Koldo Lus
Dancing about a
A Conversation
and cartoonist K

Since his breakthrough in 2005, architect and cartoonist Klaus has been reveling in the light side of architecture with his drawings, comic strips, and cartoons. Published worldwide, his work usually tackles the less uplifting aspects of the profession. Criticizing its shortcomings and the excesses of its star system, his cartoons come usually coated with an array of educated winks to the many corners of architecture theory and history, science fiction, comics, or cinema. In this conversation, he and architecture and popular culture scholar Luis Miguel (Koldo) Lus Arana discuss his work in the context of today's digital culture, where the interactions between architecture and its periphery -media, popular culture, graphic arts- seem to multiply. Comics, architectural criticism, image production, the creative power of sarcasm, the reemergence of craftsmanship and traditional techniques, as well as the new directions of the profession are some of the topics that spring through it.

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LML: Since you went online in 2009, you have produced a variety of works related to comics and cartoons: from comic strips on the life at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD) to single panel cartoons on the current events of architecture as well as illustrations. In your series for *A10* magazine's section 'Interchange' you produced poster-sized cartoons with caricatures of the architects interviewed by Indira Van't Klooster[1]; for *Uncube*, a series of vignettes that commented on news blurbs printed side by side with them. Lately you have drawn some two-page stories for *Arquine*... How would you define yourself? Cartoonist? Architectural satirist?

K: Whatever works, actually. I guess that cartoonist comes closer to what I do, even if it is not a conscious choice, but rather a result of my inability to commit to long-term projects. My first career goal was originally becoming a comic book artist, but then architecture got in the way. So when I retook this early passion 10 years later, cartoons were an easier way to keep my comic-related urges under control. In fact, in 2005 I started publishing a comic strip, "The adventures of John Corb."[2] It was a sort of "Dilbert" for architects, perhaps a little closer to "Calvin and

1   A selection of these was collected in: Indira Van't Klooster, Klaus, *Forty and Famous. 10 Interviews with Young Successful European Architects* (Rotterdam: Amilcar Publishers, 2016).

2   Originally "El Corbu" (*Aequus Magazine*, 2005-6).

Hobbes" than to what *Architexts*[3] are doing. In fact, the GSD cartoons started out as comic strips or even short comic stories. It was later, after I did the "Hope" series mixing Rem Koolhaas and Obama via Shepard Fairey [See following page], that I decided to go the way of "editorial cartoons on architectural issues,"[4] since they seemed rather popular. In fact, I had a chat with Lars Müller, who was teaching a seminar at the school. I intended to sell him on the idea of my PhD research, which I thought was eminently publishable. He did not show the slightest interest; but he seemed very keen on the cartoons and suggested I should create one about Peter Zumthor, who had recently been awarded the Pritzker Prize. So I decided to move that way. If I had to define myself somehow, however, it would be as a storyteller.

LML: Well, there is a long-standing relationship between cartoonists and architecture.[5] Editorial cartoons were a great source of impressive architectural and urban imagery in the late nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century; I am thinking of the cartoons that Harry Grant Dart, Albert Levering, or Grant E. Hamilton drew for *Judge, Puck, Life*, and other magazines, or Winsor McCay's editorial cartoons for Randolph Hearst. Saul Steinberg's cartoons often had a strong architectural component and were widely published in architecture magazines. Of course, both Levering and Steinberg trained as architects, and Aalto himself contributed several drawings to *Kerberos* magazine. But there are also funny counter-examples, such as cartoonists Carey Orr and Frank King's entries to the Chicago Tribune Competition in 1922. The list would be endless: William Heath Robinson, Hans Georg Rauch... Ronald Searle's *Paris Sketchbook* is a joy to look at, for instance.

3   *Architexts* is an ongoing webcomic (http://architexts.us/) produced by two architects hiding behind the nicknames 'Joker' and 'Maverick'. The strip follows the exploits of the fictional architectural firm Franklin + Newbury. Published since 2010, it has spawned 5 compilation volumes so far.

4   For an overview of the 'Kunst Haas' series, which includes variations of Shepard Fairey's iconic 'Hope' poster, with Rem Koolhaas replacing Barack Obama as the main figure, see: https://klaustoon.wordpress.com/tag/kunst-haas/.

5   Gabriele Neri published a study on the History of architecturally-themed cartooning from the late XIX Century until today. See Gabriele Neri, *Caricature Architettoniche. Satira e critica del progetto moderno* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2015).

