Carlo Mollino in his studio, 1968

Mollino's conceptual Mannerism

Wilfried Kuehn

Mannerism covers the entire spectrum from license to licentiousness [1], a praxis apparently too close to affectation to be topical in twentieth century modernism. But mannerism as a conceptual approach is both modern and highly relevant if architecture is accepted as a realistic art form which is not utopian but which processes contradictory requirements in a synthetic way. *Mannerism is the conceptual approach to accepting reality on the necessary level in each case; it permits that openness and imagination which allow external processes to be set in motion and to be accepted without the insincere fiction that architecture gives up its claim to create an expression: open, but nonetheless defined; poor, but nevertheless comfortable,* [2] as Hermann Czech asserts in 1977. The conceptual careers which both modernism and mannerism have achieved since *maniera moderna* was coined by Giorgio Vasari some five hundred years ago, from the definition of a new style to the contrasting connotations of *modernism* and *mannerism,* run parallel and reveal a large number of contradictions. The *maniera moderna* of the cinquecento can be identified with a subjectivisation of the artistic rules which Vasari observes in representatives of the High Renaissance in their individualisation as artists with an independent oeuvre.[3] The realization of this artistic emancipation in the modernism of the twentieth century brought forth its own forms of mannerism, which—as during the cinquecento—are reflections of a crisis. As an anti-idealistic form of modernism, mannerism is an expression of an awareness of a crisis which creates the opportunity to articulate the inevitable contradictions in artistic form: *Mannerism appears playful precisely when its mood is desperately earnest.*[4]

Carlo Mollino is a modern mannerist. He started to work as an architect during the 1930s, in the middle of the political crisis which marks both the high point and the decline of European modernism. Mollino, who was born in 1905, completed his architect's training in 1931. In 1930, while still a student, he carried out research into rural architecture in the Val d'Aosta. In it he examined, recorded and presented with great precision the anonymous architecture in Piemonte, according to its construction system and typology as well as its household equipment. More than 30 years before Bernard Rudofky's MoMA exhibition *Architecture without Architects* and other publications which appeared during the 1960s on the subject of anonymous construction, Mollino turned his attention towards vernacular architecture at the zenith of international Rationalism in Europe.[5]

It was also around 1930 that a penthouse was built by Le Corbusier in Paris whose curious roof garden cannot be explained without Salvador Dali: Charles de Beistegui's terrace on the Champs-Elysées is characterized by hedges which can be moved electrically, and an open-air fireplace room with Napoleon III iron chairs and submarine periscopes for looking out over the city. In 1933 Dali published *De la Beauté terrifiante et comestible de l'architecture modern'style* in *Minotaure 3–4* [6]. With the help of photos by Brassai and Man Ray, which show the details of Guimard's and Gaudí's convulsive Art Nouveau architecture, he presents architecture which looks like a holograph of plants, organs and material objects which correspond with the Surrealist's *cannibalisme des objets.*[7] Dali's instrumentalization of this *modern style* architecture is a criticism of rationalism by other means and at the same time a sort of appropriation which is in a position to make anything into a readymade at any time and which thus overturns the relationship between architecture and its photographic representation: *People couldn't believe their eyes; Art Nouveau became so surrealist under the dictates of my imagination.*[8] Mollino, who owned a copy of this article and all the other issues of *Minotaure,* found here a veritable mines of ideas and images, but above all a method of handling images and

1
Manfredo Tafuri, Giulio Romano: "Language, Mentality, Patrons," in Manfredo Tafuri (ed.) Giulio Romano, Cambridge 1998, p. 15
2
Hermann Czech, "Manierismus und Partizipation" (1977), in Hermann Czech, Zur Abwechslung, p. 91
3
Matteo Burioni, "Zur Vorrede des Dritten Teils," in Matteo Burioni, Sabine Feser (eds.), Giorgio Vasari. Kunstgeschichte und Kunsttheorie, Berlin 2010, p. 107f
4
Gustav René Hocke, Die Welt als Labyrinth. Manier und Manie in der europäischen Kunst, Hamburg 1957, p. 121
5
Bernard Rudofsky, Architecture without Architects, New York 1964; Roland Rainer, Anonymes Bauen im Nordburgenland, Salzburg 1961; Fernando Tavora, Arquitectura popular em Portugal, Lisboa 1961, Josep Lluis Sert, Vom Einfluss der Volksarchitektur, New York 1967. Chiorino / Bruno Reichlin refer in connection with Mollino's research to earlier studies in rural architecture by Le Corbusier 1926, Pagano / Daniel 1936, "Marconi 1929," in Sergio Pace (ed.), Carlo Mollino architetto 1905–1973. Costruire la modernità, Milan 2006, p. 138
6
Minotaure 3–4, Paris 1933, p. 69
7
Minotaure 3–4, Paris 1933, p. 76
8
Salvador Dali, Das geheime Leben des Salvador Dali, Munich 1983, p. 353

using them as a starting point for his architecture. The central event is the reversal of the focus: from architecture to photography, which after 1930 became the main focus of Mollino's activities, and which exercised a considerable influence on his spaces and objects.

