EXPOSED PRÀXIS

DISPLAY

Exposed Pràxis. The Studio and Other Crypto-Exhibitions of Architectural Poetics and Intentions

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MIMESIS

Exposing Pràxis. The Problem of the Studio

BY

Fabrizia Berlingieri

On Pretexts and Digressions

My father dealt with being an architect for almost half his life. Over more than twenty-five years, he ran his eighty-five square metres office in the province of Cosenza, Calabria, Italy. The *atelier* – as he himself titled it – consisted of two rooms and a small shared entrance where clients would wait, and in his later years even those who were not exactly welcome. The larger L-shaped room served as main workspace, filled with several drawing tables where he handled design projects closely with a few collaborators. In the smaller one, my father met with clients privately. The archive – comprising approximately forty years of professional work – was dispersed across the space: uncatalogued folders lined the walls, mingled with a vast collection of architecture magazines and disparate objects. I grew up in that space: on afternoons and off-school mornings as a curious child, later during my architectural training, finally as an apprentice with an assigned table. This early, unconscious familiarity with the architectural workplace only became clear to me during a trip to London in 2003, while visiting the Soane Museum at 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields. Suddenly, the everyday surroundings were swept away by a profound sense of wonder. I lost myself repeatedly in the dizzying beauty of those rooms, endlessly multiplying in both number and depth, as a world visible only from within.

The house-museum echoes the relationship between the threefold architectural ensemble and the archaeological and art collection it displays. The forty-years process of transformation lies not merely in the continuous spatial reconfiguration, it actively participates in building the Soane's architectural discourse itself[1], progressively aligning with the collection – as specific design language grounded on the concept of fragment – so that each room emerges as a *solo*. Architecture bends to poetics, and the house finds its definitive image in the aesthetic of bricolage.

1. F. Berlingieri, *Non finito: processo, poetica. La casa-museo di Soane a Lincoln's Inn Fields*, in L. Malfona, L. Giorgetti, S. Ruszczewski (edited by), *Unfinished. Sul non finito*, Pisa University Press, Pisa 2023, pp. 62-67.

Jo Coenen home-studio: the library, Maastricht.
Photo by the author (2025)

> The elements which the 'bricoleur' collects and uses are 'pre-constrained' like the constitutive units of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre.[2]

This first experience was followed by others – some more consistent, others purely occasional – that over time have shaped my own cultural and spatial understanding of what an architecture studio is, what it conveys and translates. From the early collaborations in Messina at Franco Cardullo's quiet *studiolo*[3], I recall the counter-sunlight entering in the brownish interiors, smoothly enlightening the wooden archive's shelves and the countless yellow paper sketches dispersed all over the space.

On the contrary, the Purini-Thermes studio is woven into a complex spatial narrative, at once enigmatic if not hindering[4]. Like "frames nested within frames"[5], an interlocking taxonomy of more

2. C. Lévi-Strauss, *The savage mind*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd, London 1966, p. 19.
3. The *studiolo* emerges as place of intellectual labour within the domestic sphere in the early 14th-century, a lay heir to the medieval *scriptorium*, traditionally devoted to the copying of manuscripts and often connected to the library within monastic settings. Its shape refers to a diaphragm between interior architecture and furniture, typically realised in wooden structures raised off the ground, articulated through a writing desk and bookcases. In literature and through its iconography it has been assessed as a trope, an ideal space – even before being a real one – embodying the scholar's cultural status. A space that establishes a critical distance from the present, a privileged vantage point from which to observe reality and grasp its meaning through the act of study. See O. Iardino, *Lo studiolo: uno spazio architettonico tra realtà e rappresentazione*, in "Heliopolis Culture Civiltà Politica", n. 2, 2018, pp. 161-176.
4. The notion of 'architecture-as-obstacle', drawing on Kafka's spatial constructs, derives from A.M. Racheli, *Il luogo kafkiano, architettura evocante architettura evocata*, Dedalo libri, Bari 1979.
5. The Henri Bergson's quote in *La Pensée et le mouvant* (1922) is taken from G. Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1957; it. trans. edited by E. Catalano, *La poetica dello spazio*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari 1999 (V ed.), p. 101, translation by the author.

private rooms appears alongside others operating within a highly crafted design workflow. Among these, the library – where I still enjoy extended conversations with Laura Thermes – houses their published works and personal sketchbooks. One sits at the heart of this overflowing shelving, where discussions unfold without haste.

During the period spent in Jo Coenen's home-studio in Maastricht, activities took place in a long room outfitted with paired tables, arranged to facilitate dialogue among the team. Adjacent to this, a perpetually disordered and ever-changing library plays a vital role: volumes by various architects are pulled from the shelves multiple times daily, laid out on tables, and summoned to address project challenges, support analytical process, or inspire modes of representation. Like a *herbarium*, it serves for everything[6]. Sometimes I had the impression it could even provide medical or culinary recipes, depending on the day and the pressure under which the books were consulted. I vividly recall the sparse entrance of Giorgio Grassi's studio in Milan, marked by a long mirror and warm, indirect lighting, and the walls of Gianni Braghieri's one in Cesena, entirely covered in large hand drawings and ancient architectural prints. It was not like that in other settings, where the workspace features prevail as a large-scale production machine-kind, and the overall atmosphere reminds to nothing more than a conventional office set-up.

Crossing the threshold of these places has meant for me, then as now, entering wondrous domains of a simultaneous belonging to the self and to the other. The seemingly intentional retreat from overt self-assertion has sparked a lasting fascination throughout my personal trajectory, strengthened by the subtle difference between exposing and exhibiting: the former an ever-questioned necessity, the latter a presumed certainty. This attraction has persisted

6. The Latin term *herbarium* originally refers to a classificatory collection focused on the description and use of plant specimens. From the 16th-century onward, it evolved into a physical space ordered according to scientific codes. Its configuration as a filing cabinet and set of preservation objects reveals a way of seeing and cataloguing the natural world, establishing itself as a link between knowledge and its archival forms, and as early display medium of the natural science museography models.

over time, resilient against the neglection brought by every day's distractions. And, indeed, it has recently resurfaced with intensity in the context of the research project *Display: The Presence of the Future. An Archive-Laboratory of the Immaterial Heritage of Architectural Exhibitions*[7], whose main aim is to provide a platform for knowledge and dissemination of the architectural exhibitions in Italy over the past fifty years, while questioning their forms and places in the contemporary contexts. Within this framework, the research *Exposed Pràxis* tackles the architect's workplace – in its various facets of atelier, home office, workshop, and lab – as a proper stage for expressing and disseminating, consciously or unconsciously, the generative processes and imaginaries underlying design poetics. A dual place where architecture, in the making and thinking, shows itself. It is not just a working environment, but a place where attitudes and experiences crystallise into spaces that often turn out to be true personal collections, fragments of a discreet and authorial mosaic[8], ultimately 'crypto exhibitions' of architectural poetics and intentions.

Recently, and on an international scale, the institutional landscape has witnessed a renewed interest in those spaces, as reflected in the increasingly widespread recognition of many architectural archives as being of cultural significance[9]. In Italy, for instance, a

7. National Research Program of Significant Interest (PRIN 2022), conducted by three research units belonging to the University of Camerino (UniCam), Scuola di Ateneo di Architettura e Design Eduardo Vittoria Ascoli Piceno (SAAD), the University of Napoli Federico II (UniNa), Dipartimento di Architettura (DiArc), and the Politecnico di Milano (PoliMi), Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DAStU), coordinated respectively by Pippo Ciorra, Pasquale Miano, and Alessandro Rocca.

8. G. Manganelli, *Emigrazioni oniriche*, edited by A. Cortellessa, Adelphi, Milan 2023.

9. The Iconic Houses Network (https://www.iconichouses.org/houses) represents one of the most significant projects in this field. While it does not strictly focus on ateliers or architectural workplaces, it more broadly connects and documents the most significant houses built or designed by architects, as well as artists' homes and studios from the 20th-century, which are now open to the public as house museums. A similar aim is pursued in the work *La casa dell'architetto* (The Architect's House) by

national register of private architectural archives has recently been established[10]. These initiatives acknowledge individual and collective architectural practices as embedded in – and contributing to – a broader historical, social, and economic context, with the mandate to preserve their traces and to affirm their value for the disciplinary discourse and beyond. However, most architectural foundations, archives, and private museums remain relatively invisible both within the disciplinary field and to the wider public. They can be recognised as particularly fragile, as they are still perceived as deeply anchored in a biographical rationale: once the creative energies animating them fade, even the physical traces become difficult to maintain, and the original spatial settings easily undergo transformation and evolution, if not outright erasure. Despite their cultural significance, many of them survive only through scattered documentation, photographs or drawings often made by the architects themselves. This lack of structured archival work opens a gap in understanding how spatial practice and architectural poetics intersect. As Ignacio Farías and Alex Wilkie observe, "the studio remains a peculiar and remarkable *lacuna* in our understanding of how cultural artefacts are brought into the world and how creativity operates as a situated practice"[11].

