

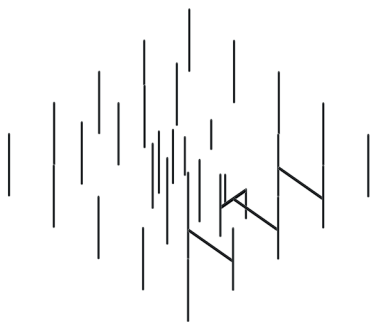


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# Imitation Parody Montage



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The Syllabus series presents experiences and research made inside formative courses at different levels: bachelor, master, doctorate. The goal is to offer these results, provisional and incomplete as they can be, to the scientific community, enhancing dialogues and exchanges.

This issue collects the assignments made in the course "Architecture in Transition", held by Alessandro Rocca on February 2023 at the PhD Program of Architectural Urban Interior Design, Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano.

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#### Cover and Frontespice

Yuwei Ren, Contrast between pillars (Villa Savoye, Villa Dall'Ava)

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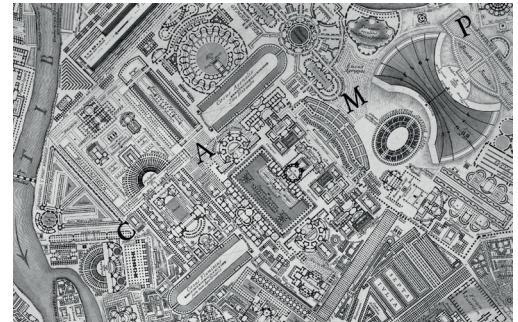
Alessandro Rocca

## **Reformulation, and Montage**

Alessandro Rocca is a Professor of Architectural Design and the Head of the Ph.D. program of Architectural Urban Interior Design at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DASU), Politecnico di Milano.

There is no more solid system for understanding an architectural project than redrawing it. In the first semester of the bachelor's in Architectural Design at Politecnico di Milano, many Design Studios use this pedagogical tool to bring students closer to the basic elements of the project. Before the photographic era, redrawing was the basis for transmitting architectural knowledge. The analytical observation and drawing of buildings and fragments of Roman architecture was the primary training of the young Venetian Andrea Palladio. Between 1535 and 1538, he laid the foundations of his culture by redrawing and reformulating the architectural elements he discovered in the Roman forums. In the eighteenth century, another Venetian architect, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, settled in Rome and devoted himself to the representation of Roman architecture, publishing collections of etchings of classical and modern monuments that spread throughout Europe. However, Piranesi's ability went beyond depicting and reinventing the existing and deepened in an accurate Reformulation of Rome's entire architectural and urban consistency.

In the hypothetical reconstruction of the Roman Campo Marzio, Piranesi produced an unlikely urban plan studded with a myriad of buildings. Recognizable monuments and spaces, such as the Pantheon and the stadium of Domitian, and the current Piazza Navona, stay together with conjectural reconstructions and inventions. Often, Piranesi refor-

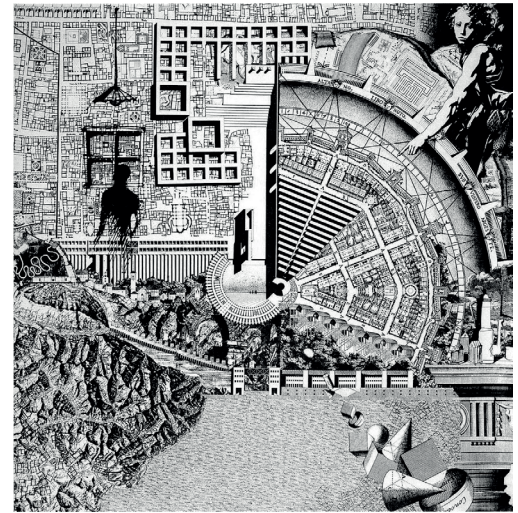


Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma (detail), 1762.

mulated these hypothetical buildings with weak archaeological foundations. In its ambiguity between redrawing and design, documentation, and creation, this extraordinary work fully represents the idea of Reformulation in architecture.