Choreography

The *Drago con fiore liberty,* which Mollino designed as a coat rack for his artist friend Italo Cremona in 1940, represents an explicit reference to the Art Nouveau architecture which Dali had shown in *Minotaure.* A curving metal line hovers on the wall as if it had been drawn in the air, with a dragon's head on one side and a stylized rose on the other. This zoomorphic object resembles in its linearity the chair produced at the same time for *Casa Devalle* which had been preceded by the curved power rail with movable lights for the *Casa Miller* of 1938: At the end of the Thirties, Mollino began to introduce movement in object form. Even more than as an object, the light design for *Casa Miller* can be interpreted as choreography which through the movable lights transforms the visitor into a dancer in space. In line with Dali's approach, here the modernistic fetish object is confronted by a hyper-artificial technical object whose main purpose is complete uselessness.

Twenty years later, the motif of the link between dance and ceiling lights recurs in the *Dancing Lutrario* and shows the reversal Mollino operates already in his drawings: the colored lights he has drawn, which now are completely static, look like a movement score, while the visitor to the dance club in particular has no alternative but to move. Kinesthesia on the part of the visitor, not moving objects; forms of movement, not speed—Mollino's choreography refers only to the physically active, perceptive subject. The layout of spaces like the *Lutrario* or the *Teatro Regio* cannot be understood typologically, but can be seen only as a direct expression of a space experienced in time.[9] In the *Regio,* his last work, Mollino may appear to be inverting the idea of theater and turning the foyer into a stage and the visitor into an actor. Through space sequences, which encourage forward movement, and at the same time project curving trajectories, the visitors become actors on a social stage. All surfaces of the foyer and the auditorium elude a clear interpretation; there is a flickering between various bases and depths; through the folded concrete ceiling and the brick relief; through the concave metal casings and the large mirrored areas; through the countless points of light in the ceiling with the geometric variations in the purple color pattern behind, and the faceted boxes of the auditorium, the multicolored fitted carpet and the mosaics made with a variety of stones. At the entrance our perception begins to whirl because a perspectival vista at right angles to all the doors looks like an endless reflection and generates a spectacular bewilderment whenever another visitor appears next door instead of one's own reflection.

Nor are Mollino's aerobatics Futurist in the sense of idealizing speed, but they are a choreographed aerial ballet in the middle of which he himself can be seen as a solo dancer.[10] Again the original purpose of the technical equipment is alienated, in that it is used purely as an artistic instrument instead of for locomotion. The aerobatic figures are recorded by Mollino in detailed drawings and can be read like a musical score—choreographies in the original meaning of the word. The machine is admired and perfected and at the same time continued ad absurdum so that it becomes the object of an intentional excess. In Mollino's case the prosthetic function of the machine as a direct extension of the body can be traced autobiographically back to his father, who developed the idea of a muscle-powered flying device with flapping wings in Turin during the 1910s and 1920s—*VUM Volo Muscolare Umano*—through the construction of experimental aircraft prototypes.[11] The zoomorphic shapes of these skeleton-like machines can be placed in a

Apartment Charles de Beistegui. Reproduction from Mollino's personal archive which was used as illustration in his article *Utopia e ambientazione* in *Domus*, 1949.

Leo Gasperl with color film camera attached to his ski. Reproduction from Mollino's personal archive.

9
Michele Bonino, Bruno Pedretti, "Lo spazio e l'esperienza: interni, allestimenti, ambientazioni di Carlo Mollino," in Sergio Pace (ed.), Carlo Mollino architetto 1905–1973. Costruire la modernità, Milan 2006, p. 127; Manolo De Giorgi, Carlo Mollino. Interni in piano-sequenza, Milano 2004
10
Fulvio Ferrari, "Aeroplani, Un'acrobatica vicenda," in Fulvio Ferrari, Napoleone Ferrari (eds.), Carlo Mollino Arabeschi, p. 145
11
Giovanni Brino, Architettura come autobiografia, Milan 1985, p. 13

direct line of descent between Guimard's metro entrances and Mollino's designs of the late 1930s.