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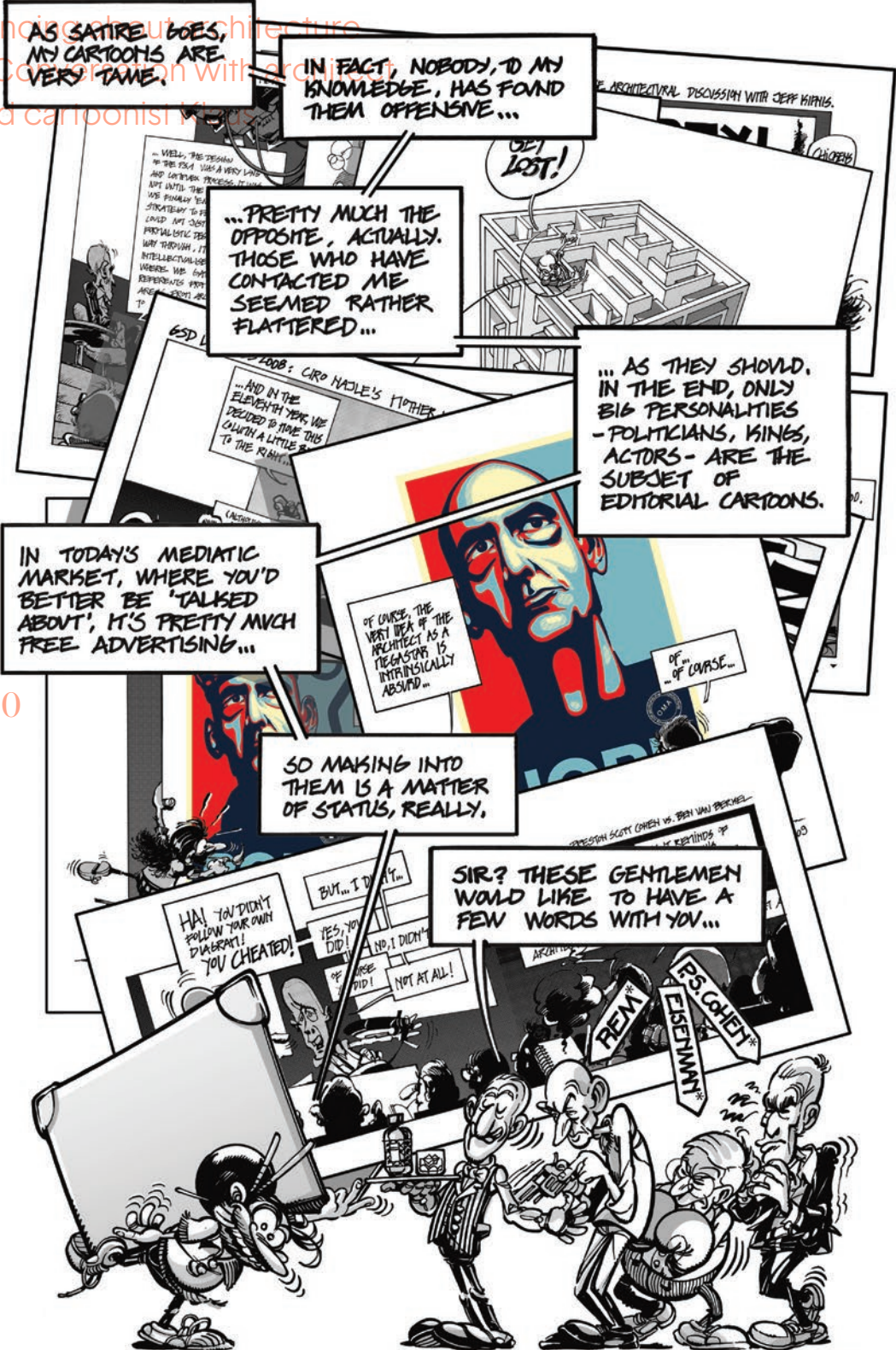
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K: Oh, I find no fault with the definition, and I'm flattered to be placed, even if in the ephemeral context of a conversation, within such an illustrious lineage. I never thought of myself as a cartoonist, but I've gladly adopted all these ways I or my work have been defined: "political cartoons for architects," "architectural satirist." Still, I am somehow reluctant to qualify my vignettes as satire, which in my mind belongs in a place certainly more elevated than where I dwell. "Mild, harmless mockery" describes more accurately what I do. *Satire*, in the tradition of Molière, usually involves a certain wit and delicacy in the way it deconstructs its subject through humor. I, on the other hand, enjoy tongue-in-cheek, lateral humor; I enjoy the partial, the unimportant.

LML: The topics you cover, however, are not really unimportant: you've been very critical of "starchitecture," and you deal with the many corners and names of architectural theory in your cartoons. Reyner Banham, Buckminster Fuller, Peter Eisenman- even Bruno Latour, or Peter Sloterdijk- have a steady presence in them, and your drawings are usually crowded with referents to films, novels, and other media.

K: Yes, that's absolutely true, but it doesn't change the fact that, even if the referents might be sophisticated, the humor is not. What I do is in a niche within a niche: you certainly have to be an architect to get it, but not every architect has read Reyner Banham, or Peter Eisenman's Post-Functionalism. And among those who have, fewer will be familiar with, let's say, *Akira*, or *Appleseed*[6], or some obscure B sci-fi flick I throw into the mix. A cartoon such as "Banham Style" (2012)[7] [page 283] requires that you be familiar both with François Dallegret's illustrations for "A Home is not a House," with Psy's "Gangnam style," and that you at least know who Jimenez Lai is. But the "twist" itself is a cheap pun. Of course, a cartoon such as the one with Eduardo Souto de Moura showing his Pritzker medal to Peter Eisenman, trapped in a cage resembling one of

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6   *Akira* (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1982-90) and Masamune Shirow's *Appleseed* (1985-89) were possibly the foremost representatives of the cyberpunk manga scene that bred in Japan in the 1980s, along with Shirow's own *Ghost in the Shell* (1989-90). *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell* also became highly influential in science fiction through their anime adaptations, in 1988 and 1995. All of them were also remarkable for their architectural visualizations.

7   Published in Brendan Cormier, Jimenez Lai, Klaus, "Caricature, Hyperbole, and the Politics of the Cartoon," *Volume* No. 36: Ways To Be Critical, 2013, 106-111.

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his houses from the 1960s-70s [opposite page], has more layers if you are familiar with Eisenman's career. I find the polysemy that arises in the random combinations very fruitful.

LML: Going back to your remark on feeling more a storyteller: it is true that, even though you have only produced a few short sequential stories, there is a serial nature to most of your work. The "Hope" cartoon was actually the first of the "Kunst-haas" installments, and of course, your contributions for *A10* (*Interchange*), *Uncube* (*Numerus Klausus*), and *Arquine* (*Arquinoir*), were conceived from the start as ongoing series. Why do you prefer serial work?

K: I find there is something very rewarding about series. Repetition is a very powerful device: it fosters a feeling of familiarity and becomes rewarding for the reader, too. The comicalness of running gags is completely based on iteration. I find systems very comforting, too, in regards to any creative work. When outlining a cartoon, for instance, they do provide you with a certain *ease* to start drawing, exactly in the same way pointed out by Bacon when he spoke about the "graph" (a term later distorted by consecutive translations)[8]: random lines on the canvas that provide the painter with a starting point and circumnavigate the anxiety provoked by the blank page. Systems, also in architectural design, give you a stable structure on which to operate freely: you can break them here and there, knowing that the design already has an inner consistency.

