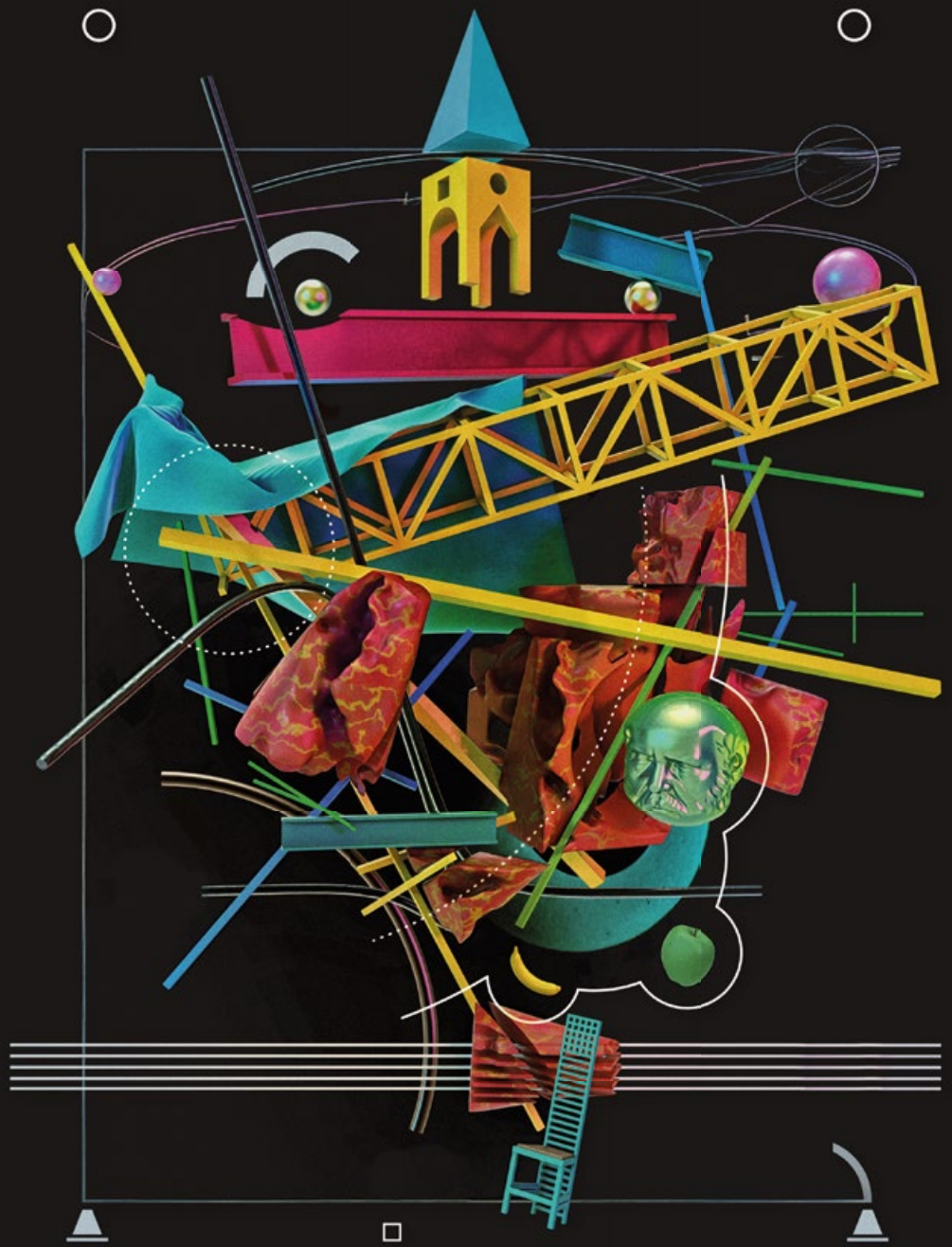


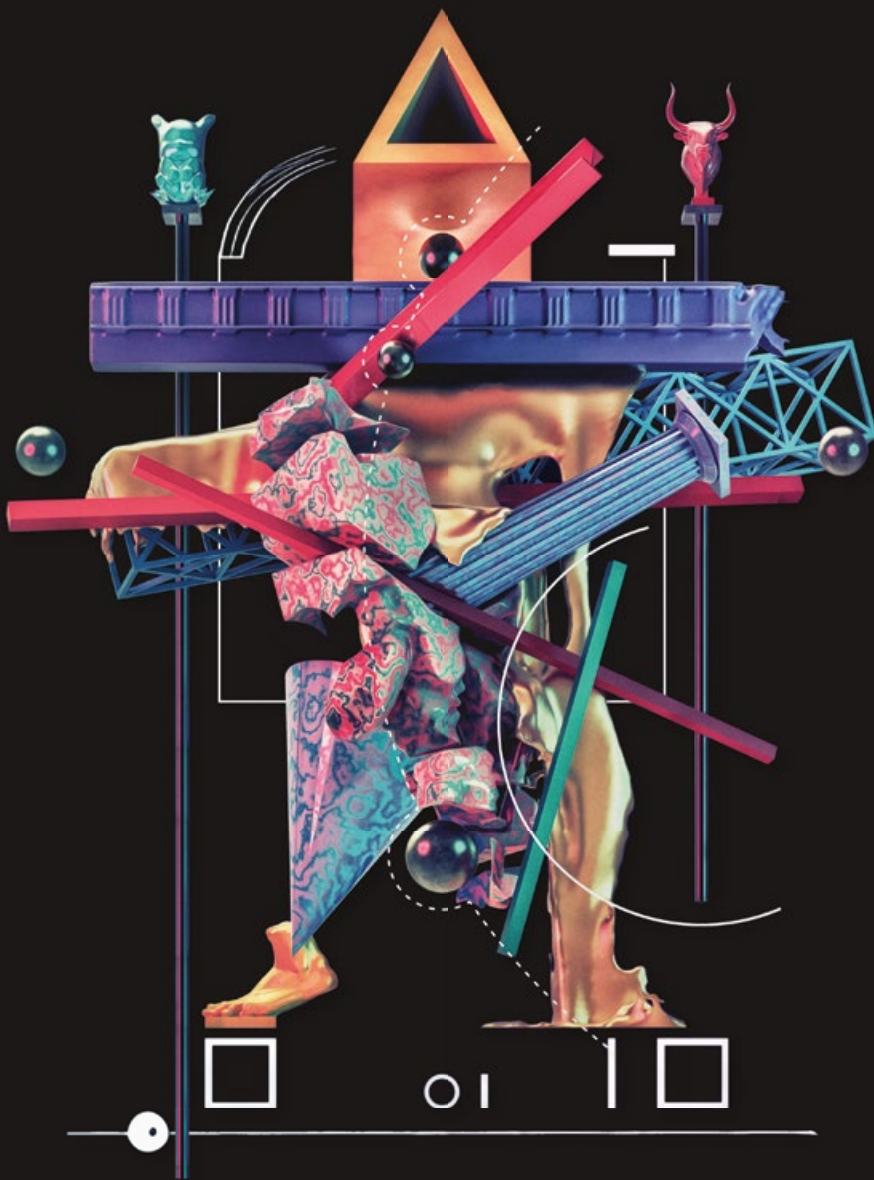
Giacomo Pala

# CONJUNCTIONS



Giacomo Pala,  
*Conjunction #4*,  
2023

Architectural composition: domesticity, structures and narratives as a representation of the opening of a domestic realm towards its outside.



Giacomo Pala,  
*Conjunction #3*,  
2023

Architectural composition:  
history, structures and symbols  
coming together, defining  
a space as a conjunction of  
different times and myths.

# OR, SPACE AS OXYMORON

**Traditional architectural thought and practice decrees that buildings should be spatially homogeneous, revealing themselves to their viewers and users as episodic and carefully orchestrated wholes. Giacomo Pala argues that the world is more complex than this, and that the digital has further enhanced its heterogeneous festival of formal, semiotic and spatial jump-cutting to establish conjunctions from which we can be architecturally inspired.**

Architecture's theories and histories have conditioned us to view space as a locus. Since the ordering of materials and forms defines a representation of memories and a validation of practices, then space is usually seen as a site for action, meaning or contemplation. This myth has been criticised, overturned, invoked, rediscovered, forgotten and re-evaluated throughout the decades: junkspace and the return of utopia; nostalgia and futurism; social awareness and sheer fantasy. Postmodern, neomodern, metamodern, anti-modern and hypermodern spaces have alternatively offered a substitute, a critique and a rediscovery.

Like obsessive teenagers who fall in love too easily, architects and designers must constantly reinvent and rediscover something, while expressing themselves: a new space and the rediscovery of traditions; the new Bauhaus and its criticism. We love the avant-garde one day and despise it the next, only to constantly rediscover that it has never been what we thought it was. The urge to establish one's ego, however, is the sublimation of a failure. The myth of creative genius, stronger than ever as a result of the endless attempts to overcome it (each one still an affirmation of individual prodigy) is inevitable if one wants to design.

