

14. Collage and Bricolage. Or How Alberto Seassaro Invented the Italia Design System in Spite of Everyone. Even Himself

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14.1 In that little room at Via Bonardi 3

There he is, alone with his thoughts. A pencil in his meditative mouth; between his fingers, a cigarette *worn down* to the impossible – strictly *Nazionali senza filtro* [unfiltered Nazionali], soft green pack – and a deck of cards ready for yet another game of *solitaire* to be played in the event of pressing duties to face, like an institutional phone call, or a grueling delivery ahead of a meeting of the Academic Senate where there is *a battle to be fought*.

An crowded solitude in the 4×4 departmental cubicle on via Bonardi – by then the Dean's Office, which he shared with all the secretarial staff – *my girls*, as he affectionately called them –; with his closest collaborators; with his course and studio assistants (a sizeable group, since he had also inherited the assistants of his friend and colleague Giacomo Scarpini). It often happened that he was alone, with his ideas and visions that others – even we who worked with him side by side every day – managed to understand only after they had materialized, giving concrete form to his thought.

Inside that little room, meetings of the Degree Program Council were also held (before the hard-won conquest of dedicated spaces); there were meetings with colleagues, a constant coming and going, and he even met with students, whom he received at all hours without the need for an appointment. There, where everything began when there was nothing, I came to know his informal, forthright way of relating to others: from the most junior student to the Rector. He felt at ease in every situation and put everyone else at ease, without any need to play the buddy. In fact, he addressed students strictly in the formal register, even though he was always well disposed to listen; which did not necessarily mean it was easy to wrest a yes from him. With students in particular, he was reluctant to grant *exceptions to the rule*, because he always kept firmly in mind that the same principles had to apply to everyone.

That little room of *forced coexistence* revealed another side of Alberto Seassaro to me. He had his own notion of privacy. He was, at his core, a free person, and precisely for this reason he could, with complete calm, discuss delicate matters with colleagues in front of everyone present, just as he could make confidential phone calls to family members without censorship. An open book.

At first I was unsettled by such a public kind of private life, but over time, and as I came to know his human and political story, I understood that this was a radical trait of his: to be what one is, with no need for pretenses or hypocrisies.

Entering that little room, you found yourself facing a cabinet crammed with neatly catalogued documents and, roughly stuck on the central door, the cartoon: *Hai voluto la bicicletta? E adesso pedala!* [You wanted the bike? Now pedal!], a playful tribute from his collaborators, because he hadn't wanted the bike, they had more or less made him get on it, but from that moment he promised himself and those working with him that there was pedaling to be done, and without too much complaining! The aforesaid cabinet served as a visual separator for a small area that housed two PC workstations for the secretary's office. Apart from these two stations, the entire room was literally colonized by large white tables, with the sole exception of a small passage (more a narrow opening than anything else) just sufficient to reach the presidential seat. A place entirely similar to those

Figure 1.
Caricature portrait of Alberto
Seassaro by Paolo Ciuccarelli
(1996).