However, before Mollino started flying in the mid-1950s, he realized the kinesthetic and prosthetic experience from 1934 in analogue form in the *Discesismo,* the downhill ski. At the end of the Thirties, through one of his chosen alter egos, the ski professional and Italian national ski trainer Leo Gasperl, Mollino underwent a brief change of role from amateur skier to ski instructor and adopted the subject of artistic skiing by teaching and learning it at once. Simultaneously he prepared a systematic treatise which was eventually published in 1950 as the *Introduzione al Discesismo:* drawings and photography became a means to a different type of skiing which was less of a sport and more of an art form.[12] As in Mollino's later aerobatics his alter ego Leo Gasperl skis so that his body and the technical medium are combined in such a way that a ballet ensues. The photos of Gasperl and Mollino's pictures of the tracks in the snow show the *model-like* activity. The skiing does not begin on the mountain. It starts where the skier lives. Mollino conceives of the skiing from the start as *tourism* which not only appropriates the landscape but also makes it artificial. Skiing in the Aosta valley begins with the car journey from Milan or Turin, and it leads initially into a vertically soaring block of flats on the mountainside that stands on its own in the countryside like a part of a dislocated city. *Centro Sportivo in verticale Quota 2600* (1947) is a model project for the magazine *Domus,* which like a transformer turns the city-dweller into a skier. On Mollino's drawing the car driver enters a flat-roofed building at the bottom while at the top the skier emerges from a hut with a pitched roof.[13] Mollino's second, simultaneous Tourism project for San Remo (1947) was analogous; in this case the city-dweller drives into the block of flats with his car and leaps as a swimmer from the roof into the sea.

Montage

The house on top of the building in the *Centro Sportivo in verticale Quota 2600* looks like a photomontage. It is a wooden alpine hut which has been placed on top of an urban apartment building. It is also a project within a project, because the hut here is a model of the *Casa Capriata*: a house whose outer walls take the form of a large pitched roof and which was proposed by Mollino in various forms and in various contexts but never actually built. On the roof of the *Casa del Sole* in Cervinia, planned and built in 1947–55, in which not only Mollino himself but also Leo Gasperl owned a flat, stands a variation on a hut with a monopitch roof which does not work as a ski club either. But here the principle of the montage of heterogeneous elements is evident, and this was taken a step further in the *Casa Garelli* in Champoluc in 1965: the wooden hut, which Mollino places on a newly constructed stone base in the form of a ground floor here, is not only different, but it is also pre-existing—an architectural readymade. Mollino dispenses with the design of the dwelling house and seeks out instead an existing traditional *rascard.* He has it dismantled and rebuilt at its new location using the same log-cabin construction technique, not without having also transformed it into an exhibit by means of the stone base he has placed it on. The obvious dispensation with the creation of a form in favor of a recontextualisation of existing forms is not only unusual in architectural praxis. It also represents a conceptual approach, which raises the construction of the context onto the same level as the construction of the architectural object.

Turin 1935. Together with his artist friend Cremona, Mollino takes part in a group exhibition entitled *L'ora della merenda.* It is held in the *Società procultura femminile dell'Istituto fascista di cultura,* a dubious event, which Cremona and Mollino encounter with an unexpected intervention: *Té numero 2* is an installation, which as was to be expected disappoints all expectations. An installation with a monstrous figure, which displays human and machine-like

Acrobats on motorcycles performing in Turin in the 1930s. Photographs from Mollino's personal archive.

12
Carlo Mollino, Introduzione al discesismo, Rome 1950
13
Carlo Mollino, "Centro Sportivo. Quota 2600," in Domus 226, 1948, p. 13

elements interwoven into each other. Replicas of hands on metal bars with complicated screw mechanisms above a glass sheet with a pointed roof and a mysterious anthropomorphic figure reaching to the ceiling are not fused together to form a unit but remain heterogeneous fragments, which have been assembled together without any solution. The installation is determined by the encounter between body fragments and trivial domestic utensils similar to Dali's *Dream of Venus Pavilion* of 1939 in New York, but in a different manner. Mollino adopts from Max Ernst the technique of the unexpected encounter which makes a home sinister and transforms it into a hysterical place; he owned copies of Ernst's collage novel *La Femme 100 Têtes* (1929) and *Une Semaine de Bonté* (1934)[14] and the drawings for *Tè numero 2* even seem to refer to Ernst's much earlier lithographs. Mollino and Cremona's piece is a spatial installation which as an art form was in the process of being developed by Kurt Schwitters, El Lissitzky, Friedrich Kiesler and the Surrealists in the relational field between art and architecture. With the idea of a spatial montage, *Tè numero 2* represents a direct introduction to Mollino's performative interiors of the following years. In the link between organic fragments and mechanical elements, the mounted installation is an extension of physical experience like aerobatics, skiing and photography.

