

Kitsch Landscapes: Strategies to Inhabit Artificial Natures

*By Elisa Monaci**

The article deals with the theme of artificial natures studying, above all, the scale of the domestic, as it relates to the role of nature in contemporary design. The narrative theme is at the heart of this essay as the nodal centre and theoretical starting point from which we rethink and redesign contemporary spaces. In particular, the term and concept of “kitsch” is studied, in its current guise and meaning, in order to deploy it as a tool and as a design method for new categories of project narration. Thereafter, using some artistic experiences and two architecture and landscape projects, the so-called “kitsch landscapes” act as a design counterpoint to the theoretical examination and open up the configuration of the design narrative for the domestic space, combining architecture and landscape together.

Introduction

In contemporary architecture, there is an increase of insertion of nature and vegetation into normal everyday places. The underlying cause of this increase is people’s desire for landscape inside their houses, for a greater degree of adventure in their private lives, so that they may incorporate a larger portion of the world into their homes. Recently, nature has been rediscovered once again as an object of people’s desire and once again used as a symbol of the contemporary, of a trajectory that aims to enter into greater symbiosis with our environment and to establish a relationship of reciprocity and no longer one of dominance. Starting from the assumption, recently affirmed by some philosophers such as Emanuele Coccia,¹ that there is nothing intrinsically natural, but that the world is made up of a set of elements that have been created and conceived by multiple designers on multiple scales (from insects to bacteria to plants and animals), the research considers nature as a tool of contemporary design, not unlike many others, to glimpse unprecedented trajectories of space design and of compromise between the artificial and the natural within the domestic sphere.

In particular, what has become necessary, is the need to establish new design narratives. Although architectural experiments have reconfigured many of the spatial dynamics of the domestic, the narrative of space in most building constructions remains unchanged over the last fifty years and linked to primary functions: sleeping, eating, body care. The project narratives see nature as part of the project and as a tool and a way to design again our spaces and seems to be able

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1. See Emanuele Coccia’s series of conferences held at Iuav University of Venice from December 2020 to February 2021 titled *La città del futuro. Il museo della natura contemporanea* (eds.) M. L. Frisa, S. Marini, and A. Mengoni.

to redesign current spaces according to desires and dreams, bringing together the real and the imaginary.

The contribution will focus on highlighting some recent projects that rethink the theme of nature within the domestic sphere. The relationship between architecture and nature is analysed not so much towards a return to the primitive as in the possibility for this *camouflage*² and mixture to define new perspectives for space design and to trace the components and characteristics of contemporary domestic space.

Literature Review

Concerning the literature review, the contribution takes into consideration the main bibliographical references on kitsch in order to detect the terms and definitions that are most relevant in the contemporary on the subject of artificial nature and design narrative.

Various authors (such as Clement Greenberg,³ Walter Benjamin,⁴ Umberto Eco,⁵ Gillo Dorfles⁶) 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. *Trübners Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 4, Berlin, 1943). Ludwig Giesz in his *Phänomenologie des Kitsches* also mentions the hypothesis that links kitsch to the German verb kitschen, in the sense of 'collecting rubbish from the street' (*den Strassenschlamm zusammenscharren*); 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.⁷

2. See especially Neil Leach, *Camouflage* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2006).

3. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review*, no. 6 (1939).

4. Walter Benjamin, "Traumkitsch," in *Walter Benjamin. Gesammelte Schriften* (eds.) R. Tiedemann, and Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt A.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991), v. II, 620-622.

5. Umberto Eco, "Struttura del cattivo gusto," in *Idem, Apocalittici e integrati* (Milano: Bompiani, 1964), 65-131.

6. Gillo Dorfles, *Il Kitsch. Antologia del cattivo gusto* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1968).

7. Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 234-235.

The article also considers the literature of the discipline of architecture and landscape design from the modern to the contemporary, taking up some fundamental authors (such as Colin Rowe, Robert Venturi and Charles Jencks) and introducing some contemporary bibliographical references from the field of art and philosophy (such as Nicolas Bourriaud, Robert Voit and Emanuele Coccia). At the same time as the theoretical examination, the contribution deploys some experiences from contemporary art that use nature as a palimpsest to define the role of the project in relation to the landscape and that map a series of contemporary behaviours and design actions. The study of architectural and landscape projects realised in the recent period allows the research to build a transition from theory to project on the theme of the kitsch narrative between artificial and natural. The article will focus on two case studies that will be analysed in depth in order to deduce theoretical and general considerations.