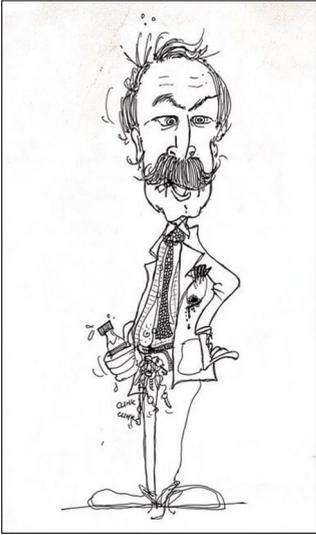
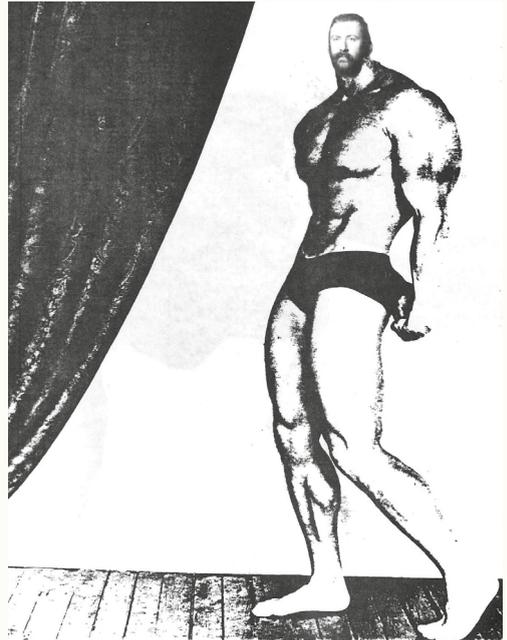
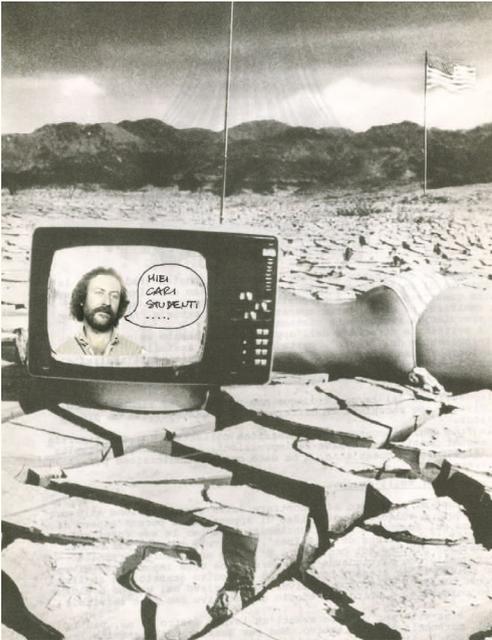


Figure 2.
Collages created by Alberto
Seassaro for teaching materials
(1980s).



of his secretaries, personalized only by a small display cabinet on the wall behind him. On the cabinet door, small snapshots of the newest arrivals in the Seassaro family, first his granddaughter Caterina, then his great-grandson Enea; a large photographic image of the Dean, Cesare Stevan, with a cut-out of a human heart in anatomical form glued to his chest and, drawn beneath it in red marker, a cascade of little droplets of blood: a collage made by Seassaro himself. Inside, proudly on view, a few little elephants – his cherished animal –, gifts from colleagues returning from some exotic trip; fines to be paid; airline tickets; loose sachets of *Aulin*; *Citrosodina*, which he gulped by the spoonful or poured straight into his mouth from the yellow tin; spray cream – the antidote to the *Citrosodina* – which he would spray into his mouth during long phone calls, producing that characteristic sound of a moka pot coming to the boil, a noise that those of us around him always suggested he decode for whoever was on the other end of the line. He felt no such need, so serenely did he live and behave, freed from the pruderies of the etiquette rules of a conformist good-manners guide.

On one side of the cabinet, a clipping from *La Repubblica* of a cartoon by Massimo Bucchi with the line *L'ambizione più diffusa è restare fermi un giro* [the most widespread ambition is to sit out a round], replaced a few years later, in the new dean's office in Building B1 on via Candiani, as a sign of a thought that updates with time while remaining the same, by an Altan cartoon reading *Vorrei vivere alla giornata, ma mi manca la necessaria visione strategica* [I'd like to live day to day, but I lack the necessary strategic vision].

Small flashes of an everyday working context that, taken together, become a self-presentation of the Seassaro spirit.

To bring it into focus, we need to pause, since we've mentioned them, on his proverbial work tables. Tables with heaps of sheets of every format (but chiefly A3 sheets, *because on A4 you can't unfold even the simplest thought*), in every color (I recall his passion for vividly colored reams of A3, which he sought out because color functioned as a tool of thematic classification and, consequently, as a visual cue amid the welter of documents inhabiting tables and surfaces), mixed with (equally colorful) document folders; clippings from magazines and newspapers; photographic images; layers of semi-worked materials; doodles, posters, flyers, mail, business cards, phone numbers; notes, *pizzini* [slips of paper], and missives from colleagues: the gathering, sediment, and stratification of a way of working in which no work can ever be said to be concluded and in which time does not proceed linearly but travels on multiple parallel planes, where many things occur at once, sometimes separately, sometimes intersecting, producing even unplanned solutions. Like searching for a particular competence to add to the teaching framework and finding the name he hadn't thought of in the catalogue of the exhibition lying there before his eyes, on the table, precisely. The table is also the place where public and private problems coexist, bills to be paid and letters to the Rector in a continuum that is life itself [↘](#).

