

BUREAU SHORT STORIES

PIECES OF ARCHITECTURE

SHORT STORIES

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MILLE IMAGES ET QUELQUES CACTUS
A THOUSAND IMAGES AND FEW CACTUS
Alexandra Midal

*Voulez-vous vous laisser conduire au bord
d'un lac des Alpes ? Le ciel est bleu, l'eau
verte, tout repose dans une paix profonde.*

*Pour ma part, je suis fier de constater que
mes intérieurs ne produisent aucun effet
en photographie (...)*

Adolf Loos, "Architecture," 1910



On August 11, 2022, Bureau invited me to react to a series of images spread over several pages. The only key was an extract from *Mille Plateaux* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The sole clue: the images were interwoven associations between Bureau and me. Great. I've been following the effervescent Bureau with interest for a long time. Their projects resonate with me. The selection of pages I received invisibly connect images to one another, surrendering to my interpretations, allowing meaning to emerge from the interstices left between each of them, inviting me to make free associations through anadiplosis. These principles of analogy reproduce the cervical patterns of information distribution engaged by our synapses, and I wonder what these enigmatic visuals mean: what narratives are they intended for? What stories are there to guess? What is Bureau playing at with this fragmented puzzle?

Storytelling: by taking up Michel de Certeau's concept of the gap and revisiting the displacement towards territories in images, Bureau places itself on the margins of the institution and frees up a point of view that gives rise to new interpretations, defying the usual order of things according to which, by convention, an image should illustrate a project. Here, it's the only trace. My task, then, should I choose to accept it, as stated in the credits of this famous spy series and franchise, is to take over this rebus punctuated here and there by heterogeneous elements: flora, a horse, neon lights, materials, walls, models, etc. But to do what with it? Is it an impossible mission to understand these photographs of landscapes, vegetation, plants and cacti, whose presence has been so frequently associated with "visions," "addictions," and other "psychotic pleasure centers of the brain," as Reyner Banham has called them? Far removed from the imagination of the Wild West and its gold-hungry colonizers, cacti are curiosities whose vertical presence interrupts the horizontality of the lake in my Franco-Swiss daily life, so well described by Adolf Loos in the preamble to my remarks. How can I, who has been wandering through this image cryptography for almost two years, without instructions or captions, decode all this? How can I get a rabbit out of this visual script?

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Inhabiting the space of the book page in this way turns Bureau away from any functionalist architectural origins, replacing them with the power of mystery and emotion. Oscillating between fantasy and strangeness, the page distills the scattered pieces of a fascinating puzzle. It was from this angle, following the explosion of mechanization shaken by the industrial revolution and its criteria of technological standardization and planning archetypes, that modernity had dreamed of a new individual, modern and intensely psychological, able to redraw their links with the fragmented space of his environment as well as their psyche. Isn't my soul just as dispersed today in the hyper-individual age of late capitalism?

This perspective was undoubtedly clearer during the heyday of horror cinema in the 1920s, when images were able to crystallize and engender states of mind through architectural embodiments that, better than any other art form, were able to condense the dramatic tension of narratives—catalyzing, both psychologically and symbolically, the characters of cinematic fiction. Architecture became the central axis of the genre: like a living being, emotionally innervated, the papier-mâché house exposed itself until it reached paroxysmal states. As a Gothic lair of torment resonating with the soul, the psycho-aesthetic dimension of these pages in turn accommodates psychological underpinnings. But make no mistake: this notion is not a thing of the past, and something is at work behind the apparent calm of the images, behind the aligned plants and the horizontality of the lake. I come face to face with the discreet presence of spectres and ghosts linked to hidden energies and forces. Everywhere, the supernatural reigns. Astonishment! Hard to swallow this revelation. I fear that Bureau has taken possession of my soul and is manipulating my perceptions...

What if, following the example of Psycho-diagnostic, the famous personality test invented by Swiss psychiatrist Hermann Rorschach (1921) and designed to determine personality based on the interpretation of ten ink-stained boards, Bureau is encouraging me to formulate mental projections in images that they would then print? What use can I be to them? Perhaps the answer lies in the process described by writer Serge Brussolo in *Aussi lourd que le vent* (1981). Brussolo stages a protocol for building architecture by hardening rare gases with a sound frequency. He describes how, using a solution that modifies the frequency of the voice, his characters create vocal sculptures: by combining sounds and insults, they form fugitive, ghostly edifices. Are thoughts delicately laid down on the paper of this work?

Since the nineteenth century, the emergence of ghost stories has frequently been associated with a complex, if not conflicting, relationship with technology. Spectres have been seen as betraying the incomprehensible and disquieting nature of existing technology. Bureau revisits the apparent calm of surfaces through photographs that better conceal their invisible project. As a result, as with Brussolo's ephemeral buildings, we're left with a stark observation! If nothing really exists at Bureau other than the images you're holding in your hands; if their buildings are nothing more than elegant glossy pseudo-productions; if their projects are nothing more than rumours, these architecture-visuals serve to protect them from commercial speculation and allow them to foment another project. In *Poltergeist*, Bureau embodies a haunting, that natural force of the mind, ready to seize joyfully upon you, the reader, who is reading this book from the comfort of your armchair at home, and their plans will remain secret for a long while.

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BUREAU

Bureau is the research-oriented practice of DANIEL ZAMARBIDE, CARINE PIMENTA and GALLIANE ZAMARBIDE. The office concentrates its work on three main vectors: domesticity, public space and pedagogy.

The creative and singular approach of the practice was nominated for the Mies van der Rohe Award 2022, won the Prix de Genève 2021, the Gold and Blue Award Best Architect 22 Germany, the Swiss Design Awards in 2019, the Swiss Art Awards, the Prix Design Suisse with the ALICE-EPFL laboratory, and the Frame Awards, among many others.

DANIEL graduated from the IAUG (Institut d'Architecture Université de Genève) and has been very influenced by art since his studies. He co-founded group8 architects in Geneva, Switzerland, and Hanoi, Vietnam, in 2000, which he left in 2012. He has taught and developed progressive pedagogical programs mainly at HEAD-Geneva, University of Laval in Canada and EPFL Lausanne as co-director of ALICE. His current practice – BUREAU – was initially formed in 2012 with Leopold Banchini (then called BUREAU A) and changed partners in 2017.

CARINE graduated from FAUP (Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto) and attended the EPFL (École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne). She developed a particular sensitivity to a socially engaged approach of architecture which led her to work for ateliermob. Her interests lie in participatory and inclusive processes. Her knowledge and experience cover the technicalities of construction detailing and site supervision. She worked during 4 years for the BUREAU before becoming a partner in 2019.

GALLIANE graduated from the visual communication department at ECAL (Ecole Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne), with a specialization in photography. She became a partner of the BUREAU in 2017 bringing to the practice a different orientation and openness to design, image and installation projects. She works as the head of fine arts department for primary school state pedagogy in Geneva. She is currently teaching at the HEAD-Geneva master (MAIA).

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DR. MARINA OTERO VERZIER is an architect and researcher currently teaching at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation. In 2022,

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ANDRÉ TAVARES is a researcher at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto, founding director of Dafne Editora and the author of *The Anatomy of the Architectural Book* (Lars Müller/CCA, 2016) and *Vitruvius Without Text* (gta Verlag, 2022). His current research, *Fishing Architecture*, is funded by the European Research Council.

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