban configuration of the emerging American metropolises: Gotham City for Batman, Metropolis for Superman and Central City for Flash.

The new skyscrapers of Manhattan become the preferred location of the drawn scene. Each hero has a direct relationship to the skyscraper which becomes a means to a purpose, a place of interest, a home that transcends his classic global vision. The vision of the skyscraper is expressed in the pages of American comics through the use of scenarios contextualized with the rest of the city, where everything is bigger and every-



Fig. 4 Bendis B. M. (writer), Bagley M. (penciler), Hanna S. (inker), Ponsor J. (colourist), Petit C. (letterer), Empire State Building, 2015, New York. (*Ultimate End*, Vol. 1 #5); Smith K. (writer), Quesada J. (penciler), Palmiotti J. (inker), Studios A. (colourist), Agraphotis L. (letterer), Chrysler Building, New York, 1998 (in: *Daredevil*, Vol. 2 #2); Slott D. (writer), Caselli S. (penciler and inker), Martin Jr. F. (colourist), Caramagna J. (letterer), Empire State Building, 2011, New York. (*Amazing Spider-Man*, Vol. 1 #673).

thing is virtually possible; almost a migration of the American dream on paper-and-ink, revealing a desire for redemption on the part of the protagonist of the work and the reader himself.

The Chrysler Building (1929-1930), designed by William Van Alen in the Art Deco style and the Empire State Building (1930-1931) which, at 443.2 meters, stands out over the New York skyline, are the undisputed protagonists of the narrative concept (Figure 4). The extraordinary heights see them as the scenes of fantastic aerial battles above real city.

In *The Boys* (2006-2012) by Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson, a group of anti-heroes paid by CIA are tasked to combat the world's worst threat: Superheroes. The operational base of the investigation is Buckminster Fuller's Flatiron Building (1902), whose neo-Renaissance features are represented in the smallest details to indicate exact location in which the story takes place.

In Japanese comics, the *manga*, the city and the architecture are often the protagonists of graphic stories. The ability of the Japanese people to globally understand a narrative based on drawn, probably inherited from the ideogram writing system, leads the *mangaka* (manga authors) to structure the scene through a dynamic method of narration with balloons, onomatopoeia and drawings that come out of their frame.



Fig. 5 From left to right: CLAMP (writers and pencilers), Tokyo Tower, 1993, Tokyo. (*Magic Knight Rayearth*, Vol. 1, page 10); Kagami T. (writer), Yamamoto Y. (penciler), Tokyo Tower, 2022, Tokyo. (*Seraph of the End: Vampire Reign*, Vol. 29, p. 1); Ray Y. (writer and penciler), Tokyo Tower, 2018, Tokyo. (*Tamamo-chan's a Fox!*, Vol. 1, p. 76).

In *The Quest for the Missing Girl* (1999), the Japanese capital's most famous neighborhoods, Akihabara, Shinjuku, and Shibuya, are depicted chaotically and without a soul where perspectives place the reader in state of crushing compared to buildings. The alleys and skyscrapers of Tokyo, the crowded Shibuya Station, the Shopping Centre Shibuya109, designed by architect Takeyama Minoru in the 1970s are represented in perspectives from below to accentuate the protagonist's sense of sorrow

The saga of Araki Hirohiko *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* (since 1987) tells the stories of the Joestar family over a period of more than a hundred years, reconstructing different places and settings. In the third part (the saga currently consists of eight part) titled *Stardust Crusaders*, the Tokyo Tower is shown in the opening scene as an unmistakable sign of the spatial location of the narrative. Designed by Naitō Tachū at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, the building, is represented with a perspective from below that emphasises its upward sweep and affirms its role as the city's main symbol.

The Tokyo Tower (Figure 5) is chosen by CLAMP as the real-life setting in *Magic Knight Rayearth* (1993-1995). The three Japanese students are on a trip to Tokyo and, near the Tower, are catapulted into the mysterious world of Cephire. The