After all, planes are the philosophical places of singular and chance encounters, as Foucault teaches us (Foucault, 1978). Places where information, data, problems, and concepts, coexisting as distinct material, can, precisely by virtue of unusual proximities and juxtapositions that at first glance seem unlikely, arrive at innovative syntheses. It is not so much the singularity and heterogeneous nature of what

1. Fotografia di Alberto
Seassaro nel suo ufficio di
Presidenza.
Document →



lies on the table that captures the imagination but, according to Foucault, the very power of contagion, the possibility of generating unthinkable mixtures deriving from the «reduction of

the interstices» separating one thing from another (Foucault, 1978, p. 6).

The pileups of elements originally separate that later find affinities allow us to grasp certain modes of contemporary innovative thought that works through *collage* and *bricolage*, techniques of making and thinking widely used by Alberto Seassaro, who was accustomed to producing



innovative – at times risky – juxtapositions starting from conceptual materials and, at times, even from human materials that were not easily associable at first glance.

After all, the criteria that drive associations and analogies are personal and strongly connected to the subject's cultural history, a history inclined to include rather than exclude. And indeed, as Maffessoli teaches us, collage does not discriminate because «collage is *stricto sensu* a metaphor that carries into the same place, that brings together» (Maffessoli, 1986, p. 123).

The studio posters themselves can be considered a place – the place – where Seassaro brought distant and diverse thoughts and people into convergence, as Michel Foucault put it: «like, on the operating-room table, the umbrella and the sewing machine» (Foucault, 1978, p. 6). The most disparate materials on the table, gathered over time, cut out from their original contexts, constituted, in fact, a reservoir of suggestions from which to draw so they could be re-aggregated. These elements, in fact, once brought together, then and only then, existed and took shape, becoming real and, above all, realistic, possible, indeed obvious. Behind those names juxtaposed at first by sheer intuition, there followed hours of dialogue, discussion, verification, adjustments, changes of course. In this, he was certainly helped

by solid knowledge; by his artistic and personal history, rich in encounters, friendships, loves, relationships, opportunities, experiences cultivated in what he liked to call *cazzeggio libero* [unstructured messing around], to which he attached considerable importance and to which we will return in the closing.

And he was probably helped as well by always being in a sought-and-willed *altrove* [elsewhere] with respect to the places, debates, and salons of design, whose mainstream, for him, authentically popular, was always to be observed from a proper distance.

His way of designing the new consisted in proceeding by parts and by integrations, without letting himself be shackled by preordained schemes or by scaffolds and perimeters established a priori, while keeping very clear what the context made available to him, including the constraints which he was in any case highly skilled at circumventing (never underestimating them but riding them in order to subvert them in the project; after all, *sparigliare le carte* [to reshuffle the cards], that is, to change the rules of the game, create disruption, or sow confusion, was among his declared ambitions) and the system's topics of interest, which he was well disposed to pick up and embrace. The very ends of the institutional project were shaped step by step, revisited and adapted to the context's resources and needs, filtered through the lens of a mode of thinking that was always political, never innocent. A *modus operandi* that very sharply captures his *forma mentis* when faced with the complexities of design.

As we stated in the Introduction to this text: «The disruptive force of Alberto Seassaro's action lies precisely in taking what the system has at its disposal, in terms of human resources, knowledge, instrumentation, spaces, organizational customs, and, through painstaking work of adaptation, micro-transformations, and tactics, designing a strategic action of unimaginable scope [...]».

È il meglio che abbiamo; Sono i migliori che abbiamo [This is the best we have; They're the best we've got], he would say to colleagues and collaborators whenever, faced with specific needs, one could respond in human and material terms only with *soluzioni arrangiate* [makeshift solutions] (another expression he used frequently). And in that *they're the best we've got* there echoes *il migliore dei mondi possibili* [the best of all possible worlds] from Voltaire's *Candide* – a reading he loved and

had raised to a life philosophy – together with a critique of easy optimism, according to which *everything is fine in the best of all possible worlds*. (Voltaire, 1950) His strength, instead, lay in everyday commitment, in reckoning with the concreteness and limits of reality.

From the very beginning it was clear to him – and it was his guiding spirit – that patience and time would help to fine-tune contents and means more *acconci* [fitting] (another term he used frequently). After all, as Sennett reminds us (2009, p. 19), in the *artigiano-demiurgo* [artisan-demiurge] [see the Introduction in this text], «the use of imperfect or partial tools stimulates the imagination to develop the capacity to repair, to improvise». In the same way, the lack of resources perfectly suited to the ends forced one to come to terms with them – not by reducing them, but by adapting, adjusting, and reorienting them.

