<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essays</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Path of Indulgence: Cruising During Covid-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christo's Corridor Store Front: Social Isolation and the Wildly Ordinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitsch Landscapes: Storytelling of the Architectural Project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Across Scales: The Work of Diller Scofidio + Renfro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views from a Diverse Practice: The Work of Marcio Kogan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To All the Mists: The Work of Adam Nathaniel Furman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Tale of A Thousand Buildings: The Work of Ricardo Bofill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismantling Architecture Through Anti-Blackness: The Work of Ițez and Heinrich Wolff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mujer sin descanso: la obra de Benedetta Tagliabue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual Essays</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slowing Down, Sensing Moss</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Reviewed Papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Stained Sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Men Will Be Cruising No Matter What: Transgressive Queer Pleasure as World-Making Praxis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sponsors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kitsch Landscapes: Storytelling of the Architectural Project
In the contemporary field of projects, there is an increased insertion of extraneous spaces, objects, constructions and figures into mundane everyday places. The underlying cause of this increase is people’s desire for more space, and for a greater degree of freedom in their private lives, so that they may incorporate a larger portion of the world into their homes. This has become even more evident in the wake of the current global pandemic that is reconfiguring the way we approach public and private spaces. While public space has become increasingly unliveable because of the deteriorating air quality, private space hosts a larger share of what was once considered public uses and has become a refuge. As a result, the pleasures of architecture have become increasingly privatized; architectural practice has become partly guilty and partly salvific. On one hand, people have started to rediscover their homes, to make them the place of their adventures, to inhabit them differently than usual, contaminating different uses with each other and overturning the expected spatial functioning in order to make them adhere to their newfound pleasures and desires.

Our homes, or dwelling spaces, have become our world, an all-encompassing space of everyday life, into which public life has also forcefully entered, making it visibly obvious that our spaces are no longer adequate, as they do not respond to the needs of our lives, and are not the spaces for a new millenium. Although architectural experiments have reconfigured many of the spatial dynamics of the domestic, the spatial narrative in most building constructions has remained unchanged over the last fifty years because of its link to primary functions: e.g., sleeping, eating, body care. New project narratives, therefore, would be the redesign of current spaces according to desires and dreams, bringing together the real and the imaginary, valourising a place beyond what its reality in order to enhance it through a different storytelling. This is already happening spontaneously by people rethinking their domestic space as demonstrated by introducing new uses such as videoconferencing or sports in the house. In this sense, Alessandro Mendini’s words seem to predict the current situation: ‘The Modern typological tradition proposes an extreme simplification of its functions, synthesising them in rooms for cooking, eating, sleeping and washing. All the incredible intertwearing of the other thousands of sensory and mental functions is forgotten, stiffened within this architectural grid of reference, elaborated on the concept of elementary survival, typical of the productive schemes and serial standards of contemporary society to guide the redesign of new kinds of survival’ , a subtle survival: instead of living room, kitchen, toilet and bedroom, we all need new kinds of rooms and living quarters: perhaps rooms for swimming, for

---

1. See Faido Fassio, La mensa rossa, storia grande e bar rossa da di Andrea Bonaffoni (Bolzano: Edizioni Ghera, 20000). Author investigates other ways of consuming and living the home through a number of architects and designers; our main concern is the transition from the table’s home for all to the home for each one in opposition to introduce the relations and mediation between individuals and their surroundings.
keeping flowers, for telecommunication, for reading books. Elementary functions can be absorbed, as sub-problems, into sophisticated theories, one can eat in the swimming room, cook in the greenhouse, wash in the telecommunications room.  

Accordingly, Mendini's theory on banality and the ordinary suggests the need to include in space multiple agents and possible configurations capable of redesigning themselves, even to the detriment of the project itself. The project is, therefore, no longer a totality of needs, uses and desires that take form in a place. In this sense, Mendini claims the right to use falsehood in an authentic way that therefore concerns a sincerity of intentions, an unmasking of the production of the project. It includes the end and the recognition of a non-absoluteness of the proposed solutions; this type of project he calls "de-project" which works most on the action of subtraction instead of addition. Subtraction takes place at the level of reducing the stylistic features and a-priori of architecture in order to move towards a more complex, involving and inclusive dialogue in a reality that has become full of contradictions and with numerous new authors in the field for which new narratives are needed. He continues: "It is also useful to talk about the project in its opposite aspect, i.e. in its possible meaning of 'de-project'. In the sense that it is important to think of a negative development of the project, where the hypothesis is that of removing rather than accumulating, that of being ephemeral rather than encrusted, of not contributing to constructive saturation and destruction by excess. While design has always meant adding something new to the new, de-projecting would mean putting oneself in the perspective of a radical reversal of the trend in architecture and the formalised environment."  