Turin 1940. With the *Società Ippica* torinese Mollino creates another montage, this time as architecture. Since it was demolished only twenty years after completion, our picture of the *Ippica* is based on Mollino's photographs, which are actually photomontages. Unreal but photogenic, horses leap into the picture, in some cases reined back by disembodied hands at the edge of the picture. The montage determines the design itself, in the way that contradicting elements encounter one another and are superimposed; cuboids nesting inside each other with flowing, undulating lines: serial and yet unique, austere and yet ornamental. As if it were a case of various architectural structures which have been placed together ad hoc, the contradictions in the construction are not resolved but create an effect. Mollino goes still further with this form of Surrealist architecture in his projects intended only for publication in the 1940s. *Casa sull'altura* (1943–44) is an architectural montage; it forms a building as a monstrous encounter of contrasting architectural fragments which look like a *cadavre exquis* drawing. Published in *Stile* in 1944, it is a kind of self-portrait in architectural form. The highlight is a white semi-dome in which pictures of Baroque ceilings are projected as a technically up-to-date trompe-l'oeil.[15]

Indian glove in red cowhide and arm of a geisha mannequin. Reproductions from Mollino's personal archive.

Paper Architecture

It is not clear whether Mollino laid eyes on the realization of his designs primarily in the built or the published form; such is the dominance in his work of all those techniques which apply only to an appearance in printed publications. Moreover, the published materials also lead a life of their own which is distinct from their realization as actual buildings and make the latter look like preliminary versions and pieces of scenery. Both the high degree of personal involvement and the selected techniques in the preparation for publication show that Mollino's works can be understood as publications, because they were conceived as such. This also applies especially to the drawings which are preserved in his archives. Instead of building plans which Mollino had prepared by other architecture firms such as that belonging to Carlo Graffi, we find in his work almost only plans destined for publication, in which the line thickness and the mode of representation makes them into artwork for lithography. There is no difference even in the sketches: something which, when printed, looks like a perfect freehand drawing, can be decoded thanks to the large numbers of archived preliminary drawings as a perfect rendering which Mollino created for that precise purpose, sketching it beforehand in pencil and then inking it in freehand, carefully following the original lines. By making use of the architecture

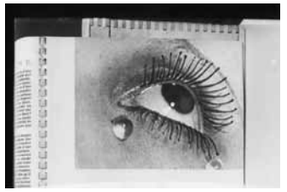
14
"The distance which exists between the elements of which a picture is composed, is essentially removed … The crisis which Max Ernst intentionally maintains in his works is what characterises his oeuvre." Werner Spies, in Max Ernst. Frottagen, Collagen, Zeichnungen, Graphik, Bücher, Zurich / Frankfurt / Munich 1978, p. 13

15
Carlo Mollino, "Disegno d'una casa sull'altura," in Stile 40, April 1944, pp. 2–11

photographs we can trace through the archive documents how the work was prepared step by step with the ultimate aim of publication. Mollino photographed the early works himself; later he commissioned photographers like Riccardo Moncalvo. The resulting photographs are then modified as to the section they actually show and meticulously retouched using an airbrush. In some cases they are extended at the end by means of a photomontage with the ultimate aim of publishing them. Anticipating all the picture-processing techniques of the digital age in manual form, from the 1930s onwards perfect picture narratives were produced which Mollino combined with his own texts or those by chosen authors to even be published in his own layouts.

Giò Ponti in Milan, a fellow architect and the founder of the magazine *Domus,* created a stage for Mollino's public performances at all times and published not only all his buildings and spaces but also Mollino's architectural works on paper. These included hybrid projects which defied classification, consisting of designs which had been completed combined with those which had not, such as the *Camera da letto per una cascina in risaia* of 1943.[16] A five-page article shows drawings of a bedroom in a rice field, complemented by a color photograph of a canopy similar to the one at the *Casa Devalle.* A photo of the model-like construction appeared as a rendering of the new project, a full-page perspective drawing in which Mollino uses a small mirror to include not only the countryside but also half of his own face as a reflection into the picture. It was accompanied by a text in which technical details like an integrated meteorological measuring station, a cooler, a lift for food and a vacuum cleaner are mentioned in the middle of this natural oasis, along with large, soundproofed sliding doors whose outer sides are concealed by painted panels of the early ottocento; their integration is mentioned in the accompanying text as an intentional contravention of the rules of *the style.*