I also find that ideas generally appear in clusters. I sometimes find it very hard to come up with an idea, but very easy to come up with three interrelated ones. There is a tendency towards the spontaneous creation of narratives present in all creative works, including architecture. In fact, there are projects whose beauty lies in the underlying narratives they contain. I think this is one of the reasons why so many architects tend to gravitate

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8   When speaking about his creative process in his seminal interviews with David Sylvester *(Interview with Francis Bacon: The Brutality of Fact*, 1975), Francis Bacon explained how he made some marks on the canvas that he later surveyed "like you would a sort of graph". In *La Logique de la Sensation* (1981), Gilles Deleuze (mis)translated 'graph' as 'diagramme', subsequently translated back as 'diagram' in *The Logic of Sensation* (2003).

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towards graphic storytelling: the processes involved are, on a structural level, the same as in studio work, with much less frustration involved.

Satire, Derision, Creation

LML: So, now that we are amidst all this discussion about the post-critical, I wanted to ask you: would you qualify what you do as criticism?

K: Let me skip the discussion about post-critical. Don't take me wrong: I love neologisms as much as the next man –the next man being Reyner Banham or Homi Bhabha– but I'd rather avoid getting too cynical. My cartoons are critical in the sense that they mock, often very arbitrarily, pretty much anything architecture-related. However, there is no attempt to build a cohesive discourse. That's the beauty of satire (I mean *caricature*): you can take issue, make fun, criticize, ridicule, one aspect and its opposite. You don't have to settle for a specific reading or set of values, which is less committed, but also less limiting. Taking everything apart unabashedly can also be very productive.

LML: I would like to tackle that productiveness later. However, before we leave this non-critical nature you claim of your work: I understand your Klaus moniker was something you coined in order to differentiate your satirical (sorry) production from your scholarly work. At some point, though, you also started writing under your Klaus persona. You have a couple of articles out there, but I'm most interested in the 'Arquinoir' section you publish in *Arquine*, which consists almost invariably of a cartoon or a short story, and a text, mirroring each other thematically and aligned with the issue's topic. How does this differ from your academic output? Do you use a different voice?

K: Certainly. At the beginning, I used the penname in order not to contaminate my serious work, both professional and academic, with activities that might undermine my credibility. However, as time passed and being Klaus took on a bigger part of my days, writing naturally became part of this, let's say... *"exploration of the light side of architecture."* As Klaus, I write with a different mindset. First and foremost, because I can say things I would never dare say as myself. There is an interview with Wes Jones in which he points out how his comic strips allowed

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him to tackle serious issues expressing very strong opinions without having to worry about the consequences, "because… you know, it's just a comic book."[9] This is an exemption that applies to satire in general, not to comics *per se*—although the infantile aura attached to comic books helps. Also, this can be very productive, because the liberation from the obligation to construct a cohesive discourse, to provide answers to the questions you raise, can take you through paths you probably wouldn't have even thought of if you were writing seriously. Relentless nitpicking involves a lot of analysis and argumentation. The same goes for humor, and fiction, of course. In my columns for *Arquine* and in my scholarly production, I deal with the same topics: science fiction architecture, megastructures, and also Reyner Banham, whose articles for *New Society* are always a source for inspiration. But the tone is different, as is the chain of thoughts it unleashes.

LML: So, if I understand correctly, these texts work as an extension of your cartoons, unleashing a sort of "automatic" reasoning…

K: That might be taking it a little too far, but they help me find unexpected ideas, yes. It also comes more effortlessly. I think some of my better writing is in those texts (speaking of faint praise…). It probably has to do with their narrative nature, which helps when developing an argumentation.

LML: … My question is: do you think caricature, be it amicable or derisive, can play a similar role?

K: Yes. Caricature is a great trigger for creation. A few years ago, Jimenez [Lai] and I were chatting about how, when you copy something, if you're able to do it poorly enough, it becomes something new. There are two keys interrelated processes in caricature: exaggeration and deformation. Cartoons work in a reverse way: they tend to strip things down to their essentials. As Umberto Eco pointed out when speaking about Charlie Brown[10]: he provokes empathy in the reader because he

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9   See Yaohua Wang, Lennard Ong, "Archinterview: Wes Jones", Sci-Arc, California, c2010 (https://vimeo.com/9878887).

10   See "Lettura di "Steve Canyon", Il mito di Superman e Il mondo di Charlie Brown" in Umberto Eco's *Apocalittici e Integrati* (Milano, Bompiani, 1964).

encapsulates the basic features of a child (as does *Tintin* or Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan*). Comics being a cool medium, cartoon drawings work by triggering a series of associative processes in the viewer who fills in the blanks and perceives them according to his own preferences and set of references. Willem Jan Neutelings extensively used this iconic ability of cartoons in his projects throughout the 1990s.[11]

Caricature plays a simultaneous game of familiarization and defamiliarization, keeping the subject recognizable while distorting it. It introduces new readings, makes associations and brings in intertextuality that only arises in the exaggeration. I think language is sometimes misleading: metaphorically, tearing something apart also involves constructing. Making fun is still making, after all. A satirical take on a topic introduces puns, doubletalk... it shows the benefits of reactive thinking at its best. Distorting, caricaturizing a design can produce interesting results, design-wise. It is, in the end, a classic design strategy: choosing a certain direction and taking it to the limit. Only, this time, you start with something that's already been designed and take it in an extraneous way.