What then are the actions and questions that designers must ask themselves in the face of these contradictory conditions? Can new narratives be the tool with which to rethink our spaces? Can we trace in the users' actions of redesigning their space a need to establish new stories? In order to approach the theme of project narration, I use the concept of "kitsch" as a parameter whose oscillatory nature allows me to highlight certain new narratives that are emerging in the contemporary world and enables us to bring together the high and the low, the popular and the cultural, architecture and society. Various authors (such as Clement Greenberg, Herbst Broch, Walter Benjamin, Umberto Eco) have been confronted with the arduous task of defining the term kitsch, which has no single rigid definition or etymological origin. To summarise the definitions and meanings, I propose using a quote from Matei Calinescu that partly encompasses the many meanings of the word: "Some authors believe that the German word derives from the English 'sketch', mispronounced by artists in Munich and applied derogatorily to those cheap images bought as souvenirs by tourists, especially the Anglo-Americans (cf. Gero von Wilpert, Sachwörterbuch der Literatur, Stuttgart, 1969). According to others its possible origin should be looked for in the German verb verkitschen, meaning in the Mecklenburg dialect 'to make cheap' (cf. Thürners Deutsches Wörterbuch, vol. 4, Berlin, 1943). Ludwig Gieser in his Phänomenologie des Kitsch also mentions the hypothesis that links kitsch to the German verb kitschen, in the sense of 'collecting rubbish from the street' (den Straßenschlamm zusammenscharen), kitschen has indeed this specific meaning in the southwestern part of Germany; it can also mean 'to make new furniture from old'. These three main etymological hypotheses, even if erroneous, seem to me equally suggestive of certain basic characteristics of kitsch. First, there is often something sketchy about kitsch. Second, in order to be affordable, kitsch must be relatively cheap. Last, aesthetically speaking, kitsch may be considered rubbish or junk."  

"Guilty pleasures" is concerned and matches with the kitsch theme in the sense that kitsch was originally born as a way to escape from the conventions and from what was considered the high culture and art. One of the first analysis of kitsch in relation to art was developed by Clement Greenberg in his essay, Avant-Garde...
and Kitch. In it, he states

"Where there is an avant-garde, generally we also find a rear-guard. True enough-simultaneously with the entrenchment of the avant-garde, a second new cultural phenomenon appeared in West, that thing to which the Germans give the wonderful name of Kitch: popular, commercial art and literature. [...] Kitch, using for raw material the debased and academized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. It is the source of its profits."

Currently, my research starts with an analysis of the major contributions written about kitch, mainly in the artistic and literary fields. I have done this in order to extrapolate the terms and the questions that could compose the narratives that kitch establishes in contemporary architecture. In this essay, I highlight some preliminary results and focus on two narratives that are guiding design today that allow me to identify theoretical and project trajectories for spaces and architecture.