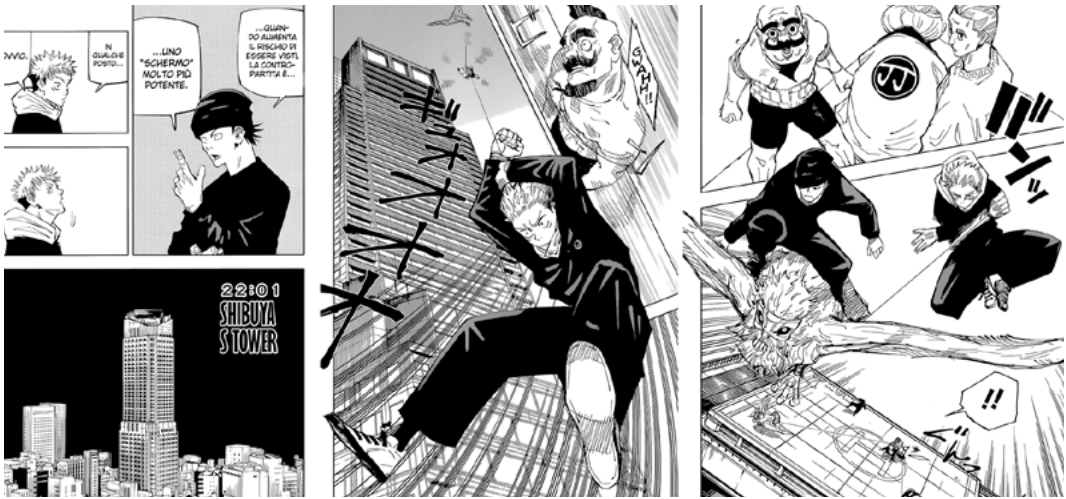


Fig. 6 From left to right: Akutami G. (writer and penciler), Shibuya Scramble Square, 2020, Tokyo. (*Jujutsu Kaisen*, Vol. 11, p. 113); Akutami G. (writer and penciler), East side of the Shibuya Scramble Square, 2020, Tokyo. (*Jujutsu Kaisen*, Vol. 11, page 120); Akutami G. (writer and penciler), top view of the Shibuya Scramble Square, 2020, Tokyo. (*Jujutsu Kaisen*, Vol. 11, p. 116).

futuristic architecture becomes a turning point between a real present and a fantastic future. The building is illustrated with perspective from below or in the distance which merge with the flashing of the sun.

In Akutami Gege's latest work *Jujutsu Kaisen* (since 2018) by the story revolves around the protagonist Yuji Itadori, who accidentally swallow a cursed artifact and becomes possessed by the curse inside of it.

In one of the narratives, titled *The Shibuya Incident*, the well-known Tokyo district becomes the scene of clashes and action, where the representation of the Shibuya Scramble Square, whose east tower was completed in 2019, make possible a greater immersion and a sense of realism for the reader (Figure 6).

Starting with an initial view into the distance, in which the building stands out from all the others, the flight is then shifted to its top; the bird's eye perspective allows a view of Shibuya district and the top of the skyscraper, revealing a part that would not normally be seen.

In Italy, in the page of *Commissario Spada*, Milan is presented as a noir city, with streets, buildings and views that introduce the reader to a gloomy atmosphere, a mirror of a troubled time. The character was born on the pages of *Il Giornalino*

in 1970 by Gianluigi Gonano and the artist Gianni De Luca, a revolutionary author due to the continuous graphic research for innovative solutions for the composition of the page, such as the sequence of narrative movements on a single board.

The Torre Velasca appears in *Il commissario Spada. Il mondo di Sgrinfia*, from the 1975, with a rarefied vision in the fog, that reduces an image anchored to daily life, to a melancholic sense of solitude.

Paolo Bacilieri's comics, including *Tramezzino* (2018), *Fun* (2014), and *More Fun* (2016), are also set in Milan, where the city itself becomes the protagonist through its architecture. In *Tramezzino* and *More Fun*, the metropolis is represented by the well-known architectures designed by famous architects of the early 20th century: the residential building in Via Ippolito Nievo by Luigi Caccia Dominioni, built between 1955 and 1957; the Torre al Parco by Vico Magistretti and Franco Longoni built in 1953; the Torre Velasca built between 1955 and 1957 designed by the BBPR team; the Pirelli Skyscraper by Gio Ponti and Pier Luigi Nervi from 1965. These urban icons are characterized by the defined sign of the architectural technical drawings, like those included in the project board.

Even though the story of *Fun* and the following *More Fun*, focuses exclusively on the creation a dissemination of the crossword puzzle and freely inspired by Stefano Bartezzaghi's work *L'orizzonte verticale*, it is already clear from the title how the architectures of Milan or those of New York are equivalent with the narrative concept as they cause its events.

BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE AND COMICS

The meeting point between comics and architecture lies mainly in the drawing, i.e. in the form of representation of events.

The drawings for a *Città Futurista* (1914) by Antonio Sant'Elia (1888-1916), the *Plan Voisin* (1922-1925) or the *Ville Contemporaine* (1922) by Le Corbusier (1887-1965) can be considered experiences in which architectural representation

seems to escape from a formal technical-descriptive dimension to open up towards a narrative component (Figure 7).

The use of clear and fast lines, with few verbal notes, translate the creative process into an immediate, non-technical and easily understandable communication tool. The act of drawing arises as a translation of the visual world, codified in shapes, lines, surfaces and colors, but also as an expression of an inner world that generates a new vision whose origins are rooted in the imagination.

Between 1960 and the mid-1970s, *Archigram*, *Superstudio* and *Archizoom*, among others, started a process of reviewing design practice. Starting from the graphic experiments of the archi-comics, to show the future users the transformation of places and new ways of living.

Archigram publish the *Amazing Archigram* series and *Archizooms*, to present the AEO chair by Cassina (1973), make a comic in which the protagonist is the chair itself.

The perspective views and the axonometries, in the construction of the pages of a comic relate the architecture to the design phase. Comic drawing becomes precise, almost technical, when it has to build settings of real architecture and cities, but also when dealing with imaginary worlds.

Comics as a ways of communicating architecture has the ability to simulate real spatial experiences. The codes of representation of architecture appear to be too restrictive for a social dissemination.

The well know letter to Madame Meyer by Le Corbusier (1925), is a comic page, with strips arranged in two columns and five lines. Each cartoon has a short written commentary in the form of a caption or ballon (Figure 8).

The layout is a further aspect that unites the communication of architecture and that of comics. The board of architectural project present boxes within plants, elevations, sections, views and geometric schemes are arranged with metric scales, captions and legends; in the comic the strip delimits the cartoons but not the content as what happens outside has the same intensity as what happens inside.