Particularly noteworthy here is the concept of *contingency*, which the epistemologist Tagliagambe (1997, p. 48) interprets as an incentive to change one's current situation through transformative explorations typical of creative activity. It is a form of creativity, the one generated by contingency, that knows how to choose alternatives that are not only conceivable but also concretely achievable.

De Certeau speaks in this regard of *minute techniques* (2001, p. 9), an inventiveness governed precisely by the art of making do that leads to recombining heterogeneous elements and knowledges on the basis of a practical intelligence that, astutely, invents procedures, adapts schemes (ibidem, p. 96), transfers and reuses subjects and knowledges by exploiting the multiple potentialities implicit in each, while at the same time following the principle that many elements/people are replaceable with others. These are forms of design that draw on whatever the context makes available to produce results that do not claim to be replicable or to become a model, but simply to resolve *contingencies*. They are processes that evolutionary approaches to innovation have described precisely as practices of *bricolage* (Levi-Strauss, 1966; Ceruti, 1995): ingenious practices triggered by necessity, supported by an intuitive, hands-on sense, able to set in motion our intrinsic ability to repurpose what is available for performances different from those for which things were designed, recombining them, or recombining some of their parts or elements, and at times yielding original outcomes (Joyce & Craig, 2011). Results that, though deriving from

the fortuitousness of the available elements that dictate the logic of their assembly, once realized seem to be «the most obvious thing» one could have done (Freeman, 2007). The action of the *bricoleur* is in fact characterized by the use of materials and components that are imperfect, suboptimal with respect to the intended outcome, and in this way the very purpose, partly shaped by what is available for use, is itself resolved in an approximate yet effective manner. (Lévi-Strauss, 1966)

This stepwise proceeding through successive adaptations, with ends that narrow in scope and transform over time while nonetheless producing effects of great impact, has much to do, as we noted above, with contemporary modes of design, where grand narratives give way to local and transitory elaborations of meaning. (Penati, 2006)

From many quarters, this trait has been discussed, with the claim that in Seassaro it stemmed from his anarchic spirit.

I believe that, despite his readings of Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, and the theoretical writings on anarchy that nourished his youth, and despite what was said about him, Seassaro was not anarchist, especially if one thinks of anarchy in its cultural sense. I think that Alberto Seassaro's way of thinking and designing, both in projects of more limited scope and in the major projects he brought to maturity, drew more from a Dadaist way of doing and thinking.

His Dadaist bent is evident in his habitual use of modes – of thinking, making, and comportment – that, by analogy with the logic underlying collage practices, lead him to generate innovative meanings, selecting and assembling, in a randomness only apparent, source materials that acquire significance solely in the final project.

And this way of being also emerges in his frequent use of the Dadaist idiom *il pensiero mi si forma in bocca* [my thought forms in my mouth], which he had elevated to a mode of observation, reflection, and judgment, indicating a thought not pre-constituted but taking shape in speech, in argumentation. In argumentation it seeks the grounds of its own credibility.

Dadaist, then, in the way of organizing thought as well as in narrative style: why have a fixed lesson in its contents and telling? The outline is enough, and then the contents are improvised, as in jazz scores; why organize a talk, a presentation according to a sequence of slides? The succession of slides conditions thought, whereas among con-

cepts one can invent endless links and sequences. This is why those who followed his lectures for years maintain they never heard one identical to the previous. This is why, in shaping the teaching framework – even when the results had proved gratifying both in the themes proposed and in the groups of instructors included in the Study Manifesto, he never tried to crystallize the educational offering; on the contrary, his motto remained: *Every year we change!; Create unique, unrepeatable realities; Never propose the same topic again, never place the instructor in the same slot. Routine kills design pedagogy; What kind of instructors are those who, in 2000, teach using acetates from 1965, while outside these walls everything has changed!?*

The teaching work groups were likewise composed by often selecting personalities, experiences, and project visions at opposite poles on the plane of theoretical-critical reflection. Or, if dissimilar personalities were not placed in the same group, they were brought to meet students in successive teaching experiences, so much did he abhor the idea of a single way of thinking, of the *scuola di pensiero* [school of thought]. He never shared absolute, dogmatic visions. He cultivated the idea of the anti-model so that each student could be formed while being contaminated by diverse poetics and cultures of design.