The *Messaggio dalla Camera Oscura* of 1949 is a book by Mollino with over 400 pages which deals with photography but which is in fact the manifesto of his working method. The book formed the conclusion of Mollino's artistic career as a photographer, as if the portraits and still lifes of the 1930s had been created in order to publish them in this context, as part of the history of photography and framed in a large format by Nadar, Brassai, Man Ray, Edward Weston and others. After this publication Mollino photographed only for private purposes, in a smaller format and after 1960 even using a Polaroid camera, without a negative film.[17] And, in contrast to his previous photography, Mollino's aim was never again to have his photos published. *Messaggio dalla Camera Oscura* marks the turning point, and we should take the title of the book literally: the message which is propagated here comes not from the camera, but from the darkroom. *It is the combined choice between brusque and gentle passages from light to shadow given by the gradation of the paper and the nature of the support and also, after minor or major masking of parts of the image while projecting the enlargement, all those operations that range from accelerating the appearance of things only touched upon by the lens with the heat of your hand to rushing anxious to raise tonalities with cottonwood or, worse still, fingers dampened with red prussiate and hyposulphite, and even abolishing entire disturbing parts of the image, right down, to the naive outrage of the purists, to dangerous and interfering retouching of the negative or positive, superimpression and photomontage: all is permitted.*[18] The photo is an image that is created by postproduction, in that it is processed, no differently from a painted picture and the opposite of a documentary event. The darkroom, that is the message, is to be seen as a conceptual location of Mollino's artistic praxis over and above photography itself: It is also the place where his architecture is created, his studio, both technically and intellectually, in which he can use technical means of reproduction and editing to create that which forms the focal point of publication: powerful images.



Man Ray images used by Carlo Mollino in *Messaggio dalla camera oscura.* Reproductions from Mollino's personal archive.

16
Carlo Mollino, "Camera da letto per una cascina in risaia," in Domus 181, January 1943, pp. 12–16

17
Napoleone Ferrari, "A photographer?" in Fulvio Ferrari, Napoleone Ferrari, Carlo Mollino Photographs 1956–1962, p. 9f

18
Carlo Mollino, Message from the Darkroom. Photography History and Aesthetics, Turin 2006, p. 86

Display

J'ai toujours incroyablement souhaité de rencontrer la nuit, dans un bois, une femme belle et nue, ou plutot, un tel souhait une fois exprimé ne signifiant plus rient, je regrette incroyablement de ne pas l'avoir rencontrée. (André Breton, *Nadja*).[19] Mollino led a second, nocturnal life. It took place in flats which he rented over a long period and designed as interiors, like the *Casa Miller* (1936), *Villa Zaira* and *Via Napione* (1962–73), and in rooms which he designed for close friends such as the *Casa Devalle* (1939–40). In these interiors Mollino created very different architectural spaces which were not intended for ordinary daily life. They are rooms which are more a film set than a site, temporary architecture whose purpose is a dramatic plot or a performative act. In them Mollino staged encounters which he experienced in the role of photographer with women and still lifes. Or women as a still life, whom he transformed through costume and staging into the object of his photographic viewpoint. Together with Mollino's camera lens, the interior of the *Casa Miller* is the *Machine Célibataire,* simultaneously his mechanized and self-centered form of desire, which again created above all one thing: images.[20] Just as Hans Bellmer transforms the *Poupée* [21] he has made himself by means of *fetishist accessories into narrative stage pictures,*[22] in order to transform them into a photographic picture, so Mollino's architecture aims at a synergy with the photographed model in the form of a picture with its curious objects which in their combination of physical associations and artificiality also created an impression of fetishist accessories—a mirror in the form of the *Venus de Milo,* a capital with a female breast, a life-size plaster horse's head, shells and furs.

In contrast to the *Casa Miller,* which is dominated by curtains covering the walls, the two *Devalle* interior designs are dominated by large mirrors. The two interiors, which through their twin-like duplication seem to form a reflection of each other, create a kaleidoscope-like fragmentation of looks which removes the boundaries of the room. On a photo which Mollino took from the corridor, he himself appears in one of the mirror fragments; the dramatization of the interior and the camera lens do not create an easy relationship between the viewer and the object. The viewer-photographer is placed in a complex relationship to himself which corresponds more closely with an exhibition situation than with an auditorium as he is not detached from the performance. The exhibition becomes a transformation of a subjective inhibition, which shows Mollino in his relationship to the photographed model in a similar position to Breton in his encounter with *Nadja*—a reflection of himself evoked by a specific situation. The act of exhibiting makes the entire interior into a display, which the viewer discerns in stages and experiences physically by becoming simultaneously both the subject and the object of the gaze.