What is at stake in recording the architectural studio? Is there any cultural or scientific urgency beyond personal fascination? Can the architectural studio be inquired as an exploration of the

Gennaro Postiglione, which features nearly 100 homes of some of the most prominent architects of the last century. See: G. Postiglione (edited by), *La casa dell'architetto*, Taschen, Koln 2013.

10. Originating from the initiative on architectural archives in Lombardy (https://sab-lom.cultura.gov.it/la-soprintendenza/progetti/archivi-di-architettura), the project later led to the establishment of a national register (http://www.architetti.san.beniculturali.it/web/architetti/home), which nevertheless still faces difficulties in achieving full implementation. Its primary objective is to survey the existing collections across the country through their preliminary identification and description, in anticipation of future digitilisation aimed at promoting broader access and understanding.

11. I. Farìas, A. Wilkie (edited by), *Studio Studies. Operations, Topologies and Displacements*, Routledge, London 2016, p. 2.

creative process, addressed both to the disciplinary discourse and to a broader public?

Such a perspective calls for a shift from a merely biographical focus toward an authorial dimension of the studio, recognizing both the value of individual specificity and its potential resonance in terms of cultural dissemination and awareness. Hence, the research project grounds upon a broader dowsing investigation into whether and how these spaces – in-between the personal and the public, and exposed to risky fetishist perversions – can, instead, enlighten lateral practices of display in the contemporary, contributing, in reverse, to the expansion of the architectural praxis. In that sense, the curatorial work – conceived as an act of 'archival archaeology', tracing and reinterpreting the material evidence of architectural practices – seeks to imagine how, and with what tools, it is possible to analyse and document them, capturing a snapshot of their highly diverse states and conditions, with the purpose of expanding their interpretation and legacy beyond the individual *persona*.

John Soane house-museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, 1792-1833. Redrawing by the author (2022) of the main transformation phases of the house. In light grey are depicted the initial change of the first house unit (12); in medium grey the changes occurred with the first expansion (13) from 1807 to 1821, and the new entrance of the house; in dark grey the latest ones in 1833 involving the entire property (12,13,14).

Epistemics of Metamorphosis

In the introduction to his recent work *The Artist's Studio: A Cultural History* – a comprehensive historical investigation of the artist's workspace from antiquity to the present – James Hall first highlights its inherent imprecision:

> This instability and semantic imprecision reflect the fact that the artist's workspace is a permeable and mutable entity, one that maintains a symbiotic relationship with artisan workshops, monastic cells, scholars' studies, and other interior and exterior spaces.[12]

Throughout the chapters, the author traces the origins of the studio to three main spatial models, today yet informing the variety of terms through which it is defined. The first one places the studio within the domestic sphere, deriving from the aristocratic *studium* and the later *studiolo* of liberal arts, toward the contemporary home-office. The second one addresses its autonomy as workplace belonging to the setting of the *officina* and the *bottega* in the late Middle Ages, later evolving into the factory, and the more contemporary spaces of the laboratory. Finally, the third links the studio to the more courtly tradition of the library – the space of collection and display of the knowable – originating in the medieval *scriptorium*, later transfigured into the Renaissance invention of the *wunderkammer* and the gallery space.

Both linguistic and spatial polysemy show the coexistence of different epistemological domains that govern the ways in which the artist (and the architect) generates knowledge through action, and how this knowledge is accomplished through a variable, and often simultaneous combination of three agencies: contemplative, experimental, and performative[13] moulded by actions clashing onto

12. J. Hall, *The Artist's Studio: A Cultural History*, Thames & Hudson Ltd, London 2022; it. trans. edited by P. Del Vecchio, C. Veltri, *Lo studio d'artista. Una storia culturale*, Giulio Einaudi editore, Turin 2022, p. 10, translation by the author.
13. M. Cole, M. Pardo (edited by), *Inventions of the Studio, Renaissance*

a single, physical space. The entity of the studio revolves around the encroachment of these different epistemic realms which crystallise as many specific spatial models. Their combination, overlap and accumulation produce the inherent ambiguity of the studio – its instability according to Hall – where the writing desk, the workbench, and the bookshelf are coexisting archetypes that explicit the space's internal tensions and turn it into a place of metamorphosis[14].

The studium spatialises in a bounded, intimate environment that fosters reflection through distance, and where knowledge is pursued through the individual experience of reading and meditation. The spatial feature of the bottega (workshop) or laboratory engages with the episteme of pràxis[15], where the knowledge production occurs through an inductive, often iterative, process of making and experimenting, trials and errors, in contrast to theoretical approaches. The third model, the wunderkammer, as one could understand the collection as almost deriving from the speculative activity – and being the precursor of the later museography

to Romanticism, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 2005. In particular, the reference is to the *Origins of the Studio* chapter where the authors survey various activities present in the artists' workplace such as study, reception, collection and display.

14. Hall indirectly refers to the metamorphic nature of the studio by tracing its roots back to myth and antique Greek historiography, with the examples of Hephaestus, the god of fire, who rises from the cave where he was educated in the art of metalworking to the grand palace where, triumphant among the gods of Olympus, he runs a family enterprise. Again, is the case of Phidias' workshop in Olympia, originally used for the construction of a colossal statue of Zeus and later transformed into a Christian Basilica. In J. Hall, *op.cit*., p. 18.

15. The concept of pràxis, although of classical origin and present in the Aristotelian philosophy, gained significance as Marxist philosophical perspective, later developed by Antonio Gramsci, which inseparably links theory to human practical activity, considered the only concrete reality. Unlike a purely speculative philosophy, that of praxis focuses on transforming the real world and producing a new history and culture, combining philosophical reflection with the social and political action of the masses. The significance of praxis as specific way of producing knowledge ultimately acquires depth in contemporary architectural research as cultural and intellectual product, see M. Biraghi, *L'Architetto come intellettuale*, Giulio Einaudi editore, Turin 2019.

– envisages the peculiar process of knowledge-by-transfer, embedded within the epistemic realm of performance:

> (…) For a collector, I mean a collector as he ought to be – ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them. So I have erected one of his dwellings, with books as the building stones, before you, and now he is going to disappear inside, as is only fitting.[16]

The artist's (and the architect) studio is a space of metamorphosis and ascesis, a site of conflict between the self and the world, a suspension between action and thought, a place of mediation between the human and the inhuman[17]. Between 1630 and 1680, the *Galeria* of Canon Manfredo Settala – housed in his private quarters inside the Paleo Christian Basilica of San Nazaro in Brolo on Corso di Porta Romana – was an unmissable attraction within Milan's cultural circles. The domestic gallery was, in fact, a complex assemblage of spaces comprising the pinacoteca, the library, and a room with various *scriptoria* hosting his vast collection of ethnographic artefacts. At the end, the laboratory of *artificialia* gave rise to a new staging of the manifold world[18], orchestrated by Settala himself through the creation of automata, mechanical devices, and scientific instruments of various kinds[19] arousing both wonder and

16. W. Benjamin, *Illuminationen*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt 1955; en. trans. edited by H. Arendt, *Illuminations*, Schoken Books New York, 1969, p. 67.
17. V. Trione, *Prologo celeste. Nell'atelier di Anselm Kiefer*, Giulio Einaudi editore, Turin, 2023.
18. G. Perani, *La maravigliosa galeria di Manfredo Settala*, in "Nuova Museologia", n. 42, 2020, pp. 2-12, https://www.nuovamuseologia.it/2020/06/01/la-maravigliosa-galeria-di-manfredo-settala/ (accessed October 5, 2025).
19. The attempt, albeit partial, to recompose the vast collection of the *Museum Septalianum*, which had been lost and divided among different institutions in the city, took place once in 1984 with the homonymous exhibition at the Natural History Museum of Milan. See: A. Aimi, V. De Michele, A. Morandotti, *Musaeum Septalianum. Una collezione scientifica nella Milano del Seicento*, Giunti Marzocco, Florence 1984.

unease among visitors. During the second half of the 18th-century, the bottega of Palazzo Tomati in Rome was a well-known centre for the international market of antiquities among the European Grand Tour travellers. In that place, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, together with his son Francesco and the assistants, carried out an intense activity of recovery, transformation, and sale of *falsi d'autore*, combining his nocturnal practice of looting archaeological finds from the city's open-air excavations with the more noble pursuits of sculptor and extraordinary engraver. His creations of candelabra, vases, fireplaces, and furnishings – today sparse all over the world[20] – are the result of manipulations, assemblages, and recompositions of pieces that lie halfway between his own poetic vision, the authenticity of the archaeological remnants, and an idealized aesthetic of antiquity, taking place in the proto-industrial process making of his workshop.

