

**Amy-D, Milano 2017**

**Fosbury Architecture, *AMBIENTI RESISTENTI***

## **What to resist**

*by Massimo Mazzone*

### **Public**

The definition of what is the public space and of what should the private one be is nowadays affected by the single thought of the ruling Capitalism.

What was once defined and recognized as Public was perceived as a common good; now, when it is accessible through the State, it is apparently perceived as simultaneously of every-one and of no-one. And this is even worse than if it were private.

Marrying a sub-aesthetics of the "urban decorum" that has its origins in Franco's dictatorship and that has today invaded, all over Europe, the once-were-free spaces, fewer and fewer activities are allowed in a street, in a garden or in a square.

Activities that are progressively forbidden and/or regulated in a square, on a street, and in a garden are – among others, and just to name a few: playing music, making visual arts, manifesting, working, having sex, begging, performing, playing, car-washing, eating, drinking, sleeping, etc.

A widespread phenomenon that goes by the grim name of "preventive urban planning" has been spreading through Europe. And it is the result of an administrative practice that reduces space to its simple institutional value.

Furthermore, this "ministerial" attitude, which is attempting to eliminate all that is spontaneously born – from Hip Hop to street art, from spontaneous aggregation to political subjectivism –, is swimming against the tide of History and Art History, since the cultural contribution of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, as the novel, has long exhausted its propulsive drive. The most interesting things done in culture in the twentieth century came from below – to name a few: Jazz, Rock, Punk; vegetarianism, ecology and social ecology; women emancipation, pacifism or antimilitarism, syndicalism, education for all. By its very nature, the democratic culture requires participation. The great social, republican, socialist, and anarchist transformations have not been promoted by self-proclaimed elites. Socially speaking, they flourished in the lower cultural environments.

Especially in Italy, it also insists on a misleading tradition of protecting the monument, well represented by the "gate". Monuments in Italy have been somewhat "erased": fenced off and taken away from the public use. But also parks and gardens are victims of this dreary fate: once open day and night, they have now closed and scheduled, guarded, video monitored, patrolled. The drinking fountains suffered the same fate – destruction –, and the benches, once widespread throughout the Peninsula, are today, in a city like Milan, a real mirage. Railway stations? That's another matter, since they are now reduced to bankruptcy shopping centres, marked by the constant opening and closing of businesses. The traveller flow is nowadays continuously impeded by security policies, as much intrusive as clearly unnecessary. So policemen and checkpoints go along with noisy advertising, while simple luggage trolleys no longer exist, replaced by "nigger carriers", as in American films of the 40s. Drinking fountains also disappeared, replaced by those that in the Netherlands are referred to as "weeping walls": sad self-service machines that distribute water at a price-per-litre higher than gasoline. Benches can be otherwise only found in the VIP waiting rooms; they are this much important for transport companies that they do not hesitate to humiliate them by segregating them in every possible way.

## **Private**

Even as not as much as before, some fundamental liberties survive in the shelter of domestic walls. The increasingly restrictive condominium regulations made the inhabitants less and less free in their "own home". Children and the elderly are the first victims of these indecent policies. The growing and lasting economic crisis has done the rest. Many young people – but not only them – sublet parts of their private space for pure survival reasons, and cohabitations are now largely determined by economic reasons. The new slogan is: more than love could the rent!

The space for life, idleness, leisure, empty and vacant, has become full-time open to all consumption – teleshopping, e-commerce, and supermarkets open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Even retirees, housewives and the chronically unemployed – those lying on a couch, watching television – are subjects and targets of an obsessive advertising, and of an alarmist information that spreads stereotypes and sells goods. Internet amplifies this new subjectivity, here understood as a subjugated audience and certainly not as a political subjectivity. It intercepts desires, shapes lifestyles and consumptions, and always collects something in money from each one, through a sort of marketing made on customer's life expectations, which have now replaced concepts such as citizenship, and political and social awareness. In this new and disturbing context, the objects, both in workplaces and in our homes, animate themselves in a neo-animistic frame. They become vessels for psychological projection; mute presences, totems, fetishes, voodoo. They are charged with positive and negative energies, making, if possible, our coexistence among people, animals and things, even more embarrassing. In other respects, the world of objects helps us cultivate our particular idiosyncrasies, fixations, and tics. Among the objects are not only furniture, but also old games, sex toys, pebbles, driftwoods and shells collected on the beach, and, especially, the technological objects, such as our phones, smartphones, tablets and our PCs.