Mollino's architecture is an architecture of display not only in its spatial form. Display is the principle of the objects he has designed, which over and above their primary function as items of furniture can take on the quality of autonomous sculptures. Their zoomorphous forms seem to link every light, every table and every chair back to a story which is engraved causally in each object. The wing armchairs for *Casa Minola I* (1945) and *Casa Orengo* (1949), specific in each case, reveal an almost cartoon-like exaggerated form whose elements—obviously different front and back legs, large wings and armrests, long extensions to the back upholstery – become fused with the human body in Mollino's drawings; the bedside table, also designed for *Casa Minola I,* is called *Canguro* because of its shape; the legs of the radio stand for *Casa Minola I* evoke a leaping dog, while the lights like those for *Casa Rivetti* (1949) and *Casa Minola* resemble flower shapes. Table frames like the one for the New York exhibition *Italy at Work* (1950) acquire the character of a spinal column, while the stools and chairs for *Casa Devalle* (1940) are made of intertwined thin metal pipes and look like climbing plants which are growing organically. Mostly

Max Ernst Collage Novels. Reproductions from Mollino's personal archive.

19
André Breton, Nadja, Gallimard Paris, 2007, p.33
20
"In bachelor machines love is alienated from its genetic purpose as energy libido and changes into self-love. From this denial of procreation, replaced by pairing with the machine, Eros appears to gain limitless increase in lust, as if the eroticism of the machine were liberating other, limitless powers." (Deleuze / Guattari) Jean Clair, "Was ist eine Junggesellen-maschine," in Hans Ulrich Reck / Harald Szeemann (eds.), Junggesellenmaschinen, Vienna / New York 1999, p. 12
21
Hans Bellmer, "Poupée. Variations sur le montage d'une mineure articulée," in Minotaure 6, 935, pp. 30–31

produced during the 1940s, these various objects are not series furniture or design, but are one-of-a-kind pieces without being typical craft items either. They are objects both of and beyond art, much in the sense Michel Leiris attributed to Duchamp's *Arts et métiers: Une fois liquidé le grand art, une fois l'homme exorcise de sa confiance candide en le discours, la place resterait nette pour l'édification d'une nouvelle physique (ou logique) amusante, ouverte aux solutions élégantes de quelques ARTS ET MÉTIERS.*[23]

Appropriation

In the *Casa Miller* Michelangelo's Dying Slave is transformed into a table. A black-and-white life-size photo of the sculpture, seen from the front, becomes an article of daily use; Mollino photographed it with glasses and a telephone standing on it. A short while later, in the *Casa Orengo:* a mountain torrent flowing between rocks, also in black-and-white and original size, is used as a wall covering so that it invades the room. In Mollino's contribution for the exhibition *Italy at Work* in New York he used the mountain torrent photo again as a panel with a larger section, while *Casa Minola, Casa Rivetti* and *Casa Rivelli,* like the *Via Napione* at a later date, are dominated by blow-ups, photographic enlargements as etchings on the walls and ceilings. The natural panoramas depicted are alienated by the multiple process of imaging and reproduction, especially through the enlargement; individual strokes become graphic lines which start to live independently as two-dimensional patterns. The photograph as wallpaper creates imaginary architecture as a trompe l'oeil through other means. If it is true that trompe l'oeil is conceptual art avant la lettre, then Mollino's walls covered with photographs are *conceptual architecture.*[24] It is no coincidence that Mollino acquired the first photocopier for the Faculty of Architecture in Turin; like his simultaneous use of the Polaroid camera it is an expression of a means of reproduction which is as technical as it is simple and which, like the latter, also alienates automatically. The focus of Mollino's photographic architecture is a form of picture appropriation which makes use of models which he has found, even banal ones, instead of inventions and abstractions. The use itself moves into the center stage of the design technique; the way the object is to be used and the associated transformation process become the subject. In the interior of the flat in *Via Napione,* which Mollino furnished for himself as a second apartment from 1962, you will find very few personal items of furniture but a large number of found objects, which he appropriated and in some cases altered: the *D70* sofa by Osvaldo Borsani, *Tulip* chairs by Eero Saarinen, a Venini glass light fitting and other design pieces, as well as Japanese-style sliding walls and a fake Piranesi etching. Finally, in the *Butterfly Room* there is a wall arrangement of framed pictures of butterflies which were simply individual pages from a book which Mollino had cut out of a publication and framed. Like that created at the same time by Philip Johnson, Mollino developed an unusual form of *camp* architecture.[25] *Casa Miller* as much as *Via Napione* is a set and not a site. It is also both a photo studio and a display; it is architecture as exhibition.