Bangkok,  
Thailand,  
2020

An urban conjunction: an aggregation of infrastructure and nature unfolding as a result of a meticulous layering process driven by symmetrical control.





Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the notion of space as a project is not enough, while being an essential prerequisite for design. The world is much too complex to be controlled, programmed, standardised or rather quashed. Beyond the potential violence of any ‘plan’, there are objects, differences and unexpected oddities. There are entities, uses and qualities evading the architect’s and the artist’s will, but they define the features of spaces: the intersection of built environment and nature; unexpected uses of objects; the intersection of virtual and material realms; or a ‘Toilet’ sign designed in Renaissance style within the Vatican Museums rooms are amongst the truest attributes of places.

These and many other qualities convey imageries and memories. They communicate common sentiment and unspoken needs while establishing a conjunction between diversities.

It is not just a matter of admitting that ‘creating modern architecture for the twentieth century was a mistake’,<sup>1</sup> of contesting the ‘notion of unified, coherent architectural form’<sup>2</sup> or of realising that the city is defined on a ‘heritage of conflict’,<sup>3</sup> but also of recognising that space – as such – has always been indeterminate, at the very least since ‘architecture’ was invented. Triumphal arches, stairs, escalators, meeting areas filled with USB ports and power outlets, plants, temples, doors and bridges generate deep conjunctions between differences, giving sense to an unpredictable reality.

Vatican Museums,  
Rome, Italy,  
2022

A ‘Toilet’ sign in Raphael’s room designed in Renaissance style, merging the most mundane needs with Raphael’s art.

## Public/Private Conjunctions

Conjunctions happen at any scale. A building-spanning freeway in Osaka embodies the conjunction of objects and infrastructures, one of the characterising elements of urban spaces. However one may want to name it, any space is a more or less complex interplay of different purposes, uses and needs. Public space, once defined as the place 'where freedom can unfold its charms and become a visible, tangible reality',<sup>4</sup> takes on new dimensions in the conjunction of public and private. We take part in a new way of living the city, best described by Andrés Jaque while studying the influence of apps such as Grindr on our way of experiencing urban environments: 'a multiplying type of space where simultaneous techno-human settings can be promoted'.<sup>5</sup> Go there with an Uber; commute with Flixbus, Megabus or Neeta Travels; reach yet another exotic destination with EasyJet, Frontier Airlines or 9Air; have a hook-up in an Airbnb and share it on OnlyFans. Move hungry, move foolish.

## Local/Global Conjunctions

Conjunctions define a Gordian knot of contradicting traditions. A Chinese entrance to a mediocre alpine architecture in Seefeld in Tirol, Austria, marks the conjunction of the 'global' with the 'local', proving that the latter is nothing but the consequence of the former: 'its residue, its secretion'.<sup>6</sup> Authenticity and identity are suddenly exposed as heirs to a commercial fantasy conceived in the commodification of inflated ideals. The 'local' and the 'global', the 'traditional' and the 'shock of the new' find unexpected conjunctions, taking multiple forms: regional modernities, regionalisms, and even apparently fake settings – from a Chinese Paris to fireplaces re-created by streaming YouTube videos inside televisions, now simulacra of what Gottfried Semper defined as one of the first signs of 'human settlement'.<sup>7</sup>

Osaka, Japan,  
2019

A conjunction between infrastructure and buildings: a physical manifestation of the interconnection between objects and infrastructures that defines any city.



## Domestic Conjunctions

Conjunctions characterise all spaces we inhabit, including any domestic realm. From the computer one uses to play a video game, to the spaces for the very experience of domestic boredom, space is based on an infinite number of concurrences, not least because everything is dependent on the extraction of the raw materials and minerals that constitute the cosmos, itself 'studded with galaxies and fifteen billion years in the making'.<sup>8</sup> Space expands from the inside out, but in a far different manner than architectural history lectures and design studios have taught us. We dwell in a new kind of phenomenology: a home is not a house, and a home is not a place. It may actually be an unprecedented conjunction of interconnected individualities, each one escaping its own domestication and its physical household. It may be violence, or it may be perversion. It could be a rave on Zoom, gaming, networking, entertainment, excitement, boredom, joy, diversion, hate or love. There are endless encounters of singularities defining new spaces and places for communities: new households made of cables, connections, objects, toys and data.