But let us linger a moment longer on *collage and photomontage* as ways to construct reality, to rectify it, to reinvent it. Collage provides unconventional means of inventing new realities by making their different facets perceptible, as was typical of the Cubists, but it also offers unusual ways of representing reality by juxtaposing different materials and techniques, introducing defamiliarizing inserts into given contexts, or rendering certain elements dystopian through their juxtaposition.

And for Seassaro, collage was also a true instrument of representation. Here a fundamental role was played by his immersion in artistic culture and his deep knowledge, not only theoretical but practiced during his years of study in Brera, of pictorial techniques, from the most traditional to those of the avant-gardes.

His penchant for collage was always and inevitably accompanied by a mania for cutting things out: removing from their original context any article, cartoon, or magazine cover that caught his interest, so as to make them available for new contexts of use. This ran from his youth to his very last days. Hence containers filled with meticulously ordered

clippings: from the covers of *Alfabeta* and *La gola* (by Pedrazzini) to those of *Il Male* (by Liberatore), *Frigidaire* (by Paziienza, Scòzzari, and others), up to Altan's satirical cartoons, as well as Umberto Eco's *Bustine di Minerva*, Umberto Galimberti's essays in *il Venerdì di Repubblica*, and so on. Cutting out is an act that, in itself, already summons infinite possibilities of reuse.

A device used to facilitate a thought that is never improvised, yet susceptible to those modifications and deepenings that can emerge from time to time when reflecting on the structure and on the ways of articulating the unfolding of the project, and that may require integrations, inserts, or even a revisiting of the order and sequence of topics. A way of thinking and representing thought that is already born hypertextual, with cross-referencing marks, off-page additions, corrections, erasures, and displayed shifts of position. In Seassaro's many writings, contemporary and friend of Isgrò, it is immediately evident that erasures, too, are a text, one that lets us intuit the leaps and transitions of thought.

A device accompanied by a kit of narrative marks, figures and symbols placed on the page to meet the need to communicate mental processes and paths more effectively, including the possibility of going back and putting everything back where it started. A writing made not only of words, but of spaces and directions that are themselves already a visual text, and then signs, drawings, diagrams, tables. The cosmos boxed in and ordered with tailorly precision across pages crowded with thoughts that, despite their apparent visual disorder, are born already expressed in an utterly finished form.

There is at least one further path that must be followed through to the end to grasp the qualities of his way of thinking by designing: it is total immersion in artistic languages and, more broadly, in visual languages, in writing through images, and among these, in particular, that of comics, which shapes his design style. Comics provide him with the visual-culture tools that fuel his distinctive way of explaining and accompanying the processual phases of the project, through script-graphic narratives made of drawings, tables, and illustrations to support or make written texts more immediate, or, conversely, to contaminate project pages with written notations. His attraction to forms of visual text also came from his earliest, rudimentary learning

tools: above all the illustrated pages of the *Enciclopedia dei ragazzi* [Children's Encyclopedia], which, by his own account, he had avidly absorbed and from which he said he learned all the essentials at a time when the encyclopedia still had the power to encompass and catalogue all available knowledge, offering it through the richness of images derived from an important tradition, that of didactic illustration. A great comfort for a generation whose schoolbooks were almost devoid of images. He would recount that children's books, too, lacked them, and when illustrated pages did appear, imaginative worlds opened up for him beyond the text. And indeed, his vast historical, geographical, and artistic knowledge was highly vivid, and he always sought, even in oral storytelling, to render it visually.

The panoptic urge to fix complex systems with pen in hand by translating them into visual syntheses is remembered by everyone who worked with him and who had the arduous task of digitizing what he had produced by hand. His tables, his procedural and schematizing drawings did not merely represent what existed; they were already configurations and prefigurations capable of giving a precise relational order to the various elements. In other words, they were always acts of design that contemplated multiple alternatives.

These schemas could range from the Study Manifesto, for which he defined a format still in use today, a visually codified world of complex information that set out the educational programming framework for each degree program, all the way to more complex schemas (such as those that related upper-secondary studies to university courses, to Master's programs, *Corsi professionalizzanti* [professionalizing courses], *Corsi d'alta specializzazione* [advanced specialization courses], PhD programs, etc.). Schemas conceived, for example, so that a student could grasp at a glance, without reading pages and pages of the Student Guide, the Faculty's entire educational offering, with the many options available to them in their university and post-university path.