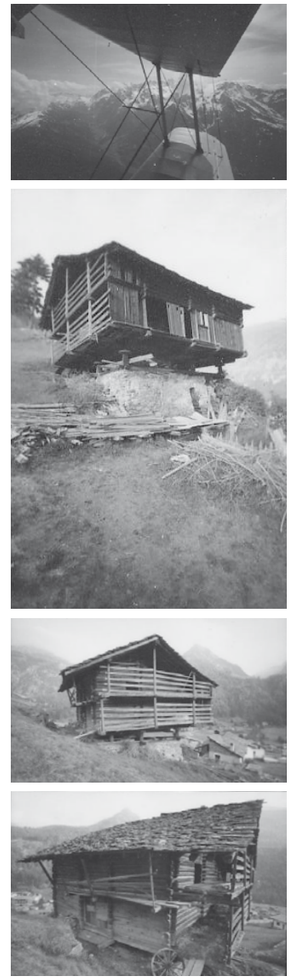
Just as Raymond Roussel explains the method he uses to write his books as the formal consequence of a conceptual positing at the beginning of the story which starts out as multiple meaning, so Mollino's alpine architecture should be seen as a formal consequence of a number of fixed but ambivalent components.[26] In *Rilievi di Architetture alpine* he created in 1930 a basic stock of elements which recur to form a form of writing in his designs, where they encounter other writings from other fields. The pitched roof and log cabin are formally present in the *Stazione al Lago Nero* (1947), but they are united structurally with a concrete skeleton construction which stands in contradiction to them. As the presentation views of various previous projects by Mollino show, the design unfolds from this basic ambiguity in all its details and is developed

22
Verena Kuni, "Pygmalion, entkleidet von Galathea, selbst? Junggesellen-geburten, mechanische Bräute und das Märchen vom Schöpfertum des Künstlers im Surrealismus," in Pia Müller-Tamm / Katharina Sykora, Puppen, Körper, Automaten. Phantasmen der Moderne, Düsseldorf / Cologne 1999, p. 190
23
Michel Leiris, Arts et métiers de Marcel Duchamp (1946), in Michel Leiris, Brisées, Paris 1992, pp. 129–135
24
Bice Curiger, "Der zeitgenössische Kunstraum als Augentäuschung," in Ortrud Westheider / Michael Philipp (eds.), Täuschend echt. Illusion und Wirklichkeit in der Kunst, Hamburg / Munich 2010, p. 60
25
"Camp is a vision of the world in terms of style—but a particular kind of style. It is the love of the exaggerated, the 'off', of things-being-what-they-are-not.", Susan Sontag, Notes on Camp (1964), in Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation, London 2009, p. 279
26
Raymond Roussel, Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes Livres, Jean-Jacques Pauvert, Paris 1963

through a variety of forms. It is always the tension between the two contradictory forms of construction which is the determining factor and permits the building to take on different composite forms depending on the view of it and the component in question. The composite form excludes collage: Through the simultaneous presence of contrasting structures and languages a unique fusion is created which cannot be repeated and which corresponds to the irreversible character of the composition. And this script moves from project to project, as can be shown by means of a single subject such as the roof. Bruno Reichlin describes it as intertextuality: *La Casa Capriata recurs in slightly modified form in further projects on repeated occasions; raised from the floor by other substructures: mushroom-like, on columns, in wood, concrete or stone—in other words with connotations which are sometimes rustic and sometimes modern.*[27]

The *Capriata* is the design for a house which develops its architectural form initially from the traditional pitched roof construction: a gable as an entire façade which rises above a central concrete support. In the unrealized projects of the *Villa Dusio* (1946) and *Villa Caranda* (1947) Mollino varies it in interaction with a panorama terrace; in the project *Centro Sportivo quota 2600* dating from the same period, which was also not realized, the block of flats replaces the concrete support and the Capriata hovers above it as a ski club; in the competition *Vetroflex-Domus* 1951 reappears as a design for a prefabricated house. It was developed as an independent project under the name *Casa Capriata* in 1953 in a contribution which Mollino designed for the *10th Triennale* in Milan but which he was not able to realize. Here, too, the idea of a prefabricated house which could be quickly and inexpensively built was foremost in his mind, a house which linked traditional wood construction with the latest developments in materials such as foam rubber and plastic surfaces. At the same time Mollino developed the *rascard* typology from the 1930 study for a dwelling house on two pillars, initially in the unrealized *Casa Loro Totino* (1946) and then in the *Villa Agra* 1953, which was designed and realized entirely by Mollino including furnishings and fittings and which today is his only surviving project for a private dwelling house with inner and outer rooms. The two columns create an open space underneath the house which serves as the approach for cars in front of an entrance on the ground floor. Raised above the ground like a traditional haystack but without the traditional stone base beneath, the living space on the supported floor extends along a long picture window for the length of one side which is flanked by the slope with a view of Lago Maggiore, instead of being lined up to face it—like the *Capriata* or the *Lago Nero* mountain station. The gable is counteracted, and with it the slope location, while other elements such as the row of windows along the side and the balcony extending along the entire length of the building are given the main emphasis.

