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Book of Proceedings



Conference for Artistic and Architectural Research  
& Collective Evaluation of Design-driven Doctoral Training Programme

# Reformulation —Book—of —Proceedings

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Architecture  
and Academy of Fine Arts and Design

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# Reformulation

## Book of Proceedings

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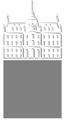


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# Menard's Invention

Alessandro Rocca, Politecnico di Milano

There is no more solid system for understanding an architectural project than redesigning it. In the first semester of our Bachelor in Architectural Design, many Design Studios use this pedagogical tool to bring students closer to the founding elements of the project. Before the photographic era, the redesign was the basis for the transmission of architectural knowledge. The relief, and the redesign of Roman architecture, was the training ground for the young Venetian Andrea Palladio. Between 1535 and 1538, he laid the foundations of his architectural culture by redesigning, reformulating the architectural elements he discovered in the fora of Rome. In the eighteenth century, another Venetian, Giambattista Piranesi, settled in Rome and devoted himself to the representation of Roman architecture, publishing collections of prints with illustrations of classical and modern monuments that spread throughout Europe. However, Piranesi's ability did not stop depicting the existing, more or less reinvented, but deepened in a work that was an accurate Reformulation of ancient Rome, taken in its entirety.

In "The Campo Marzio of Ancient Rome, by G.B. Piranesi, a member of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of London" (The Campus Martius of Ancient Rome, the Work of GB Piranesi, Fellow of the Royal Society of Antiquaries, London), 1762, the Venetian architect produced an unlikely urban plan studded with a myriad of buildings. Recognizable monuments and spaces, such as the Pantheon and the stadium of Domitian, the current Piazza Navona, stay together with conjectural reconstructions and inventions. Often, Piranesi reformulated these hypothetical buildings without any archaeological foundations. In its mix of redesign and design, relief and invention, this extraordinary work represents the idea of Reformulation in architecture fully.

In recent years, Reformulation could be updated and transmuted in the term Montage. As Manfredo Tafuri taught us, contemporary culture no longer believes that it can reconstitute a unitary and homogeneous system.

We deal with fragments, splinters, residues and conceive a new order only as a sum of different parts. Palladio was able to reconstruct a classical system of enormous value and immediate application. Piranesi instead put together fragments that could only evoke the past through the instrument of Reformulation. As Tafuri recalls, the Russian film director, and theorist of Montage, Sergej Eisenstein, was a collector of Piranesi prints.

When Aldo Rossi produced the table of the Analogous City, he juxtaposed urban fragments extracted from many different eras and origins, including some of his designs, and the suture lines between one excerpt and another remained visible. Unity is lost forever; there remains the possibility of working through the Montage, the arbitrary juxtaposition of incoherent fragments that finds its meaning through the friction, the rejection, the similarities and differences that separate the different pieces. The theories and techniques of artistic restoration require that the new, or reformulated, parts that integrate the mutilated work must be separate and recognizable. At the same time, they must reformulate a unitary and complete perception, thus restoring the whole that was lost.

The Reformulation, in these examples, is placed in techniques that belong to the sphere of design. It identifies a terrain that lies halfway between representation and invention. We are here in a middle region where the project exists, it is a *sine qua non*, but it is also diluted, reduced, subject to the need to maintain a fraction of the original work. Reformulating would also be similar, in some ways, to translation. Especially in literature, translate means operating on two separate registers simultaneously.

On the one hand, the original must be preserved, made understandable, and appreciable. On the other hand, it is necessary to give the new text an autonomous form recognizable in the canons of a different language. This

objective, responding to entirely different terms and parameters, can only be achieved by reformulating the original work with various degrees of alteration.

Investigating the meaning of Reformulation helps us to identify this territory, usually in the shade, scarcely explored and less noble, where representation and invention overlap, generating gray, blurred, ambiguous areas, where the difference between the copy and the original, between the old and the new, between copyist and author, blur.

In Jorge Luis Borges' short story "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" (1962), a contemporary writer decides to rewrite Miguel de Cervantes' masterpiece. It means that Menard will place on paper, one after the other, all the words that make up the work, eventually producing an exact copy of the original. Menard meditates and reformulates each word, one by one, and, at the end of compositional reasoning, repeats the same creative process in the author's mind. In this way, the copyist also becomes the author of Don Quixote, overturning the classic scheme of creative construction. The normal is that there is only one author for each work, and each author can produce several works. In the "Pierre Menard" a literary universe is outlined where a single work can generate an infinite number of authors because the repetition carried out from Menard opens a series that can recur indefinitely. The story also poses another fascinating paradox: the transformation of the reader into an author. Menard is, first and foremost, a reader of the Quixote, a very attentive reader who never misses a word, capable of absorbing one hundred percent of the work. Therefore, if the novel is always the same, it is evident that its representation will always be different, modeled each time by each reader's mind in personal and unique memory. The multiple paradoxes embedded within the story enlighten the meaning of the word Reformulation and its ability to prefigure multiple relationships, middle lands, two-

way paths between reading and writing, drawing, and project.

We have confidence and appreciation for the reformulation practices that are part of the Design-driven methodology, often alongside or preceding more explicitly design-oriented operations. Therefore, we ask students to work through a series of reformulations in the Architecture Research Agenda course, which inaugurates the doctoral program in Architectural Urban Interior Design (Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Milan Polytechnic, professors Alessandro Rocca, Andrea Gritti, Stamatina Kousidi).

The first Reformulation concerns a "position project," selected among those made by them previously, to be redesigned, highlighting the aspects that later converged in their research proposal. The second Reformulation concerns the redesign of a project which constitutes an essential reference for them. These two initial exercises highlight the relationship between study, recognizing, and applying the knowledge that stays within the design activity.

Reformulating their personal history and design references, students bring tacit knowledge to the surface. We evaluate these preliminary exercises inaugural approaches necessary to unveil the kind of architectural knowledge that must become the primary research engine.