

## Preface to the English Edition

This is a revised translation of a book first published in Italy in 1998 (*L'architettura dell'età della stampa. Oralità, scrittura, libro stampato e riproduzione meccanica dell'immagine nella storia delle teorie architettoniche*, Milan: Jaca Book). I am indebted to many friends and colleagues (and indeed, to some students) for ideas, comments, and criticism, before and after the publication of the Italian version. Particular mention, however, is due several reviewers who prompted me to rewrite some chapters of this book prior to its translation into English: Frédérique Lemerle, Christof Thoenes, Georg Germann, and Yves Pauwels. Likewise, Françoise Choay and Joseph Rykwert provided generous and helpful advice throughout the various phases of researching, writing, and translating; before publication in Italy, Maria-Antonietta Crippa helped me to revise the Italian text; for some years Jean Clay has been taking care of the (now forthcoming) French version; and finally, useful advice was given by some anonymous readers who assessed the manuscript for the MIT Press, and by Roger Conover who patiently supervised the whole operation. Sarah Benson translated this book from Italian and a variety of other languages and dialects, and did her best to cope with the fact that I sometimes wanted to translate parts of it myself, much to the detriment of all parties involved.

Originally published in January 1998, this book is essentially based on the state of the art around and not after 1996 and 1997, when most of it was actually written. Since then, new and important contributions have appeared in fields relevant to the scope of this study. Some of these recent publications are mentioned in the notes to this edition when they bear immediately upon the topics under discussion.

More crucially, the basic thesis of this book, focusing on the feedback loop between architectural theory and the media, was conceived at a time (around 1995) when the notion of an ongoing media revolution was not yet the talk of the town—and certainly not in Europe. My argument then (five or six years ago, which is a long time in the chronicles of information technologies) was that at the beginning of the modern age, the shift from script to print, and from hand-made drawings to mechanically reproduced images, had changed the history of Western architecture.

Having proved that, as I hope this book has, I remember cautiously suggesting at that time that a similar revolution might have been in the offing—likely to happen again, and indeed, imminent. The next shift would obviously be from text to hypertext, from printed images to digital representations. And since the rise of printed images had changed the history of architecture, so my argument went, then the decline of printed images, and the parallel rise of virtual reality, were necessarily going to have some consequences for architecture as well.

This is happening. Things have changed fast, and cyberspace has already pervaded the discourse of architectural criticism. Rem Koolhaas is now granting interviews to *Wired*, not to *The Journal of Reinforced Concrete*. Still, for all the hype, and alarm, which as always accompanies every period of challenge and change, no one knows for certain what architecture will be after the age of printing. This book, which recounts how architecture came into the age of printing, implicitly suggests that architecture will also manage to get out of it—and survive. After all, we did well without printing for quite a while.

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