Fig. 7 Sant'Elia A., *Casamenti con ascensori*, 1914; Sant'Elia A., *Studio per una centrale elettrica*, 1914; Sant'Elia A., *Progetto per stazione a Milano*, 1914.



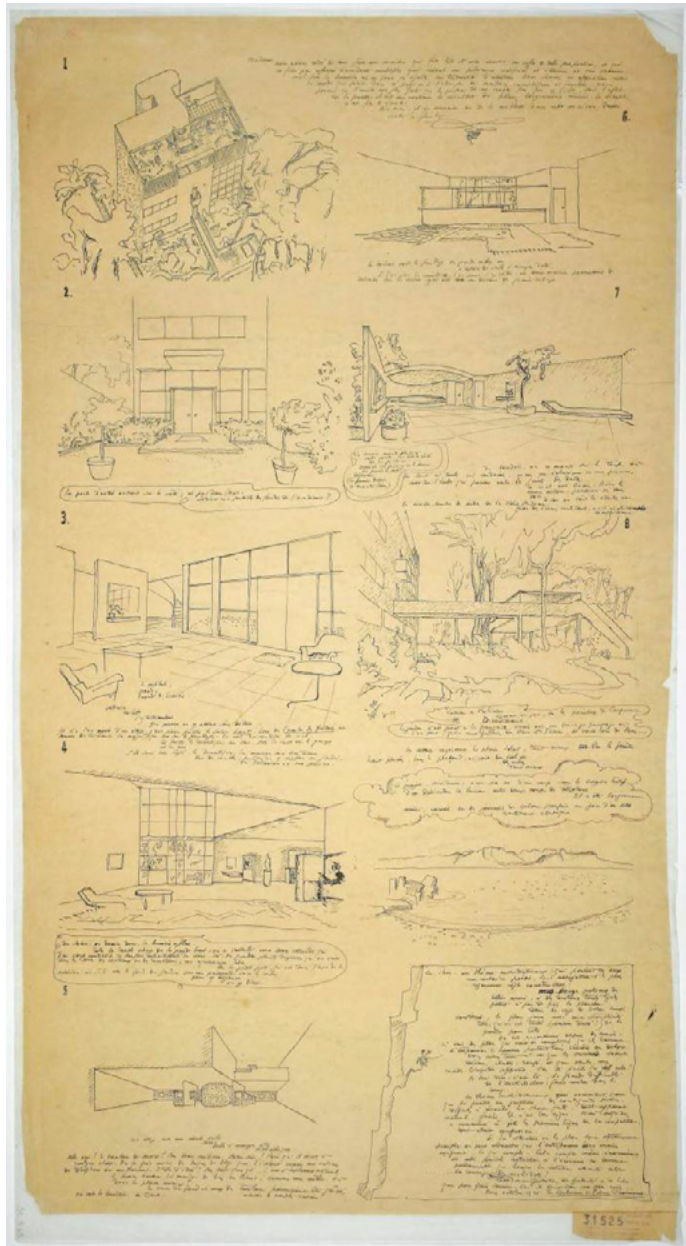
DRAWN VISIONS

The comics use signs and symbols as the preferred means of communication: graphic signs are combined with verbal signs to create an original figurative language. Sign recognition becomes the basic means of communication: the reader accepts the visual message and attributes meaning to the sign through a mnemonic and cultural process.

For Groensteen, a scholar of contemporary comics, the comic is a linguistic form based on the relationship of a multiplicity of images whose meaning is expressed through the separation and cohesion of the sign units (Groensteen, 2012).

Without going into the structural semiotics of Greimas (1974) or Eco (2002), the recognition of the images produced by the sign and the meaning that they convey becomes the main condition of narrative communication.

Fig. 8 Le Corbusier, *Letter to Madame Meyer*, 1925.



Moreover:

cultural interfaces in their turn inherit the principles of text organization [...]. One of these principles is a page, a rectangular surface containing a limited amount of information, designed to be accessed in some order, and having a particular relationship to other pages (Manovich, 2001, p. 74)

The bond that holds together the signs of the represented object and the verbal expressions, or rather the interaction between verbal codes and visual codes in comics, is linked to the linear or translinear sequence of the strip.

In the narrative layout of comics, architecture takes on the role of an iconic figure that refers to a place understood as a defined space-time element.

One wonders what affects the imagination collective so as to transform the real space of a city in place of the mind [...]

A symbolizing operation it does not necessarily require the city to be physically known (Corti, 1987, p. 52)

It is the cultural-mindly imaginary, not direct knowledge, that determines the role of the figure.

The framing plane, outcome of the narrative invention of the comic, transcribes the figure and thus, the architecture, to the scenic settings in which the reproduction of the real space becomes a representative and interpretative model, not only functional, but also and especially emotional and cultural.

Scott McCloud identifies the basic steps for properly drawing a comic in six famous panels (McCloud, 2006, p. 10): the narrative 'choice of moment'; the 'choice of frame' in which he suggests "choose the right distance and angle to view those moment [...] and where to trim them"; the 'choice of image' which must necessarily fit in the frame; the 'choice of word' that must be connected to the representation; the 'choice of flow' of reading in the sequence of panel; the last frame schematically summarizes the five moments and warns of the effectiveness of method from which deviating would lead to a 'confusing mess'.