Franco La Cecla, who is a very acute observer of Modernity and Contemporaneity, openly speaks of "surrogate of presence", a concept deep enough to make someone dizzy. Have you never hugged your pillow, or dialogued with your car dashboard? Have you never found yourself talking with your phone or with your computer, instead of using them to talk to someone? Is it a clear sign of personification of the inanimate life, of a projection or a relational interference? Not so long ago, at the beginning of modern capitalism, objects looked at us and called at us, displayed and exhibited behind the shop windows, recalling ideas that are now unknown to most. Take for example the idea of status symbol, or their intrinsic usage value: beauty, rarity, originality, and craftsmanship defined their main features. It was the era of spectacularization, the era of glass, of transparency and smoothness. The next large-scale industrial production, the unresolved need to retrieve the oil industry waste products, and the forthcoming diffusion of more economical and sophisticated 3D printers, plunged us, or rather submerged us, into a much opaquer plasticized world. A world built by a production world that has not yet elaborated the impact of the environmental costs of its realization on a planetary scale, producing a conforming desertification made of pollution and irresponsible behaviours. All in the name of a misunderstood sense of development and progress.

## **Working hypothesis**

For years, Amy-D gallery has been working on these complex relationships between economics, scientific research, aesthetics and visual arts. Since the beginning, the Fosbury Architecture collective has been engaged in a research aimed at highlighting system criticalities, often resorting to delicate and sophisticated language games. The term "resistance" in the exhibition title, "Resistance Environments for Social Individuals", must be read as a game: it certainly does not allude to the Resistance and the Partisan Fight. It, instead, refers to that kind of natural opposition, moral resistance or passive resistance to some habits

that contemporaneity imposes on everyone. It is a self-induced, and therefore independent, process of decolonization of the daily life; given the unavoidable forces that are at stake, it is a proposal strong in content but soft in practice.

A game we must respect, even when it hints at a fashion that is quite widespread in the context of the official political art. An oxymoron much in vogue today, the paradox of a socially involved research – which is produced "from below", among common people, in social centres and universities – that is at the same time continuously present in local and international exhibitions, in search for a validation from that very "system" – in fact, a commercial one – we try to put into question through a constructive critique.

This is also the attempt to get out from the forced helplessness of a generation constrained to a continuous compromise, with nearly one single possibility: namely, to use irony to affirm spaces for possibilities, reasoning, and, ultimately, research. The staging is essential and smart: the sequence in the exhibition follows an almost cinematic plot, with an introduction, a development and an end. Everything is always reminding us of this strange relationship that we finally intertwine with the objects of our life, which say something about us, beyond our own will to communicate it.

At the centre of the gallery, we can find an octagonal steel structure that reduce the exhibition space and on which the historical catalogue of Resistance Environments is displayed: 432 "private spaces", from Middle Ages to nowadays, in a temporary crystallization of an in-progress cataloguing process. On the wall, a collection of 7 unexpected pieces of design, between furniture and home space, attempts to synthesize the historical catalogue and to bring to light domestic rituals that are now lost or endangered. The exhibition is then completed by the representation of the contemporary urban condition, where everything is rented in an impelled sharing economy regime: 100 postcards of the 100 most lucrative Airbnb apartments from the 100 most famous tourist places in the world; and, finally, a digital wallpaper made up of thousands of anonymous objects that define the barren landscape in which we move.