Methodology: The Kitsch Parameter

What are then the actions and questions that designers must ask themselves in the face of these contemporary 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.

Kitsch was originally born as a way to escape from the conventions and from what was considered the high culture and art. However, some characteristics of kitsch from the last century endure in the contemporary world. Today, kitsch 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 kitsch 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 kitsch 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, kitsch 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 kitsch.

Currently, my research starts with an analysis of the major contributions written about kitsch, 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 kitsch establishes in contemporary architecture and landscape. In this essay, I highlight some preliminary results and focus on two kitsch narratives that are guiding design today that allow me to identify theoretical and project trajectories for spaces and architecture.

From this point of view, within the architectural discipline there is a dual movement and a reversal of forces between natural and artificial actions that influence each other. Man's construction attempts to evolve towards natural dynamics conforming itself to the landscape in which it fits, concentrating on reducing its "impact" on the surrounding context and defining with the environment a "vegetable" behaviour: draw from nature to take resources and sustenance and at the same time keeping the balance and the *status quo* unchanged in the reality.⁸ Together, the landscape towards which architecture attempts to conform is artefact and tampered with by man. Over the years, the multiple *artificialisations* of natural elements have hybridized and genetically varied much of the existing vegetation. Therefore, there is no uncontaminated real space or place, just as there is no nature with these characteristics, it is always reproduced or reproducible. In these terms, kitsch is analysed as a methodology and as a strategy of reproduction or emulation of reality in the field of artificial natures.⁹

In this artificial, reproduced and reproducible reality, kitsch design project is going towards a method of action that constantly oscillates between the ambiguous and the overtly false, going deep inside efficient reproduction that surpasses the original, assuming nature as the new contemporary symbol, being such only through its infinite reproduction and is essentially an artificial product. On this theme, mention should be made of the work of the artist Ilkka Halso, who designs impossible, uninhabitable and unconventional scenarios using landscape and nature as his working material. Trees become buildings to be restored by means of scaffolding in forests that suspend them from their context and elevate them to a work of art and at the same time to a fragile element in the process of crumbling. The rocks and waterfalls become the stage and the scene of an imaginary theatre artificially created on paper to hypothesise new scenes and new representations with the context. Large warehouses of containers and disposable shelving store stones, molluscs and trees, taking the place of Ikea furniture or Amazon products and defining a fine line between nature as a commodity to be bought and mass-produced, and nature as a resource put into storage for preservation. In the meantime, the photographs of some sets of pleasant and balanced places reveal the artificiality of the staging: we are those who produce the narration and thus define its degree of verisimilitude and the range of the project's reach.¹⁰

8. It is worth mentioning the European Landscape Convention which works to define the boundaries of interaction and work between different types of landscape and their corresponding definition and regulation, based on the assumption that there is no landscape that has not been remodelled by the artificial and by man.

9. On this topic, particular reference is made to Jean Baudrillard and his theory on the simulacrum and simulation (Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation* (Paris: Édition Galilée, 1981)), especially the distinction between simulation and dissimulation in the process of copying. Reference is also made to Jean-Luc Nancy on the theme of the opponent and the overcoming between copy and original (Jean-Luc Nancy, *Tre saggi sull'immagine* (Napoli: Cronopio, 2007)), as well as to the topic of the mask and disguise in Walter Benjamin, *Aura e choc. Saggi sulla teoria dei media* (Torino: Einaudi, 2012).

10. See the sections *Tree Works*, *Museum of Nature* and *Naturale* inside his personal website: www.ilikka.halso.net. [Accessed 2 May 2021.]

The contemporary project field is marked by the transition from the dichotomy of pairs of opposites (natural-artificial, landscape-architecture) to an ambiguous context, made of mixtures and hybridizations.¹¹

Domestic Natures

Projects of synthetic nature are increasing inside dwellings and in urban contexts, 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).

Kitsch methodology 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 it at the same time. Reference is made here to Lucius Burckhardt's theory that when the copy ceases to symbolise the authentic but transcends it and becomes independent then the *fake* becomes *authentic*, in these terms that symbol is both perpetuated and betrayed.¹² Reference is also made to Nicolas Bourriaud who, in relation to the reproduction of 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.¹³

Simulation and the 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 (Figures 1-3). The trees are actually electrical antennas disguised in the guise of a fake vegetal element which allows them to adhere more closely to their context, 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 borderline between landscape, technical 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 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

11. See Emanuele Coccia, *La vie des plantes. Une métaphysique du mélange* (Paris: Bibliothèque Rivage, 2016). The author turns to the plant world as a paradigm to look to in order to review the assumptions through which we inhabit and populate the earth. The plant is the element that most relates to the geological world below us, to the interpenetration of the atmosphere and climate that pervades us and to the impulse to inhabit the sky, focusing on the position assumed in space and time only by standing and not always moving and acting.