Lastly, long before taking shape as the iconographic research corpus *Bilder Atlas*, *Mnemosyne*[21] was the result of a painstaking collection process, one of the world's most extensive assemblages of photographs and images of mythological subjects. Aby Warburg, in his ambiguous role of author-collector-researcher, sought to illustrate the mechanisms by which themes and figures from antiquity were transmitted to the modern era, particularly through the recurring motions, gestures, and postures that convey the full range of human emotions. The outcome is an ambitious intellectual journey across the centuries, bearing witness to the enduring resonance of recurring visual motifs. In 1921, Warburg's personal library rapidly evolved into a more open research centre. In 1933, four years

20. P. Panza, *Museo Piranesi*, Skira, Milan 2017.

21. The seventy-nine boards assemble the reproductions of different works: evidence of a particularly Renaissance context, with artworks, manuscript pages, playing cards, etc.; archaeological finds from eastern, Greek and Roman antiquity; newspaper clippings, advertising labels, postage stamps as testimonies of the culture of the 20th-century. For an updated overview of the studies and research about Warburg and his oeuvre see: M. Piccichè (edited by), *Warburg Updated. Bibliography and Mnemosyne Atlas*, in "Rivista Engramma", n. 217, 2025; https://www.engramma.it/eOS/resources/bookstore/digital/e219b.pdf (accessed October 10, 2025).

after his death, the Institute – along with its collections and staff – relocated from Germany to London to escape the Nazi regime. Ten years later, the Warburg Institute was incorporated into the University of London, where it still functions as research and educational institution.

The chronological and spatial *diaspora* of these three examples emerges as the tip of an iceberg, standing among many others in a sort of undismissed historiography. Beyond being "a creative hybrid between the production and the exhibition of the artwork"[22], they exemplify, in even extreme conditions, the subversive role of the studio. This is not only the place where the process of knowledge production appears and where the subtle boundaries between reflection, production and display become pivotal. Rather, its real nature is a blurred one: a private religious environment transformed into a public gallery and a scientific cabinet of invention; an architectural practice of assemblage fostering a profitable family company; a personal obsession in transcultural studies evolving into an institutional framework. Moreover, each of them illustrates the practice of collecting as transfer: the fragment's incompleteness as the basis to build upon and to decode the 'world', the modern logic of taxonomy, the creative aspect of manipulation[23].

While historical and theoretical research has primarily focused on artists' workspaces, it is evident that similar conditions – as previously illustrated by some examples – can also be observed in architects' studios, and more broadly in spaces dedicated to creative practice today[24]. In the loci of pràxis, dispositions – both interior and objectual, especially in the case of the architectural studio – converge to translate attitudes into sign, atmosphere, and space.

22. H. U. Obrist, B. Vanderlinden, *Laboratorium*, Du Mont, Antwerp 2001.
23. A. Rocca, *Lo spazio smontabile*, Lettera ventidue edizioni, Syracuse 2017.
24. K. Thoring, R.M. Mueller, P. Desmet, P. Badke-Schaub, *Spatial design factors associated with creative work: a systematic literature review*, in "Artificial Intelligence for Engineering Design, Analysis and Manufacturing", n. 34 (3), 2020, 300-314. doi:10.1017/S0890060420000232 (accessed November 13, 2025).

The materiality, lights and shadows of the atelier as a space of ascesis characterizes the *Black box* that Klas Anselm built in Lund as the home-studio addition that hosted Sigurd Lewerentz in his later years, devoting time to the construction of his architectural works' archive.

> The new room was rather unusual in that it had no windows, and was lit only by three evenly spaced skylights in the roof. In line with Lewerentz's character and choices, the room was painted black, with an aluminium covering on the ceiling to exploit the natural light from above.[25]

The same atmosphere permeates the description of Rothko's atelier, tall and dimly lit seemingly to "a preface to transcendence" where "the windows looked out on nothing in particular, but the light from them and from the skylight was coaxed to deposit itself in a crepuscular vibration on the dark canvases"[26]. Yet the ambiguity of these spaces arises not only from the constant recombination of the epistemological models of thinking-acting-displaying, but also from the relationship established between the inhabitant and the inhabited space, better within the clash between private and public realms. For instance, the tension between private and public takes place in the split enacted by Le Corbusier in his daily oscillating routine between the Parisian mornings in the private art studio annexed to his two-level apartment in the *Molitor* apartment block, and the afternoons within the architectural office in rue de Sèvres[27].

25. G. Postiglione, *Sigurd Lewerentz 1885-1975*, in G. Postiglione (edited by), *op.cit.*, p. 227, translation by the author.
26. B. O'Doherty, *Studio and Cube. On the relationship between where art is made and where art is displayed*, Columbia University, New York 2007, p.22.
27. On December 2024 the Atelier at 35 rue de Sèvres has been the focus of the encounters promoted in the occasion of its centenary in the XXII Symposium of the Fondation Le Corbusier, a two-days program on the place, its structure, functioning and agencies, see: https://www.fondation-lecorbusier.fr/en/news/22nd-rencontres-de-la-fondation/ (accessed October 23, 2025).

Here the large master's wall painting overlooked the drawing room like an upscaled monastic cell and filled with his industrious draftsmen wearing long smocks. This attitude recalls Courbet's conception of the atelier famously depicted in his monumental painting *The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory of Seven Years of My Moral and Artistic Life* (1855). At the centre, the painter stands as the fulcrum: at the same time craving the hegemony of the cultural context and the desire for withdrawal[28].

> A closer look at Courbet's painting – or at any of the many depictions of the studio in nineteenth-and early twentieth-century art, as well as historical evidence of modern artists' studio practices – reveals that past artists consciously negotiated the same limits, anxieties, and tensions (...), including art's "relational possibilities" and the link between studio practice and real-world 'agency' and 'action'.[29]

The studio as a *limen* between private and public also permeates the concept and the long process of construction of the Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin projects[30] poised between house, studio, farm, and a learning by doing community of young architectural students and apprentices. Also, the metamorphic character of the studio emerges in the proliferation of the diverse ones Alvar Aalto inhabited along his architect's career and life. From the intimacy of the early home-studio shared with his first wife Aino in 1936[31], to the second more formal office completed in 1955 and located scarcely five

28. W. Hofmann, *Das Atelier. Courbet Jahrhundertbild*, Verlag, München 2010, it. trans. *L'atelier. Courbet, l'Ottocento e il quadro del secolo*, Donzelli, Rome 2012.
29. B. Alsdorf, *Reviews: Alsdorf on Jacob and Crabner*, in "Art Bulletin", 2013, vol. XCV n. 2, p. 333.
30. The intertwined history of these two projects – Taliesin East in Wisconsin and Taliesin West in Arizona – is gathered in K. Smith, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin and Taliesin West*, Harry N. Abrams, New York 1997.
31. "Aalto's private studio, which overlooks the double-height office space, is equipped with a secret staircase that leads to the upper floor's outdoor terrace. These hidden stairs and the balcony – as well as, more broadly,

minutes away from the previous. The *Muuratsalo House*, built between 1952 and 1954, was an open-air display in which experimental ceramic tiles and brick materials were exhibited on the exterior walls. Lastly, almost ten years later, in the city of Jyväskylä, near Muuratsalo, Aalto designed and opened his personal museum, displaying his oeuvre as future legacy. It is no coincidence that almost all these works are based on the L-shaped plan configuration, so central to his research. A kind of parallelism to Queneau's *Exercises in Style*[32], transposed into an architectural practice.

In the multifaceted and ever-shifting setting of the studio, the act of exposing becomes in certain cases a predominant factor – especially in contemporary practices – signalling the loss of the studio's everyday utilitarian value. The atelier, as Zuliani observes, "is less and less an alcove or refuge and increasingly, quite literally, a laboratory"[33], even finding new spaces of expansion within museums and exhibition programs[34], in a kind of endless mirroring process of resonances that Lane Relyea aptly defines as "unbound"[35].

the unique atmosphere of the studio – came to take on a playful dimension in the eyes of the Aalto children and future generations (…), to the point that in every corner of this house one finds that 'methodical adaptability to circumstances'." In F. De Maio, *Tra Aino ed Elissa, le case manifesto degli Aalto*, in "La Rivista di Engramma", https://www.engramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=6081 (accessed October 5, 2025), translation by the author.

