

Contradiction juxtaposed and digital representation in contemporary art. The work of Dionisio González

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Abstract: The Spanish artist Dionisio González creates imaginary landscape images —urban or natural— from combining digital photographs of real scenes with renders of fictitious architecture, and extreme designs. His creative strategies are typical of contemporary artistic production, and can be compared to several ideas that Robert Venturi developed in his book “Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture”, related to the phenomenon of “contradiction juxtaposed”: superadjacencies, shock effects, accidental contrasts, etc. The aesthetic results are also those suggested by Venturi: complexity, inclusion, richness of meaning and multi-faceted vision. González generates contradiction through the juxtaposition of reality and fiction, but also shows the contradictions of the real world through his selection of scenes, in which situations of social injustice, precariousness and vulnerability are often revealed —such as the favelas of Brazil, or places exposed to natural catastrophes—, compelling the viewer into critical reflection. Dionisio González’s work reveals, on the one hand, contemporary art’s interest in architecture, cities and landscapes, and on the other the potential of digital representation —photographic rendering and retouchin— to construct virtual landscapes of extraordinary verisimilitude.

1. Introduction

Art, architecture and landscape are disciplines that frequently interact and intermingle. In “Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture”, although his analysis focused on architecture and the urban landscape, Venturi also made use of various examples of modern art, and especially, pop art, to illustrate his ideas. He believed that the ambiguity of images and complexity of meaning were part of the essence of art.

Translating Venturi’s ideas into the XXI century, we present in this text an example of contemporary art in which complexity and contradiction play an important role, and that is also closely tied to the representation of art and landscape: the work of the Spanish artist Dionisio González. Throughout the text we will see the visual and technical devices that Gonzalez uses to generate contradiction and discussion about urban landscape, and why, from the categories set out by Venturi in his various chapters —elements of double function, contradiction adapted, contradiction juxtaposed, etc.— it is contradiction juxtaposed that best defines the artistic strategy deployed.

The text is divided into three main parts. The first part is dedicated to a definition of the concept of “contradiction juxtaposed”: firstly as Venturi describes it; then from the point of view of aesthetics; and finally, from contemporary artistic practice, including the implications concerning landscape. The second part is centred around the work of the artist Dionisio González: his work is presented from a general viewpoint, and the role of contradiction juxtaposed is analysed. The third part is concerned with digital representation —a medium employed by Gonzalez— and the generation of contradictions through it. Lastly, some final considerations and conclusions are proposed, intended as a reflection on the implications that artistic compositions such as Gonzalez’s have beyond their own disciplinary field.

2. Contradictions juxtaposed

In this section, we firstly expound on what Venturi means by “contradiction juxtaposed”, the concept on which this exploration is based. Venturi illustrates it with examples both from architecture and art. We will then consider the aesthetic implications of the concept, before finally, exposing the presence of contradiction juxtaposed in the art of the XX and XXI centuries, including examples of its insertion into urban and natural landscapes.

2.1. Contradiction juxtaposed according to Venturi

Chapter eight of Venturi's book "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture", is titled "Contradiction Juxtaposed". In contrast to contradiction adapted, addressed in the previous chapter, this type of contradiction "involves shock treatment". Its contradictory relationships "become manifest in discordant rhythms, directions, adjacencies" and, especially, in what the author terms "superadjacencies", that is "the superimpositions of various elements". (Venturi, 1977, p. 56)

Contradiction adapted and contradiction juxtaposed are understood by Venturi as opposites —within a specific variable, contradiction, itself based on the existence of opposites; which makes the discussion about the very idea of contradiction even more complex. According to the architect "Contradiction adapted is tolerant and pliable". (...) On the other hand, contradiction juxtaposed is unbending. It contains violent contrasts and uncompromising oppositions. Contradiction adapted ends in a whole which is perhaps impure. Contradiction juxtaposed ends in a whole which is perhaps unresolved" (Venturi, 1977, p. 45)

This last phrase seems to suggest that contradiction juxtaposed is, therefore, an accidental situation, not desired and undesirable, that must be "resolved" by means of adaptation, in order to "mitigate" the violence generated by the juxtaposition of opposites. However, although sometimes it is certainly generated spontaneously, or by virtue of accidental situations, a contradiction juxtaposed is also on many occasions designed or caused deliberately. The work of Le Corbusier —to whom Venturi repeatedly refers in the book— shows various examples of it: the Mill Owners building in Ahmedabad, where the repeated design of the *brise-soleil*, based on static and rectangular divisions, becomes violently interrupted by the gap created by the entrance, the ramp and the stairs, with a composition based on different diagonals (Venturi, 1977, p. 56); the two assembly chambers in Chandigarh, where the conical assembly hall, squeezed into the rectangular grid, represents a violent three-dimensional superadjacency (Venturi, 1977, p. 56); the Villa Stein, where the scale of the entrance contrasts with the service doors (Venturi, 1977, p. 66).

