CONCEPT AND SCIENTIFIC ORGANIZATION
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BIBLIOTHECA HERTZIANA
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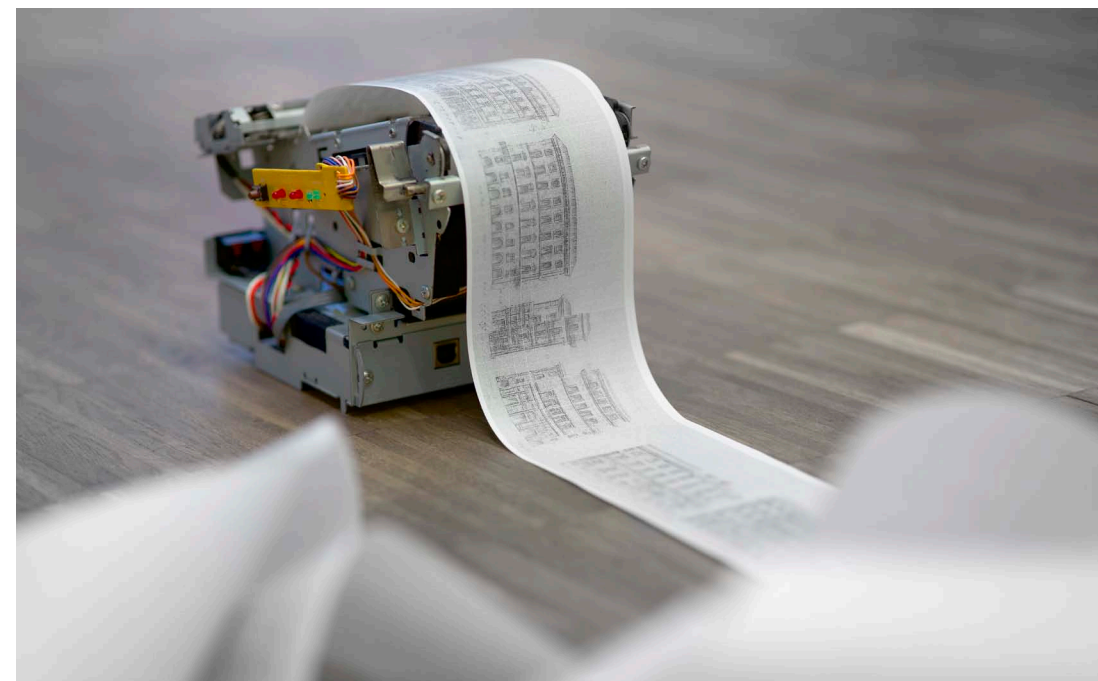ACCADEMIA TEDESCA ROMA
VILLA MASSIMO

Pareidolia.
Vie, piazze e monumenti di Roma

Exhibition
OCTOBER 8 – 10, 2020

Bibliotheca Hertziana, Max Planck Institute for Art History
Villino Stroganoff · via Gregoriana 22, Rome

IMAGES
Pareidolia, 2020, installation shot,
making-of (detail)

Round Table
Thursday, October 8, 2020, 5.00 pm

Architect Sebastian Felix Ernst (Villa Massimo Fellow 2019-2020) and media artist Christian Losert develop *Pareidolia*, a research-based exhibition that critically engages with the legacy of renaissance proportions in architecture.

A corpus of architectural drawings featured in Giacomo Antonelli's volume *Vie, piazze e monumenti di Roma* (1835), recently digitized from the Bibliotheca Hertziana's holdings, is turned into a data-set for a "self-learning" neural network designed by Ernst and Losert. After a training process, their software generates drawings translated from algorithmically derived cityscapes. Besides transposing the nineteenth-century visual input into a computational output, Ernst and Losert's network itera-tively produces new rules for its progressive calculations. It thereby accentuates and re-invents, in dream-like visualizations, canonical design elements, relationships and proportions. Machinic parei-dolia—the flickering projection of learned patterns—is here employed to test out the potential for variance contained in the scripts of a long influential architectural style, as they undergo contingent, individual interpretation.