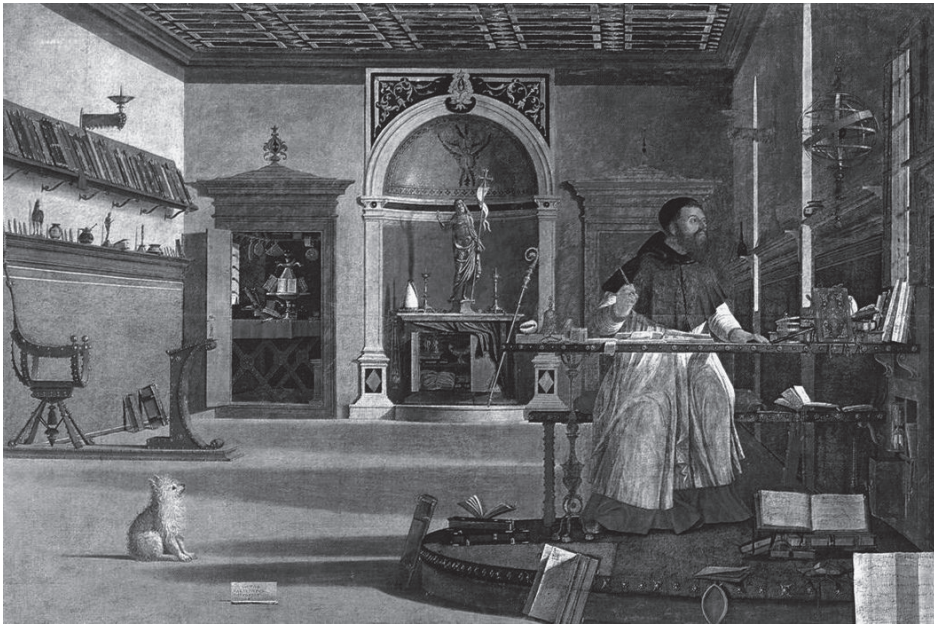
32. R. Queneau, *Exercises de Style*, Editions Gallimard, Paris 1947.

33. S. Zuliani (edited by), *Atelier d'artista. Gli spazi di creazione dell'arte dall'età moderna al presente*, Mimesis edizioni, Milan 2013, p. 189, translation by the author.

34. Beyond the striking musealisation process of Bacon's London studio (see: D. J. Getsy, *The Reconstruction of the Francis Bacon Studio in Dublin*, in *The studio reader, op.cit.*, pp. 99-103), a recent example is the exhibition series *The Architect's Studio* hosted from 2017 to 2023 at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark showcasing the work (and the generative processes) of five international architectural firms of Wang Shu, Alejandro Aravena, Tatiana Bilbao Estudio, Anupama Kundoo and Cave bureau. See also: E. Steierhoffer, *The Exhibitionary Complex of Architecture*, in "Oase", n. 88 Exhibitions Showing and Producing Architecture, 2012, pp. 5-11.

Precisely, its elusive polysemy constitutes the hard core of the studio historically depicted as a romanticized and idealized place, the same one that, in more recent decades, has been disavowed in vain[36]. Although today's demands for remote work shed a different light on the needs for a physical workplace, in essence this space – as mutant offspring of knowledge's archetypes – remains constantly vivid within the collective interest. As recent debates note, "contemporary artists and writers have not left the studio or its mythologies behind"[37].

35. L. Relyea, *Studio Unbound*, in M. J. Jacob, M. Grabner (edited by), *The Studio Reader: On the Space of Artists*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2010, pp. 341-349.
36. The crisis of the studio as place of authentic, independent, creation runs from 1968, when Robert Smithson argued that liberation from the physical boundaries of the studio partially releases the artist from the constraints of craftsmanship and the compulsion toward continuous creativity. Since then, several voices contributed to the idea of the "fall of the studio", such as the seminal article *The Function of the Studio* by Daniel Buren in 1979, or even to the emergence of a new entity, the 'post-studio'. See W. Davids, K. Paice (edited by), *The Fall of the Studio. Artists at Work*, Valiz, Amsterdam 2009.
37. B. Alsdorf, *op.cit.*, p. 335.



Sant'Agostino nello studio, Vittore Carpaccio, 1502. Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, Venice. Source Wikimedia Commons.

Spatial Embodiments: Anatomy of the Studio

"We can read studios as texts that are as revelatory in their way as artworks themselves"[38]. O'Doherty's argument rests on the idea that behind the spatial configuration of the studio lies not only the artist's biography and oeuvre, but also a historically conditioned social contract between the individual and the collective. To move beyond a biographical perspective, he reports the experiment Lowell Nesbitt conducted in the 1960s, drawing upon Eugène Delacroix's *Corner of a Painter's Study, the Stove* (1855). Nesbitt, together with a commissioned photographer, visited the studios of several major New York-based painters at the time. From the selected frames, he then painted those same spaces where the author-artist is absent. The result is a series of artists' studio portraits in which accumulated objects and materials quietly inhabit the space, giving it a sense of autonomous existence. Indeed, following Aldalgisa Lugli, within the studio "certain carefully chosen objects, or a particular decoration, are above all bearers of a 'concept', the paradigm of the place", so that "in every case, it is from the objects arranged on the walls of the studio that identification proceeds"[39]. In this sense:

> Object and subject, viewed and viewer, object and frame no longer reside as dichotomous counterparts. Rather they are co-constitutive elements, evidentiary and embodied, a complex, multivalent event registered within the material properties of things in space through which a set of circumstances and forces – political, social, spatial, historic, economic, legal, administrative, regulatory, art and architectural historical – cohere.[40]

38. B. O'Doherty, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
39. A. Lugli, *Naturalia et Mirabilia. Il collezionismo enciclopedico delle Wunderkammer d'Europa*, Editore Mazzotta, Milan 2005, p. 44, translation by the author.
40. T. Di Carlo, *Exhibitionism*, in "Log", n. 20 Curating Architecture, 2010, p. 151.

The condition of co-constitutive elements evokes, as Tina Di Carlo notes, Bruno Latour's notion of *quasi-objects*[41], which are "more threadlike, more fragile, more complex, more richly vascularized, more fully able to generate than either the fact or the fetish"[42].The significance of spatial conditions – their specific arrangements arising from the careful and deliberate elements placing – mediates the relationship between the inhabitant and the inhabited space. It mirrors the personal disposition onto a specific architectural poetics, or more precisely, toward its materialization and spatial transposition. In doing so, it also delineates the 'rules of the game' within which certain actions – no longer purely private, but culturally inflected – are enacted. Embedded within this intricate interplay of dynamics:

> A singular museum of architecture emerges. An architecture certainly represented according to the tastes of a single collector and conceived by the pencil of a single architect – yet in this 'museum', uncertainties, broken rules, groundless games, and the extraterritoriality of contemporary architectural languages are listed, recorded, and catalogued relentlessly.[43]

The space of work – whether personal or professional – becomes the place where work is exposed to scrutiny: questioned in its premises and in its attempts by oneself, by colleagues, and by anyone who happens to enter, even by chance, becoming part of the piece as it unfolds. In this transposition, which operates on multiple levels and simultaneously, the staging of coherent things and actions presuppose the arrangement of specific spatial tropes[44] – *luoghi retorici* – that emerge as semantic deviations from the constitutive contexts they are used to, such as metaphors and allegories. The use

41. B. Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 272-273.
42. T. Di Carlo, *op. cit*., p. 153.
43. F. Dal Co, *La casa dei sogni e dei ricordi*, in "Lotus", n. 35, 1985, p. 124, translation by the author.
44. See G. L. Beccaria (edited by), *Dizionario di linguistica e di filologia, metrica, retorica*, Giulio Einaudi editore, Turin 2004.

of spatial tropes as rhetorical figures for reading the studio's spatial features does not stem from a semiotic tradition or narrative in architectural theory. Following Lefebvre's analogy with Gothic churches[45], the studio is first and foremost a space meant to be lived in, perhaps without any explicit intention to communicate, or to be dissected and analysed. Yet, in seeking to uncover the implicit logic woven into its arrangements, their metaphorical resonance[46] acts as a lens through which these spaces can be explored, articulated, and brought to evidence.