Expressive communication takes place through a rigid grid in which the combinations of text and figure determine the spatial field of the scene, whether it is declined in single frame,

in a series, or in a more extensive combination. The frames are concatenated into a sequence of images that has at least two orders of reading: the linear sequence between images and the one in which actions take place in non-sequential areas of the page that are simultaneously made accessible to the gaze (Floch, 1977, p. 190) and in which acts of interaction take place between the narrative and the graphic medium.

The creative model, to quote Ernest Gombrich (2008) does not spring directly from one's own imagination, rather it refers to models from 'countless centers of culture', from which creativity and originality spring (Barthes, 1984).

In the reader's imaginary, the recognition of the architecture refers to a real place, that is transformed into the creation of a new one, while the temporal place is perceived through the stylistic features of the author.

The Chrysler Building in New York plays a role in the fantastic narratives of the superheroes not only as a scenic backdrop to the urban setting, as in the case of *Daredevil* or in the more abstract axonometric form of the Manhattan of the Fantastic Four, but lends itself to fantastic manipulations becoming protagonist of the scene. Like Rem Koolhaas's *Delirious New York*, whose first edition dates back to 1978, the city of skyscrapers even if manipulated and altered, manages to express the culture of overload and the technology of the fantastic. The physical deformation of the character also underlines the communicative/emotional value of the narrative.

More related to the technical representation of architecture are the draw of the Empire State Building in *Amazing Spider-Man* and *Avenging Spider-man* whose elevation shows the exact dimensions and architectural details of the famous skyscraper. Even when the perspective is heavily distorted like in *Gold a Treasure Hunt Through Time*, the skyscraper remains a meticulous and defined graphic detail.

An important aspect assumes the meaning of the architecture within the narrative. Akutami's Shibuya Scramble Square, for example, has an evocative meaning, changing from a real place to the scene of an imaginary battle.

On the other hand, the Tokyo Tower by Yuuki Ray or by the team CLAMP acquires an identifying meaning, also through the indication of its colours. The use of perspective, where depth gives a more realistic configuration of the urban environment, allows for a realistic and immersive mimesis of the reader. Views from such a distance that they can be viewed in their entirety lead to a memory process in which the figure becomes the visual reference of a particular context.

The two-dimensional representation shifts the level of narration towards a symbolic interpretation, in particular of architecture. The Torre Velasca in Bacilieri's Milan becomes the chest in which events take place. Always portrayed within a defined frame, it is represented on the projection plane parallel to the facades, even when these are represented foreshortened or in urban perspectives with a raised point of view. The graphic style recalls that of the architects of Italian rationalism and each scene seems to originate from the BBPR project board.

The architecture is presented in figuration, in which the type of representation and the technique used become functional to the narrative communication, even the characters are flattened on the representation plane and respect the rules of visual composition between figure and background, foreground and background, horizon line, etc.

The understanding process is ensured by the sequential drawing which visually concretizes the narrative, through the succession of shots, in which the architecture is recognizable through the conventional codes of representation.

Architecture represents the part of the lived world, of inhabited places, of everyday life. It becomes the element of the research for an identity that requires a recognizable connection with the memory of the real world especially when the narrative becomes dreamlike.

The graphic forms, not only the line and the technique, the underlying grids and the verbal forms constitute the composition of the narrative message of the frames. Generally the scene is presented as a descriptive system, whether the representation refers to a real or invented place, in any

case, being a representation it does not coincide with reality but re-proposes itself in the reader's imaginary as a possibility of reality (Dotto, 2020, p. 156).

Comic scenes, the result from connection between text and image, visual and linguistic codes, are formed on several levels of communication: the citation of elements which leads to a mnemonic connection with other events (physical, literary, etc.) outside the history; graphic information, which belongs to different categories (balloons, drawings or onomatopoeic expressions) and which must be decoded by the reader; the type of representation that stimulates concentration on some elements placed according to a careful hierarchy and which refer to the communicative paradigms of visual perception; the contextualization of the story; the repetition of the scene in which the change of some details leads to an increase in the expressiveness (Figure 9).

POV: POINTS OF VIEW AND COMPOSITIVE PROCESSES

The study and analysis of some comic has allowed to implement a synoptic and comparative vision of the architecture figuration.

The criteria for choosing the example was that of the exclusion of similar elements, of the type of color spot representation and buildings that no longer exist.

The comic page is intended as an architectural representation sheet. The building and the city, extracted from the narrative context, were analyzed using methods and tools of architectural representation (Figure 10).

The first analysis concerns the architectural figure and how this is represented in the graphic context. It has widely emerged that the design of the strip evokes situations that can be found in real life, to allow for greater identification of the reader within the narrative plot. The perspective view, with more or less balanced points of view, seems to be the type of representation most used by comic artists. It is precisely the

Fig. 9 From left to right: Bacilieri P. (writer and penciler), Velasca Tower, 2018, Milan. (*Tramezzino*, p. 1); Bacilieri P. (writer and penciler), Velasca Tower, 2007, Milan. (*La Magnifica Desolazione*); Bacilieri P. (writer and penciler), Velasca Tower, 2020, Milan. (*Ciclamino*, short story inside the December issue of *Linus Extra - Speciale Giro d'Italia 2020*); Bacilieri P. (writer and penciler), *Desolation Row*, 2021.