The negative attributes of contradiction juxtaposed that Venturi first appears to emphasize —inflexibility, violence— are turned into positive aspects a few pages later, by stressing that

"Superadjacency is inclusive rather than exclusive. It can relate contrasting and otherwise irreconcilable elements; it can contain opposites within a whole; it can accommodate the valid non sequitur; and it can allow a multiplicity of levels of meaning, since it involves changing contexts —seeing familiar things in an unfamiliar way and from unexpected points of view— (...). Superadjacency can result in a real richness as opposed to the surface richness of the screen which is typical of a "serene" architecture" (Venturi, 1977, pp. 58-61)

Despite the various illustrative architectural examples of this type of contradiction, both from modern and classical architecture, the author places greater emphasis on the urban scale rather than the buildings. It is in the city where we find more examples of superadjacencies, mainly the result of accidental and unplanned situations, and especially, of the conjugations of multiple authors, as opposed to a single author in the case of a building. This may be considered as the final conclusion of the chapter: contradiction juxtaposed occurs "more by accident than by design", something that, nevertheless, many urban planners accept, permitting, in contrast to orthodox zoning, more violent proximities in their plans (Venturi, 1977, p. 68).

2.2. Contradiction juxtaposed as an aesthetic phenomenon

A preliminary question in the aesthetic analysis of contradiction by juxtaposition concerns its relation with the concept of beauty.

According to its classical conception, in general beauty related to proportion and harmony, a harmony based on the consonance of similar elements, and proportions based on the numeric and geometric relations between the parts of the whole. The juxtaposition of contradictory elements —contrasting elements or discordant parts— is associated with imbalance and a lack of harmony, and hence ugliness. The first Pythagoreans promoted this concept of beauty, based on mathematical and geometric ideas defined by duality: odd/even, limited/unlimited, unity/multiplicity, square/rectangle, straight/curved, etc., where one of the parts represents perfection (odd, straight and square are good and beautiful) while the opposite features are bad, erroneous and lack harmony (Eco, 2010, p.72)

We find, however, a different concept in Heraclitus. He believed that if opposites exist in the universe (such as unity and multiplicity, love and hate, peace and war, stillness and movement, etc.) the harmony between these opposites is not arrived at by one cancelling the other, but by each being permitted to live in continuous tension. Thus, harmony is not the absence of opposites, but balance between the two opposed elements that neutralise each other (Eco, 2010, p. 72). The tension between opposites is present in the divinities Apollo and Dionysus, to whom Nietzsche (2007 [1872]) attributed two different notions of beauty: Apollonian beauty (serene harmony, order, proportion) contrasted with Dionysian beauty (disruptive, joyful and dangerous; the contrary of reason). Both divinities are represented on both the eastern and western pediments

of the same building, the temple of Delphos, which demonstrates that, even with an ideal of beauty based on harmony, there is a place for antithesis and the juxtaposition of opposites.

At the opposite extreme, ugliness, and even monstrousness, has also been frequently represented throughout history, especially since the medieval period. The juxtaposition of contradictory or discordant elements has played an important role in the representation of monsters and imaginary beings: different limbs and animal parts, distorted dimensions and shocking configurations, are grafted together to create fantastic figures. (**Fig. 1**).

A second question to consider is the role of contradiction juxtaposed as a device or artistic effect a theme addressed by aesthetics if not without conflict.

The representation or the creation of beauty ceases to be an essential objective of art the moment the idea of its universal and objective nature is abandoned—that is, the idea of beauty as an inherent attribute of the object, regardless of the observer's opinion—and, from the XVIII century, influenced by Hume and Kant, it starts to assume in the main its subjective and relative quality. (Sartwell, 2017). The concept of beauty becomes, therefore, a simple question of taste. Art assumes this subjectivity and, although it continues to pursue the creation of emotions in the spectator, these are not necessarily related to pleasure or delight in the contemplation of something beautiful. Surprise, confusion, or even displeasure, are also emotions sought by art,

The juxtaposition of contradictory elements is a powerful tool in the generation of such emotions. The presentation of two opposing things, very distinct or usually associated with different contexts, has an unexpected quality, generating, initially, surprise and confusion—the “shock” effect, if we use Venturi's term—that can be used for various ends, ironic, critical, transgressive, etc. Not only in the visual arts, but in all of art's manifestations, such as literature or music, the juxtaposition of contrasting or contradictory parts is a common device.

From a philosophical point of view, contradiction, as an inherent characteristic of XX century art, has entailed difficulties of methodology for its analysis, at least under the Popperian model, considered a scientific philosophical model that is also valid and applicable to the domain of the humanities (Teske, 2016, p. 14). According to this model, the absence of contradiction is one of the basic suppositions of any research. When contradictions exist, the falsification process becomes complicated. This is a fundamental procedure to eliminate erroneous theses and theories. The contradiction cannot be taken as an unequivocal indication that the thesis or theory is incorrect, as the contradiction can also be derived from the subject being researched.

In the fields of logic and ontology a Aristotelian vision has predominated, and the majority of philosophers throughout history have rejected contradiction; yet some others, such as Priest (Priest, 2006), have accepted it, developing a paraconsistent logic, suggesting, for example, the philosophical consideration of imaginary or fictitious worlds in which operate different logical laws, or proposing the existence of “hard” and “soft” contradictions. Outside of these fields, such as the areas of psychology or aesthetics, the existence of contradiction has been accepted with wider latitude—based on a more colloquial conception of the term, including, for example, notions like narrative inconsistency, ambiguity or metaphor—(Davies, 2010), (Haack, 2004). Thus, the presence of contradictions in the arts has been one of the drivers of conflict between philosophical and artistic theories, but also has been contemplated and accepted from within philosophy.