> Perhaps the observation of things was my most important formal education; then observation turned into the memory of things. Now it seems to me that I see them all arranged like tools in a neat row; aligned as in an herbarium, in a list, in a dictionary. But this list, between imagination and memory, is not neutral; it always returns to certain objects and also constitutes their distortion or, in a sense, their evolution.[47]

Within the architectural studio the archive, the library, the model room, the gallery, and the desk appear both as allusions to the formal and intellectual decoding of the world and as fertile microcosms for the design process, perpetually reshuffling, their positions subtly interchangeable. Assuming the intrinsic kinship between studiolo and wunderkammer – between production and projection – the *mise-en-scène* of the studio struggles with the challenges of representing the submerged world of references essential to the design

45. H. Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, Anthropos, Paris 1974.
46. According to Adrian Forty "There is no reason why a metaphor should be required to reproduce every detail of the object to which it is compared: metaphors are never more than partial descriptions of the phenomena they seek to describe, they are always incomplete. Indeed, were they to succeed in total reproduction, they would cease to be metaphors, which subsist through likenesses drawn between inherently unlike things". In A. Forty, *Words and Buildings. A vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, Thames and Hudson, New York 2000, p. 84.
47. A. Rossi, *Luoghi Urbani*, interview by Cecilia Bolognesi, Unicopli, Milan 1999, p. 27, translation by the author.

process. What kind of relationship exist between a specific poetics and the organisation of the place hosting its creation? What figures emerge, and through which strategies of display are they conveyed?

Indeed, while the relationship between epistemological domains and spatial models has been extensively explored, much remains to be said about how the latter are made explicit through the dynamics they activate, in their becoming spaces of exposure, and moreover, about the instances where the original epistemological significance of these arrangements is either inverted or translated.

The discreet survey of the collected practices offers a set of lenses through which one may perceive – as transversal critical reading – both recurring and specific spatial dynamics, as well as the altered instrumental use of space and its semantic displacement in relation to the architect's generative processes. At first, the embodiment of the space-poetics relationship can be traced within a *core logic*: a hierarchically organised spatial system where a central nucleus provides the dominant features of the studio, and around which the other functions revolve. These peripheral spaces acquire distinct relational qualities – sometimes mirroring, sometimes counterpointing the main one – creating a rhythm of circulation and encounter that shapes both practice and reflection.

The 'shophouse' of Francesco and Alessandro Mendini, as described in the contribution by Filippo Lorenzo Balma and Miriam Pistocchi, can serve as an exemplary case. Although Alessandro Mendini when speaking about his atelier evokes the model of the workshop, his studio is in fact a more complex environment, establishing a vertical spatial dynamic between different semantic realms. From the internal staircase connected to the main living area, one descends into the double-height open space of the studio. Half way, the mezzanine accommodates a couple of small and more secluded rooms, in contrast to the large workspace below.

If these upper rooms appear to align with the spatial model of the studiolo – recalling the beautiful painting *San Girolamo nello studio* (1474) by Antonello da Messina – or with the monastic cell– also a reminiscence of the *loge* device in academic architectural apprenticeship[48] – their function does not end here. The elevated position,

mid-air suspended along the descending staircase, and their predominantly glazed enclosure grant them an additional, subtle role: that of overseeing the work being carried out below[49]. They resemble a pair of small twin turrets wrapped around the central column that bisects the studio. This image is ironically reinforced by the narrow balcony, which extends the resting platform of the staircase itself. At the same time, the balcony signals an act of control while offering visitors an outstanding view of Mendini's oeuvre, displayed along the entire walls as mimicking a gallery space[50].

The house at 60 Belvederestraße in Cologne by Oswald Mathias Ungers also reveals a semantic spatial inversion in the two-phase process of its construction, which, according to the architect, correspond to one another as a joint act of "inhalation and exhalation", as Annalisa Trentin reports in her contribution. Two spaces are of particular interest: the library and the model room. The latter occupies the ground floor of the original house (1958-59), while the library was added during the later extension (1989-90). Although these two spaces appear independent and would be conventionally associated with the material experimentation of architectural work and its technical-theoretical study, their uses are in fact intertwined, if not reversed.

48. See S. Türkkan, *The Architecture of the Making of the Author*, in "Oase", n. 113 Authorship, 2023, pp. 25-35, https://oasejournal.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/25-Oase-113-e-book-3.pdf (accessed October 23, 2025).
49. The presence of devices enabling the control of the studio space takes place in several examples. One is the striking use of more than one hundred round convex mirrors by Soane in his house-museum, or, in Milan, the angle mirror used by Achille Castiglioni in his atelier in Piazza Castello.
50. The gallery model is also a common figure of the architectural studios, also known through different terms such as "wall atlas" or "mood board" – that are the exhibition of tools for the design practice, whether these tools are understood in the traditional sense – as for example the wall of wooden details and models in the Renzo Piano's studio in Genoa –, or whether more conceptual instruments, such as images, references, or objects, as in the case of the Spanish architect Souto de Moura. See A. Tavares, P. Bandeira (eds.), *Floating Images. Eduardo Souto de Moura's Wall Atlas*, Lars Müller Publishers, Zürich 2012.

The model room becomes the site dedicated to theoretical inquiry, housing numerous scale models – 1:20, 1:10, and 1:50 – commissioned by Ungers from the artist Bernd Grimm. They represent architectural masterpieces from antiquity to Italian Renaissance, all rigorously rendered in white, and include some of his own architectural projects. The *Kubushaus* library gathers the striking collection of treatises informing this research through the material reproduction at reduced scale, while simultaneously functioning as a window onto the world: "I have so many memories – Ungers told Annalisa Trentin some years ago – and I want to keep them purified by traveling in books instead of actually going to the places"[51].

Adjacent to the library lies the model room and, at the far end of the plot, a small gallery hosts several white models. Between these, the open-air courtyard amplifies[52] the collection, displaying works by Bruce Nauman (Square, 1977/88) and Günther Förg (Ohne Titel, 1988). Beneath the two-level library is the archive. Around the two focal points – the library and the model room –, the spaces of the house-studio revolve in a complex yet precise set of connections that form an interior vestibule for the open-air gallery. Here again, the three epistemic domains coexist, yet they are not unified.

Indeed, along the studios' collection one may notice other forms in which semantic inversions and spatial dynamics are arranged around a centred logic, exhibiting its own "dominant selection strategy"[53]. This is the case, for instance, with Piero Portaluppi's display and use of the archive: both literal and material ones. Rather than merely serving as a repository for the architectural projects, the archive of the Milanese architect extends, like a polyform virus,

51. The quote is reported in C. Baglione, *Oswald Mathias Ungers 1926–2007 in memoriam*, in "Casabella", n. 761-762, December 2007-January 2008, p. 6, translation by the author.
52. M. D'Alessandro, *Oswald Mathias Ungers at Belvederestrasse: Self-portrait in the Studio*, in "Athens Journal of Architecture", n. 8, Issue 4, 2022, pp. 405-438, https://doi.org/10.30958/aja.8-4-5 (accessed November 23, 2025).
53. B. Groys, *Art Power*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2008; it. trans. 2010, Postmedia, Milan, p.108.

throughout all the interlocking rooms of his studio, as noted by Lucia La Giusa in her contribution. Portaluppi curated an extensive collection of several thousand postcards, gathered from the early 20th-century through the 1970s, organised in multiple filing cabinets[54]. Complementing these was a vast repertoire of images – likewise related to historic buildings, monuments, interiors, and ornamental details – divided into historiographic sections ranging from antiquity to the modern era. Together, they constituted a living imaginary from which the architect continuously drew inspiration. This archival practice – usually associated with the final phase of knowledge acquisition and design production – thus becomes an active agent within the entire *raumplan* studio's interiors, through the strategic use of cladding and wooden samples, deployed with the same rigor of archaeological remains or constructive material display.

Moreover, the complex articulation of the interior space reveals a different logic, recalling a labyrinth, or 'interlocking rooms' that characterise certain hindering architectural studio. This is based on the juxtaposition of different spaces, each one centred on a specific character and autonomy, sometimes arranged in surprising successions, others in a voluntary opposition. The result is an initial disorientation for those entering, who neither have access to the entire spatial configuration of the studio nor can reconstruct it, except through gradual and partial attempts.

At the XVI Triennale di Milano, Guido Cannella, head of the curatorial committee for the seminal edition spanning from 1979 to 1982[55], organised the second cycle of the architectural section as

54. O. Selvafolta, *L'archivio di immagini di Piero Portaluppi: percorsi formativi e materiali del progetto*, in M. Docci, M. G. Turco (edited by), *L'architettura dell'altra modernità*. Atti del XXIV Congresso di Storia dell'Architettura, Roma 11-13 Aprile 2007, Gangemi Editore, Rome 2007, pp. 212-224.

55. The XVI Triennale di Milano, titled *Città, architettura, design, moda, audiovisivi* (1979/1982) set out to expand its exhibition activity across the entire three-year mandate, aiming to function as a permanent hub for events dedicated to design culture. To reflect this shift, the program was

a double exhibition exploring the interdependency within architectural practice and theory, between knowledge and ideas.