Today's space is seamlessly built upon juxtapositions and dislocations: conflicts between identities and new fluidities add to the rethinking of predefined categories, uses and imageries. We live within a new and wide ecology, enabling 'the thinking of home, and hence world (*oikos* plus *logos*)'.<sup>9</sup> But this ecology is an eccentric hybrid of known and unknown, familiar and uncanny, liberation and repression. We live within an infrastructural ordering of nature and a naturalisation of technology that has led to an inevitable subjunctivisation of our world-making abilities, creating new kinds of struggles. On the one side there are those who aim to define spaces for sharing experiences and knowledge on a global scale. On the other, there are those who define new power structures through the control and monetisation of different forms of sociality. From within such new global domestic policy, it would be all too easy to believe in a Promethean utopia liberating humanity thanks to techno-sciences, just as it would be quite simplistic to believe the opposite. We should dare saying that we enjoy living in this new world. We love, use and even fetishise bricks, burgers, quinoa, books, prompts, avocados, PDFs, gyms, streaming services, landscapes, bed and breakfasts, and the many more things that make up this new world. There are no saints anymore. Each of us, to some extent, is a sinner. One can sublimate pain by posting severe memes on social media, maybe while eating some authentic pho in Buenos Aires, or some asado in Hanoi. Nevertheless, we all worship the heterogeneous, 'hybrid-', 'hyper-', and 'extra-' spaces we inhabit, or at least some of their aspects.



Restaurant in Seefeld,  
Tirol, Austria,  
2023

A conjunction of different traditions by means of architecture, mixing the commodified images of alpine architecture and Chinese characters into a whole.

**Today's space is seamlessly built upon juxtapositions and dislocations: conflicts between identities and new fluidities add to the rethinking of predefined categories, uses and imageries**

## Designing Conjunctions

But the question of how to give this space some form and significance persists. Architecture needs to understand the world by recognising that every space and form has multiple meanings, requirements, interpretations, uses and functions. To define a measure and a link between various times, traditions, expectations, identities, scales and demands is the challenge of creating new meanings for the many forms and practices that constitute the present space-time. As new customs, technologies and traditions alter physical environments and the way we experience them, it is imperative for architecture and design to provide expression to such becoming. In order to make sense of the forms that contemporary life takes in space, it is necessary to define plausible conjunctions. Even if we can no longer be utopians or nostalgic, we may still strive to strike a balance between our own wants and the collective good of a community, or whatever we want to call ourselves, while knowing that any plurality is not a homogeneous unicum. Perhaps it is still possible, in this sense, for architects and designers to *produce* meaning, and give form to likely realities.

When talking about 'sense' and 'meaning' in architecture and design we are referring to works that are grounded in the idea that they must once again face the world, its mundanity – both globally and locally – in terms of representation, praxis and recognition, while acknowledging the simultaneous variety and cohesion of the real. It is vital to learn to link the reality's multifaceted qualities, while being aware that, in today's world, 'science and art, reason and myth, are no longer contradictory poles, but give shape ... to one homogeneous, indivisible discourse. It's a form of knowledge about life and its forms, which takes the same shape as the life it purports to apply to.'<sup>10</sup>

Conjunctions between the disjunctions of reality may turn architecture into a dialogical object capable of combining the many instances of the world. This should inevitably begin with a rejection of dissociations, naïve utopianism and onanistic subjectivism, in favour of combination, analysis and contemplation of the actual world within which one is operating. Only in this manner can architecture make sense of the world, reflect it, and give form to the contemporary needs to rediscover a plural dimension within the multiplicity of today's space and environment.

This is not to dismiss the value of anyone's own voice. It is self-evident that representation and analysis only exist in relation to expression and interpretation. After all, as poetically told by Borges, even the man who intended to sketch the whole world did nothing but draw 'a likeness of his own face'.<sup>11</sup> However, architectural design and theory may become practices establishing conjunctions between the parts of reality's manifold qualities. As demonstrated by the work of today's many architects, designers, historians, critics and artists, *our* practices and disciplines may be seen as needles stitching together material reality, the dreamt world, and socioeconomic relations, instead of producing mere innovation.

There is still a lot to see and do, especially in the near future, since what we normally refer to as modernisation

Giacomo Pala,  
Conjunction #2,  
2023

Architectural composition: nature, geometry and objects as discrete elements, yet combined to make a conjunctive whole.