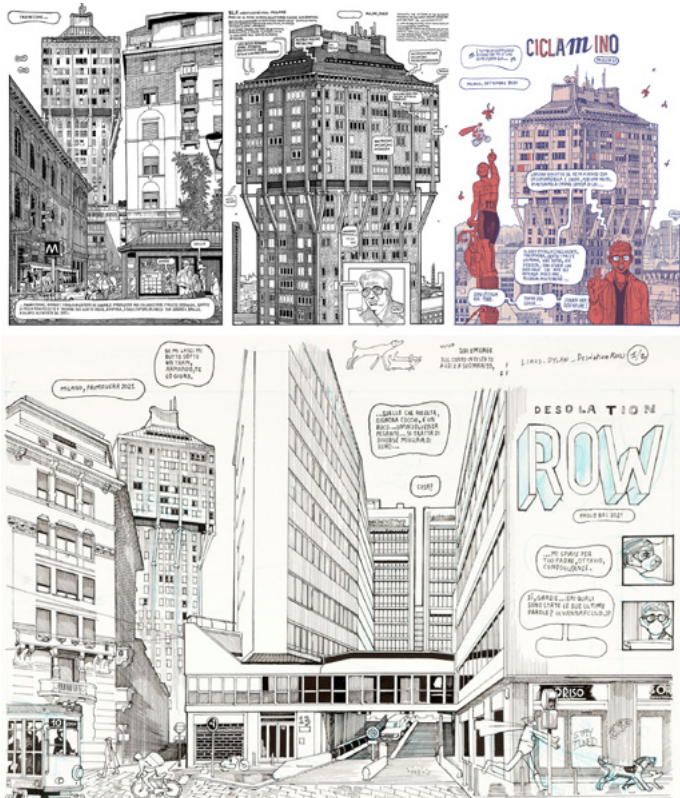


Fig. 10 Bacilieri P., *Tramezzino*, 2019, p. 32; Milan, Via Ippolito Nievo 28/a; *Fun*, 2017, p. 5; Gillender Building, 1900, photo.



perspective view that camouflages the setting of places and spaces as perceived by an observer. By superimposing the comic drawing, the positions of the horizontal and vertical axes and the angle of rotation were established. The width of the focal length in the camera settings makes it possible to determine the position in three-dimensional space in agreement and coherence with the view represented in the comic. Once the points of view were identified and fixed, the high quality

renderings were made. Two types of drawing were generated: one with realistic textures applied to the elevations of the buildings, to make a visual correspondence between the drawing and the model; a further monochromatic model takes up the urban context in which the building is inserted. It was thus possible to proceed to determine the position in real space of the architecture represented in the comic. A further analysis was conducted by marking the axes of perspective, from which the perspective vanishing lines and the horizon line.

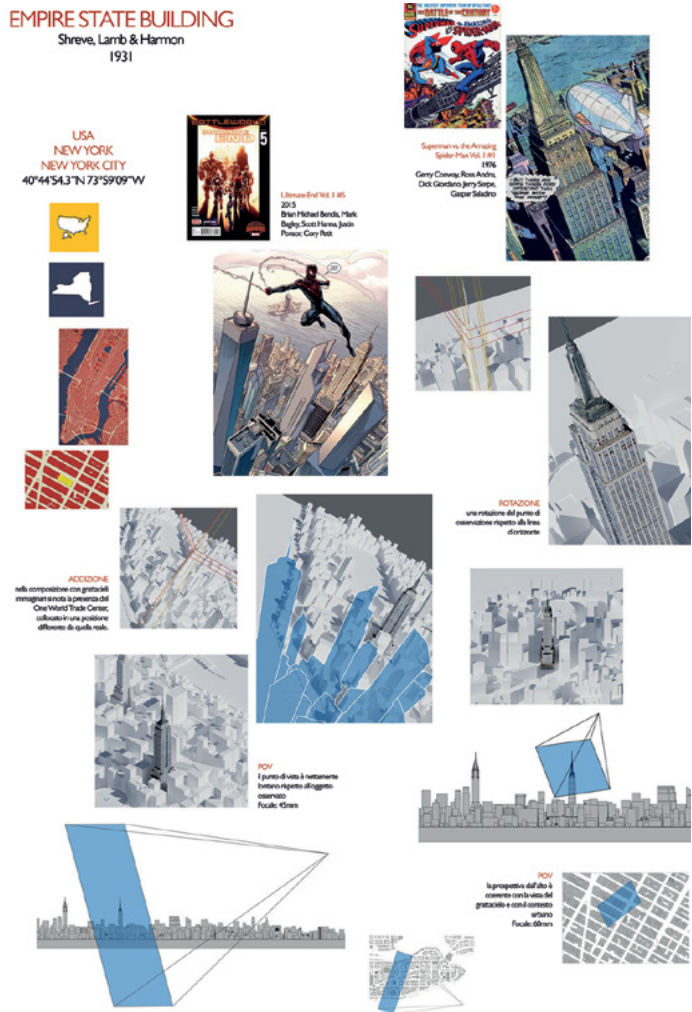
These elaborations highlighted some details in the construction of the space of each comic representation. The research of the point of view has provided some relevant information: the position of the observer, the figurative composition of the sheet and also the graphic techniques. Two types of settings have been detected: a static view and a dynamic one.

When the point of view is fixed, the representation of the architecture is accurate, proportions and dimensions are respected, and particular attention is paid to the representation of the detail of openings, mouldings, spiers, etc. In the case of a dynamic point of view, the figure lends itself to communicating the sense of movement even by modifying or distorting some features.