Generally, the existence of contradictions in art is understood as the conscious and deliberate strategy of the artist that enriches the work's meaning. With regard to cognitive theories of art, this meaning and its cognitive value are not solely defined by the artist, as the experience and interpretation of the spectator is needed to complete the definition (Dewey, 2008), (Ossowski, 2012) and in the process, contradictory interpretations may be generated. In contrast, deconstructivist theories, out of scepticism, consider contradictions in art as involuntary and inevitable, caused by the inability of language—artistic language in this case—to transmit meaning (Teske, 2016, pp. 246–247).

Finally, we should mention Marxist theories that attribute a political dimension to the analysis of contradiction in art, placing the spotlight on the role of the artist. The mission of art is social: to express reality, reflect the contradictions of society. The artist themselves, can fall into contradiction, when they criticise the capitalist system but at the same time be part of it, through the art market.

2.3. Contradiction juxtaposed in contemporary art

We find various artistic manifestations associated with the phenomenon of contradiction juxtaposed throughout the XX century. At the beginning of the century, the Dadaist movement clearly exploited the principle, in conjunction with other compositional devices that sought to create surprising contrasts, such as changes of scale, dislocations, decontextualizations, etc. Similar strategies were used by surrealism.

The collage becomes the ideal graphic technique for Dadaist and Surrealist experimentation, and has the added value of novelty, offering an alternative to traditional artistic techniques (however, not abandoned). The collage is possibly the clearest expression of superadjacency in art, as it consists, literally, of the placing of elements or fragments from different and unrelated sources next to and over each other (**Fig. 2**).

Conceptual art, heir of Dadaism, from the second half of the XX century, also made use of juxtaposition as a creative strategy: the work of Joseph Kosuth, in which an object was usually juxtaposed with its own printed image and textual description, is an example. We also find juxtaposition of contrasting elements in the non-figurative paintings of conceptual artist Sol Le Witt (**Fig. 3**).

As an important follower of the Dadaist and conceptual currents in the XXI century a mention should be made of the Chinese artist Ai Wei Wei, who has used the juxtaposition of contradictory objects and symbols on various occasions (**Fig. 4**). His work is usually loaded with ironic and political allusions

Moreover, we find clear strategies of juxtaposition in the pop art of the second half of the last century. The movement seeks to unite art (intellectual, highbrow) with modern life and popular aesthetics, and in the fusion contradictions are often generated. The *assemblage*, based on juxtaposition, is a common format of pop art, which we find in renowned pop-influenced contemporary artists such as Jeff Koons, Paul McCarthy or Damien Hirst.

The second half of the last century also saw the birth of the genre of the happening, that Susan Sontag defined as “an art of radical juxtaposition” (Sontag, 1962) for its relation with Surrealism and its use of the “principle of collage” in reference to the way the events were sequenced in time. “The happening operates by creating an asymmetrical network of surprises, without climax or consummation”.

Finally, the contradiction juxtaposed is not only associated with the creation of fictions. Realism with its various manifestations (direct realism, social realism, critical realism) has also been employed, especially through photography, to reflect the strong contradictions and contrasts that exist in the real world. This was reflected in the title of the retrospective exhibition of XX century photography that was held in the Tate Modern in 2003: “Cruel and tender”, with photographers such as Walker Evans and Diane Arbus, who captured scenes and people full of contrasts.

2.4. Contradiction juxtaposed in landscape

In the XX century the natural or urban landscape becomes another artistic stage on which it is possible to create superadjacencies and contradictions by juxtaposition. On occasions, the work of art contains its own internal contradiction, and landscape is simply space that accommodates both the work and the viewer. But often, the landscape itself is one of the operative elements: contradiction is generated between the work of art and the landscape in which it is placed. To speak about a contradiction juxtaposed, and not adapted, in Venturian terms, the continuity of the landscape has to be abruptly interrupted, without any space for transition, and the inserted element must be clearly contrasted, in formal, dimensional, material or semantic terms.

We find contradictions by juxtaposition with the urban landscape in the sculptures of Claes Oldenburg, which consist of the reproduction, on a monumental scale, of banal objects from everyday life, not usually associated with a public space. The shock generated by the semantic juxtaposition is added to that generated by the object's radical change of scale.¹

As regards natural landscape, the artistic intervention generally known as Land Art inherited from the similarly titled artistic movement emerging in the late 1960s, does not obey the logic of the shock; in fact, its integration into the environment is its most notable characteristic (Lailah, 2007, p. 11). These works usually have an ecological genesis and attempt to exalt the value of nature, by attempting to maintain a formal and material continuity with the site, blurring the boundaries between the work of art and its natural environment. Even so, cases exist where violent visual contrasts are produced, as occurs in the ephemeral landscaping interventions of Christo and Jean-Claude (**Fig. 5**), in which the monumental scale of the works also operates as shock value. The work of Christo and Jean-Claude is noted for the contrast between nature and artifice: the grandiosity of nature enters into combat with the magnitude of the impact that man is able to generate.

¹ Venturi repeatedly refers to the change of scale as a generating factor in contradictions juxtaposed, when it happens abruptly. As an example he cited the intervention of Michelangelo in the Palazzo Farnese, which increased the height of the upper floor and created large openings in the loggia of the back facade, that contrasted violently with the scale and rhythm of the adjacent elements (p. 57). He also mentions the combinations of various sizes in the columns of the University of Virginia, in Jefferson (p. 58), as well as what he termed “accidental collage” of the colossal head of Constantine and the louvered shutters in the courtyard of the Capitoline Museum (p. 66). As an artistic example he mentions Jasper John's paintings of superimposed flags (p. 58) that reproduce the American flag in different sizes.