In order to retain the impression of a house protruding from the slope in spite of being set at 90° to it, Mollino artificially created a sloping area at right angles to the main slope, by raising the terrain visibly on the side of the rear gable and making the heap of earth a part of the architecture rather than a part of the landscape. Mollino treats the alpine plank chair in a similar fashion to the roof; from the 1940s onward he varies it as a three-legged and four-legged chair in a variety of furnishing situations. For *Casa Agra* (1953), *Casa del Sole* (1955), the *Faculty of Architecture in Turin* (1959) and even the furnishings for his flat in *Via Napione* (1961) he creates variations on the rustic type of chair which are always both an evocation of the human body and a perfected counter-form, supporting the body when used through its complementary molding. And here, too, the construction is contradictory: Upon closer examination the plank chair reveals itself at the same time to be a frame chair, which as in the case of the log cabin construction with a reinforced concrete skeleton is subject to a dual logic of tradition and alienation.[28]



The Alps photographed from an airplane and vernacular architecture in Piemonte. Reproductions from Mollino's personal archive.

27
Bruno Reichlin, "Mollino in Bau und Schrift," in Bruno Reichlin / Adolphe Stiller, Carlo Mollino baut in den Bergen, Basel 1991, p. 9
28
Adolphe Stiller, "Mobiles Gerät von Mollino," in Bruno Reichlin / Adolphe Stiller, Carlo Mollino baut in den Bergen, Basel 1991, p. 20f

In Mollino's work, techniques represent applications which are more alienated than orthodox. His inventiveness, which was accompanied by a constant stream of patents, lies above all in the surprising use of familiar materials, a form of controlled misappropriation. While Charles and Ray Eames, like Alvar Aalto and Eero Saarinen, had achieved the first serial production of furniture objects during the 1940s with the help of bent plywood, Mollino turned his attention in 1950 to a low-tech version, which he had patented. He reversed the usual technique: Instead of gluing thin veneers and using heat to form bent plywood, which was then cut to produce the required shape, Mollino cut 3 mm plywood sheets flat like pieces of fabric which are cut before sewing using paper patterns. He then glued them together cold in a wooden mold to form bent sheets. Just as he appropriated the log-cabin building technique and the plank chair technique in a manner which ran counter to their original logic, the apparently plastic form of Mollino's curved table and chair frames is an elegant deceptive move. It permits a sheet of wood which is only bent in one direction to look as if it had been molded three-dimensionally: Consequently the two-dimensional plans for the wooden sheets look like dress patterns—and like the animal skins in the *Casa Miller.*[29]

The *Bisiluro Damolnar,* the racing car with which Mollino entered the Le Mans race in 1955, was also a derivative. It was based on another racing car, the Maserati bodywork of the *Osca 1100,* which had won the race in Le Mans two years previously. Mollino changed the exterior appearance of the *Osca,* by retouching a photograph of it on the cover page of a magazine using a pen and airbrush. Mollino transformed the middle section of the Osca into an aerodynamic torpedo, which he then duplicated. The result was the *Bisiluro,* which literally means *double torpedo.* Car racing remained a brief episode of only a few years, in which Mollino did not even sit behind the wheel at Le Mans, but was forced to watch as the car driven by his business partner and driver Mario Damonte crashed; nonetheless the staged pictures with Mollino at the wheel of the *Bisiluro* have become iconic.[30] Like most of Mollino's activities, the *Bisiluro* is not a success story, but a specifically constructed experimental situation. It served to test new and always tentative identities which were assumed temporarily by alter ego figures and through permanent playacting in front of and behind the camera. If the assembly and use of found techniques and objects to the point of alienation as well as the interest in anonymous buildings and the activities which are apparently far removed from art, such as aerobatics, skiing and automobile racing each in their own way are demonstrative examples of *anti-architecture,* the role-playing in turn always creates a programmatically unstable and temporary identity for the author. Post-heroic and contextual, conceptual mannerism is neither a marginal nor a historic episode, but a form of architecture highly relevant today.

Carlo Mollino and Carlo Graffi at the presentation of their project for the *Nuovo Teatro Regio* in 1965. Reproductions from Mollino's personal archive.

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29
Gino De Ferrari, in Atti e Rassegna tecnica Societá Ingengneri e Architetti in Torino, Nuova Serie vol. 43 nos. 11–12, Nov.1989, p. 321f; Adolphe Stiller, "Mobiles Gerät von Mollino," in Bruno Reichlin / Adolphe Stiller, Carlo Mollino baut in den Bergen, Basel 1991, p. 22f
30
"The photo of you in the racing car at Le Mans is so spectacular that you, even if all the efforts to develop it had led only to this picture, would have to be very satisfied." Luigi Licitra, in "Fulvio Ferrari, Automobili Dalla Osca al Bisiluro," in Fulvio Ferrari, Napoleone Ferrari (eds.), Carlo Mollino Arabeschi, p. 172f