Furthermore, the choice of point of view establishes the perception of the scene, a tall building is even more slender if represented from a lowered point of view, on the contrary the point of view from above tends to compress the real dimensions.

The Empire State Building, in *Ultimate End* Vol. 1 #5 (Figure 11) is represented through an exaggerated perspective aberration from above; in the composition with imaginary skyscrapers we note the presence of *One World Trade Center*, however located in a different position from the real one. The Empire State Building in *Spiderman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man* Vol. 1 #1, we can see a rotation of the observation point with respect to the horizon line; the perspective from

Fig. 11 Empire State Building, New York City: analysis and visual reconstruction (digital elaboration by Fabio Testaì).

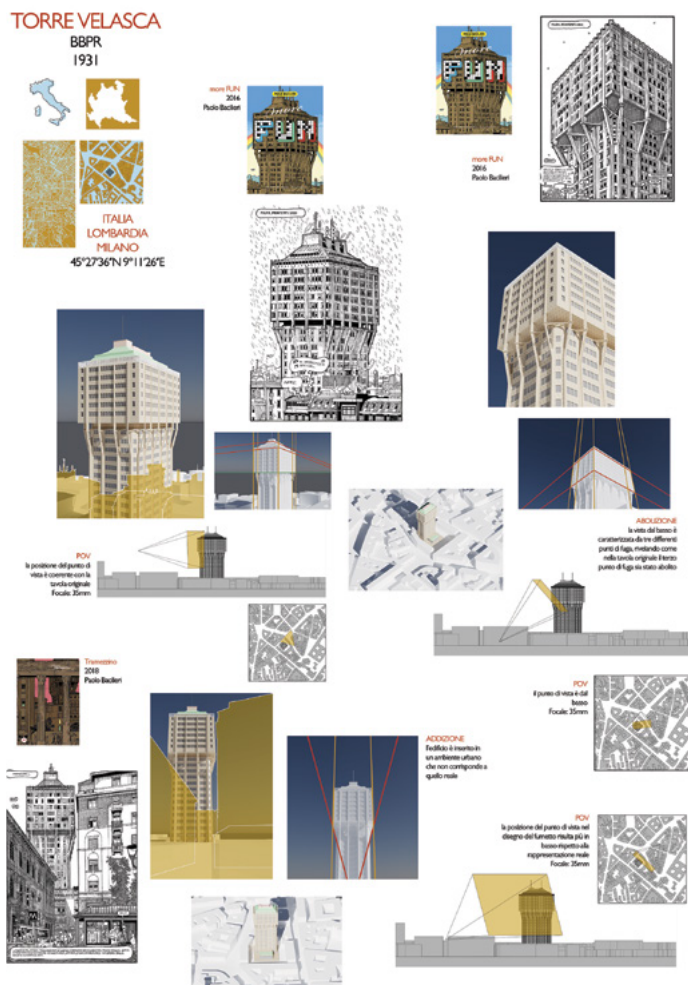


above is congruous and coherent with the view of the skyscraper and with the urban context.

In *More Fun* (Figure 12) the first the representation of the Torre Velasca shows a two-point perspective coherent for the height of the point of view and the perspective view.

Another representation shows the view from below, it is characterized by three different vanishing points, revealing how in the comic it was decided to represent the vertical lines in a straight manner, abolishing the third vanishing and modifying the correct graphic restitution.

Fig. 12 Torre Velasca, Milan: analysis and visual reconstruction (digital elaboration by Fabio Testai).



CONCLUSIONS

In comics, tall urban buildings and skyscrapers are generally inserted for the recognition of the narrative contexts. Their inclusion in the stories represents not only the real context but the identification with imaginative and emotional contexts.

The representation of the architecture, in addition to the stylistic code of the author, depends on the cultural context in which it is inserted.

In the *manga*, even if Japan is launched towards technological advancement and overcoming, however, the sense of traditionality persists in the collective imagination, architecture appears as an element of difference between the two worlds.

In Europe, and especially in Italy, being rooted in art forms makes it possible to weave narrative interweavings between museums, historic cities and ancient architecture.

The trend is that of a faithful representation of reality in which the language of architecture participates in the graphic composition of the scene. It is the architecture itself that orders the graphic register of the comics.

In the United States the inclination is that of the 'great' and 'all is possible'; the scenes take place on the upper floors of the skyscrapers and when they are placed at ground level show themselves feeding an inexorable feeling of oppression.

The comic reads the architecture of the city in its essence, adapting it to the sense of narrative and graphic culture of the country of origin and bringing it into the reader's imagination, through the use of *closure*.

The forms of architecture thus assume the value of representations of a semantic nature, becoming graphic icons. These peculiarities have aroused the interest of some architects more inclined to innovation in the language of representation, who through the use of comics codes have attributed narrative contents to their projects, or have used the popular qualities of this pop language, through *arci-comics*.

NOTES

1 "Una operazione simbolizzante non richiede di necessità che la città sia fisicamente conosciuta: è il punto di vista che determina la fisiognomica dell'oggetto descritto" (Corti, 1987, p. 52).