12. Lucius Burckhardt, "Das Falsche ist das Echte," in *Schmuck- Zeichen am Körper*, (ed.) Linzer Institut für Gestaltung, 55-60, exhibition catalogue (Linz 1987).

13. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Radicant: Pour une esthétique de la globalisation* (Paris: Denoël, 2009).

artificial establishes a new relationship of contrast and emulation of the landscape context in which it is inserted, placing the end and means of the project in opposition¹⁴ (Figures 4-5).



Figure 1. *Superimpositions. Robert Voit, New Trees, Mobile Home Park, Las Vegas, 2006*



Figure 2. *Superimpositions. Robert Voit, New Trees, Scottsdale, Arizona, 2006*

14. See Robert Voit, "Fukushima Archive. New Trees," in *Spectre, Vegetal Trauma*, no. 2 (2019): 174-181; and photographer's website: www.robertvoit.com. [Accessed 25 March 2021.]



Figure 3. *Superimpositions. Robert Voit, New Trees, Halfway House, Midrand, Gauteng, 2006*



Figure 4. *Superimpositions. Robert Voit, New Trees, Galleria at Sunset, Las Vegas, 2009*



Figure 5. *Superimpositions.* Robert Voit, *New Trees, City Creek Road, Mentone, 2006*

It must be acknowledged that the theoretical fortune of the multiplication of vegetation in private urban spaces lies largely in Edouard François's project *Tower Flowers*¹⁵ which forms the matrix of nowadays insertions of vegetation in terraces and balconies. The project in that case uses nature as an ornament or as a mask of architecture, as Charles Jencks actually 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".¹⁶ In the contemporary world, the *postmodern game*, of which Jencks speaks, is widely used, not only by architects or landscape architects, but also by the actions of individual inhabitants who redesign their balconies, their living rooms or their courtyards through plastic natures or miniatures of forests and botanical gardens. Individual actions of this kind, together with large-scale design proposals, are redesigning the image of the city and contributing to the mixing of landscape and architecture, converging towards ambiguous features that define the image and imagination of our time.

This is the starting point to investigate the spatial dynamics that concept this type of desire and to investigate the compromise between the artificial and the natural with this kitsch angle that sees them indissolubly unresolved and mixed.

15. See www.edouardfrancois.com/projects/tower-flower. [Accessed 6 May 2021.]

16. Charles Jencks, *The Story of Postmodernism. Five Decades of the Ironic, Iconic and Critical in Architecture* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons 2011), 160.

Nature thus becomes the subject of the project from a kitsch point of view, at its most extreme, most accentuated component. 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 architectural perimeter. The oscillation between the project of a space for a necessity and a space for a whim becomes more and more blurred and confusing within the design of space and its relationship to nature. Questions of pleasure, of small-scale agriculture on one's own balcony and of 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, overturning its coordinates to invade the small balconies or terraces of the city. It invades indoor spaces: domestic forests and the piling up of plants in the apartment is partly to supply certain culinary needs, those that can be met with the little land available, but mainly to get lost in the home. The adventure no longer lies in conquering unknown places but in redesigning one's own dwelling and then being able to cross it in a new way, with different behaviour, reviewing the relationship between the body and the space.

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 following two paragraphs will investigate the theme of domestic landscapes in which nature is a tool for architectural project. The first paragraph will analyse an experience in the field of architectural project inside an urban condition that allows me to connect the theme of nature to the theme of spatial project to be solved by a mixture and *camouflage* with artificial elements with the aim of augmenting the imaginary field of that space. While the second paragraph will analyse an interior-exterior project which outline the narrative aspect of the operation, which makes it possible to increase the spatiality of a confined space such as a courtyard in an urban space by tracing a rediscovery of a false archaeology and enhancing the narrative of the artificial and natural elements present in the garden.