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Utopia, Dystopia, Fiction, and Design
LML: Earlier you mentioned the productive value of fiction. As we commented before, fiction has historically been a great producer of novel architectural imagery and concepts. In our short-term vision of History, *Blade Runner* is possibly the paradigmatic example, as a film that not only became an object of desire of postmodern writing, but has also influenced several generations of architects. However, this is also true of a "lesser" medium such as comics. Academic literature usually brings up *Archigram* 4 (May 1964), and its appropriation of comic book imagery from 1950s and 1960s American space pulps (from *Mystery in Space to Fantastic Four*), but this image production has abounded all

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11   Neutelings and Riedjik used to include small 'cartoons' of their own buildings in their presentations (see, for instance, Neutelings-Riedjik, 1992-1999. *El Croquis* nˇ 94, Madrid: El Croquis Editorial, 1999). Willem Jan Neutelings also used a series of vignettes in the competition for the European Patent Office Headquarters in Leidschendam, designed in collaboration with Frank Roodbeen (See Neutelings & Roodben Architecten: *European Patent Office* Rotterdam: Nai010 Publishers, 1991. He confirmed this interest in comics by providing an introduction to Pascal Lefèvre's *Architectuur in de negendekunst / Architecture dans le neuvieme art* (The Hague: NBM-AmstellandBouw, 1996).

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throughout the History of the medium, becoming more intense from the mid 1960s onwards, particularly in France.[12] In fact, the comics of that period were crucial in the development of architecturally conscious sci-fi in cinema from the 1970s onwards (*Valerian* is an obvious example, but there are many more), and I would say they stayed way ahead in terms of architectural design. There are notable exceptions, of course, but filmic world-building has always shown a tendency towards the generic, so you get a sort of standard space age, post-apocalyptic, cyberpunk, post-industrial futurism, also in terms of architectural image. However, in comics you can find authentic design exercises when it comes to creating the architectural backgrounds, particularly since the early 1980s.

K: Yes, there is a boost of "architectural consciousness" in comics at that point where a younger generation, which had grown up reading *Pilote*, but also *Métal Hurlant*[13] (better known in the non-francophone world through its American edition, *Heavy Metal*), entered the medium professionally. There is a mixture in those years: you find the members of the older generation, such as Moebius, Jean-Claude Mézières, and their followers -Enki Bilal, Tanino Liberatore- who cultivated the sort of metaphysical or surrealistic sci-fi that inspired *Blade Runner*. Then, you had the younger ones, who started their careers in the already intellectualized scenario created by *Métal Hurlant,* and brought their own interests to the foreground in their comics. Architecture, for instance, is one of the driving forces in the work of Andreas [Martens], Marc-Antoine Mathieu, or François Schuiten. They were, and still are, very inspiring.

LML: Schuiten, and his series *Les Cités Obscures*, created together with nouveau-roman writer Benoît Peeters, is possibly the ultimate example of dedication to architecture in a comic book series, but there are many to be found in those years. In cyberpunk *manga*, you can find Katsuhiro

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12   For an analysis of the contents of *Archigram 4*, see my own "Building a Utopie Autre [AMAZING ARCHIGRAM!-50 years of ZOOM!/ZZZZRRTT!/ THUD!/BLAAM!]", *Proyecto Progreso y Arquitectura* no. 10 (2014).

13   *Métal Hurlant* was a groundbreaking French comic book magazine created by Jean Giraud (Mœbius), Philippe Druillet, Jean-Pierre Dionnet, and Bernard Farkas. It ran originally from December 1974 to 1987. It was highly influential in the consolidation of an adult science fiction scene in the 1970s and 1980s, introducing a thematic and aesthetic revolution, whose influence on popular culture at large has been acknowledged by Ridley Scott, among others.

1. COMICS AND MODERN ARCHITECTURE HAVE HAD A LONG STANDING RELATIONSHIP.

6. IN 1925, F'INSTANCE, LE CORBUSIER WROTE A STORYBOARDED LETTER TO MS. MEYER, WITH A SEQUENCE OF CAPTIONED DRAWINGS OF THE VILLA HE WAS DESIGNING FOR HER
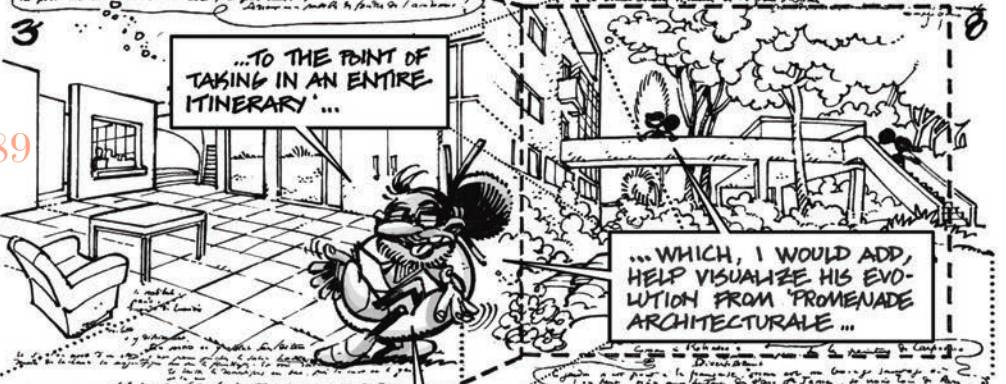
AS BRUNO REICHLIN NOTES, THESE DRAWINGS...

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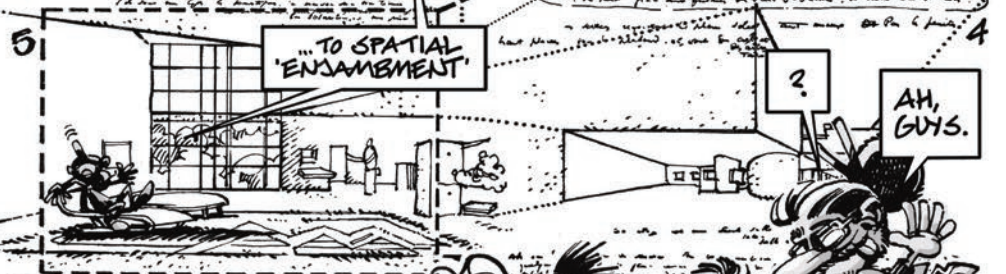**2.** ... EXPLOITED 'ALL THE CINEMATIC POSSIBILITIES OF THE 'CARTOON'...