Apart from art and literature, it has been in 20th century architecture, that kitch was most widely deployed through Postmodernist design and criticism (e.g. Charles Moore, Alessandro Mendini, Michael Graves, Etienne Sottsass). More recently, it seems to have become an exclusively negative term leading contemporary architects to rarely ever make it their theoretical banner. In fact, there is a kitch, which we may call "traditional", that today has been appropriated by society. As a result it is not only recognised as kitch and it is actually sought after because of its very nature; this type of kitch no longer has the delirious and irritating effect that it had from the 19th century to the end of the 20th century. For example, garden gnomes or front-lawn pink flamingos, popular domestic kitch embellishments, are emblems of the American middle class struggle, and are objects that have become fashionable today and attracted a cult-like appreciation. The garden gnomes (or dwarf) have been reified, a process by which the object has now been cleared through customs of approved consumer tastes, as evidenced by Philippe Starck's design for Kartell. Moreover, kitch was linked to the concept of middle class, which has been lost in recent decades, thanks to class struggles and the loss of rigid subdivisions of social classes. As a result, we now have multiple cultures, which means that kitch is defined differently depending on the point of view of that particular social condition. It is in this particular historical and social condition that the concept of camp emerges. It is in the United States since the 30s that Susan Sontag theorizes that the word camp is a symbol and adjective referring to a cultural trend that makes some banal and everyday objects the symbol of the poor class and of some social topics such as homosexual rights. The mass-produced, low-cost objects, such as the plastic flamingos, became a status symbol full of cultural meanings, precisely because they were banal, easily accessible and available in stores. Camp, or kitch, cultivates the banal until its recognition and awareness, overcoming and becoming its opposite. In recent period, we find the 2019 exhibition-event at the Metropolitan Museum of New York, Camp. Notes on Fashion, in this case the English world makes direct reference to Susan Sontag's essay on the theme of camp in sociology, art and cultural debate and once again brings into focus the debate on the term and its meanings in the contemporary world. However, some characteristics of kitch from the last century endure in the contemporary world. Today, kitch is used as an adjective to describe something or someplace when there is a gap between the initial intention and its material reality, no matter if we are talking about objects, space, culture, or politics (social networks have spread the mechanism of kitch in the staging and fiction that distorts reality and serves to give a certain virtual image of oneself and, conversely, the different ways and looks with which this is received by others). It follows that kitch has an effect that depends on several factors: it depends on viewpoint; it differs according to the historical period; and geographical and cultural context. Moreover, kitch does not have an absolute effect but rather results from the differentiation between reality and expectations that is registered by those who look at it. This may be partly by design, but most of the time this difference is unintentional, and it is precisely this characteristic that produces the condition of kitch.
The unintentional resultant that moves the condition of kitsch is detected in particular at the scale of private space and dwelling. The desire to go beyond the reality of one’s own dwelling to make room for one’s own interior pleasures, is an aspect that has become much more pronounced with the global pandemic in which the interior of the home is experienced only by its inhabitant. Issues of hospitality, entry and reception have disappeared and been replaced by intimate and personal pleasures. In architecture there is always a gap between the initial design intent and reality or what, if anything, is realised. The kitsch parameter bridges this difference: it accentuates or strengthens the gap by using storytelling. The kitsch parameter allows people to mediate without ruptures between the paradigms of the proposal and the realities. Kitsch provides alternative ways of generating space, responding to realities that are increasingly “authentic” but conversely increasingly specific, reconciling with memory of the original through a detached and critical attitude. This shift between reality and imagination had already taken hold during Postmodernism, in particular with Robert Venturi’s theory and the need for a complexity and contradictory of design:

"The desire for a complex architecture, with its attendant contradictions, is not only a reaction to the banality or prettiness of current architecture [...]. First, the medium of architecture must be re-examined if the increased scope of our architecture as well as the complexity of its goals is to be expressed. [...] Second, the growing complexities of our functional problems must be acknowledged. [...] But even the house, simple in scope, is complex in purpose if the ambiguities of contemporary experience are expressed. This contrast between the means and the goals of a program is significant. [...] Although the means involved in the program and structure of buildings are far simpler and less sophisticated technologically than almost any engineering project, the purpose is more complex and often inherently ambiguous."

The main difference that emerges in the contemporary, as compared to the middle of the last century, is that then the primary focus was on the "skin" of architecture (its façade, its symbol, its appearance in relation to the city), whereas today, the kitsch parameter is increasingly concerned with architectural interiors with the aim of revising spatial conventions. Kitsch is therefore the tool that allows us to identify the different narratives working inside the gaps between imagination and reality and, between desire and everyday life.

For these reasons, the sphere in which kitsch mostly operates is the scale of the private dwelling, within which personal needs can have a greater degree of freedom, in opposition to the urban and public space where social attitudes and behaviour are generally governed by traditions, norms and conventions produced by a more controlled environment. The domestic sphere should have a restful nature in terms of comfort, it is contemplatory, it puts one at ease, because it merges the practical needs of everyday life. For this reason, each user or owners attempts to modify their private environment to suit it to their preferences, these re-significations of the space determine the gap between the immaculate vision of the project and its life. Into the gap between design intention and everyday life “guilty pleasures” come into play. In this case, the kitsch project corresponds to a more open-ended design. It enables the subversion of reality contrary to the pre-established and the already planned; kitsch therefore celebrates the material possibilities incorporated by the design of the banal, of standardized, the service places, of all residual spaces, and the aggregated. In Collage City, this difference is analysed at the urban scale, as the authors establish a spatial relationship between the Modernist priority of a totalized project vision and compare it with the opposite approach in which the city form emerges in an open-ended organic process. Today, the holistic vision of the architect is simultaneously confronted and connected with the vision of bricolage (work carried out with one’s own hands using means other than those of the trade expert)."

