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Andrés Jaque / Office for Political Innovation
Mies e la gatta Niebla. Saggi su architettura e cosmopolitica, Leonforte, Siké, 2021, pp. 226 [*Mies and Niebla the kitten. Essays on architecture and cosmopolitics*; Italian translation edited by Gianluca Burgio and Ramon Rispoli of *Mies y la gata Niebla. Ensayos sobre architectura y cosmopolitica*, Barcelona, Puente, 2019]

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It happens rarely – at least to me – to be positively surprised by a publication. The contrary – being startled and baffled – is more frequent. But, I guess, the majority of the times one ends reading a book or an article simply filing it under the "interesting-relevant-worth-taking-into-account-and-discuss" label or the opposite one.

Mies e la gatta Niebla. Saggi su architettura e cosmopolitica [*Mies and Niebla the kitten. Essays on architecture and cosmopolitics*], Italian

translation of a Spanish publication, is one of the rare cases of a book that has surprised me positively.

The book is a collection of twelve essays written by Andrés Jaque, renown Spanish architect, head of the Madrid-New York based architectural practice Office for Political Innovation (OPI), as well as professor of architecture and director of the Master of Science program in Advanced Architectural Design at Columbia University.

Except for the first one, *Politics of the everyday* (my translation), which through a quick review of Jaque's past architectural interventions introduces his approach to architecture, the rest of the essays are quite autonomous pieces distributed into five sections called "Domestic space as political space" (my translation), "Mies as rendered society", "Household parliaments" (my translation), "Architecture as reproduction of the biosocial" (my translation), "Sex and the non-city". As the titles of the sections suggest, these essays tackle diverse issues like the negotiations of, and within, everyday domestic spaces, trajectories of domestications of the built environments, modernity or, better, modernism as purification, the rearticulation of space and of power through architectures that act as media and media that act as architectures, urban development related to luxury and finance. These issues are tackled focusing on very diverse objects such as: an hospice for priest, Ikea, California residential houses, television as technology, telenovelas, fertility clinics and luxury towers, Milano2, Grinder, water lilies and male escorts homes, funeral homes and no-return valves, gay porn and the New York real estate market, besides the Barcelona Pavilion originally designed by Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich in 1929 in order to represent Germany at the International Expo of Barcelona and rebuilt in 1986. The latter is the core of the book and also at the origin of its title.

The various topics tackled by the essays are clearly of interest for STS scholars (and not only). Nevertheless, they and the often peculiar and unexpected objects at issue are not the main reason of my surprise – although the unpredictable trajectories and connetions of some of them are indeed the reason for my apprecciation of individual essays.

In order to understand in which way the book has positively struck me, let me start by admitting my initial partial lack of knowledge of Jaque and OPI's manifold projects, interventions and researches. Indeed, I knew about Jaque only because I read, probably without the attention it deserved, an interview Albena Yaneva did with him (2015) about cosmopolitical design. Such partial ignorance made me open to surprises (positive, but also negative ones), given I could not really know what to expect from the book.

Moreover, I should also admit my prejudice against architects writing "theory" or referring to "theory", especially to "theory" elaborated outside the architectural field. Such attitude affected my disposition to surprises.

My prejudice was not reduced by Ramon Rispoli (one of the two editors

and translators of the Italian edition) introducing the book as coming from one of the "voices that, in the field of architectural research […], claim today – from a perspective referable in general to the tradition of […] STS, and, more specifically to some theoretical orientations like Actor-Network Theory […] – the necessity to look at buildings as assemblages" (p. 9, my translation). However, my curiosity was elicited.

By reading through, one discovers that the book is not at all concerned with "theory". It mainly presents accounts related to empirical researches carried out through interviews, observations or documentary analysis, in order to design OPI's projects and interventions. Few other essays are descriptions and reflections about these very projects and interventions. Precisely on this lies one of the major sources of my surprise: the book completely overturned my prejudice.