... WITH 'PERSPECTIVES EXTENDING ...

3. ...TO THE POINT OF TAKING IN AN ENTIRE ITINERARY'...

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8.

... WHICH, I WOULD ADD, HELP VISUALIZE HIS EVOLUTION FROM 'PROMENADE ARCHITECTURALE ...
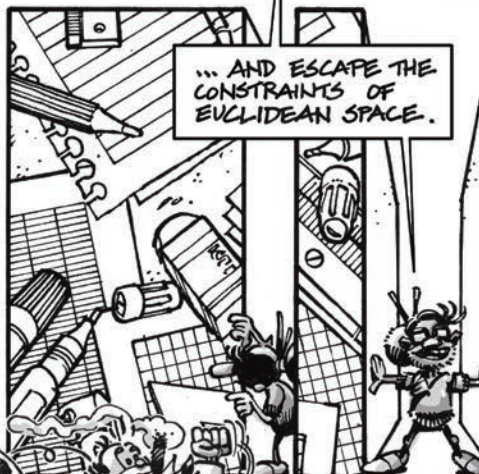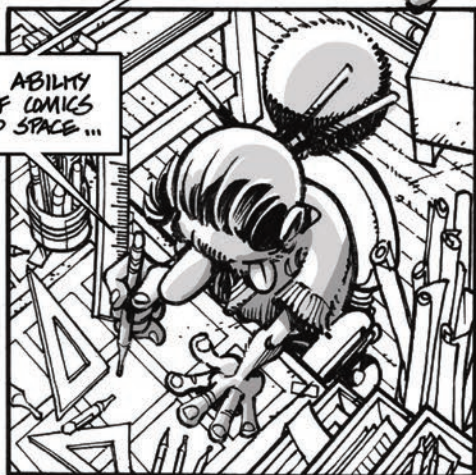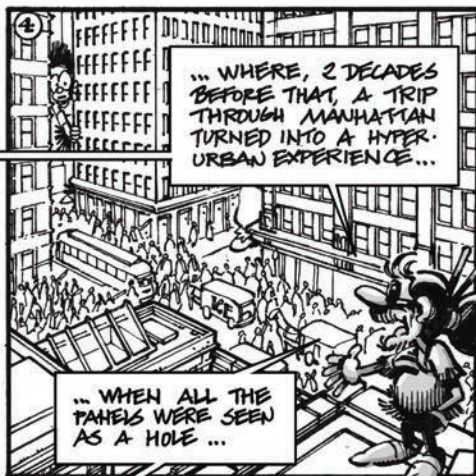
5. ...TO SPATIAL 'ENJAMBMENT'

4.

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AH, GUYS.

YOU ALREADY HERE ?

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Otomo's *Akira* (1982-90), Masamune Shirow's *Appleseed* (1985-89) and *Dominion* (1986/ 1995), Yukito Kishiro's *Gammu* (1990-95), and, some years later, Tsutomu Nihei's *Blame!* (1998-2003). All of them produce very distinct, precisely designed and beautifully drawn urban environments. And this usage of fiction as a plateau to develop architectural styles that end up creating very characteristic "urban personae" becomes more eloquent when fiction meets surrealism, magical realism, satire, or straightforward parody. Shirow's *Dominion* was very skillful in using an environmental post-apocalyptic scenario to develop a whole catalog of "earth urbanism" inspired in the architecture of insects, but perhaps the most self-consciously architectural are the ones of the francophone *bande dessinée*. Patrick Cothias and Phillippe Adamov have been very productive, style-wise: in *Les Eaux de Mortelune* (1986-2000) they developed a whole "trash-baroque" architectural style, and their series *Dayak* (1993-97) offered in turn, some "tribal cyberpunk" in their futuristic Addis Ababa. My favorite is possibly *Damanuestra*, in Alejandro Jodorowsky and François Boucq's *Face de Lune* (1992-2004), a whole city designed in the style of Paul Virilio's *Bunker Archéologie* [See illustration on page 296]. How do you feel about comics as medium for architectural experimentation? Does this also have a place in your work?

K: Well, if narratives are an integral part of designing architecture, it follows that fiction is, too. The narratives I develop to conceive the design are stories, pieces of fiction, and architecture, in its ideal state, is a fiction. Eisenman's houses are, in their true self, fictional narratives. Paging Baudrillard, we could say Eisenman's *built* houses that are *simulacra* of their true Platonic selves. But this is true of any design.

Fiction provides a great *alter*-reality where one can exercise his architectural muscles freely. When studying, I always felt that the history of architecture was a very rich toolbox, but we were only allowed to use a fraction of it. Postmodernism tried to break out of that mold, but only in a limited capacity and with an ironic flair that did not allow the architect to fully dive into the complexities of stylistic induction. In fiction, the story informs the design: the mechanics of fictional utopian and dystopian societies provide many opportunities to the designer.

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LML: Now that you bring it up, in *Megastructure*, Reyner Banham was very critical of the latitude with which the term "utopian" was applied to architecture and planning that could be better defined as fantastic or visionary.[14]

K: Yes, because those proposals did not provide any information on how they could ameliorate social conditions, nor on the shape of the society they housed. In fiction, however, utopian and especially dystopian settings offer great opportunities for design. I'd argue that it's dystopian settings that are particularly favorable. Utopias are very fragile and restrictive scenarios, with a delicate balance that spawns a negative dialectics: intervention in a utopian state is usually better defined by what you cannot do. Dystopias, on the contrary, are all-inclusive. Their dystopianism is very durable and very inspiring, design-wise. I was very grateful when Liam Young and Darryl Chen coined the term "productive dystopia."[15] *Blade Runner* is possibly the best example of this: there is an article by Norman Klein in which he commented on a conference where several urban planners hoped Los Angeles would look someday like Scott's film; talk about a strange Stockholm syndrome.[16] In this context, I think comics have some advantage, because they stand somewhere between the substitutive sequentiality of cinema and the possibilities of non-linear narratives –not to mention simultaneity– of the written page of the literary tale, where the very concept of utopia was born.