"In place of an idea of universal management based on what are presented as scientific certainties there is also a private, and a public, emancipatory interest (which, incidentally, includes emancipation from management); and, if this is the situation and, if the only outcome is to be sought in collision of interest, in a
permanently maintained debate of opposites, then why should this dialectical predicament be not just as much accepted in theory as it is in practice? 12

Kitsch is therefore about cellars, improperly sealed verandas, storage rooms, corridors, the desire for an extra room, terraces covered with PVC and plasterboard: this too is architecture, but more precisely, it is architecture about pleasure. The contemporary era is characterised by supermarkets of furniture and space, by reality shows for furnishing and renovating homes: Ike a showrooms set up fictitious rooms in which every problem is neatly resolved by providing a priori spatial answers to problems found elsewhere. Later, transplanted to real dwellings, the I ke a room is hybridised with the furniture inherited from the grandmother, with the wall’s materiality and with the spatial nature of the dwelling that was envisaged for other furnishings, and for other ways of living. Somehow, it is time to design our junk spaces 12 of everyday life, mixing them with memories, souvenirs, all within the project’s limited scale. The characteristics and vicissitudes of reality, made up of a galaxy of behaviours, are placed at the basis of the project and they are used as a design material. The kitsch project becomes anti-dogmatic because it is no longer driven by absolute a-priors but instead derived from life’s everyday compromises. Kitsch is also found in design activities that collide and rebel against a hyper-designed space that impedes the freedom of movement. Kitsch narratives design through the useless, the bizarre, the crazy, through the personal memories and by putting their own family memory into a space form.

Having articulated what kitsch is and does, I next investigate the theme of “kitsch landscapes” in which narration is a tool to solve or enhance the architectural project. The first paragraph will start from an experience in the field of art that allows me to connect some terms of the definitions of kitsch to the design projects and to the theme of space project. While the second paragraph will enter the field of architecture to outline a narrative of the project, which concerns the mixing and camouflage between architecture and the vegetal elements (from now on summarized with the term nature).

3 A Story of the Contemporary: Treasures From the Wreck of the Unbelievable

To introduce the theme of narration in everyday life, it is useful to look at the experience that emerged during the exhibition Treasures From the Wreck of the Unbelievable by the artist Damien Hirst held at Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana in Venice in 2017. 16 The exhibition constitutes an important step in reconciling the canonical conception of an art exhibition, its visit and the concept of what is a museum by focusing on the narrative experience, more or less truthful, imbued with irony and symbols – staged and designed. Although the term kitsch is never explicitly mentioned, the exhibition constitutes a useful case of narrative configuration and its impact on the reconfiguration of contemporary spaces, such as reproduction and simulation, fake (in particular fake news), the musealization of “pop” symbols, and of narratives. 17 The exhibition showcases treasures unearthed from an underwater discovery of a shipwrecked vessel in the Znogosky bavary. Perfectly preserved, except for some beautiful, coloured coral, the statues and objects of many different scales are displayed in two museum sites accompanied by captions listing contemporary building materials, brochures, tour guides telling the discovery story and videos showing the underwater recovery of the artefacts. The exhibited objects are entirely fake, reproduced especially for the occasion, with its falsity suggested in particular by the presence of well-known works such as the bust of Nefertiti or statues of Disney characters. The operation relies, in part, on the lack of attention placed today when visiting a place or a museum (many visitors passing through it quickly have false victim to its effect). It also concentrates on the theme of fake news: the criticism and newspaper articles on the subject do not
informa, Issue 14, Events, Archive

< 14: ‘Guilty Pleasures’

Title
Kitsch Landscapes: Storytelling of the Architectural Project

Author
Elisa Monaci

Tags
Kitsch, Landscapes, Banal, Narration, Storytelling

17

Examples include die Landmark & Johnny Lee’s Library in Austin, Texas or the Museum of the City of New York. In the absolute copies inscribed on a one-to-one scale, details are unaltered or transferred with a