3. Dionisio González

The work of Dionisio González combines three features that make it a particularly relevant subject for analysis: firstly, its main theme is landscape; specifically, urban landscape and natural landscape manipulated by man through architecture. Secondly, the representation of architecture has a special significance in his work, as it is done via digital means. And thirdly, that it presents an abundance of contradictions by juxtaposition, by which the richness of meaning and the artistic dialectic that the artist seeks is generated.

In this section we present the general features of the artist's work followed by a more detailed analysis of the presence of contradictions juxtaposed within it.

3.1. *The work of Dionisio González*

Dionisio González (Gijón, Asturias, 1965) is an multi-faceted artist with a well-established professional reputation², who has worked with various media —interventions, sound installations, video, etc. — but is especially known for his photographs, or as they should be more correctly called *photocollages*. These are images of real landscapes (urban, peripheral or natural), digitally modified to create new invented scenes. The alteration of the landscape is performed by inserting architectural constructions or imagined pseudo-architecture, that in reality, do not exist. Gonzalez acts, therefore, like a real architect, creating designs with which he modifies the landscape, and he presents his ideas through a commonly used method in contemporary architectural practice, photorealistic rendering.

Although González has photographed and virtually altered landscapes in the developed world, including New York, London, Amsterdam and Venice, his work is mainly centred on places at the margins, which feature poverty and destruction, and man's struggle against the forces of nature, such as Brazil's favelas, the floating villages of Halong Bay (Vietnam), the peripheral slums of Busan (South Korea), or the area of stilt houses on Dauphin Island (United States), devastated by hurricanes and tornados such as Katrina.

Into these scenes, González inserts architectural proposals that contrast with the environment, to completely transform what exists, but which have also been designed ad hoc, after observing and studying their specific logic. This enables the artist to reflect, and invite the viewer to reflect on various questions, whether political, economic, historical, sociological, urban planning, etc. that determine the configuration of the city and its surrounding land, on a global scale.

By this reflection, the artists reveals a constant preoccupation for the drift of the city in the XXI century towards an ever more exclusionary and "dissocializing" model, a cityscape which contains the specific forms of the evils and problems of society as a whole. He complains:

"Never before had architecture been so far removed from, so unoccupied with the socialization of spaces. This way of inhabiting could be defined as architecture of violence and security. These new aesthetics of security, along with the protection of shining spaces of culture and entertainment, are sowing dystopian ruins around the technological and urban territory" (González, 2018a, p. 35)

And in another passage, we can read:

"A megalomaniac ideography (...) is inserted in the cities external to the air quality, education, pedestrian accessibility transferred, now, to the place of automobiles. We have lost the faculty to create cities where non-indispensable activities take place. On the contrary, we have made private spaces possible that do not belong to us as well as public institutions that broadcast us covertly with video cameras. In short, we have constructed a network of strongholds" (González, 2018a, p. 37)

Thus, González adopts, by means of artistic production, a political position, relating to Marxist theory that bestows the artist with the social responsibility to denounce the errors and injustices of the system. He uses the contradictions in his images, as is appropriate, as a useful tool to denounce the intrinsic contradictions of our current society, generated by inequality, social injustice and the destruction of the environment.

²González has a doctorate in fine art (1996) from the University of Seville and is a professor at the same university. He has received numerous prizes, including the BBVA Foundation Leonardo Scholarship for Researchers and Cultural Creators (2016/2018), the National Prize for Engraving from the Spanish Museum of Contemporary Engraving (2015) and the European Month of Photography Arendt Award (2013), among others. His work is displayed in museums such as the National Museum Centre of Art Reina Sofía, in Madrid, the Museum of Contemporary Photography, In Chicago, or the Pompidou Centre in Paris, as well as some important private collections. He has exhibited his work in a host of galleries, art centres and fairs all over the world. His most important recent exhibition was a monographic retrospective, comprising almost a hundred of his works, entitled "Parrhesia and Site", held at the Centre of Contemporary Art in Malaga in 2019. The exhibition catalogue gives a detailed curriculum of the artist (González, 2018b, pp. 219–228).

We encounter similar attitudes in some architectural initiatives of recent decades that we might describe as “urban parasites”, which have been carried out in practice (in general, temporarily, and mainly intended as artistic experimentation and for public viewing rather than having a real functional use). Among them we might mention the intervention “Parachutist” of Héctor Zamora in the Museum Carrillo Gil, in Mexico City (2004), various temporary installations by Santiago Cirujeda (**Fig. 6**), or the dwelling “Parasite”, of Korteknie & Stuhlmacher, installed in Rotterdam in 2001.

Gonzalez not only gives priority to his interest in popular architecture or anonymous subsistence architecture, which is the main subject of his *photocollages*, but also avant garde contemporary architecture and the works of the maestros of architecture of the modern movement. This is reflected in certain works of video-documentation —such as “Thinking Amsterdam”, 2018 or “Interviews”, 2015— and other 3D reconstructions —such as “The Sunlit Hours”, 2011, or “Somewhere. Nowhere”, 2013— that lie halfway between artistic creation and research work.