In producing the schema, he had in mind, already from the first stroke, the entire *canovaccio* [framework], the proportion, and the placement of the various parts in the page space, by virtue of their interactions. Collage intervened as a *remedium* where some element had to be integrated because it had not been foreseen or had emerged in the course of the project. We all remember the famous

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2

VIAGGIO IN GRAN GARABAGUA

(dalla raccolta intitolata tempo (EZZANI 1982))

di Henry MICHAUX e di SEASSARO

pittrice infatuata
 scrittrice di diari di viaggio veri (Equador 1923)
 o immaginari Viaggio in Gran Garabagua (1923)
Nel paese della magia
Qui Paddeum

scrive e dipinge in viaggio
 o in "trip"
 sotto effetto dell'acido (LSD)

Preziosa il senso della quotidianità
 nelle sue descrizioni

non c'è storia - né tempo
 né grandi eventi

è sempre il particolare
 il personale
 che determina un senso inusuale
 del generale
 del politico

Mi è un antropologo dell'immaginario.
 descrive se stesso nelle infinite possibilità del suo 10.

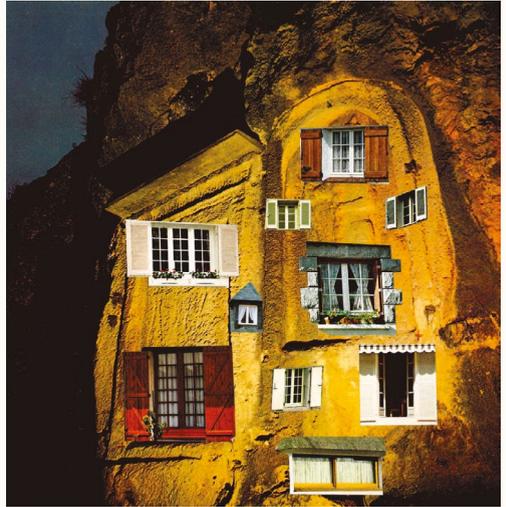
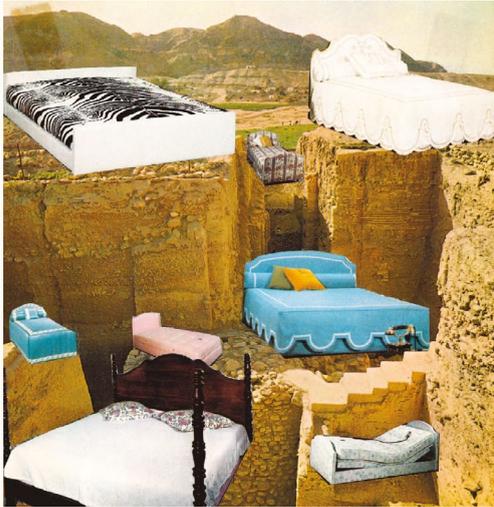
l'10 diventa mondo, universo, totalità

"IO è fatto di tutto. Una flessione in una frase, si tratta forse di un altro io che cerca di apparire? Se il sì è mio il no è di un secondo io? Io non è che provvisorio (forse) faccia davanti a qualcuno, lo addestra che si cambia in un'altra lingua, in un'altra parte) e gonfio di un nuovo personaggio, che un incidente, una emozione, un colpo sulla testa libererà per l'esclusione del precedente, e con stupore generale, spesso formato istantaneamente. Era dunque già del tutto continuo. Forse non si è fatti per un solo io. Si ha tutto a volentieri atterrire. Pregiudizio dell'unità. In una doppia, tripla, quadrupla vita, ci si sentirebbe maggiormente a proprio agio, meno rosi e paralizzati dal subconscio ostile al coesistere (entità degli altri io soppiantati). La più grande fatica di una giornata e di una vita potrebbe proprio essere dovuta allo sforzo, alla tensione necessaria per conservare uno stesso io attraverso le tentazioni continue di cambiarsi".

Mi si identifica con tutti gli io diversi 10 possibili.
 Il suo 10 si espone, e assume (invidiosamente?) aspetti e comportamenti di altre forme di 10 esistenti.