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14   Banham took particular issue with Tomas Maldonado's distinction between 'Old' and 'New' Utopians: "*This, clearly, is a conventionally sloppy usage of the Word 'utopia' as meaning little more than visionary or improbable; few of the projects under discussion here were seriously engaged in the task of proposing a radical new or perfected social order. (...)Utopia, by contrast (in the view offered by Colin Rowe, Françoise Choay and other recent scholars), is often obsessional about the proposed social system, but not too concerned about architectural form.*" P. Reyner Banham, *Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 79-80.

15   See Darryl Chen, "Productive Dystopia," in *Utopia forever: visions of architecture and urbanism*, ed. Robert Klanten and Lukas Feireiss (Berlin: Gestalten, 2011).

16   "*(I)n February, 1990, at a public lecture series on art in Los Angeles, three out of five leading urban planners agreed that they hoped someday Los Angeles would look like the film Blade Runner... It has become a paradigm for the future of cities, for artists across the disciplines.*" Norman M. Klein, "Building Blade Runner," *Social Text* no. 28 (1990): 147.

LML: Yes, they belong in that narrative middle ground born out of the incestuous marriage of the visual and the literary pointed out by Lessing.[17] Schuiten and Peeters's *Les Murailles de Samaris* (1982) is a great example of this. It shows the advantages of the ellipsis and combination of precision and ambiguity of comics from the very first page: In it, Schuiten and Peeters set up to design a whole city and the society within it, in the style of Victor Horta's *Art Nouveau*. Of course, they only design some details, and render vaporous aerial views, but in his mind, the reader can "see" the whole city designed with the same excess of detail.

K: Funnily enough, it was comics like those which finally made me drift towards architecture. I learned to love architecture through the magnificent drawings that could be done after it, and it was the architectures created by Schuiten, Andreas, and Otomo, among many others, that shaped my architectural imagination. It is part of the mental *humus* where I dive when I design. There is a definite distance between architecture and its representation where the latter always has the better chance of succeeding. Drawing has an ability to render the utopian dimension of architecture, and comics–both sequential and simultaneous representations–even more so. Aldo Rossi's, or Michael Graves' buildings could never capture the magic of their drawings. So, yes, I do use my cartoons as a way to channel my architectural anxieties.

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I think I ended up veering towards cartooning because the balance between effort and satisfaction is much higher than when I used to work as a designer. Getting a design built is a long and frustrating process. Cartooning architecture is quick and immediately rewarding.

The Architectural Profession
LML: So, in a way you have come full circle: you started out with comic books as a career goal, then you moved to architecture, and after a few

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17   The subject of comic strips in relation with Gotthold E. Lessing's literary theory has been discussed at large by Thierry Smolderen in "Naissance de la Bande Dessinée" (*Scénario et BD, reponse à un questionnaire, Hors Série Pallaxe*, Ed. Section arts plastiques, Montpellier Université Paul Valéri: 1997), and "The Arabesque Novels of Rodolphe Töpffer" in Thierry Smolderen et al., *The Origins of Comics: From William Hogarth to Winsor McCay* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014; 35-52).

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years, you started working for architecture magazines as an architectural cartoonist, if there's such a thing. And, I must say, you've managed to do so keeping a Marcinelle School[18] style not particularly akin to architectural representation.

K: Yes, I like saying that I am a third-rate Franquin. I would probably have much more success if I drew in a *ligne claire*, or *manga* style, something a little more abstract that might be more palatable in architectural circles. But I just enjoy drawing like this. I admire Chris Ware's dedication, but it would suck out all enjoyment for me.

LML: Do you think there is a niche here for architects to work in? Browsing the net, there seems to be an upsurge in architects' interest in comics: Bjarke Ingels' *Yes is More* invariably comes up in every discussion about this topic–and we could argue whether it is really an archicomic–but there are many other architects using comics as a means to present their designs, as well as those who produce comic books as an end in themselves. Competitions such as *Fairy Tales* are fostering the appearance of those, and it has become frequent to see students using comics in their designs. Do you think comics are living an *âge d'or* in architecture?

K: I want to say that, yes, architecture is finally looking at comics as a medium that has things to offer, and more people are interested in them. But I also wonder if it is not a matter of exposure. There have always been exchanges between the worlds of architecture and comic books, starting with Le Corbusier, whose passion for Rodolphe Töpffer, the Swiss Father of comics, has been widely discussed.[19] Many comic book artists have

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18   The term "Marcinelle school" (École de Marcinelle) was coined to refer to a group of Belgian cartoonists consisting among others of Joseph Gillain (Jijé), André Franquin, Morris, Will, and Peyo (Pierre Culliford). Those artists were associated with the weekly magazine Spirou, whose offices were located in the town of Marcinelle (Belgium). It has often been cited as a counterpart to Hergé's *ligne claire* school.

19   Le Corbusier's interest in Töpffer was first mentioned by Stanislaus Von Moos in "Voyages en Zigzag," in *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier: Applied Arts, Architecture, Painting, Photography, 1907-1922*, ed. Arhur Rüegg, Stanislaus von Moos (New Haven: Yale University Press, c2002). A lengthier discussion on Töppfer's influence on Le Corbusier's usage of caricature and graphic narrative can be found in "La Ligne Claire de Le Corbusier. Time, Space, and Sequential Narratives, "*Le Corbusier, 50 Years Later* (Conference Proceedings, Valencia: Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, 2015).

THESE ASPECTS ARE VERY MUCH PRESENT IN PRACTICES SUCH AS JIMENEZ LAI'S...

... WHOSE SHORT STORY 'SOCIOPATHS'...