Elsas to make the copy more realistic and comprehensible (i.e. the purchase agreement for Reclamation of the Documents of Independence reproduced in material detail its English original of the

18


19


20

Reference is made to Walter Benjamin, Aura, a certain, Saggi sulla storia dei media (Parigi: Gallimard, 1982) but most of all to Walter Benjamin, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968) where he talks about the aura of the work of art as the fundamental distance created in the viewer in the viewing event, involving the progressive disappearance of space.

overly reveal the exhibition’s game, bringing the theme of stories and their narration back to the centre of the issues. Importance is therefore given not to the veracity of the story but to the willingness to believe and the need of contemporary society to find new mythologies and stories to tell. Importantly, it highlighted the need to focus on the relationship between a fact, its context and space; it reveals that we are often led by social norms to conceive that information contained within museums as reliable and as incontrovertible reality. Instead, the exhibition forges the possibility of believing in the fable or allowing oneself to be

deliberately mocked. Reference is made in particular to Umberto Eco’s thesis on the production of a hyperreality that overcomes the imaginary. In his study of American culture, Eco defines a new procedure, as reflected to “façades”, which he calls “fac-diverse”, i.e. a place, a city, an object or a document that reproduces reality different from how it really was, reproducing the past or a falsified antecedent so that it acquires meaning in the present or allows the narrative to unfold. In everyday life we see the presence of reproductions of antecedents that never existed and therefore are completely new, such as urban landscapes with vegetation that would not “naturally” grow in that context, or tropical plants in city flats. These actions can be defined in a similar way to Eco’s exposition as “fac-diverse” because they are the putting into space the desire to create a story with partial or completely falsifying the antecedent that would have generated them. Comparing the Hirst’s exhibition with Eco’s text, it is possible to see how the reasoning on the construction of an imaginative story is pushed to its extreme consequences in the exhibition exemplifying precisely the narration of a “fac-diverse”. The story, competes with reality by replacing it, not only generating the exhibit itself and its works, but also codifies a new type of narration poised between fiction and artifice. The operation echoes a common practice involving copies of works of art in major international museums and cities. Often, what we are looking at is usually a replica, the original is kept in unexpected interiors and places, in order to allow continuous reproduction of copies in time and space. Here, reference is made to the Serial Classic exhibition held at Fondazione Prada in Milan in 2015 on the themes of the original, the copy, and imitation in the Roman era of the Republic and the Late Empire. At the same time, in the Venetian venue of Fondazione Prada, the Portable Classic exhibition was on display, which instead investigated the miniature reproduction of classical works of art, hence reproduction with change of scale. Both these staged exhibitions bring back to the centre two of the main components of kitsch: serial reproduction and change of scale with the aim of dilution, increasing its symbolism while preserving aura and remembrance within everyone’s reach. The theme of copying and the copy-paste operation in architecture is elaborated at length in the volume Copy Paste. The Badaux Architectural Copy Guide, in which, using phenomena of collage programs, some of the most famous architectures are transferred, shrunk or enlarged, into completely foreign contexts, creating circuits of meaning that open up new ways of thinking about architecture and new approaches to the discipline of design. Places, such as cities, museums and as well as gardens and parks, are therefore the result of reproductions and collages of different times. In this vision, kitsch is confirmed as a design operation and as a contemporary tool for project design. Hirst’s exhibition also focused on the theme of the symbol and its everyday domestic significance, one that is easily associated with the private sphere and in which a person can recognise oneself. Similarly to what happens in a kitsch operation, every piece of the exhibit, reproduced or not, contributes to the same message: the methods are complex, contradictory and built up by numerous steps, while the goal is simple: to tell a story. Finally, the Venetian exhibition focused on the theme of context. Hirst’s works, if hypothetically transferred to a souvenir shop not far from the Venetian exhibition venue, would arguably lose their aura and symbolic because they would be perceived differently on a conceptual, economic and marketing level outside of the museum context. The reference in this case, is to the experiences of ready-made and poor art.
In contemporary landscape projects the context is often taken as a pretext to define assonances and to blend in with the environment, while on the contrary, many building operations extend indifferently to the surrounding territory. Those buildings often apply a copy-paste method widely and the result of remodelling and diminishing spatial models experimented elsewhere. In these terms, Hirsh's exhibition constitutes a key assumption that makes it possible to relocate and translate the themes of reproduction, serial copying and the reworking of the kitsch symbol into the contemporary world. Kitsh, in fact, always has a positional relationship but above all, one of de-contextualisation with the found place in terms of temporal and spatial manipulation, dimensional variation to its own components and in relationship to the scale of the context, and in terms of the relationship of material, colour and form with the pre-existing situation. The alteration of context can take place through an operation of camouflage that on the one hand aims at mimesis with the found environment and an invariant of the status quo, while on the other hand the disguise enacted is never fully completed and resolved, leaving margins of error or inaccuracy, if not general incompleteness, which introduce or suggest the mismatch of the new elements in their context. In this process, kitsh works to recover the symbolic, dissociating it from its relationship with the environment and defining a-contextual quotations that enhance both the pre-existing place and its own newly installed message. The linking of spaces and places to define dissociations and a-contextual actions, allows us to investigate the theme of the symbol no longer as an intrinsic value of the construction, but as a design maintaining relationships with the pre-existing and therefore with history. With kitsh, memory is used as a material through which to play and be ironic: the transportation of archetypal elements that acquire new meanings through a change of position or scale makes it possible to use memory as a tool through which to build new configurations and new figures of reference through the action of betraying the source. The object or space of the memory is extrapolated from a common culture and transposed into everyday life for another use and another context. There is no memory of the original because one may never have experienced it. On the subject of detachment from the original, I now turn to the next paragraph in which nature is taken as a symbol and as a work of art and it is reconverted into infinite copies that have lost their original and have surpassed it.