2 "Vien fatto di domandarsi che cosa agisce sull'immaginario collettivo così da trasformare lo spazio reale di una città in luogo della mente [...] Una operazione simbolizzante non richiede di necessità che la città sia fisicamente conosciuta" (Corti, 1987, p. 52).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is the result of a joint project and is fully shared between the authors; the manuscript was drawn up as follows: the paragraphs 'Introduction' and 'Conclusions' by Michela De Domenico, Paola Raffa, Fabio Testà; 'From concept to the architecture in the comics' and 'Between design and cominc' by Michela De Domenico; 'Iconic architectures in drawn narratives' and 'POV: points of view and compositive processes (Fabio)by Fabio Testà; 'Between archirecture and comic' and 'Drawn Visions' by Paola Raffa.

REFERENCES

- Ahearne, J., Currie, A., Edwards, N., Hitch, B., Millar, M., & Smith, C. (2009). *Fantastic Four*. Vol. 1 #568 - Doom's Master: Part Three. New York, US: Marvel Comics.
- Andru, R., Conway, G., & Giordano, D. (1976). *Superman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man*. Vol. 1 #1 - The Battle of the Century. New York, NY: Marvel Comics.
- Araki, H. (2010-2011). *Le Bizzarre Avventure di Jojo: Stardust Crusaders* (trad. it. di A. Maniscalco). Bosco, IT: Star Comics. (original title: *JoJo no Kimyou na Bouken: Stardust Crusaders*).
- Auster, P., Mazzucchelli, D., & Karasik, P. (2011). *Città di vetro* (trad. it. di C. Oliva e O. Martini). Roma, IT: Coconino Press. (original title: *City of Glass*).
- Avril, F. de Loustal, J., Götting, J.-C., Juillard, A. (2010). *La maison de verre*. Paris, FR: Bdartist(e).
- Bacilieri, P. (2016). *More fun*. Roma, IT: Coconino Press.
- Bacilieri, P. (2017). *Fun* (3° ed.). Roma, IT: Coconino.
- Bacilieri, P. (2019). *Tramezzino* (2° ed.). Bologna, IT: Canicola.
- Bagley, M., Bendis, B. M., & Hanna, S. (2015). *Ultimate End*. Vol. 1 #5. New York, NY: Marvel Comics.
- Barthes, R. (1988). *Il brusio della lingua*. (Trans. by B. Bellotto) Torino, IT: Giulio Einaudi.
- Bates, C., McLaughlin, F., & Novick, I. (1978). *The Flash #1*. Milano, IT: Editrice Cenasio. (*The Flash* Vol. 1 #255, 1977, Burbank, US: DC Comics).
- Caselli, S., & Slott, D. (2011). *Amazing Spider-Man*. Vol. 1 #673 (Spider-Island Epilogue: The Naked City. New York, NY: Marvel Comics).
- CLAMP (2019). *Magic Knight Rayearth*. Vol. 1-3. New York, NY: Kodansha USA Publishing. (Original title: *Mahou Kishi Rayearth*).
- Corti, M., (1987). La città come luogo mentale. *Casabella* n. 535, pp. 52-55.
- Ditko, S., Lee, S. (1962). *Amazing Fantasy*. Vol 1 #15.
- Dotto, E. (2020). In sovrapposizione. I layers e la lettura delle immagini. E. Cicalò & I. Trizio, *Linguaggi grafici. Illustrazione*. pp 145-165. Alghero, IT: Publica.

- Eco, U. (2002). *La struttura assente. La ricerca semiotica e il metodo strutturale*. Milano, IT: Bompiani.
- Eisner, W. (1985). *Comics and sequential art* (1985), Tamarch, FL: Poorhouse press.
- Ennis, G., & Robertson D. (2019). *The Boys Ediz. Deluxe* (trad. it di L. Mutti; 1° ed., voll. 1-7). Modena, IT: Panini Comics.
- Finger, B., & Kane, B. (1939). *Batman*. New York, NY: National Allied Publications.
- Floch, J. M. (1997). *Identità visive: costruire l'identità a partire dei segni*. (Trans. by L. Ranelletti). Milano, IT: Franco Angeli.
- Gege, A. (2018). *Jujutsu Kaisen - Sorcery Fight* (trad. it. di C. Spiga; Voll.+ 1-18). Modena, IT: Panini Comics. (original title: *Jujutsu Kaisen*).
- Gombrich, E.H (2008). *Arte e illusione. Studio sulla psicologia della rappresentazione pittorica*. (Trans by R. Federici). New York, NY: Phaidon.
- Gonano, G., & De Luca, G. (2006-2006). *Il Commissario Spada*. Milano, IT: Edizioni BD.
- Greimas, A-J. (1974). *Delsenso*. (Trans. By G. Marrone). Milano, IT: Bompiani.
- Groensteen, T. (2012). *Il sistema fumetto*. (Trans. by D.Gigantelli). Genova, IT: Pro Glo Edizioni.
- Herzog, J., & De Meuron, P. (2009). *Metrobasel: A Model of a European Metropolitan Region*. Basel, CH: ETH Studio.
- Ingels, B., (2009). *Yes is more*. Colonia, DE: Taschen.
- Jodorowsky, A., Moebius (1981). *L'Incal*. Paris, FR: Les Humanoides Associés.
- Lai, J. (2012). *Citizens of No Place: An Architectural Graphic Novel*. New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Livesay, J., Walker, B., & Williams, R. (2012). *Avenging Spider-Man Annual*. Vol. 1 #1. New York, NY: Marvel Comics.
- Manara, M. (2002). *Fuga da Piranesi*. Segrate, IT: Mondadori.
- Manovich, L. (2001). *The languages of New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- McCloud, S. (2006). *Capire il fumetto: L'arte dell'invisibile*. (Trans. By R. Rizzi). Torino, IT: Pavesio editore.
- Mau, B., & Koolhaas, R. (1997). *S, M, L, XL: O.M.A. - Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau*. New York, NY: Monacelli.
- Mazzucchelli, D. (2020). *Asterios Polyp* (trad. it. di F. Pacifico; 3° ed.). Roma, IT: Coconino Press.
- Ōtomo, K. (2005). *Domu Sogni di Bambini* (trad. it. di C. Baglini). Roma, IT: Repubblica. (original title: *Doumu*).
- Ōtomo, K. (2021). *Akira. New Edition* (trad. it. di E. Serino; 1° ed., voll. 1-6). Modena, IT: Panini Comics. (original title: *AKIRA*).
- Outcalt, R. F. (1895). *At the Circus in Hogan's Alley*. New York, NY: New York World.
- Palmiotti, J., Quesada, J., & Smith, K. (1998). *Daredevil*. Vol. 2 #2 - *Guardian Devil Part Two: The Unexamined Life*. New York, NY: Marvel Comics.
- Peeters, B., & Schuiten, F. (2018). *Les Cités obscures - L'Intégrale* (Livre 3). Tournai, FR: Casterman.
- Quici, F. (2017). Architecture and visual narrative. In: *Proceeding of the International and Interdisciplinary Conference IMMAGINI? Image and Imagination Between Representation, Communication, Education and Psychology*, Brixen, Italy, 27-28 November 2017.
- Rambert, F., & Thevenet, J-M. (Eds.). (2010). *Archi & BD, Laville dessinée*. Paris, IT: Citéchaillot/Monografik.