... PUBLISHED IN THRESHOLDS #40, '~SOCIO'... *

... PUBLISHED IN THRESHOLDS #40, '~SOCIO'...

... PLAYS WITH THE AMBIGUITIES BRED IN THE FREE COMBINATION OF PANELS, FLOOR PLANS, CROSS SECTIONS...

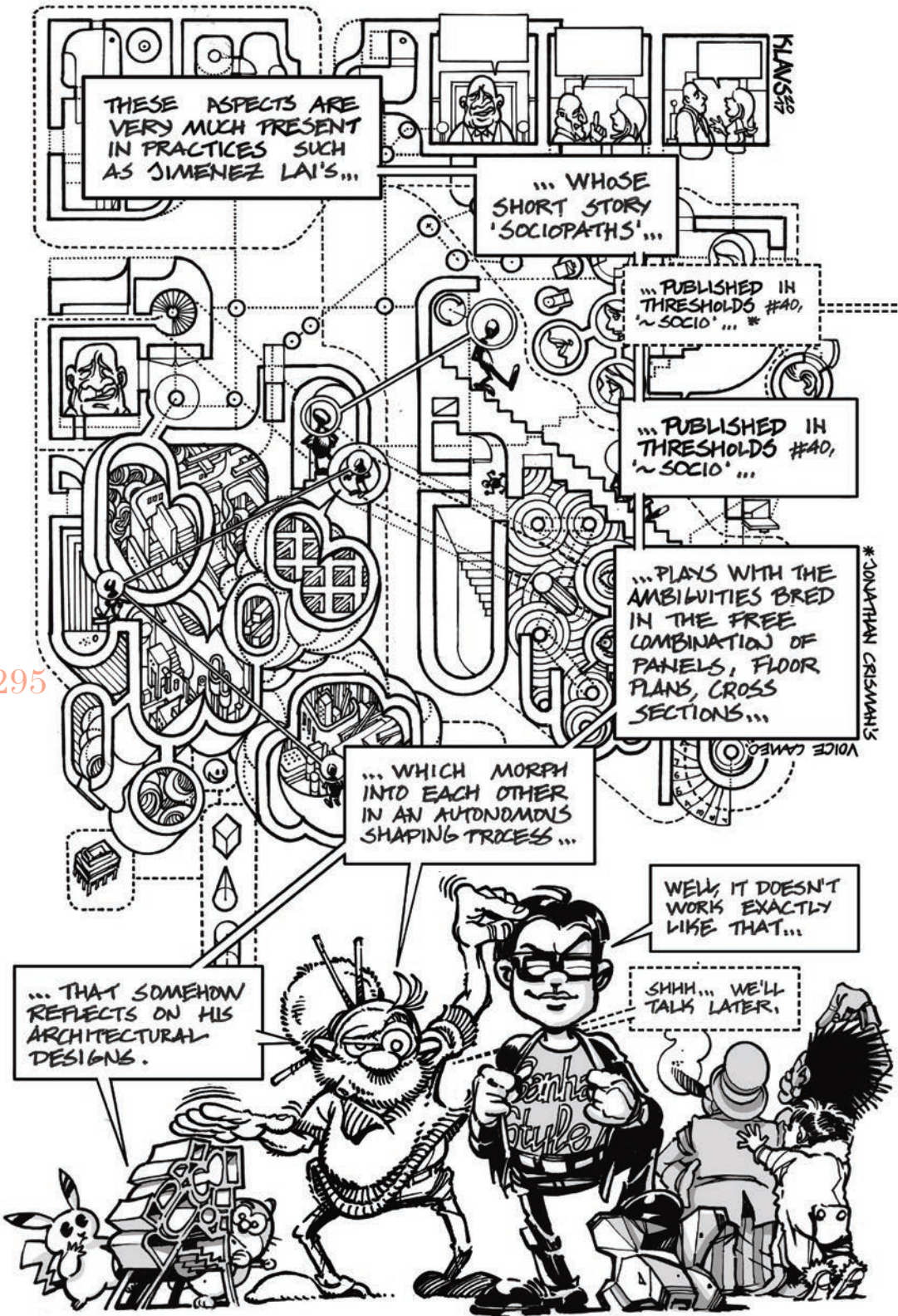... WHICH MORPH INTO EACH OTHER IN AN AUTONOMOUS SHAPING PROCESS...

WELL, IT DOESN'T WORK EXACTLY LIKE THAT...

SHHH... WE'LL TALK LATER.

... THAT SOMEHOW REFLECTS ON HIS ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNS.

* JONATHAN CRISMAN'S VOICE CAMEO.

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Koldo Lus
Dancing about architecture
A Conversation with architect
and cartoonist Klaus