4

Nature As Kitch Narration

I know focus on one of the kitch narratives that is currently emerging and that can be individuate as a new trajectory for spatial design. This kitch narration concerns the mixing and camouflage between architecture and nature. Within the architectural discipline there is a reversal of forces between natural and artificial actions that influence each other. Much of contemporary construction has evolved towards a natural dynamic that attempts to fit into its contextual landscape, concentrating on reducing its "impact" on the surrounding environment, defining the environment with a "vegetable" behaviour drawn from nature to take resources and sustenance while at the same time maintaining a balance and the status quo of an unchanged reality. Together, the landscape towards which architecture attempts to conform is and artefact tampered with by humans. Over the years, the multiple artificialisations of natural elements have hybridized and genetically varied much of the existing vegetation. Among the most extreme examples of this contamination is the recent discovery of a new type of fungus that grew inside the Chernobyl nuclear reactor following the explosion and subsequent abandonment after 1986. The fungus, which is black in colour and dense in appearance, would appear to originate and feed on the high level of radiation present in the building, and is
informa, Issue 14, Events, Archive

< 14: ‘Guilty Pleasures’

Title: Kitsch Landscapes: Storytelling of the Architectural Project
Author: Elisa Monaci
Tags: Kitsch, Landscapes, Banana, Narration, Storytelling

26


27

See Emmanuelle Costa, La vie des plumes, In: Archéologie des images. Paris: Editions de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2006. The author refers to the place world as a paradigm in which it is necessary to review the anthropocentric paradigm of the contemporary and claims that the concept of place is the result of a cultural and social construction. The place is an essential part of the narrative, in which the aesthetic is not just something that is visually appealing, but also something that is perceived and experienced in a more meaningful way.