Kitsch Landscape: House A12 by Lucas y Hernández-Gil

Among the domestic space projects nominated for the 2021 Mies van der Rohe award,¹⁷ there is a large percentage of projects introducing gardens that protrude from the floor of the home, incorporating a portion of the surrounding landscape and copying and translating it into the private space, or reinterpreting the patio as an intrusive element penetrating the uses of the home. This trend is even more intense now, in line with ecological movements, in which personal identity is combined with the desire to contribute in some small way to the good of

17. See <https://www.miesarch.com>. [Accessed 6 May 2021.]

the planet, materialising through the domestic forest an ambition of community and participation.¹⁸

Among these project, detailed analysis should be made of the A12 home project in Madrid by Lucas y Hernández-Gil architects, who propose an approach to the theme of the relationship with nature in the dwelling as a solution capable of rethinking certain spatial problems in the urban environment and as an element enhancing the domestic imagination. The project involves conversion of a commercial space into a residential and office space on two floors covering 380 square metres. The main aims are to increase the amount of light in the spaces, given the building's very dark character, and to increase the number of interior patios, in keeping with the architects' idea of introverted Mediterranean living composed of a succession of rooms with the sky (Figure 6).



Figure 6. *Superimpositions. House A12 on New Trees*

The two floors are complementary and opposing, especially in the choice of colours, reminiscent of Rothko as the architects stated, and are interconnected by a series of double volumes and skylights and windows which increase the passage of light and the spatial relationship. The courtyard-garden, which “functions as an urban oasis”,¹⁹ is located in the basement and takes light from the atrium of the house through metal gratings (Figure 7). The garden is configured as an artificial landscape in which the plants are immersed in an orange pavement reminiscent of a desert or of a beach whose overly bright colour immediately reveals its

18. See in particular Gianfranco Marrone, *Addio alla natura* (Torino: Einaudi 2011).

19. See project's description in <https://eumiesaward.com/work/4674>. [Accessed 6 May 2021.]

artificiality and declares itself in the desire to alter space and context. The plants stretch out towards the grille and the light and contrast with the metal and the artificial lighting (Figures 8-9). The oasis, as the architects define it, is the metaphysical, surreal space to which the whole house turns, especially the basement, and from which connections are made with the sleeping space, defining the comings and goings between the foreign, exotic place of the courtyard garden and the aseptic space of the bedroom, conceived as separate artificial landscapes which look at each other and contaminate each other in their uses and colours (Figure 10). This is also evident from their words published in the project description for the Mies Award nomination: “A landscaped interior English courtyard that receives light from the street filtered by a latticework creating a kind of oasis, a tropical garden of surreal character is connected to the lower level of the house”.²⁰



Figure 7. *Superimpositions. Lucas y Hernández-Gil, House A12. Tropical Garden*

20. Ibid.



Figure 8. *Superimpositions. Lucas y Hernández-Gil, House A12. View of the Garden-Courtyard from the Bedroom*



Figure 9. *Superimpositions. Lucas y Hernández-Gil, House A12. View of the Garden-Courtyard from the Atrium in the Upper Level*



Figure 10. *Superimpositions. Lucas y Hernández-Gil, House A12. Bedroom and Garden-Courtyard*

Nature in this project is conceived as a design tool capable of enhancing unused or unimportant spaces, such as the courtyard below the atrium facing the entrance on the street, almost a gully, which become places in which to discuss the imagery of the home and increase resonance, thus enhancing spatiality instead of mortifying it. Nature in the project is also a mix of the artificial and the natural, contaminating plants and vegetation from different places as contrasting materials to define a new interior landscape that can rethink the space of the domestic. The oasis of orange carpet, plants and metal directly overlooks the room, making it possible to sleep in an artificial desert, and contaminating a technical space, solving problems of humidity and lighting, with a classic domestic space in which the two looks at each other and define a new interior landscape: a controlled but at the same time imaginative domestic nature.

A12 House allows us to catch a glimpse of a new contemporary trajectory of interpretation of nature as a design tool and as a material, even in urban or highly artificial contexts. A return to nature does not necessarily imply a regression of technique and the loss of application of the artificial in architecture; nature can become a material that enhances space precisely because of its interaction with artificial materials and because of its ability to configure a place differently. Moreover, the house, through the vegetation growing inside it, is constantly changing. Like a landscape, it also changes with the seasons and time, continually redesigning the artificial space.

Particularly in waste spaces, connection spaces or technical rooms, the reinterpretation of these places gives rise to new landscapes. Through the addition of artificial materials, which thus propose images that are distorted, new, non-canonical, different and unprecedented, a new idea of nature is proposed, no longer just an ornament or a symbol of our involvement in the ecological issues of the planet, but an opportunity to rethink the design of spaces and an occasion to start again from the imagination of the project as the first element of characterisation of the space.