In recent years, Reformulation could be updated and transmuted in the term Montage, as Manfredo Tafuri explains in *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, contemporary culture no longer believes it can reconstitute a unitary and homogeneous system. We deal with fragments, splinters, and residues and conceive a new order only as a sum of different parts. Palladio could reconstruct a classicist method of enormous value and immediate application. Piranesi instead put together fragments that could only evoke the past through the instrument of Reformulation. Sergej Eisenstein, the Russian film director and theorist of Montage, was a collector of Piranesi prints, and this is, for Tafuri, the sign of continuity, of a living link between the classicist practice of Reformulation and the modernist technique of Montage.

In the *Analogous City* (1976, by Aldo Rossi with Eraldo Consolascio, Bruno Reichlin, and Fabio Reinhart), a collage that juxtaposes drawings extracted from many different eras and origins, including some of Rossi's projects, the suture lines between one excerpt and another remained visible. Unity is lost forever; it remains possible to work through the Montage, the arbitrary juxtaposition of inco-

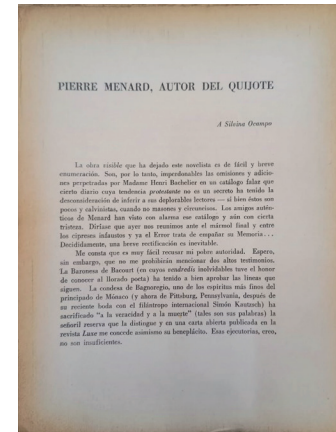


Aldo Rossi, Eraldo Consolascio, Bruno Reichlin, and Fabio Reinhart, *La città analoga / The Analogous City*, Collage presented at the Venice Biennale of Art, 1976.

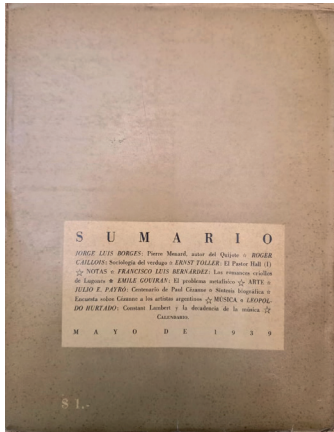
herent fragments that finds its meaning through the friction, the rejection, the similarities, and the differences that mark the different pieces. The theories and techniques of artistic restoration require that the new or reformulated parts that integrate the mutilated work be separate and recognizable. At the same time, they must reformulate a unitary and complete perception, thus restoring the whole that was lost.

In these examples, the Reformulation principle is at the base of techniques that belong to the sphere of design. It identifies a terrain between representation and invention, involving both attitudes, belonging to a region where the project is a *sine qua non*. Still, it is also diluted, reduced, and subjected to the need to maintain fragments, ideas, and leftovers of previous work. Reformulating also is similar, in some ways, to translation. Especially in literature, translation means operating on two separate registers simultaneously.

On the one hand, the original must be preserved, understandable, and appreciable in its specific qualities. On the other hand, it is necessary to give the new text an autonomous form recognizable in the literary canons of another language. The original and the translation must respond to different rules, terms, and parameters, and to achieve this result, it is necessary to reformulate the original work with various degrees of alteration.



First page of the short story "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote", by Jorge Luis Borges, published in Buenos Aires by the journal *Sur*, 56, May 1939.



Index of the journal *Sur*, 56, May 1939.

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* a contemporary writer decides to rewrite Miguel de Cervantes' masterpiece. It means that Menard will place on paper, one by one, all the words that make up the work, eventually producing an exact copy of the original. Menard meditates and reformulates each term and, at the end of compositional reasoning, exactly overlaps the same creative process of the author's mind. In this way, the copyist reformulates himself as a perfect copy of the author of the Don Quixote.

The creativity rule, as it is commonly intended and adopted in modern times, is that there is one author (or one group of authors) for each work, and each author can produce several. In the "Pierre Menard," the literary creation is upside down because a single work can generate an infinite number of authors trespassing any limits of space and time: the repetition carried out by Menard opens a series that can recur indefinitely.

The story also poses another fascinating paradox: the reader's transformation into an author. Menard is, first and



foremost, a reader of the Quixote, a very attentive scholar who does not miss a word, capable of absorbing and re-producing the perfect totality of Cervantes' work. Therefore, if Menard's novel is exactly a replica, it is evident that its creative process is different, molded in a personal and unique experience. The multiple paradoxes embedded within Borges' short story enlighten the meaning of Reformulation and its ability to prefigure multiple relationships and two-way paths between reading and writing, drawing and designing.

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