La dinamica degli 10, invariata per non dover soffrire la realtà, al tempo stesso la rivela.
 (Lo stesso procedimento che c'è in Quivera)

Il vero 10, è sempre la morte: presente sempre.



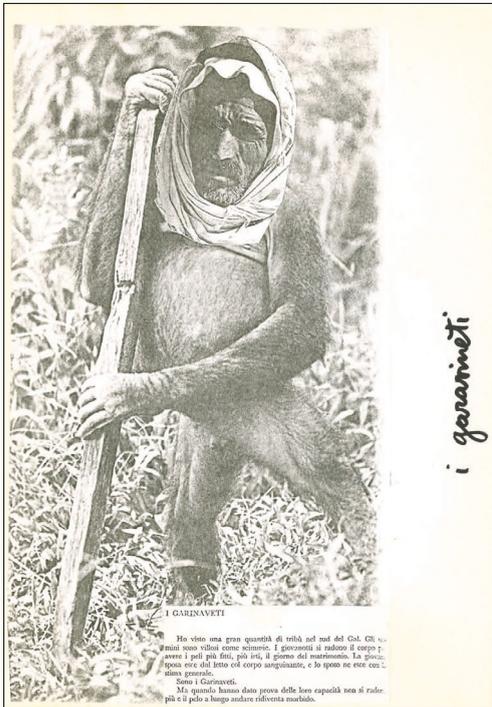


Figure 3. Visual translations of Michaux's text *Voyage to the Great Garabagne* created using the collage technique by Alberto Seassaro and used as teaching material for Architecture students.

giunte [add-on joints] of multiple sheets, or intersections of sheets within sheets.

Alberto Seassaro's verbal language was anything but banal, both in written prose and in speech. A language of warm, empathetic humanity, trained by his readings of François Rabelais, among his favorite authors. Characterized also by great lexical richness, with the use of concrete, colloquial, popular, and even dialectal terms: a collage here as well. In this he bore the imprint of writers like Gadda, whose work he was introduced to by Bruna Bianchi, a fine linguist and translator, his companion for many years.

He grasped in Gadda the plurality of linguistic registers – from scientific and philosophical terms to archaic usages and even dialect – that he especially flaunted in his writings. Some of his recurring words – *alfine* [at last], *vieppiù* [all the more], *verboso* [verbose], *imperituro* [undying], *acconcio* [fitting], *cimento* [trial], *tenzone* [contest], *scalchignato* [battered], *macché* [no way], *sgorbagna* [colloquial: a mess/kludge], *cippirimerlo* [zilch; sweet nothing], *ciau pep* [colloquial interjection: *so long!*] – and some of his sayings – *El püsse san el g'ha la rognà* [the healthiest one has the mange; i.e., even the perfect have flaws] – testify to a repertoire ranging from slang to high register to dialect. And, on this last front, one cannot overlook the influence exerted by his unbridled love for Jannacci's texts – to whom he would have awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

He was also quick to coin neologisms: *abluire* [to blue-highlight], for example, a term he used to indicate the act of highlighting text on a computer (which, as is known, turns bluish); *inignatico* [enig-stagnant], a midpoint between *enigmatico* [enigmatic] and *stagnante* [stagnant] (as in *qui la situazione si fa inignatica* to say a situation is complex and knotted), where the onomatopoetic *gn* digraph perhaps owes something to Gadda's neologism «*gnommero*» [snarl; tangle]. Or *museabile* [museum-worthy; museable], as Eleonora Lupo and Raffaella Trocchianesi remind us in their chapter.

To close, two notes on Seassaro's thought. The first describes Alberto Seassaro's way of working with fellow colleagues.

Alberto Seassaro belonged to a generation that Andrea Branzi, speaking of Joe Colombo, a few years younger than Seassaro and in some respects his inspiration, baptizes as *the jazz generation* (Branzi, 2011, p. 5).