28


29


a material currently being studied as a covering and membrane that would allow astronauts to live and protect themselves in space, thus becoming shelter and clothing. The fungus also elicits the debate as to whether its consequent origin from artificial and human actions challenges our profound human status as a natural element, as this fungus was generated by a catastrophe that can be considered as the paradigm of Anthropocene vegetation. Therefore, just as there are no unainted real spaces or places, there are also no naturally occurring biomes with these characteristics. In these respects, these phenomena present as a methodology and as a strategy of reproduction to emulate reality. In this artificially reproduced and reproducible reality, kitsch is a method of action that constantly oscillates between the ambiguous and the overtly false, going deep inside reproduction that modify and evolve the original. Assuming nature as a new contemporary symbol, only through its infinite reproduction does it become an artificial product. Moreover, mention should be made of the work of the artist Ikka Italo, who designs impossible, uninhabitable and unconventional scenarios using landscape and vegetal elements as his working material. In his work, trees become buildings that are restored by means of scaffolding in forests, suspended from their context and elevated to a work of art, at the same time becoming fragile elements engaged in the process of crumbling. The rocks and waterfalls become the stage on which an imaginary theatre created on paper is used to hypothesise new scenes and new representations of the context. Large warehouse containers and disposable shelving store stones, mullusks and trees, take the place of Ikea furniture or Amazon products and define a fine line between nature as a commodity, to be bought and mass-produced, and nature as a resource put into storage for preservation. Meanwhile, the photographs of pleasant and balanced places reveal the artificiality who produce the narration and thus define its degree of verisimilitude and the range of the project’s reach. The contemporary project field is thus defined by the transition from the dichotomy of pairs of opposites (natural-artificial, landscape-architecture) to an ambiguous context, made of mixtures and hybridizations. Today there is also an increase of vegetation in private homes and in urban contexts. Projects of synthetic nature where artificial performs and acts as an intermediary between ecology and technique, determining a reconfiguration of nature as a new status symbol (serving the same function as a souvenir snow globe). Among the many architects and landscape designers that are working in this direction reference is made here to Japanese architect Junya Ishigami and to French architect François Roche studio. Kitsch works on the symbol that nature covers today, both as an element of redemption and salvation to strive for and copy, and as an element to defend and oppose. The reproduction and dissemination of nature as a contemporary symbol is achieved by distorting it, falsifying it and transferring it to the scale of the domestic and the everyday in such a way as to betray and perpetuate, according to Lucius Burckhardt’s theory, when the copy ceases to symbolise the authentic but transends it to become independent then the fake becomes authentic, in these terms that symbol is both perpetuated and betrayed. Similarly, Nicolas Bourriaud who, in relation to the work of art, examines the necessity of the copy as an operation that allows the survival of the original while entailing its death. Starting from the continuous translation and betrayal, no path backwards can lead to the original. The simulation and concept of nature as a symbol are the subject of many projects and works of contemporary art, in particular Robert Voit’s photographic work New Trees, which depicts a series of trees that are alien to their context in terms of species, shape and above all size. The trees are actually electrical antennas disguised in a vegetal element that allows them to adhere more closely to their context—or at least until the artifice is revealed on closer look. The short-circuit of meaning that these elements create in the urban or peri-urban spaces in which they are placed raises a series of questions about their status on the border between landscape, technological element and architecture. The need to camouflage one’s appearance through “natural forms” in order to depart from a purely technical and technological meaning is
informa, Issue 14, Events, Archive

14: ‘Guilty Pleasures’

Title: Kitsch Landscapes: Storytelling of the Architectural Project
Author: Elisa Monaci
Tags: Kitsch, Landscapes, Banal, Narration, Storytelling

one of the facets that the theme of the artifice of nature has taken on in the contemporary world. Disguise, mimesis and simulation are the design actions through which the artificial establishes a new relationship of control and emulation of the landscape one in which the means of the project. Kitsch falsifies and reproduces nature in order thereby increasing the ambiguity of nature’s character. In particular, it makes use of the ambiguity between true and false where the project can work no longer by defining a pair of opposites but by working within the ambiguous to define its theoretical assumptions.

The kitsch narration of contemporary nature continually mixes reality and imaginary with the authentic and the reproduced. It includes a material and scalar substitution of space, a disguise of one’s true nature in favour of other appearances that wants to be emulated in order to confuse, often defining unresolved camouflage or in which the process of disguise is evident. In these terms, kitsch is authentically false because its falsity is precisely the agent that enables a different condition that would otherwise be impossible to pursue. An example of this is Architect Stefano Boeri’s Bosco Verticale (in English, literally vertical forest) project in Milan. It is the clearest manifestation, although unmarked, of the concept of disguising and camouflaging architecture with vegetation. The metaphor of the forest is subverted by its spatial coordinates as built within the metropolitan: By means of an overabundance of vegetation, it hides an apartment building with the typical spatial dynamics of an urban construction. It must be acknowledged that the theoretical fortune of the project lies largely in the earlier projects that form its matrix, first and foremost that of Edouard François. The project in that case used nature as an ornament or as an architectural mask, as Charles Jencks stated, “In this way, he creates a postmodern play on ‘artificial nature’ by taking advantage of the fact that a considerable part of the population, while choosing to live in crowded cities, wishes to return to nature. The contradiction translates into balconies crowded with flower essences that devour the entire house”.