The first, titled *Architecture and Knowledge*, was entrusted to Roberto Gabetti, while the second section on *Architecture and Idea*, was curated and installed by Ado Rossi. In describing the design choices for this exhibition, Rossi writes:

> [My exhibition layout] is a wall with several doors; from each door one enters a corridor, and from there, into one single room. In the room is the sought-after object. This path, which carries both archaeological and psychological resonances and takes the form of a Myth, is also the most logical from a distributive standpoint (…).[56]

The most logical distribution layout is that of the gallery, in the specific case a *quasi-enfilade* like, that Rossi associates with the Greek *stoà*'s archetype and with that of the museum, where rooms replay and mirror the exposed works of art. Within the central exhibition hall, Rossi displays the reproduction of Raphael's *School of Athens* (1509-1511) preparatory drawing, whose spatial features inspired the Boullée's design for the Grand Library (1785). In front of the cartoon stands a model of Palladio's Villa Emo (1559-1565), and nearby a few geometric solids are placed against the light blue of the corridor walls.

Objects, paintings, models, and drawings serve as materials through which the narrative is carefully assembled: a kind of exposed autobiography of the references and imaginative world that shape the author's poetics. This spatial approach, which shifts emphasis toward a performative understanding of space, is also evident in the photographic reportage Luigi Ghirri conducted on Rossi's

articulated into three separate exhibition cycles unfolding over the course of the triennium. See: https://archivi.triennale.org/archive/archivi-triennale/16 (accessed December 6, 2025).

56. A. Rossi, *Architettura/Idea*, in A. Rossi, L. Meda, D. Vitale (edited by), *Architettura/Idea*. Catalogo della XVI Triennale di Milano, Fratelli Alinari, Florence 1981, p. 15, translation by the author.

Milanese studio in via Maddalena between 1989 and 1990[57]. The intricate relationship between the two started from an earlier collaboration for the "Lotus" magazine, and along two exhibitions dedicated to the architect[58]. His visual recordings map the workspace closely intertwined with Rossi's drawings, furniture, and artefacts mingling with the personal objects that filled, again, the light blue rooms of the studio. Ghirri himself describes the reason for the intellectual *liason*:

> There is also a joyous sense of wondering, magically, inside a wonderful toy, getting lost and finding one's way amid the gears and little wheels, almost as if it were possible to understand the secret that arouses within us such a sense of surprise and amazement. (…). In the end what fascinates me about his work is all this, but it is not a sweet memory, a happily evocative synthesis, nor are these the clever points of a Great Architect. Rather, they are the memories, stories, connections, inventions, and appearance that constitute the various layers of making things of our perceptions.[59]

The image of a set of rooms to be entered, where is possible to find the "sought-after" object, makes the analogical leap to Giulio Camillo's *Theatre of Memory*. Alongside the taxonomic list, the archive, the collection, and the library, it represents an established generative model of knowledge process. This is based on the loci technique cherished by the *Art of Memory*[60], and on the idea of defining "an ordered route of places in the mind.

57. P. Costantini (edited by), *Luigi Ghirri, Aldo Rossi: cose che sono solo se stesse*, Electa, Milan 1996.
58. See G. Braghieri, *Aldo Rossi*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1981 and A. Ferlenga, *Aldo Rossi: Architetture, 1959-1987*, Electa, Milan 1987.
59. L. Ghirri, P. Constantini, G. Chiaramonte, *Per Aldo Rossi*, in Id. (edited by), *Niente di antico sotto il sole: scritti e immagini per un'autobiografia*, Società Editrice Internazionale, Turin 1997, pp. 127-129.
60. A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1966.

To each is assigned, through an interplay of associations, an image related to the thing to be remembered" [61]. Lina Bolzoni precisely describes the structure of this most renowned example:

> The structure of Camillo's theatre appears to have been based on the form of the classical Roman amphitheatre, although in this case the relationship between spectacle and audience was reversed. The spectator was placed at the centre, on the stage, while the spectacle of all reality unfolded around him along seven axes. Each of these consisted of seven tiers, and was marked at its base by a column representing one of the seven known planets and the classical divinity associated with it. However, the array of columns also corresponded to the seven days of Creation, to the first principles of Pythagorean and hermetic philosophy, and to the first seven divine names in the Kabbalistic tradition. The whole of reality – from its first principles to the arts and sciences – was thus arranged around forty-nine principal loci, each place marked by an image. According to the rules of the art of memory, the spectator could employ each one as an imago agens, that is, as an image capable of summoning up a network of associations in the mind. Like the pieces on a chessboard, however, the observer was supposed to take note not only of the image, but also where it was placed in relation to everything else in the theatre.[62]

The logic of *interlocking rooms*, embodied in the gallery-palace-theatre of memory model, shapes the spatial organisation of many architectural studios, functioning as specific spatial trope. Among the many examples, these include the previously mentioned studio

61. L. Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory. Literary and Iconographic Models in the Age of the Printing Press*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2001, p. xvii.
62. L. Bolzoni, *Giulio Camillo and the Theater of Knowledge. A Mind Endowed with Windows*, in "Cabinet", n. 65 Knowledge, 2017-2018, p. 2; https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/65/bolzoni.php (accessed November 14, 2025).

of Portaluppi and the house-studio of Gae Aulenti in Milan's Brera district, presented by Serafina Amoroso. In Aulenti's private apartment, the interior becomes a complex system of passages and interconnected spaces in which the experience of movement – through both the house and the studio – becomes a characterising theatrical feature. The mezzanine, for example, overlooks the living area below, often a stage for semi-public or public meetings in the cultural Milanese circuits. At its far end, it bends to symbolically connect with the intricate, narrow, and vertically articulated space of the studio. The latter – accessible through an independent entrance and still linked to the house via the living area – unfolds across five staggered levels, organised as platforms of varying sizes. More reminiscent of a womb than a traditional workspace, it offers deliberately constricted and partial views along the path to the upper level: a kind of secret room, her personal studio.

Within a *performative logic* – as Lina Bolzoni asserts – the role of the viewer is inverted. The viewer occupies the centre of the space, from spectator to actor. It is precisely around this relational dynamic that the space is constructed. The mission for OMA, with the project for Marina Abramović's Institute for the Preservation of Performance Art (MAI) in 2012, was to combine two different kinds of spaces, that of performance and that of a living archive, where the artist's personal biography would merge with training activities for artists and public audience. In doing so, according to the limitations imposed by the existing structure – the former Hudson theatre in New York – "a new volume is placed within the existing building's shell. This new space provides a monastic ground that is both highly flexible and controlled"[63]. The "monastic" volume is posed at the centre of the space and divided into three part that are combinable. Around it delves the space of offices, services, and meeting rooms. The focus – both in terms of size and architectural quality – is the performance arena, which in the design concept

63. See the project's description on https://www.oma.com/projects/marina-abramovic-institute (accessed November 21, 2025).

acts as a propeller for the entire institute. A place where agents and spectators coexist in the ambiguity of an a-hierarchical stage. The same concept could be noted when looking at Rem Koolhaas office in Rotterdam, also informally called the *aquarium*. The large office has no secrets, no blind spots. Anything "that does not hide a desire to be seen", to report Giulia Menzietti's words in dialogue with Cino Zucchi.

The interior space is subdivided by glass walls exposing the entire working cycle: the teams while working, the building materials, the trials and models of the ongoing projects as a unique platform in which the creative (and management) process is promoted to the eyes of the visitors. The workspace thus provides an opposing model to that of the wunderkammer, while maintaining the same scope: the wonder is the working process itself with its actors and spectators placed on the same stage.