Showcased at the Bibliotheca Hertziana's *Sala degli specchi* are the rare books on architecture that the software was trained on, as well as visualizations that span across different media and formats. These visualizations provide insights into the algorithmic processuality itself—generally opaque to nonspecialist observers—and into its outcomes. With this constellation of exhibits, Pareidolia seeks to draw attention, more broadly, to the potentials and limitations of the use of artificial intelligence in artistic and architectural practice. What type of expertise does the inventive potency of algorithmic writing presume, and how do its pragmatics and aesthetics generate new knowledge in turn? What meaningful ways of engagement with the past can a combined human and machinic authorship per-form, as it re-activates archival materials without losing sight of ever-recurring historical, social, and technical biases? On the occasion of the exhibition opening, a diverse group of speakers will convene for a round table to discuss Ernst and Losert's in situ and practice-based approach to the Bibliotheca Hertziana's holdings: Sebastian Felix Ernst, Sietske Fransen, Christian Losert, Darío Negueruela del Castillo, Marie Theres Stauffer, and Maria Bremer.

Open House with Artists
October 9 – 10, 2020

Please register through the web page of the Bibliotheca Hertziana for the visits:

| October 9 | 3.00 pm – 4.00 pm |
| | 5.00 pm – 6.00 pm |

| October 10 | 10.00 am – 11.00 am |
| | 12.00 am– 1.00 pm |

Research Seminar
Friday, October 9, 2020

| 11.00 am | Built Space as Enabler: Social and Affective Affordances |
| | Darío Negueruela del Castillo, *Digital Visual Studies, Max Planck Society/University of Zurich* |

Architecture's fascination with the machinic dates to its very origins. The enquiry into the capacities of autonomous generation and the rendering of complex and often unpredictable aesthetic, tectonic, and spatial outcomes is engrained at the core of the architectural and urban disciplines. And nowadays, algorithmic prowess promises to revolution the generation of form. But to what aim?

Beyond stylistic recombination and autonomous generation of form, urban studies still identify the ultimate extant performative capacities of architectural form to be at the socio-spatial dimension and at urban scale. From this perspective, I propose to look at the city as the yet unequalled architectural 'machine'. I contend that the importance of architecture lies in specifying the spatial conditions that ultimately facilitate a structured articulation of social alterity and the affective and cognitive frames of tolerance and collaboration the urban environment is characteristic for. This postulate might help us elucidate a strategy that embraces the unavoidable dynamics of new algorithmic machines and envi-ronmental awareness together with a careful and attentive regard to spatial transformation, sketching an adequate response to the challenges of our contemporary societies. Under this light, the analysis of existing forms and the projection of generative architectural articulations ought to embrace a reconsi-deration of space as a capacity and form as an enabler.

| 12.00 am | Machine Vision(s): a Seventeen-Century Catoptric Device Reconsidered/ Reconfigured |
| | Marie Theres Stauffer, *University of Geneva* |

In early modern Europe, it was not uncommon that mirrored devices were used to provide intense vi-sual experiences. These practices were actually part of a scientific culture in which aesthetics played a fundamental role. Catoptric devices offered a wide range of optical illusions such as luxuriant gardens with topiaries and fountains, but also flying bodies, transformed faces and fire-spewing dragons or even alleys with splendid houses and palaces.

This is at least what we learn from the description of such mirrored machines and their effects in books – since few of them have survived. One must therefore necessarily ask, to what extent and in what form is the field of early modern catoptrics accessible from a twenty-first century perspective? If knowledge of such «mirror-machines» can hardly be accomplished through direct access and must be gleaned mainly from the written sources, it is crucial to note, however, that the visual effectiveness of a catoptric image during an actual demonstration obeyed different rules than those described in the written accounts. Consequently, this talk will concentrate on the dissociations that existed between the Early Modern textual descriptions and the actual processes that may have taken place during de-monstrations. In order to substantiate hypothesis on catoptrical praxis, the conference will include observations made with a recently constructed model. This model is based on seventeenth-century descriptions and ultimately serves as a means to reflect on historical distance.