3.2. Contradiction juxtaposed in the work of Dionisio González

In adherence to the main tendency in contemporary art, Gonzalez’s work embraces contradiction. The element of contradiction is produced at several levels, but that generated by juxtaposition stands out most clearly in his *photocollages*. Here, the work of González combines the features described by Venturi: complexity, inclusion, richness of meaning, multi-faceted vision (Venturi, 1977, pp. 58–61).

At a general level we may speak, as a first contradiction, of the dichotomy between destruction and construction, or, in the terms used by Castro Flórez (2018), “utopia and disaster”. According to Castro, Gonzalez unceasingly expresses an aesthetic of destruction, focusing on manifestations of “social wreckage”, yet in parallel he formulates “utopian projects” (Castro Flórez, 2018, p. 23). Disaster is a product of observation and a faithful reflection of reality; utopia, on the other hand, comes from imagination and the “desire to not only intervene, but actively interfere in an extremely thorny issue, whether as a project designer or social regulator” (González, 2018b, p. 49)

Realism and fiction imply a second level of general contradiction, whose coexistence is possible in a single medium: the digital image. This question is tackled in greater detail in the section on digital representation.

At an individual level, the various thematic series in which Gonzalez’s work is organized reflect specific contradictions. Several of these are analysed below.

In the series “Maps for removal” [Cartografias para a remoção] (2004-2007) and “Busan Project” (2011), the contrast is generated by the apposition of social levels: wealth compared to poverty, integration compared to marginality. The scenes are, in both cases, poor and marginal slums in great cities: Busan, in South Korea, and Sao Paulo, in Brazil. The buildings that form the composition are single-storey dwellings built by the occupants from modest materials and means (including discarded materials, in the case of Brazil) and in a poor state of conservation. The houses are arranged without any order or apparent planning, and the organized planning of public space is limited. These neighbourhoods are totally different from other parts of the city, where glass and steel skyscrapers, wide avenues and gardens predominate. A juxtaposition of images from different locations in the same city would be enough to reveal the powerful contradictions that exist, similar to what Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega do in “History of two cities” (**Fig. 7**).

However, Gonzalez opts, via fiction, for a juxtaposition that includes an extra layer of meaning: confronted with despair, hope; faced with abandonment, recovery. He also presents an adjacency which is much more multiple and fragmented between the contradiction juxtaposed and the contradiction adapted, to make use of Venturi’s categories. In both series, fragments of gleaming and unsullied architectural design emerge from between the precarious constructions. In the first series they are more discreet and integrated (**Fig. 8**) and in the second, more structural and striking (**Fig. 9**). His designs might well belong to architects such as Thom Mayne, Steven Holl or Daniel Libeskind. With these fragments of new architectures, the artist tries to demonstrate the potential of these precarious pre-existing structures, which in his way of looking should not be eradicated but renovated to improve the quality of life for the inhabitants.

“I wanted, if possible, to take a social stance in defence of these settlements, advocating not their eradication but their improvement, which is the same as intervention; an alteration of the existing “cartography” The favela is the most substantial, iconic proof that urban architecture is a problem that can be solved by popular logic” (González, 2018b, p. 49).

In the series “Halong Bay” (2008-2013) (**Fig. 10**) and “Dauphin Island” (2011) (**Fig. 11**), Gonzalez highlights a type of architecture that must be adapted to conform to nature, especially with the aquatic environment. Despite their adaptation, these constructions are vulnerable and are exposed at any moment to their destruction and deterioration. For these locations, Gonzalez proposes completely different architecture to the light wooden constructions usually found there (floating houses in Halong, and stilt houses on Dauphin

Island): in contrast he suggests bunker-like constructions in exposed concrete, with abundant folds and twists and compact dimensions.

Through superadjacencies, Gonzalez's designs create contradictions juxtaposed with two elements. Firstly, with the natural environment: here, the contrast is generated semantically through the opposition of nature/artifice, similar to that featured in Christo and Jean-Claude's land art interventions, as Gonzalez's designs are interpreted as artificial constructs; although from a formal perspective, the inserted volumes present a certain mimesis with the natural environment through the concrete's colour and texture, the organic shapes and the vegetation hanging from the facades. Secondly, visual contrasts are generated with the existing buildings: while these give an impression of lightness and fragility, their height comes from being constructed on wooden stilts, the artificial buildings are heavily supported on the ground giving a sensation of robustness and stability; the volumetric simplicity of the existing buildings, rectangular, straight walls and inclined roofs, contrast with the extravagant folds and curves of the constructions created by the artist.

In the series "The Sunlit Hours" (2011), Gonzalez focuses on the city of Venice seen from its canals. A landscape that seems entirely unrelated to the previous series, as the architecture featured, palaces and luxury hotels, are not characterized by their precariousness, but once again, by their relation with the aquatic environment. The artist explains that this series has its origin in "prior research and investigation which determined the exact locations of absent works designed for this city by legendary architects (Wright, Le Corbusier, Kahn, Rossi). As such, they are photographs of positional precision, of geolocation" (González, 2018b, p. 117). From the perspective of this text, that attempts to establish a relation between the work of Gonzalez and the theories of Venturi, this series probably creates the clearest connection, we recall that "Venturi's primary inspiration would seem to have come from (...) the urban facades of Italy, with their endless adjustments to the counter-requirements of inside and outside and their inflection with all the business of everyday life" (Scully, 1977, p. 9). Gonzalez's photographs express the urban faces of the Italian city, in which facades of historic architecture from different styles and eras that so fascinated the American architect are aligned together.