Kitsch Landscape: Sunken Garden by Bureau Bas Smets

The project taken into analyse in this paragraph is called Sunken Garden, located in London and designed by the Belgian landscape and architecture studio Bas Smets.²¹ It is an intervention inside a courtyard of a private building carried out between 2010 and 2011. The courtyard is 4 by 8 metres inside a typical 18th-century building and bordered by tall facades. The client's request was to have a garden inside the courtyard, despite the fact that it was located at a lower altitude than zero and was almost completely in the shade throughout the day. The position at a lower height of the courtyard was revealed to be perfect for an increase in the temperature and therefore for the humidity of the space. The place thus functions in the same way as a tropical forest: the large trees through their shade encourage a certain type of planting below in the undergrowth, in this case the effect is given by the tall buildings instead of the trees, similarly allowing an increase of about five degrees in the altitude of the courtyard. The shadow has therefore become from an initial obstacle to the installation of the garden to a design suggestion around which the whole project has developed (Figure 11).

The technical considerations about the temperature of the project space become triggers for a certain narrative about it: the story that is designed is to assume that these few square metres are the only ones left untouched in the whole of London, as if buildings had grown up around them, leaving an intact pre-historic archaeological frame at their centre (Figure 12). A sort of reunion of Jurassic archaeology is thus staged, which becomes the narrative motive of the tropical garden. The ground is covered with two tons of York stones that were transported and installed in the courtyard by crane. The humidification system allows a mist effect at certain times of the day, the space is enlarged by mirrors placed on panels in one side of the courtyard. The garden is inhabited by a yellow sculpture by the artist Franz West, reminiscent of a mythological creature, not clearly identifiable, imaginative and foreign²² (Figure 13).

21. See <http://www.bassmets.be/projects-selection/>. [Accessed 10 May 2021.]

22. The project is documented and explained by Bas Smets himself in particular in the lecture called *Atmosphere 2019. Adaptation* he gave at Faculty of Architecture, University of Manitoba, 4 July 2019. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTwvpHnAxHg>. [Accessed 10 May 2021.]



Figure 11. *Superimpositions. Sunken Garden on New Trees*



Figure 12. *Superimpositions. Bureau Bas Smets, Sunken Garden. Sculpture by Franz West in the Garden*



Figure 13. *Superimpositions. Bureau Bas Smets, Sunken Garden. View of the Garden from the Buildings*

The use of narrative in this intervention defines the possibility of expanding the space beyond its limited dimensional boundaries that would otherwise have defined its claustrophobic and unliveable character. Instead, the definition of the story of the survey of a prehistoric garden within the urban fabric of London allows for the welding together of the best technical and meteorological conditions for the growth of a natural system in the courtyard and for the exploitation of the density of humidity present. At the same time, it allows the space to be enriched by conforming it to a discovery site within an ordinary residential courtyard. The project of the sunken garden makes it very clear how the narration of space is a design tool capable of combining the natural and the artificial and introducing a landscape, perhaps hidden or rediscovered, into the domestic and everyday spaces.

The intervention also introduces the estrangement factor that is activated by the user especially through some of the project elements, such as the Jurassic statue, the 18th century stones and the effect of condensation through the windows (Figure 14). The estrangement and decontextualization brought about by the storytelling of the project make it possible to experience and perceive a canonical space as unprecedented and rediscovered. The project meets a general tendency in everyday life to have adventures inside one's own home, to discover landscapes inside architecture, and to be able to cross and experience one's own space in a different way, otherwise known and familiar. Conceiving of nature as a design tool in the contemporary world means being able to trigger these forms of rethinking of domestic space and introduce new narratives even in apparently obvious places,

especially urban ones. This type of operation introduces a design dynamic that constructs a landscape situation within very precise limits that aim to alienate the place from the rest of the context. Within which a spatial dynamic is installed that has completely different characteristics, detached from its environment in terms of the vegetable elements chosen, the natural relationship with the context and the mixing of natural and artificial elements. The separation of the intervention area, which is often inserted in the courtyards of edifices or dwellings, and therefore in an enclosed situation with precise margins, makes it possible to eliminate all visual, sensorial and conceptual links with the actual context. The intervention is therefore conceived as a model, allowing any scalar relationship with the rest and dictating above all the possibility of being able to stage a new narrative completely distant from the pre-existing one. The precise delimitation, which often also implies the impossibility of being able to cross that limit: the place of intervention is often a space that cannot be crossed but only observed from a different height or through a separating element. The new narrative is often linked to very distant periods of time, and thus aims to recreate an impossible landscape. In this way, the landscape of elsewhere defines an effect of amazement and *divertissement* within a canonical and common place. These design operations take the experiences of theme parks to extremes, bringing a piece of Jurassic Park or an amusement park into urban dynamics and everyday life (Figure 15).