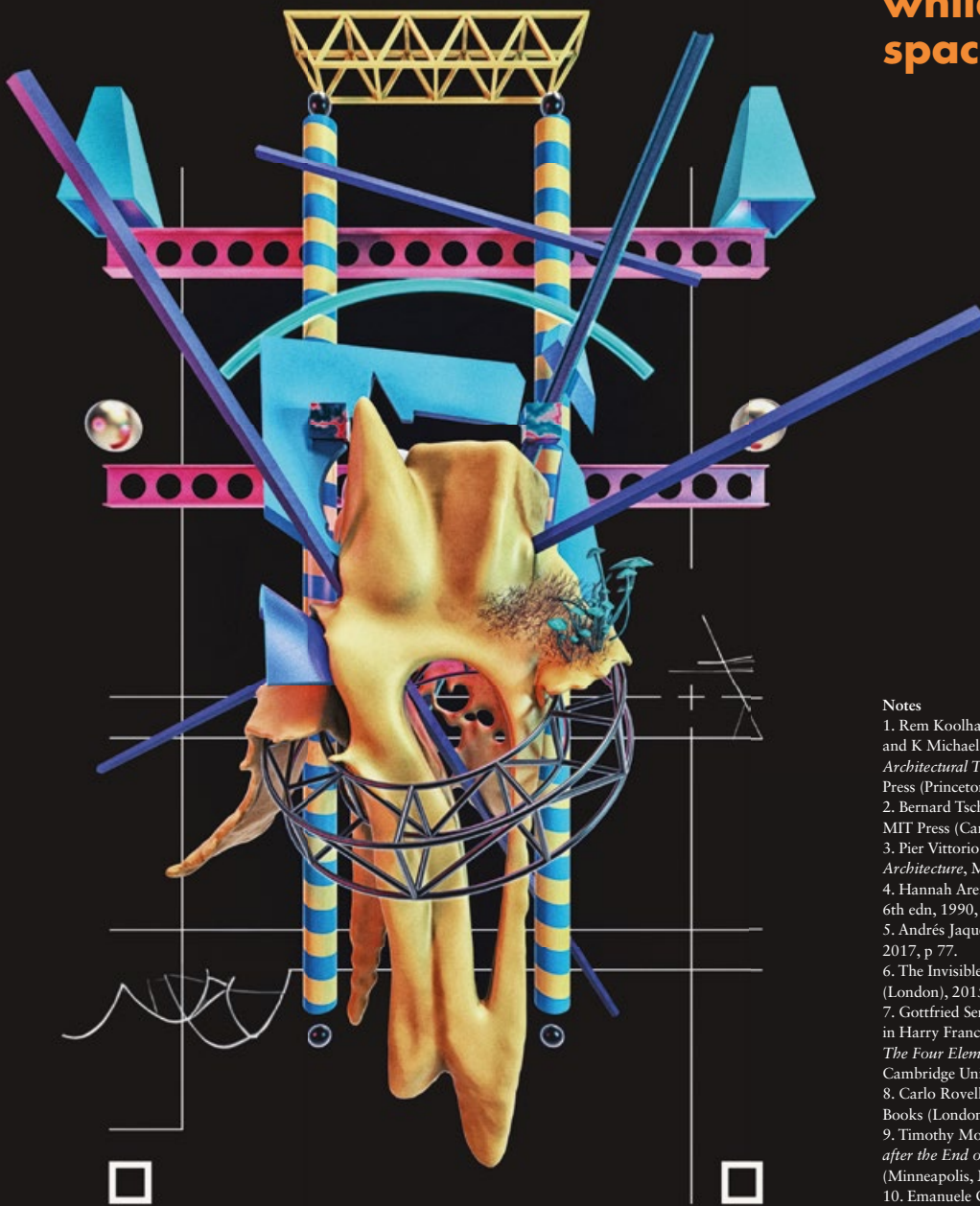


is going through yet another self-inflicted crisis. For the time being, it might be useful to pick up everything that has been stated so far with a single line, while knowing that doing so carries the danger of creating a slogan.

There is a need for a refreshed attention to the real, for an interest in differences and paradoxes, in an attempt to construct plausible conjunctions between differences while envisioning spaces for today. ▢

Giacomo Pala,  
*Conjunction #1*,  
2023

Architectural composition: a  
combination of forms, elements  
and nature, forging a combination  
of different conditions.



**There is a need for a  
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to the real, for an  
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#### Notes

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