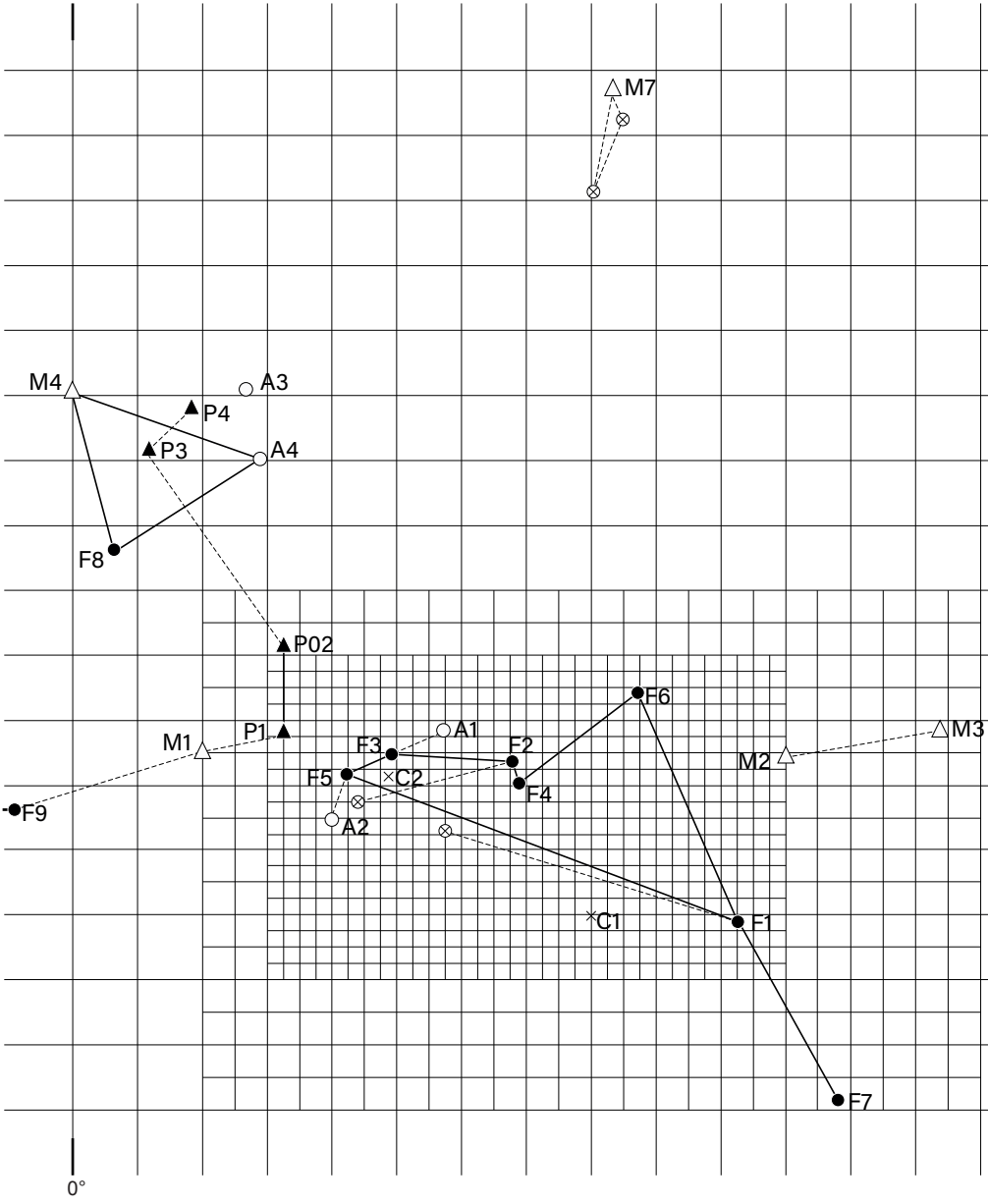
Certainly, the reading of the (architect's) studio is not always clear or self-evident. Epistemic models and their embodiment rarely present themselves in a stable or univocal form. Rather, they appear ambiguous, layered, and elusive. Such conditions persist through coexistence, as an attentive reading of *Sant'Agostino nel suo studio* (1502) by Vittore Carpaccio suggests. Indeed, it is a *com-posed* space, a structured simultaneity. The studio is ultimately an indulgent space, as Enrico Miglietta also underlines: "where architecture preserves its most intimate traces". One that admits error, revision, and continuous transformation, within which grace manifests itself as the capacity to "deciding within doubt"[64].

Precisely this coexistence and graduated ambiguity enables the reader, across the collection of studies that follows, to construct a personal and necessarily shifting narrative. One that is not without unexpected analogies: between Mollino's house and Rossi's enfilade,

64. It is undoubtedly a risk to describe the studio as a site in which grace manifests itself. A condition characterized by a sense of benevolence, beauty, and indulgence, as well as serenity. In this context, grace does not refer to a supernatural state; rather, as articulated in Paolo Sorrentino's film *La Grazia* (2025), it denotes the capacity to to choose despite a persistent condition of uncertainty.

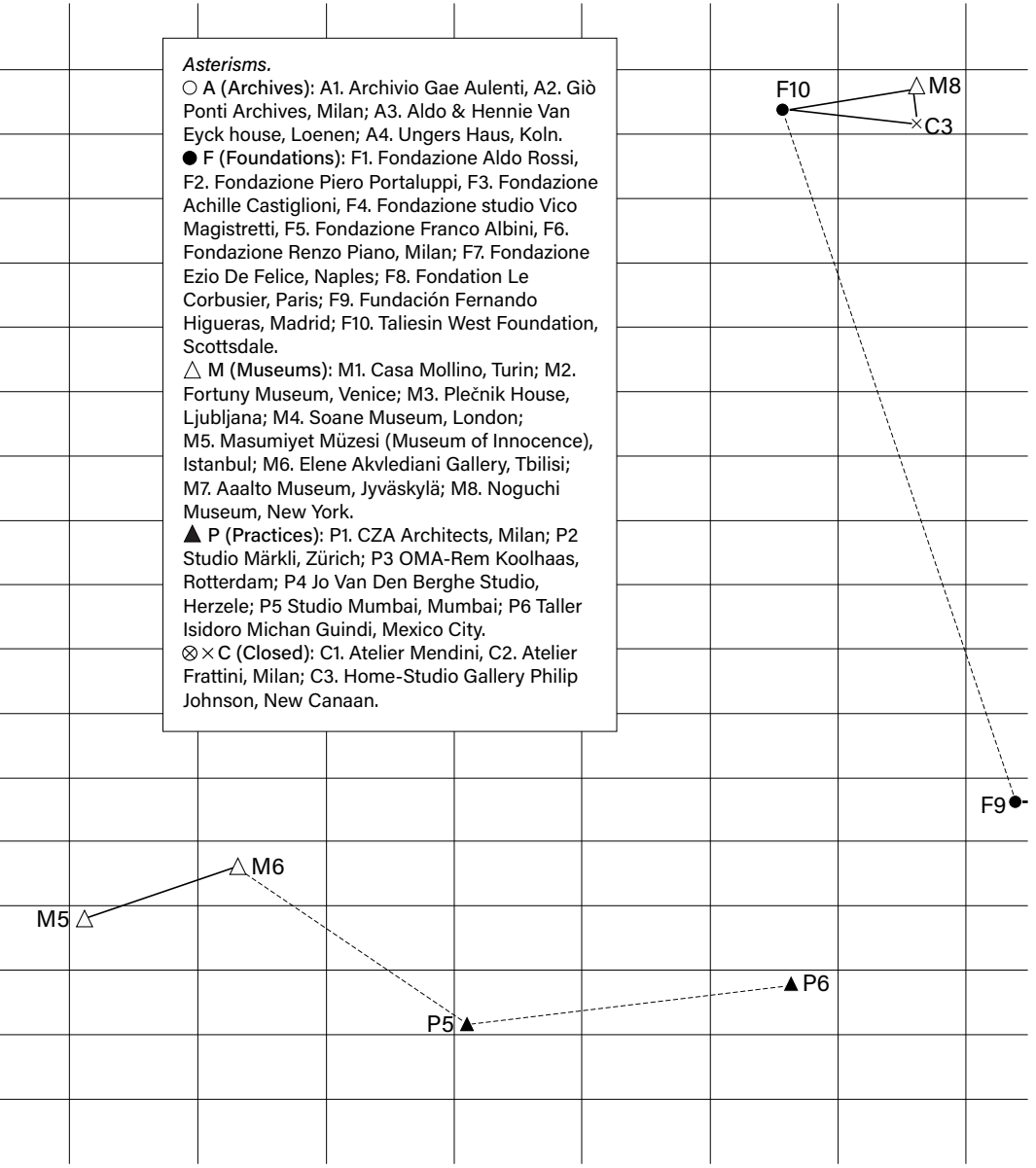
for instance, or between the interlocking rooms of Plečnik and those of Ungers. These correspondences do not imply direct lineage but recurring spatial questions that resurface across distinct historical and theoretical contexts.

Yet, within the specificity of the possible readings, this extended sequence ultimately does justice to the evident relationship between space and poetics – or, more precisely, its construction – through the emergence of spatial tropes. These operate as conduits, as mediating devices between intellect and the senses: zones of transition in which architectural meaning is neither purely abstract nor entirely phenomenological, but continuously negotiated. It is through these embodiments of mediation that architectural practice is daily informed, shaped, and recalibrated.



Asterisms. Constellation of the case studies. Drawing by the author (2025).

