

Resource Architecture –
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Plenum 2: The Built and the Natural

A NEW NATURALISM (6 MICROMANIFESTS)

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1 Latent Garden. Only as a puritan rest of modernity can it be understood that even today the word beauty is proscribed from professional arguments. The simple statement of the desire to construct a new notion of beauty, away from the tricks that we meticulously tend ourselves, is exactly what gives sense to our work and gives way to imagine a convincing action plan. If we accept this proposal the own work will transform into a singular trip notebook with which one can build a mental atlas, an imaginary geography able to illuminate each place from this projection thereby inverting traditional contextualism and giving shape, step by step, to a latent garden. This vision might remind to the pintoesque vein underground survivor to us, engaging names such as Uvedale Price, Frederick Law Olmsted, Le Corbusier, Bruno Taut, Roberto Burle-Marx, Lina Bo Bardi, Robert Smithson, Archigram, Cedric Price and others... The fusion between nature and artifice, the dissolution of the disciplinary limits of architecture, art, landscaping and thinking, the organisation of experiences as narrative sequences, the primacy of the visual and the movement, also in the immaterial and the invisible, the construction of a public space and architecture which reflects new sensibilities are ingredients that lead to a new garden that is seen or not seen, but without there can be no new architecture but only variations.

Whoever imagines this, must not only feed himself/ herself from abstract announcements and last names but must build a parallel cartography that illuminates his projects by conquering new formal references, new symbols, new words and techniques that allow him to abandon the old ones which lack the necessary attraction. The protagonist must rebuild his audience and the world to which he aspires. The notebook is composed with sketches (works and projects), notes, borrowed and original ideas, names, images, conversations, multiple materials that reflect upon themselves and that generate our own gaze. The architect's work is assimilated to the work of a gardener:

choosing species and sowing them in an organized way, scoping that time, will make a good work.

2 Descountrylized / Areas of Impunity. The dissolution of the natural-artificial opposition we can see on every scale requires a works programme, which is nothing but the rediscovery through architecture of the contemporary human position in the world. 'Areas of impunity' are precisely the zones where, as an exception, we find this ambiguous condition with an imprecise definition as a public or natural spaces. Formerly negative zones, endowed with a new urbanity by the gaze of the new social subjects and their practises. Look at the wasteland beyond the outer suburbs, look at the way that almost all the emerging forms of socialisation have been constructed in these wastelands although (or precisely because) they are deregulated territories. We are tempted to ask whether they might contain a metaphoric model, a near-model, or whether it is possible to think of their complement, the de-edification, given that the term 'wasteland' embodies a fascinating concept: land that has lost its attributes as the city approaches, sterilised before proceeding with the occupation, but also given a transcendental role in its new context. We ask ourselves whether architecture could be constructed in the same way....

3 Ecomonumentalism. We have got used to thinking of architecture in terms of place, believing that it holds the keys to our ability to tackle the project. Many forms of anchorage to the location have been developed in recent decades, from those involving the phenomenological root ('Anchoring' is the title of an important text by Steven Holl), via the Bersonian influence in Moneo's work and the structuralist effect of the 'genus loci' in Aldo Rossi, to attitudes that arose at the Frankfurt school (Frampton and his contextualism). In recent years we have witnessed an important shift: every location has started to be regarded as a landscape, either natural or artificial, and it has ceased to be a neutral background on which more or less decidedly sculptural, artificial, architectural objects stand out. Instead, it has become the primary interest, the focal point of the architect. In this way, by changing the point of view, the landscape loses its inertia and becomes the subject of possible transformations; it is the landscape that can be designed and become artificial.

At the same time, architecture has begun initially diffuse processes involving the loss of traditional definition in which there is an obviously growing interest in including a naturalistic type of condition in the geometric and compositive as well as the constructive aspects, all part of a search for environmental sensitivity and formal complexity which responds to the new values of our society. The project is validated insofar as it constructs a complete redescription of the place; as it primarily proposes the invention of a topography. This dual movement from nature to the project and from the project to nature thus resuscitates an 'ecomonumental' condition which is beginning to push inexorably beyond any argument of opportunity, in a way that others would not hesitate to call 'the spirit of the times' or 'the desire of a period'.

4 World Material. This artefact-city we are talking about appears to us as an amalgam, a hitherto unknown material, a conglomeration of natural, artificial and immaterial elements or forms which at the same time is porous and fibrous, with dense stable areas laden with memory, and vast unread areas lacking qualities, almost liquid, made up of antithetical elements that have broken the link with the precision of traditional limits between natural and artificial. If we were modernist architects, we would think of this city in moral terms and would produce reformist policies. However, we think it is much more necessary and, if you wish, more closely linked to architectural practice, to find poetic substratum in this magma, to understand it as something that is inviting us to experiment in a new thing, other than this material; the dissolution of the natural-artificial opposition we can see on every scale, involves a works programme which is nothing other than the discovery through architecture of the contemporary human position in the world...

5 Hybrid Technique, Mestizo Style. Sensitivity towards nature-oriented policies has influenced the technical paradigms, with interest shifting from high tech experiments, no doubt a residue of the modern spirit, towards hybrid models in which the accent has begun to be placed on the interaction between natural materials —massive and energetically inert^α and highly sophisticated artificial materials —light and energetically active—, which respond sensitively to environmental variation, giving rise to composite systems in which the former are responsible for accumulating and reducing exchanges while the latter act as generators, capturing energy resources.

This new technological model implies a shift from the aspects of material organisation —mass production, simplified assembly, time and cost optimisation etc.— towards the rational organization of the energy consumed during both the production and upkeep of the building. This shift now enables us to conceive 'systems', not from the perspective of congruence and unity in the materials, but rather in terms of their environmental congruence, thus opening the way to experiments in which the congruous mixture of heterogeneous materials becomes a new visual feature. This hybrid materialism implies a profound transformation of aesthetic ideas in harmony with the crossbreeding of our human landscapes.

6 A New Naturalism. Paradoxical conclusion: a new naturalism with no natural references. How did the colloquial use of the term 'natural' arise? The word 'natural' or 'naturally' probably could not be used in its present sense in so many languages until nature was domesticated, understood, subjected to taxonomic organisations which gave a reasonable explanation to something which was previously construed as an unapprehensible,

threatening mystery; until it could be contemplated as worthy of representation, and a picturesque concept was superimposed on a certain degree of cosmogenic organisation as the effect of multiple journeys that provided the necessary distance and capacity for observation. This is a plausible hypothesis which needs no ratification. Its mere mention allows us to imagine a new naturalism arising from the profound ambiguity in which nature is presented as the subject of knowledge and aesthetic experience, a hybrid, crossbred, entropic, humanised conglomerate that is confused with its former enemy, the artifice, tightly wound into the political space, a carbon copy of what was once public space, a turbulent, flowing, random magma. Perhaps the key to the illumination of this expanding naturalistic gaze is to be found in the journeys yet to be taken, the dark zones of the atlas of the picturesque, those constant continents unconnected to the set of routes that hold it together. A new naturalism should begin by integrating these zones, bringing them to life and giving them a voice, demanding architectures that can be equally meaningful in Lagos and Quito as in New York or Dusseldorf, capable of articulating an immediate, unified sense of beauty, something which could never be considered insulting or arrogant. Who can claim to have achieved such a thing today? But perhaps this fruitful journey can only be taken in the opposite direction from tradition, from those dark holes towards us, now reincarnated in the new indigenous peoples of a different form of wild nature. These journeys may well have begun already and we are still incapable of understanding them, now the objects and not the subjects of a turbulent beauty to come.