- Swarte, J. (2012). *Is That All There Is?*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics.
- Taniguchi, J. (2019). *La ragazza scomparsa* (trad. it. di D. Sevieri). Roma, IT: Coconino Press. (original title: *Sousakusha*).
- Testaì, F. (2023). *Archinovel. L'architettura nel fumetto*. Architecture Degree Thesis, Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria. Tutor prof. Paola Raffa; co-tutor arch. Michela de Domenico.
- Trizio, I. (2020). Cities and Comic Books. Berlin in Alberto Madrigal's Graphic Novels. In: Cicalò, E. (eds) *Proceedings of the 2nd International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Image and Imagination. IMG 2019. Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing*, vol 1140. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41018-6_30
- Vasari, G. (1991), *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*. Roma: Newton Compton. (Original Published 1550).
- Ware, C. (2003). *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*. London, UK: Jonathan Cape.
- Ware, C. (2012). *Building Stories*. New York, NY: Pantheon.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

- Alberghini, A. (2006). *Sequenze urbane. La metropoli nel fumetto*. Rovigo, IT: Edizioni Delta Comics.
- Bagnolo, V., & Lusso, L. (2018). Comics as a means of architecture representation. In C. Marcos (Ed.). *Graphic Imprints*. pp. 752–763. Cham, CH: Springer.
- Cicalò, E., & Trizio, I., (Eds.) (2020). *Linguaggi grafici. Illustrazione*. Alghero, IT: Publica
- De Domenico, M. (2013). Gli archetipi della fantasia, le architetture visionarie dei fumetti. L. Carlevaris, (Ed.) *Linee di ricerca nell'area del Disegno*. Approfondimenti delle tesi di dottorato. X Congresso UID Matera 2013, pp. 145-154. Roma, IT: Aracne.
- Labio, C. (2015). The architecture of comics. *Critique Inquire* 41(2), 312-343.
- McCloud, S. (2007). *Making Comics. Storytelling secrets of comics manga e graphic novels*. New York, NY: Harper.
- Quici, F. (2017). Architecture and visual narrative. In: *Proceeding of the International and Interdisciplinary Conference IMMAGINI? Image and Imagination Between Representation, Communication, Education and Psychology*. Basel, CH: MDPI.
- Rambert, F., & Thevenet, J-M. (Eds.). (2010). *Archi & BD, Laville dessinée*. Paris, FR: Citèchaillot/Monografik.
- Testaì, F. (2023). *Archinovel. L'architettura nel fumetto*. [Architecture Degree Thesis], Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria. Tutor prof. Paola Raffa; co-tutor arch. Michela de Domenico.
- Trizio, I. (2020). Cities and Comic Books. Berlin in Alberto Madrigal's Graphic Novels. Cicalò, E. (Eds.) *Proceedings of the 2nd International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Image and Imagination. IMG 2019. Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing*, vol 1140. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41018-6_30

Article available at

DOI: 10.6092/issn.2724-2463/16246

How to cite

as article

De Domenico, M., Raffa, P. & Testai, F. (2023). Com(ic)onic. Architecture in the comics. *img journal*, 8, 56-85.

as contribution in book

De Domenico, M., Raffa, P. & Testai, F. (2023). Com(ic)onic. Architecture in the comics. In Luigini, A. (Ed.), *img journal 08/2022 Imaging and Imagery in Architecture* (pp. 56-85). Alghero, IT: Publica. ISBN 978-88-99586-36-2



© 2023 The authors. The text of this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.