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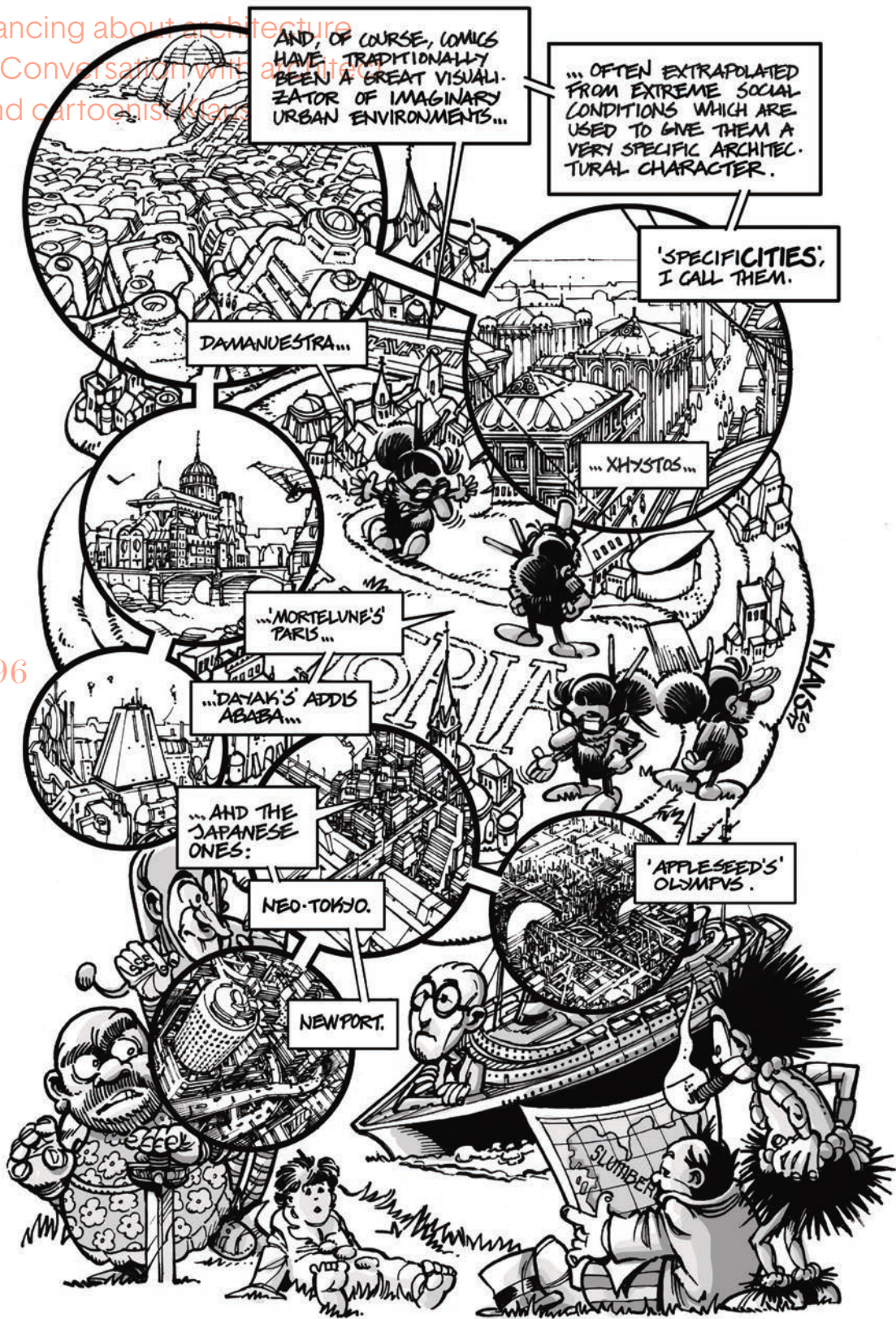
had an architectural background: Guido Crepax, Milo Manara, and more recently Tsutomu Nihei, or Manuele Fior[20].

There have also been architectural cartoonists: Louis Hellman–and to a lesser extent, Leo Krier–in the UK, or *Focho* (Justo Isasi) in Spain. Also, architect José María Pérez has had a successful parallel career as *Peridis*, one of Spain's most famed political cartoonists. And, while it is true that nowadays we can find some fine examples of students using comics in architecture schools, let's not forget that, during the "electric decade," comics also abounded in and around the Architectural Association, produced, among others, by notable alumni such as Mark Fisher. While it is true that these transfers seem more frequent today, it may well be that, in the era of the internet, we are simply more aware of them. It is possibly a mixture of both: there is a bigger exposure, there are many more of us, and also there is an increasing interest in/ acceptance of the medium. Many of us who ended up in architecture have a natural affinity to comic books; also, we are at a point where popular culture has entered academia as a subject of study and has become increasingly integrated into official culture. Nowadays, so-called graphic novels (ah, euphemisms!) finally allow grown-ups not be ashamed of being caught reading comic books. Also, architects' practice is inevitably diversifying, so these exchanges with the discipline's periphery are intensifying and slowly being accepted. Not without major resistance, of course.

LML: It is true that comics and architecture have typically portrayed a love-hate relationship: Love on the side of comics, and a mixture of love and hate on architecture's side. I've always felt this emanates from a certain intellectual inferiority complex on the architects' side. The architectural establishment, at least in those places where the discipline is highly professionalized (Southern Europe, etc.), seems to be very reluctant to allow any mixture with anything whose cultural pedigree is not reputable enough; as if it could somehow endanger architecture's respectability. Do you feel this is changing?

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20   Interviews with some of the authors mentioned in this conversation can be found in *MAS Context* nº 20: Narrative, ed. Luis Miguel Lus Arana, Iker Gil (December 2013). For an in-depth view of the use of comics in current architectural practice, see: Mélanie Van der Hoorn, *Bricks & balloons: architecture in comic-strip form* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2012).

Koldo Lus

Dancing about architecture
A Conversation with architect
and cartoonist Klituse

K: Well, we architects are very fragile living beings. I've often said—and I can oversimplify because I am a cartoonist, you know?—that architectural practice tends to move within a triangle defined by art, engineering, and philosophy. So, whenever we are attacked, we retreat to another corner. When someone says "You just design sculptures," we counter-attack: "No, no, I'm also a technician." Or: "You are aprioristic; you just design shapes…" –"No, no, I've read Heidegger." But we do not belong to either field completely, so in a typical case of superiority complex that stems from an underlying inferiority complex, we overreact and behave like these arrogant demigods society is so fed up with.

But the times are a-changin'. Traditionally, we have always rejoiced in the fact that architectural education, at least in Mediterranean and Latin countries, where architecture studies were usually 6-year programs (7 in my case), provides students with an ample array of aptitudes. We architects pride ourselves on being Renaissance men who can make a building, paint a picture, write a book, design an exhibition… But we are not in the Renaissance or in Le Corbusier's times, and it is only natural that architects specialize in all these different directions the profession prepared them for. Of course, there will still be those who respond to the classic profile of the architect as a mega-star, the new Le Corbusier, the new Rem Koolhaas.

At least I hope so, because that means there will be need for some of us who make fun of them in order to keep the balance.

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