Figure 14. *Superimpositions. Bureau Bas Smets, Sunken Garden. The Tropical Vegetation Fills the Few Square Metres of the Courtyard*



Figure 15. *Superimpositions. Bureau Bas Smets, Sunken Garden. Humidification, Mirrors, and the Yellow Inhabitant of the Garden*

In the contemporary, it is no longer a question of going to a special place, which, by requiring the crossing of a border and the payment of a ticket, implies a predisposition and an intentionality to go from the ordinary of real contexts to a place that is openly other. This intervention differs from his famous predecessors in that he relies on the operation of transferring a piece of otherness into an everyday place, which is then discovered with surprise and generating a collision of spaces and uses. The *collage*²³ operation implemented is capable of contaminating different languages and narratives in order to transform a mostly modest place into a space of the imagination.

Conclusions

The narrations of nature and the space-relationship with the vegetal elements are therefore an opportunity to rethink the spaces within which we live, the domestic sphere, and within which we are led to spend an ever-increasing amount of time, at least in view of recent contemporary conditions. The theme of domestic natures and how architecture can design it go through the definition of storytelling that can get closer the ambitions, desires, dreams of everyday life with the spaces we inhabit.

23. See Colin Rowe, and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1979).

Project narration is the tool that allows impossible places to be built, to trigger stories out of context. The message becomes more important than the form, the story goes beyond the real datum of the space. Storytelling allows the landscape to rise above reality and build itself on the basis of an imaginary that becomes a constructed place.

Narrative is a tool that landscape design has always drawn on as a device for seeking an *elsewhere*.²⁴ Often the narrative is constructed *a priori* to overcome certain facts of reality that would not allow the project to be realised; the narrative, on the other hand, determines the necessary detachment so that the dynamics of space open up to configurations that would otherwise be impossible in that place. But narration also allows the stories of everyday life to be told, so that nature takes part in the lives of the inhabitants.

In particular, kitsch is the pretext for the triggering of narratives which, on the one hand, can recover a lost memory of that territory, go towards forgotten events or distant historical periods (as in the case of A12 House), or, on the other hand, determine the intrusion of a completely extraneous narration which serves to highlight dynamics of that space which have remained latent or unexploited (as we have seen in Sunken Garden). The narration in kitsch thus becomes the most important instrument through which the project can overcome external circumstances and to imprint its own reasoning and its own imagery.

Mainly, the narration inside kitsch becomes a device able to define an immediate identification with that space, which is the element that creates a feeling of belonging to the place and defines an affective, personal and collective value.

The rediscover of nature as an object of people's desire and used as a symbol of the contemporary is a condition that the architectural project must take into account during the design process. The need to include the landscape in one's domestic space and the individual actions of people who introduce nature into their homes are elements of contemporary society which lead – as we have studied based on the two cases analysed – the project to review some of its assumptions and rethink the dynamics of the domestic between architecture and nature. This new trajectory enables the rethinking of the spatiality of domestic and then lead to new design dynamics in the everyday life. The projects studied during the research, together with the experiences of contemporary art, clearly show how narrative is a design tool that, if put into play in an unprecedented way, can lead to the revision of some of the most ordinary and everyday spaces in which we live and can introduce nature and its artificialisation into private or common spaces in a contemporary way. Above all, it makes it possible to redesign and rethink certain ordinary spaces such as service rooms, distribution spaces, those places that are often left unresolved or hidden but which are at the same time essential and need to be questioned again. The cases of Sunken Garden and of A12 House reveals how the narration of nature as a contemporary tool and symbol can bring ordinary spaces into a new imaginary and allow people to experience them differently. Kitsch design, especially in the approach to artificial nature, can conceive new

24. See above all: Annalisa Metta, *Paesaggi d'autore. Il Novecento in 120 progetti* (Firenze: Alinea, 2008) 276-280.

stories that incorporate the natural element, the mixing of artificial and natural, the interior landscape, the differences and the ambiguities of spaces and life.

There are new *landscapes* that can be discovered inside our *domestic* realm, and they are places where we are building nature and artificial together for new ways of conceiving architectures and landscape together.

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