Urban Legends

Città Ticino

GayMenzel Studio addresses the complexity of the context as a source of development of a narrative linked to the site itself. This highlighting tool reveals the inherent qualities of the place and integrates projections or personal aspirations into it, with the broad ambition of reconnection to the environment.

Urban legends are short fictions that come close to myths, contemporary tales, which spread in popular culture by oral transmission and proliferate through social networks. These stories that circulate and that everyone knows. Your uncle told you about that alligator living in the sewers of New York, your father’s girlfriend confirmed it. These legends are mysterious, terrifying or funny. They are adapted to the local folklore by word of mouth, through hearsay. Each city produces these murmurs. Like an echo.

Double exposure: video still by Peter Kernel, «We are not gonna be the same again», 2011, and drone photography by Lorenzo Meloni, 2020
The Making of Sense

In these times of crisis and post-confinement, a reassessment of our way of life is essential. The quality of our relationship with nature, with the territory, and our way of living is questioned. Maybe a solution would be “resonance”, of which the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa speaks, proposing us to redefine our relationship with the world, to create what he calls the axes of resonance? Is it the “care” that Heidegger talks about that induces an exchange with the environment? Are there other ways to be explored?

Architects are actors at the heart of these fundamental questions. They have a role to play in implementing visions of how to live and work, as well as in shaping the environment: to establish a link between people by promoting the social, to reconsider the relationship to the built and the non-built, to think of new strategies in order to generate quality and meaning, in the contemporary context of responsibility.

Unveiling Narratives

The development of a project strategy is addressed through the narrative, as a crystallization of personal imagination and understanding of the site. How does the architect generate anchor points to make places legible, porous and appropriable in order to give them meaning?

The studio explores the way the project operates. It studies how the design process is constructed and develops reading keys for the establishment of a coherent discourse. The narrative becomes the tool for the fabrication of the architectural project. The objective is to develop the proficiencies of observation, reading of site complexity, and imagination. Furthermore it is the ambition to create, in spite of all the constraints of the project, an architecture which refers to something and which revives collective and shared experiences.

The studio develops a coherent idea of a project starting from the territory and its landscape all the way up to the very detail. A prototype of a lamp will reflect these influences and enable evo-cation. This is an opportunity for you, students, to assess what you can contribute to architecture by revealing your secrets.

Lamp prototype by students Gilles Gasser and Maxime Theuvenat, MAI 2020
Grande Bellinzona extends from the junction of the Riviera and the Mesolcina valleys to the Magadino plain. Recognisable from afar, the unique silhouette of the fortified rock of Castel Grande is linked to the mountain by a wall, once extended by the Torretta bridge crossing the Ticino river. This strategic point of passage through the Alps has changed continuously since the arrival of the Gotthard railway in 1882. Until then, the canton Ticino was fragmented by steep valleys. Today, with the completion of the tunnel under the Monte Ceneri, the Alptransit project, a major transport axis between northern and southern Europe, has been achieved. At the scale of the canton, an urban network connected by public transport comes to life: the Città Ticino.

Bellinzona did not develop much in the 19th century. In the second half of the 20th century, the boundaries between town, village, hamlet and countryside became blurred and then disappeared due to an uncontrolled urbanisation, consisting mostly of villas scattered across the plain, blurring the reading of urban identities. The studio focuses on leftover zones on the fringe. The limits of the agglomeration’s perimeter provide the backdrop for reflections on public space, new forms of housing and production as a territorial and societal issue. It is sharing and caring. It is about a respectful, resilient and sustainable occupation of the territory, transposed through the architectural project.