Using these photographs, González virtually reconstructed several buildings: Wright's Masieri Memorial (1953 project), Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital (1964 project) and Rossi's Teatro del Mundo (constructed in 1979 and dismantled). However he also developed his own designs that contrasted strongly with their immediate surroundings, which he inserted to replace existing buildings such as the Hotel Bauer, the Palacio Giustinian Lolin and the Palacio Gardella (**Fig. 12**). Here, the existing facades, essentially flat, composed of recognisable architectural elements, and organized around an orthogonal grid structure at regular intervals (individually different, and therefore enabling contrasts by juxtaposition, but always within the rules of composition for classical architecture), are opposed by extreme volumes, which protrude out from the frontage and whose composition is based on neither grid nor orthogonal structures.

Lastly, in the series "Inter-actions" (2013-2014) (**Fig. 13**), the buildings are "Structures elevated on stilts, regulated by an unusual usage of space and an occupation that gives rise to estrangement and exception; due to the style of the architecture itself or its adaptation to the landscape and the equilibrium established when nature interacts with the architectural *apparatus*. (González, 2018b, p. 153). As the artist himself describes it, the artefacts not only generate contradiction with the immediate surroundings by their decontextualization, but also by their own internal contradictions, that generate an uncategorizable morphology, thereby creating a double layer of contradiction

4. Digital representation

4.1. *The digital image in contemporary art. Truth and creative liberty*

As stated by Llopis-Verdú (2018, pp. 558–559), photography has undergone drastic changes, in terms of veracity, with the appearance of the digital image and its almost infinite possibilities of manipulation. If analogue photography was considered a technique that guaranteed a faithful record of reality —although still subject to the partiality of the photographer's gaze—, digital photography does not enjoy the same confidence, being susceptible to being used as a vehicle of suggestion, manipulation and even deception. However, the veracity of pre-digital photographs has been put in doubt by many authors (Fontcuberta, 1997; Batchen, 2004; Garcia, 2010).

At the margins of newspaper, documentary or scientific photography, in modern and contemporary art, with its consolidation as an artistic category, photography has undoubtedly lost its claim to veracity. In the early XX century, under the sway of the New Objectivity, modern photography laid claim to its documentary character, free from manipulation and poetic effects, to show reality in all its nakedness.

However, the various avant gardes —Surrealism, Constructivism, etc.— explore the plastic and visual possibilities of photography beyond its documentary value, turning the photographic film into a canvas. In the second half of the century, the various artistic movements similarly adapt the use of photography to artistic ends. The photographic narrative gathers force, characterized by its fabrication of tales and fictitious dramatizations that are completely removed from documenting reality —Jeff Wall and Cindy Sherman are some examples—.

What becomes known as the Düsseldorf School is an example of how the artistic value of photography has superseded its documentary value. Disciples of Bernd and Hilla Belcher and, in theory, heirs of ideas from the New Objectivity —at least from the point of view of their aesthetic and compositional strategies— the members of this school and, in particular, its most prominent figure, Andreas Gursky, abandoned realism to accommodate the “appearance of realism”. Gursky created totally realistic images of scenes that, however, never existed in reality (Nayeri, 2018). Thus, the observer of Gursky’s work always feels challenged by a guessing game about which part of the contemplated scene is real, and which part has been modified. A game in which, in the end, it is not important to know the solution, as the value lies not in the truth but in the image’s message.

Truth in photographic art is therefore at the mercy of the artist’s intentions, as Fontcuberta has suggested (Fontcuberta, 1997, p. 15): “Every photograph is a fiction that is presented as a truth. (...). The important thing is how the photograph is used, what is its purpose. The important thing, therefore, is the photographer’s control of the photograph to put an ethical spin on his lie. A good photograph is one that lies well about the truth.”

Today, in addition to the creative possibilities of digital photography —images captured by a camera and subsequently manipulated— we now have computer-generated images that appear real but are not derived from any photographic capture of real scenes. Hyper-real digital painting and photorealistic rendering of virtual 3D models, are becoming increasingly believable, and a further step in the process of blurring the border between reality and fiction, just as is occurring between categories of art —painting, sculpture, photography, architecture—, “analogue” categories that are losing their validity with the rise of digital technology.

However, while the foundations of truth and the traditional structures of art are being destabilized, potentially disconcerting the viewer who seeks referents to cling onto, the artist enters into a new world of creative freedom as Kuspit suggests (Kuspit, 2007, p. 34):

“There is greater potential for freedom in digital art —that is, the “mental elements” can be “combined and manipulated more freely” than in architecture, painting or sculpture. This is why nowadays there are buildings, two-dimensional images and three-dimensional objects that are designed and made by digital means using computers and manufactured by machines controlled by computers. (...). It also gives us an effective means to produce art that has never existed before.”

This artistic production, he insists, transcends traditional art categories:

“The computer is not a new instrument to make the old architecture, painting and sculpture. Digital architecture, digital painting and digital sculpture —all the digital drawing software products that utilize computer embedded algorithms— are new artistic forms with a surprising aesthetic, creative and visionary potential, and are still partly unexplored.” (Kuspit, 2007, p. 37)

4.2. The use of digital photorealistic representation in Dionisio González

In terms of representation, the great contradiction of Gonzalez’s work, common to all his *photocollage* series, and intrinsic to all contemporary artistic photography, is the juxtaposition of realism and fiction.