Most of the essays are, indeed, the outcome of such research work: some in a more articulated and thorough way, like the research on Milano2 and the Barcelona Pavilion (see also, Jaque 2018); some are more sketchy, being in a preliminary, hypothetical or explorative stage, like the ones about fertility clinics or sex, luxury and the New York's urban development; some others are in the form of collections of vignettes and life stories, like the essay on California residential housing.

Jaque has thus used Actor-Network Theory as a method – i.e., what it actually is, despite the name. It is a method enabling researchers to "follow the link[s] [informants] make among […] elements that [by using another approach] would have looked completely incommensurable"; and it is a method that, by following such links, enables to write "good accounts", which describe networks, i.e. "a string of actions where each participant is treated as a full-blown mediator" (Latour 2005, 141; 128).

By considering buildings and architectural interventions as "material devices" [*dispositivi materiali*] and inquiring about them through the notions of "interscalability" and "trajectories", Jaque has done exactly what Latour suggests, providing descriptions of them as cosmopolitical assemblages.

For iconic examples of "participant […] treated as a full-blown mediator", I suggest the reader checking the story of no-return valves in waterpipes and their role for New York's urban development (pp. 202-204), to which also Gianluca Burgio (the second editor and translator of the book) turns in his postface; or, the more articulated story of the curtains used in the Barcelona Pavilion (pp. 102-103). The two kinds of curtain used – heavy or light – play not only a role into different interscalar networks related to constructive constraints, industrial districts, craft cultures, nations on display, international market relations, but also, when in contact with the wind, dispose different compositions of the pavilion, contributing to generate a controversy about the fidelity of the reconstructed pavilion to van der Rohe's and Reich's design.

As you have probably understood, the book can be read as a collection

of social researches – precisely as a collection of STS' social researches. This has been my approach and the one I suggest *Tecnoscienza*'s readers taking if, like me, they do not have a detailed knowledge of OPI's projects and interventions.

The book could – and probably should – also be read by constantly referring to OPI's projects and interventions, to which the essays refer. However, this reading presupposes a good knowledge of OPI's work or, alternatively, a back and forth between the book and the OPI's internet site, given the frugality of images in the former: they are few, small and black and white – a very rare configuration for an architecture book.

The back and forth between the book and the OPI's site would not only compromise the autonomy of the book itself, but also a relaxed and enjoyable reading that it disposes. Each account is, indeed, a narration written with literary sensitivity, designed to engage and take the reader through it. As for the Italian edition, this is also the result of the good work of the translators and editors, the architects Burgio and Rispoli.

By leaving to the readers the pleasure of diving into the book and be surprised themselves, I will not say much more about its contents – and certainly nothing about Niebla the kitten.

Before coming to the conclusions, I just want to highlight two points, which I deem can further show the relevance of the book for STS scholars in general, also for those not especially interested in architecture and urban studies.

The first point regards the Barcelona Pavillion (see also, Jaque 2018). Jaque describes its rebuilding as a way to construct a purified version of modernism. In the 1986 version of the building, a big and not easily accessible basement has been added, as storage for maintenance tools, replaced elements of the pavilion, equipment used for events taking place in the pavilion and other beings. This basement is invisible and inaccessible to visitors, who only enjoy the upper part as an absolute example of modernist architecture, completely detached from the rest, from the passing of time and the deperibility of materials. Of course, this crystallized image of modernism is only possible thanks to what lies in the basement and to the traffic between the basement and the upper part, before and after the visits. I wonder why Jaque and other commentators did not notice that the Barcelona Pavilion in its entirety is a wonderful tangible translation of Latour's diagram of modernity as presented in *We have never been modern* (Latour 1993, 11). There, you see the lower part – like the basement – called "hybrid networks" where the work of translation takes place, and the upper part where non-human nature and human culture are kept separated through the work of purification. As for the Barcelona Pavillion, the purification of the upper part takes place by distinguishing what is van der Rohe's "authentic" design (i.e. his intentions, often forgetting Reich's contribution) from the compromises made for rebuilding it – a game visitor often play (Jaque 2018).

