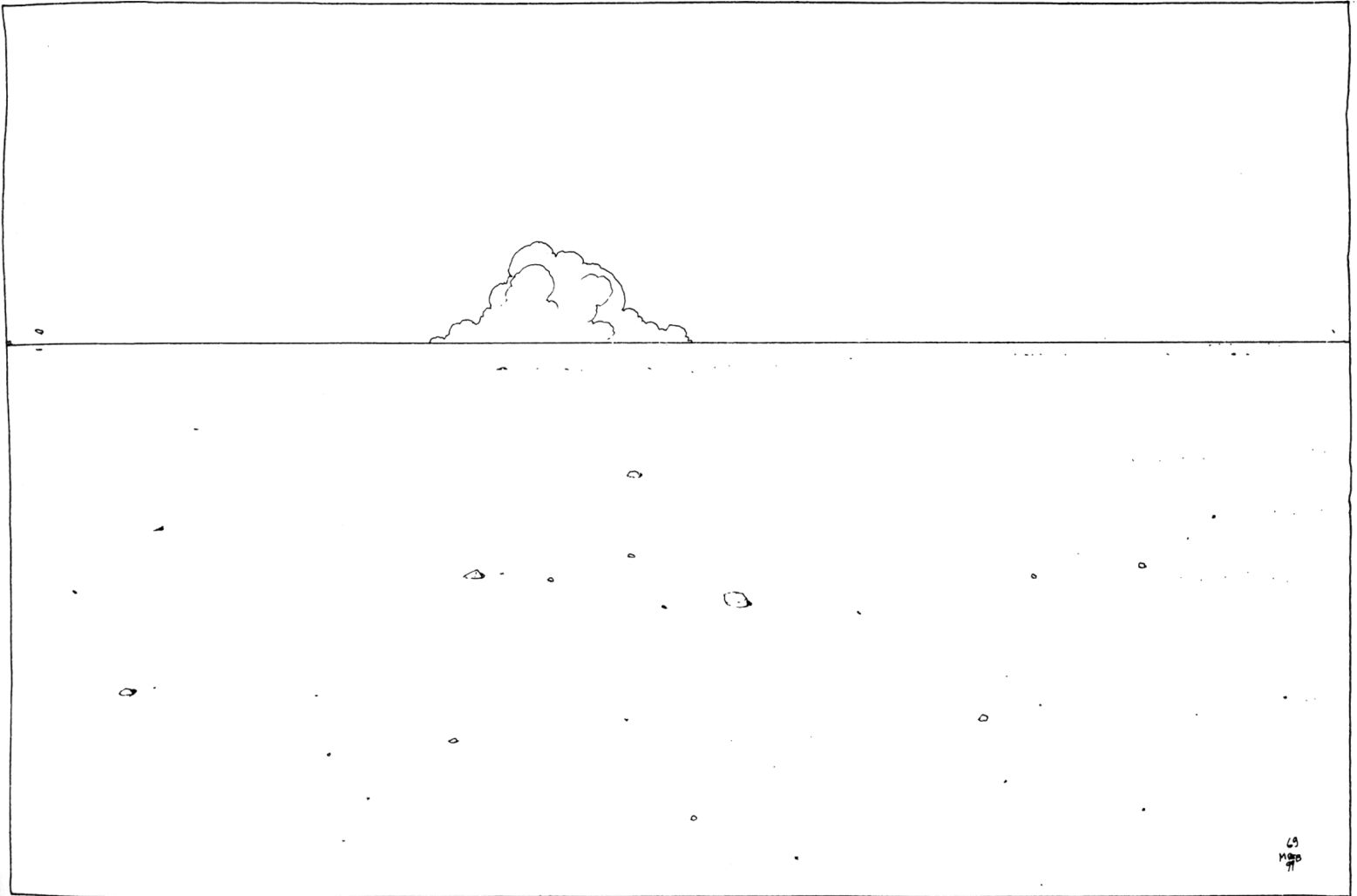


*Deserts*  
Arch 586-520  
Francesco Marullo



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1986  
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The seminar explores the idea of the desert and how it permeated the architectural imagination, as its inevitable empty counterpart and legitimizing reason for its very presence and ambitions. Focusing upon the North American Deserts, we will look at how the desert has been conceptualized in popular culture and how it has been used or misused by architects. We will proceed through weekly readings, the analysis of architectural case studies, and a movie-series, alternated with discussions and writing sessions, to produce a conceptual Image Atlas (group work) and a collection of essays (individual work). The desert could be considered a testing ground for the deepest obsessions and most enduring myths of civilization. In a place where nothing officially exists, everything becomes imaginable and, thus, possible: a blank canvas for inventing new worlds to come or looking at the ones long gone. Land of illusions and thin air, innocence and temptations, boredom and sci-fiction, colors and abstraction, nuclear experiments and religious sects, nomad camps and yippies' communes, outlaws and gold-diggers, entropy and light, salt and sands, wilderness and colonization, clarity and remoteness, museums and oil-derricks, ecstatic ravers and ascetic hermits, military bases and gambling enclaves, aircraft boneyards and timeless traces of the earth's magnitude, extraterrestrial monoliths and giga-factories, astronomical observatories and copper mines, hunting rituals and solstice bonfires... The desert is a crude mirror of humankind's history, the backstage that both precedes and survives any of its institutions. For Baudrillard, the desert is the essence of American society and a daunting premonition of the end of the world. For Ballard, deserts possess a particular magic, having exhausted their own futures and, thus, free of time: "Anything erected there, a city, a pyramid, a motel, stands outside time. It's no coincidence that religious leaders emerge from the desert. Modern shopping malls have much the same function. A future Rimbaud, Van Gogh, or Adolf Hitler will emerge from its timeless wastes." Others see the desert as the physical and mental space to exceed the limits of individuality and rediscover the species' common dimension, or the generic potential that precedes and substantiates us. Dwelling in the desert is not a fugue from society but a practice of resistance and critical observation for probing its structures and reinventing its principles, a place for getting lost or resurrect. And so, Reyner Banham rides his foldable bike in the Silurian Lake and has revelations. Arzach rides a pterodactyl across endless wastelands and sees mirages. Anakin rides his podracer somewhere in the desert of Tatooine and gets noticed. A Man with No Name rides among unknown Texas villages beyond good and evil. Michael Heizer *slices* the Mojave desert, Walter de Maria *draws* on it, while Antoni attempts to *paint* it red before blowing it up. Some other ones run tests in the desert for blowing up the whole planet. Dali burns clocks in the desert, and the Cacophony Society burns up wooden men on every summer solstice. The red-painted town of Lago is burned right after the movie. Saint Anthony leaves the city to seek hidden truths in the Egyptian desert. Bowles and Burroughs search for other deserts across the ocean. Marco Polo travels far east, reporting the marvels of lands, cities and deserts to Kublai Khan. The Consorzio Suonatori Indipendenti records *Tabula Rasa Elettrificata* after a trip to the Gobi desert. There's no Continuous Monument without a Monument Valley...