The impact of the Bosco Verticale’s overabundance of plants on the well-being and biodiversity of the area is the manifesto by which the project became famous: the principle of the vertical forest has developed and been copied in numerous other urban or peri-urban situations because it makes clear a general desire to possess a forest inside the home and, in the context of environmental sustainability, projects like these permit in the domestic realm the sense of a personal contribution to the planet’s well-being. The aim of this project is therefore not only to emulate nature as ornament and formality, but also to serve the ecological theme by translating 20th century architecture into a new contemporary paradigm. The narration of Bosco Verticale has been exemplified by the designed, which makes it comprehensible to everyone and a reproducible model, as opposed to a canonical construction. It is a kitsch narration because, as I argued previously, the two starting and ending points of the project do not agree, and because of the multiplication of goals: to make the built environment ecological, to make the private public, and above all, to build desire into a space. This is the starting point from which to investigate the spatial dynamics that concern this type of desire, “domestic and restful”, and to investigate the compromise between the artificial and the natural viewed from this particular angle that sees artificial and natural indissolubly unresolved and camouflaged.

Nature therefore becomes the subject of the project at its most extreme, most accentuated, an added and ornamental component, and therefore definable as kitsch. Architecture strengthens its narrations through falsehood and ambiguity of language and form. The project reinforces the false, the story tale and the artifice to define a theory within the theme of architecture and nature, within the use and the ornament of spaces, which deals with desire and pleasure of nature inside the architectural perimeter. The oscillation between the project of a space for a necessity and a space for a whim becomes increasingly blurred, confusing within the spatial design its relationship to nature. Questions of pleasure, of small-scale agriculture on one’s own
informa, Issue 14, Events, Archive

Title: Kitsch Landscapes: Storytelling of the Architectural Project
Author: Elisa Monaci
Tags: Kitsch, Landscapes, Banal, Narration, Storytelling

Balcony and personal involvement in ecology are on the same level and intertwined. The garden becomes the paradigm of contemporary identity to such an extent that, where it is not feasible, it climbs vertically onto urban buildings, modifying its altitude to invade the small balconies or terraces of the city. The garden invades indoor spaces: domestic forests and the piling up of plants in the apartment is partially to supply certain culinary needs, those that can be met with the little land available, but mainly to get lost in the dwelling. Now, the spatial adventure no longer lies in conquering unknown places but in redesigning one’s own dwelling and then being able to transit it in a new way, with a different behaviour, engaging the relationship between the body and the space it moves through.

The narrations of kitsch are therefore an opportunity to rethink the spaces within which we live and we are led to spend an ever increasing amount of time, at least in view of recent contemporary conditions. These days, the pleasures of architecture are being defined by a storytelling that can get closer the ambitions, desires, dreams of everyday life with the spaces we inhabit. Likewise, narration can also open up to new pleasures of architecture that we do not currently comprehend. The contemporary world asks us to conceive new stories that incorporate the differences, dissonances, errors of our daily lives, and life’s ambiguities. There are new landscape that can be discovered inside our domestic realm, and they are places where we will build the stories of future architectures.

5 REFERENCES


Title: Kitsch Landscapes: Storytelling of the Architectural Project

Author: Elisa Monaci

Tags: Kitsch, Landscapes, Banal, Narration, Storytelling

---


Greenberg C., *“Avant-garde and Kitsch”* *Partisan review*, no. 6, 1939.


---

6 AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Elisa Monaci, architect, PhD student of the XXXIV cycle of the PhD in Paesaggio e Ambiente (Landscape and Environment) at Sapienza Università di Roma. She graduated in Architecture at Università degli Studi di Firenze, Dipartimento di Architettura in 2016. From 2017 to 2018 she was a research fellow at Dipartimento di Cultura del progetto di Università luav di Venezia. She is currently a collaborator at the Pard Publishing Center (Publishing Actions and Research Development) of Dipartimento di Cultura del Progetto, Università luav di Venezia, she is part of the Editorial Staff of “Vesper. Journal of Architecture, Arts & Theory”. She collaborates to the teaching activities of Professor Sara Marini, and she collaborates to the Venice research unit of PRIN (Italian National Project Research) titled “Sylvia. Rethink the sylvan: Towards a new alliance between biology and artificiality, nature and society, wilderness and humanity”, scientific coordinator Professor Sara Marini.