As for the second point, it is related to the essay *Transmedial Urban Planning* (pp. 155-174, my translation), which I deem of interest especially for Italian STS scholar. The essay – a surprise within the surprise – is the account of an inquiry into Milano2, a semi-gated community Silvio Berlusconi built in the 1970s, which paved the way for becaming a media tycoon. Jaque, through documentary research, interviews and participant observations on site, shows the connection between the urbanistic logic of Milano2 and the one of commercial television Berlusconi developed later on, both based on the segmentation of consumers – be they inhabitants or television viewers. As far as I know, such connection between the two phases of Berlusconi's enterprise were never explored in such a way.

The book is engaging, inspiring and insightful and a recommended reading for STS scholars in general. Nevertheless, I cannot avoid warning possible readers against two issues. First, Jaque uses the notion of "black box" to refer to hidden aspects of buildings or architectural interventions – for instance, in the essay about the Barcelona Pavilion, he calls the basement a "black box". However, as also underlined in Marres et al. (2018, 26), what he is pointing at is a "backstage" as Erving Goffman intended it – the "black box" is, in case, the unquestioned well-functioning pavilion resulting from the frictionless relations between the backstage and the frontstage, with which Jaque carefully interferes in one of his projects (Jaque 2018). Secondly – and this is more an issue due to the translation – by rephrasing a famous Latour's statement, in the italian edition, Jaque defines architecture as "technologically represented [*rappresentata*] society". In English, the same definition appears with the word "rendered" instead of "represented". Besides the problematic aspect of using the notion of "representation", I deem that the two words are not synonymous, and finding a more adequate translation for "rendered" would suit Jaque's approach better.

The Italian edition includes two contributions written by the editors and translators of the book, Burgio and Rispoli. The latter prefaces the book by summarizing Jaque's research path through his main notions – assemblages, cosmopolitics, design as intertwining, devices [*dispositivi*], interscalar, trajectories. The former, in his postface, recovers parts of the essays in order to connect Jaque's research to a broader debate about cosmopolitics and life with troubles. Both contributions, mainly addressed to the Italian architectural milieu, highlight the need for such a milieu to start abandoning the idea of the autonomy of architecture, which, as Jaque shows, would lead to a dialogue and a collaboration with social sciences, and especially with STS, grounded on empirical research.

Let's use this book also as a platform to develop such a dialogue.

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Veronica Moretti e Barbara Morsello (eds.)

Interferenze Digitali. Prospettive Sociologiche su Tecnologie, Biomedicina e Identità di Genere [*Digital Interference. Sociological Perspectives on Technologies, Biomedicine and Gender Identity*], Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2019, pp. 184

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When students ask me how to evaluate the quality of a book, I use to answer: "a book that deserves to be read is a book that teach us something". However, this sentence needs to be at once amended: a book must teach us something not recurring to any universalistic methodology, rather grounding its insights in embodied and embedded cartographies. That's exactly what *Interferenze Digitali* does, it provides us new pieces of situated knowledge (Haraway 1997) that take its own space and time in the framework of posthuman knowledge (Braidotti 2020). Reading *Interferenze Digitali,* edited by Veronica Moretti and Barbara Morsello in 2019 for FrancoAngeli, we not only learn a lot on cutting-edge bio/infotechnologies, but we also know more about *our bodies, ourselves* in the biomedical arena. *Interferenze Digitali* it's a cartography of the bodies that we are becoming. We are not all man and neurotypical, there is a plethora of non-conforming subjectivities that simultaneously upsets both male-centered medicine and male-centered sociology. *Interferenze Digitali* helps us in knowing these non-conforming subjectivities: in this book you will encounter non-standard bodies with all their living questions, not depicted as isolated and abstracted, rather as part of a *natureculture* continuum. All the essays col-