A generation that «knew [...] how to sense that the era of great harmonies, of great symphonies, was coming to an end and, in their place, an anarchic social creativity was taking the stage» (Branzi, 2011, p. 5), with the magic of chorality, with deft improvisation outside given scores, with solo performances yet effects in unison. Having worked with Alberto Seassaro for a very long time, I cannot recall a single project conceived without, at its base, the inclination to form a group, to let each person play their part, introducing individual creativity and interpretation held together by an adaptive score; to accept *off-program – off-score*, precisely – as something to be valued; to build ironclad design processes in which, however, the flexibility of collective intelligence made room for improvisation; to welcome the combination of different rhythms and sensibilities; to make working together light and engaging. In this task, he put in the swing himself! Among the stories drawn from his musical past, jazz emerges as a metaphor for a certain way of understanding creative interaction among people and for the necessity of yielding something personal so the group can prevail. That is how his first youthful jazz-band project was born: Alberto Seassaro, a proud trumpet player, realizing there were too many trumpets in the group, said, *evabbé io suonerò il banjo altrimenti la band non si fa* [fine, I'll play the banjo, otherwise the band won't happen]. With all due respect to Charlie Parker! Controlled jazz anarchy is a fitting image for twenty years of working together.

The second concerns Alberto Seassaro's relationship with making and the relationship between his making and time.

Procrastination was the watchword. Wasting time was a conquest of life. Alberto Seassaro's success is undoubtedly the product of his brilliant, visionary ideas, of his bold ruptures and his battles to achieve the impossible, but above all of continuous, intense, almost obsessive work. Intensity is a hallmark that aptly characterizes both his being and his doing, and it attests to his passion.

And yet that *continuum* consisted, at once, of an attention that never shifted from the objective and of working in fits and starts: meditative pauses in a wandering without apparent destinations. In those moments he was elusive.

No sooner did his eyes light up at a new goal to chase, and no sooner had he unleashed his stalwarts on projects whose ultimate meaning

only he mastered, than, after stirring up half the world, creating expectations, setting deadlines, the running after things would diabolically turn into being chased by things. The things to be done became an obsession; the things to be done constrained him, distressed him. Keeping him from being ensnared became everyone's job.

These pauses, these intervals, were a necessity: as a deadline approached, urgency made him razor-sharp, productive, focused: there he was, writing in one sweep, almost without hesitation or second thoughts, and mapping out cluster-projects that touched teaching, research, and design simultaneously.

Wasting time as an art. He loved rewatching Fellini's interview on the loss of time elevated to a lifestyle, indeed, to a true life goal. But not the wasted time of *I vitelloni*, idle time in pursuit of vainglorious aims (another term belonging to Seassaro's vocabulary, which he had duly underlined in his reading of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*), rather time spent seeking the *intervallo perduto* [lost interval], distraction, detachment, separation, the zones of passage between one thing and another, the voids that must be cultivated because there, precisely there, unexpected experiences can occur. Wasting time as the art of the pause that adds knowledge.

When he put his head down to work, even then intense labor never coincided with optimizing time and energy. On the contrary, if he could, he lingered *wasting time* even during work time. *Never optimize! Optimization was an annoyance, a mortal sin of the contemporary age! In design, economies of scale, the pared-down approach, don't pay; you must always do more, overflow. Why do little when you can do a lot? Why work by day if you can work at night? Why work on weekdays if you can work on Sunday! To the complainers he'd reply: you're bound to petty-bourgeois rules!* Then, though, he'd make himself forgiven by bringing you something he knew you adored, for example *caldarroste* [roasted chestnuts] kept warm in his *blu marin* [navy blue] sweater, to quote Jannacci's *Musical*. Perhaps it is the sum of these traits as «the breezy tone even on the most important occasions [...] while at the same time maintaining a subtle sense of institutions combined with the ability not to lose sight of every small detail of the world around him in order to inscribe it within the design he has in mind», as Luciano Crespi recounts in his chapter in this volume. Or the union of «a

firm determination and a vision that might have seemed impracticable, with the gifts of a fine strategist, concealed by irony and by a *dégagé* attitude that neither intimidated the world of architects nor alerted them to his real intentions», as Cristina Tonelli instead relates here, or, again, his deftness in the «microphysics of building», as Flaviano Celaschi reminds us in his chapter, that led Alberto Seassaro to *depistare* [throw off the scent], to use again a term that appears in Luciano Crespi's chapter, an entire system marked by decades of inertia, proceeding step by step, collage by collage, inexorably toward the goal. A goal that he himself had neither foreseen nor perhaps fully wanted, so great was his desire for a free life. From the day after his retirement, Alberto Seassaro no longer concerned himself with anything relating to Politecnico di Milano. To those who asked him for news of the Politecnico he would reply: *Politecnico? It was my job, I loved it and it gave me much, but it wasn't my life. My life is elsewhere.*

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