Asterisms.
○ A (Archives): A1. Archivio Gae Aulenti, A2. Giò Ponti Archives, Milan; A3. Aldo & Hennie Van Eyck house, Loenen; A4. Ungers Haus, Koln.
● F (Foundations): F1. Fondazione Aldo Rossi, F2. Fondazione Piero Portaluppi, F3. Fondazione Achille Castiglioni, F4. Fondazione studio Vico Magistretti, F5. Fondazione Franco Albini, F6. Fondazione Renzo Piano, Milan; F7. Fondazione Ezio De Felice, Naples; F8. Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris; F9. Fundación Fernando Higueras, Madrid; F10. Taliesin West Foundation, Scottsdale.
△ M (Museums): M1. Casa Mollino, Turin; M2. Fortuny Museum, Venice; M3. Plečnik House, Ljubljana; M4. Soane Museum, London; M5. Masumiyet Müzesi (Museum of Innocence), Istanbul; M6. Elene Akvlediani Gallery, Tbilisi; M7. Aaalto Museum, Jyväskylä; M8. Noguchi Museum, New York.
▲ P (Practices): P1. CZA Architects, Milan; P2 Studio Märkli, Zürich; P3 OMA-Rem Koolhaas, Rotterdam; P4 Jo Van Den Berghe Studio, Herzele; P5 Studio Mumbai, Mumbai; P6 Taller Isidoro Michan Guindi, Mexico City.
⊗ × C (Closed): C1. Atelier Mendini, C2. Atelier Frattini, Milan; C3. Home-Studio Gallery Philip Johnson, New Canaan.



Navigating the collection

The atelier, traditionally perceived as a private and introspective space, is here reconsidered as a cultural construct, an active site of production, negotiation, engagement and representation[65]. While aligning with this ambition, the curatorial approach avoids the construction of a clear taxonomy, or a comprehensive state of the art .on the features and the evolution of the architectural studio. Rather than tracing a historical or typological continuum – where such material is, in the specific case of the architectural studio, scarcely available – it assembles a selection of situated cases, conveying a reflection on the material and conceptual conditions of such spaces within the architectural discourse.

As already stated, this inquiry does not claim to be exhaustive, and indeed often proceeds by figurative leaps, fragmented and at times even rhabdomantist. It nonetheless grounds on a defined set of geographic and cultural parameters, with a limited number of criteria guiding the selection. An initial step in the curatorial project, developed within the research framework program of *Display: The Presence of the Future*, focused on considering the specific Milanese context, a particularly rich one offering numerous examples of atelier-museums, foundations, and publicly accessible archives of architecture and design. Within this context, at least twelve cases were identified, most of them still located in the original places, although only in a few instances with the original settings preserved. Thus a preliminary field work served to verify the relevance and consistency of the topic.

Building on some intuitions the survey itself provided while exploring accessible foundations and studios, the research was opened to contributions for the selection of national and international cases through an open call. It was first addressed to colleagues from the research units involved in the *Display* program, with the

65. See T. Avermaete et al., *Authorship as a Construct*, in "Oase", n. 113 Authorship, 2023, pp. 1-8, https://oasejournal.nl/en/issue/authorship/authorship-as-a-construct/ (accessed December 2, 2025).

valuable contribution of Marta Atzeni, Filippo Lorenzo Balma, Luca Esposito, Luca Galofaro, Jose Maria Garcia Fuentes, Giulia Menzietti, Miriam Pistocchi and Giulia Setti, with solicited and unsolicited case studies deeply discussed during the writing process.

Progressively, the research took on a more precise and well-defined direction, identifying – through a cross-referenced bibliographic effort between themes and authors – the spatial hypothesis as the foundational research core that would connect the diversity of scientific contributions. This third and longest phase was crucial in refining the spectrum of variations, and spatial possibilities that emerged during the process of selection. It often unfolded through direct dialogue with scholars, whose expertise and deep familiarity with the specific case study proved essential in shaping this constellation.

At that point, the contributions by Marco Addona, Serafina Amoroso, Lucia La Giusa, Gabriele Neri, José Cherem Serur, Duccio Fantoni, Vincenzo Moschetti, Annalisa Trentin, Alejandro Campos Uribe, Jacopo Leveratto and Alessandra Bruno, Lina Malfona, Enrico Miglietta with Jo Van Den Berghe, Isidoro Michan Guindi, Benedetta Patella and Sezin Sarıca consistently helped in pushing the research to a certain level of awareness. Many of the case studies submitted as contributions were not necessarily those initially chosen – indeed, some were entirely unexpected – and perhaps for this very reason even more valuable. Assembling the diverse material turned out to be a complex puzzle, and the result is, inevitably, open to debate, as it entails several notable omissions – at times because certain topics, and authors, had already been extensively explored, and at other times due to a lack of sufficient coherence with the research's aims.

Although the research has consistently maintained a broad openness in terms of case-study selection, certain parameters have gradually consolidated as common features. Indeed, while preserving a wide typological range that explores the various gradations between public and private space – from studio-houses characterised by more intimate or solitary working modalities, to ateliers and workshops where material production becomes a third, more

complex layer of activity – cases were excluded in which the work or study spaces are ancillary, secondary, or lacking distinctive spatial qualities. Across the selected ones, the workspace possesses its own spatial, volumetric, or formal autonomy. In some instances, the studio features are even dominant, overturning traditional domestic hierarchies: the house becomes a space of sociability, an exhibition site, where the private sphere becomes secondary or diluted. Most of the selected examples are situated within a defined historical frame – roughly the 20th-century. There are no canonical or extensively historicised cases, and only a few examples from the contemporary period. In the rare instances where contemporary cases have been addressed, a critical filter has been applied circumventing its immediateness and the lack of critical distance, an approach that often led to stimulating negotiations and discussions among the authors. Finally, as already stated, a necessary condition was a direct and in-depth familiarity between the author and the case study, if not habitual, at least grounded in a solid research engagement and genuine interest.

The collection delves around the two terms of investigation – the spatial features in relation to the architectural poetics and the authorial intentions – entangled in the concreteness of their appearance, atmosphere and materialities. This double fil rouge characterises the two-types contributions. The first 'spaces/figures' consists of textual micro-narratives and image-based explanation related to one specific practice. It investigates the spatial features and the relationship between work and space of exposure, posing some questions. For example, is it possible to draw analogies with previous models? And do these analogies reveal other possible deviations?

The second category of contributions 'dialogues/intentions' collects longer texts presented through in-depth dialogues. It addresses today's theoretical questions on the role of exhibiting – and of collecting – within the spaces of contemporary architectural production, understood both as expressions of cultural and operational positioning and as tools for communicating authorial poetics.

Once the ensemble of contributions was defined, the research questioned the ways in which these situated practices could be

effectively communicated within the book's editing. The decision was made to explore their abstraction through drawing. This approach was applied only to the case-studies, which present a tripartite structure, three components that shape the form of the essays. First, a brief text offers a spatial gaze, emphasizing, in turn, the processes, figures, and metaphors that mould the studio through a personal perspective that could often, and perhaps inevitably, misrepresent or betray the original idea, which in most cases remain inaccessible for direct consultation. In addition, authors were asked to provide a selection of photographs of the studio, mainly focusing on its interiors. These images reveal the voyeuristic stance that such spaces evoke – the curiosity, the desire to appropriate privateness, the wish to possess it through the targeted act of photographic recording. The pictures show activities, objects, and modes through which work, study, and the degree of exposure are present and experienced in the space, both using new or archival materials.

The third element consists of a drawing prepared by the curatorship, produced after the first two components and based on objective architectural data – plans and sections – collected for each case-study, even not always feasible. The axonometric drawing offers a scientific lens for dissecting the space again, highlighting, through selected shading, the spatial tropes, invariants, and key devices that transpose specific settings onto a possible classification. It provides both a form of abstraction and a spatial revelation, claiming for links and similarities between the cases. What is proposed here is a form of *critical voyeurism* – a deliberately detached, yet spatially attuned gaze that investigates the studio not through the aura of its inhabitant, but through its spatial logic, its recurring figures, its latent metaphors. In this way, the studio is reframed not merely as the extension of the author's identity, but as a site of generative investigation for the architectural discourse.

Each of the included case-studies contributes to this reframing. They are presented as partial and situated fragments, and at times contradictory. Yet they collectively articulate a field of inquiry, where the discipline rehearses and questions its modes of working, thinking, and communicating.

Organising the material in this volume required a structure flexible enough to reflect the variety of perspectives presented. Instead of relying on fixed or rigid categories, the book uses the idea of *asterisms* – informal groupings of stars that help with navigation – as a guiding model. Unlike official constellations, asterisms are adaptable, overlap with different regions of the sky, and allow for multiple interpretations. This metaphor supports an approach that prioritises connections, cross-readings, and relationships over strict classification.

Following this logic, the contributions have been arranged not only according to geography and spatial characteristics, but also through a retrospective process that identifies shared themes and recurring concerns, while still preserving their distinctiveness. In this way, the curatorial outcome mirrors the complexity of architectural workspaces themselves – shaped by personal experience yet connected through broader collective actions and agencies.

Again: at the same time belonging to the self and to the other.

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