

Questioning images: digital collage as an instigator of design driven research.

The advancement and popularization of image processing techniques in the last twenty-five years has provided architects with a powerful tool to merge research and design. If the history of photography is the history of the duplication and recycling of reality, then the history of the digitization of photography can be read as the history of the possibility of blending the duplicated real and the virtual. By intervening seamlessly on photographs, it is now easier than ever to conflate a particular reality and its potential transformation, thus interrogating the very essence of said reality by providing an apparently plausible version of it.

Some of the prospects of this design driven research methodology are exposed here through the analysis of a speculative project that was produced for the XV Venice Biennale of 2016. Reflecting on the state of an abandoned estate derived from the Spanish housing bubble, the project used digital collage to initiate a collective exercise of imagination of alternative scenarios for it, questioning the underlying processes made visible by the abandoned constructions. The questions raised by the resulting images initiated a conversation that went beyond the Venetian event and motivated two separate research projects. The first one explored the ability of this methodology to construct imaginaries that transcended national boundaries by visualizing interrupted urban developments, and culminated with a presentation in a humanities conference organized by the Valencian Institute of Modern Art in 2017. The second, for its part, engaged the relevance of digital collage as a technique that informs the work of a number of contemporary designers and academics, including François Charbonnet from Made In, Piet Eckert from E2A, and Philipp Schaerer. This project is part of an ongoing PhD that relates their instrumental use of digital collage with the rise of the internet as an important channel of access to architectural information.

This, in short, is a reflection on a specific example in which the use of a design technique transcended the boundaries of a specific project to advance architectural knowledge and scholarship.