However, it is evident that truth as an artistic concept still concerns Gonzalez, as the title of his most recent retrospective, “Parrhesia and Place” testifies. “Parrhesia” is a term used by Foucault to mean, “a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself)” (Foucault, 2004, cited by Francés, 2018, p. 11)

Gonzalez’s use of the term reveals that he attributes the quality of parrhesia, or sincerity, to his own work. This may appear paradoxical, as his photomontages, entirely based on photorealist renders —impeccably realized from a technical point of view— have been designed to deceive the eye, and are so perfectly executed that the joins between the real photograph and the fictitious model appear impossible to distinguish.

Nevertheless, if we attribute any validity to artistic language, including contemporary modes of expression —such as digitally manipulated photography—, the meaning of the message does not reside in the medium, but in the “ethical spin” of the author, as Fontcuberta stated. Therefore it is not so contradictory to think that an artist can express themselves sincerely through visual tools that alter reality, such as the photorealistic renders employed by Gonzalez.

In the words of Francés (Francés, 2018, p. 12), “In his projects Dionisio Gonzalez offers ideas of what these structures, buildings, homes and houses might have been, or should have been according to his way of thinking, his truth”. Constructions that Gonzalez places into existing scenes, that he has walked around and analysed to extract their complexity and intrinsic contradictions. Therefore, Gonzalez exercises truth through knowledge and from his ethical responsibility as an artist — “to tell the truth is a duty to improve and help other people” —.

The other concept associated with parrhesia, according to Foucault is freedom. He wrote “In parrhesia, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion” (Foucault, 1999, p. 5). The freedom by which the artist operates is granted to him again, among other things, by digital media. The use of technology allows him to develop and present his utopian landscapes that would be very difficult to realize in practice, through any other media that could be used. Digital media facilitates the creation of projects that are not limited by their materiality, legal implications or difficulties of execution.

However, it should be stated that the freedom attributed to digital media is not made possible by the simple use of technology, but an understanding of it is also required, in fact, its technical mastery, as is clearly the case with Gonzalez. Just as with a Renaissance artist, the digital artist must be a trained craftsman —an artist that has to learn his trade both materially and intellectually— at a time when it might appear that much of art is pseudo-intellectual and bereft of talent, that is, lacking in both internal and external logic.” (Kuspit, 2007, p. 36). Dionisio González is a digital artist who knows his trade and applies his skills with material and intellectual rigour. As we have shown, his renders are totally photorealistic and impeccably executed from a technical perspective. The visual impact achieved by his images on the viewer, the contradiction generated by the juxtaposition between reality and fiction, would not be possible if this were not true.

5. Conclusion

Commencing from an analysis of the work “Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture”, a text that, ever since its publication, has exercised a great influence on the theory and practice of urban planning, in this section we have presented the work of Dionisio González, an artist who creates images of landscapes — urban, peripheral or natural— characterized by complexity and contradiction, which are generated, in turn, through architecture. A new discipline thus joins architecture and landscape, entering into dialogue with them: fine art.

Perhaps two types of contemporary artistic practice could be defined: those that are basically centred around their own discipline, trying to update, refine and explore its boundaries, etc. —art that speaks about art, it might be said— and those that are centred around everything else: humanity, society, politics, the city, the planet, etc. Dionisio González belongs to this second category. He is an inhabitant of the world he explores, interacts with it, reflects on it, and, as an output of this activity, generates his art. The intention of this artistic output is therefore to transcend the frontiers of artistic dialogue and initiate a dialogue with society in general.

Dionisio González’s work is centred on three themes: the city, architecture and nature; the latter, in its relations with man. These three themes are, almost, united in one, as they are so interconnected that sometimes it is impossible to tell where one ends and another begins. Gonzalez’s regard is profoundly critical, revealing that which must be questioned and improved; especially, those situations and scenes —architectural, urban or natural—, in which is encountered man’s precariousness and vulnerability, concerning specific people or population groups.

Gonzalez deliberately produces contradictions and stark contrasts in his works, as he understands the aesthetic power that they have and the cognitive effects they can generate. Although he does this through fiction, in the first instance he does it by exposing the complexities and contradictions inherent in the real world. Contradictions that are often not desirable. In parallel, contradiction is manifested through utopia, from the utopias that the artist creates —the “solutions of how it ought to have been, or how these constructions, buildings, homes and houses should be in his mind, in his truth”; returning again to the words of Francés—.

Many urban planners, landscapers and architects work along the same lines as González, devising projects to resolve the complexities and contradictions of the city and the landscape that are not desirable, that have been generated by inequality, bad management, abandonment, etc., and that cause precariousness and vulnerability in the lives of their inhabitants. The advantage of Gonzalez’s proposals is, precisely that they remain in the realm of the imagination, fiction, and have no potential to be brought to fruition. This plays to his advantage in terms of his creative freedom. But some of them are not so unimaginable and may serve as inspiration for projects that may be realized. Evidence that Gonzalez can act as a real project influencer is the fact that his “Busan Project” originated from a real commission from the local authorities of Busan city to explore the possibilities of improving the city’s slums.

Thus, just like contemporary art observes what is happening in contemporary architecture (like Gonzalez does by knowing its history, tendencies and most cutting-edge techniques of representation), architecture, town planning and landscaping could also pay attention to contemporary artistic production; not only from an aesthetic or stylistic point of view, as often happens, but also by taking into account the analysis that some artists make of the city and the landscape —natural or built—, and the projects they propose for them.

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FIGURES

Fig. 1 *Les heures de Croy*, cod. 1858, XVI century, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. Image source: Eco, U. (2007) *Historia de la fealdad*. Lumen, Barcelona, p 47



Fig. 2 Dadaist collage as example of contradiction juxtaposed: Raoul Hausmann – “Tatlin zu Hause”, 1920. Image source: Walther, I. F. (ed) (2005) *Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts – Band I*. Taschen, Cologne, p 122

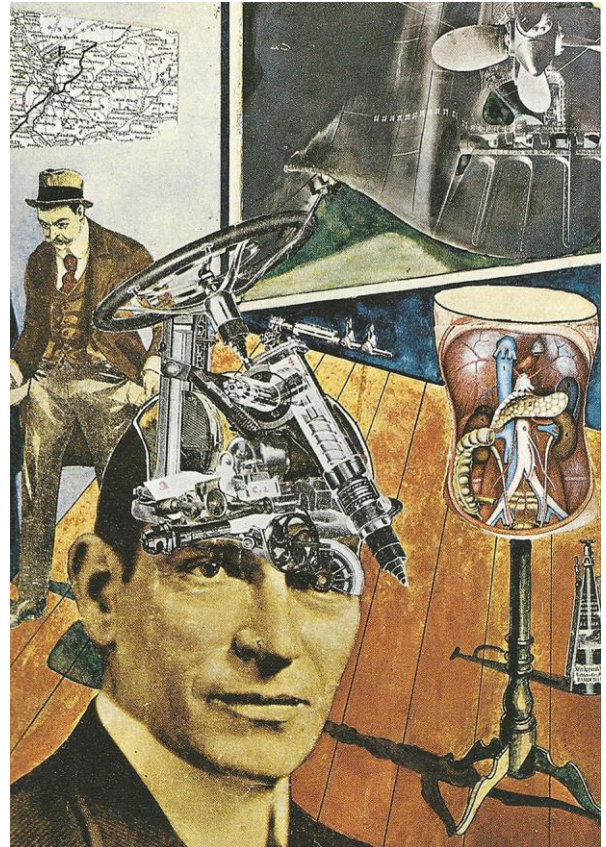


Fig. 3 An example of juxtaposition in non-figurative painting: Sol Le Witt - Wall Drawing 901, 1999. Image source: Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (2008) Sol Le Witt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective. <https://massmoca.org/sol-lewitt/>



Fig. 4 Ai Wei Wei – “Coca-Cola Vase”, 1994. In this work, the artist uses antique Chinese vases as a subject on which to stamp the Coca-Cola brand logo, a current global symbol. Thus, he aims to express he is heir of traditional Chinese art and, at the same time, he is heavily influenced by XX century Western avant gardes. Image source: Sotheby’s (2014) <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.56.html/2014/contemporary-art-evening-auction-114024#>



Fig. 5 Christo and Jean-Claude - Mastaba, 2018, Serpentine Lake, London. Temporary installation of 20m height, formed by more than 7,500 brightly painted oil barrels stacked horizontally onto a floating platform. The work creates a juxtaposition with the landscape, as the floating object has no formal, material or chromatic relation with the lake or Hyde Park. Image source: Christo and Jeanne-Claude. The London Mastaba, Serpentine Lake, Hyde Park, 2016-18. Photo: Wolfgang Volz. <https://christojeanneclaude.net/press/the-london-mastaba>



Fig. 6 Santiago Cirujeda - “Casa Rompecabezas”, 2002, Cádiz. Image source: Cirujeda, S. (2007) Casa rompecabezas. La estrategia del armario. <http://www.recetasurbanas.net/index1.php?idioma=ESP&REF=1&ID=0006>



Fig. 7 Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega – “Historia de dos ciudades”, 2010. In one of the video’s photograms two landscapes are juxtaposed which evidence a stark contrast: above, view of Barcelona; below, field of Sahrawi refugees. Image source: CCCB (2010) Atopia. Art i ciutat al segle XXI. Diputació de Barcelona, Barcelona, p 157



Fig. 8 Dionisio González - “Ipiranga II”, 2006. Image source: González, D. (2018) Parresia y Lugar. CAC Málaga, Málaga, p. 57



Fig. 9 Dionisio González – “Busan Project IV”, 2011. Image source: González, D. (2018) Parresia y Lugar. CAC Málaga, Málaga, p. 97



Fig. 10 Dionisio González – “Halong VII”, 2009.. Image source: González, D. (2018) Parresia y Lugar. CAC Málaga, Málaga, p. 83



Fig. 11 Dionisio González – “Dauphin Island I”, 2011. Image source: González, D. (2018) Parresia y Lugar. CAC Málaga, Málaga, p. 105



Fig. 12 Dionisio González – “Gardella restated” (fragment), 2011. . Image source: González, D. (2018) Parresia y Lugar. CAC Málaga, Málaga, p. 122



Fig. 13 Dionisio González – “Inter-actions 18”, 2014. Image source: González, D. (2018) Parresia y Lugar. CAC Málaga, Málaga, p. 161