

Aesthetics of the Improvised

This piece of theory is born from the need to study and develop an already existing problem-solving process which brings together elements from the fine arts, architecture, and society. We will use "improvised" as a way of naming constructions that have in common either one or a combination of worn-out, unrefined, repurposed looks and at the same time demonstrate examples of practical, intuitive, empirical, temporary, and resourceful solutions. We will use aesthetics as a way to acknowledge and give value to this type of solutions.

The aspects that characterize these constructions challenge technical methods in an almost artistic manner while showing a sensibility toward social conditions. To better examine the topic, we can take from art as a way of showcasing and architecture as a way to discover concrete solutions. References available for this study are merely found on the media as news from developing countries or by having been a witness of the product. This type of constructions often conveys stories of fragility and latent adversity, yet it is resourceful and inspirational.

Within the context of art practices, it is relatable to Arte Povera's aim where materials create dialogs with the precariousness of time and are linked to univocal gestures of primitive intentions. Distinct on the way the movement attempts to separate art from life, the improvised products are not a representation of, but rather they are traces of life itself, conceived unintentionally. Thomas Hirschorn's installations and social concerns can also be connected to these representations. However, they are different, for instance, from the spontaneous housing solutions in Tegucigalpa with colorful plastics and tin roofing sheets which manifest the limitations faced by a great number of people. These examples are also found in other developing contexts around the world.

Concerning its visual and spatial qualities as a practice, certainly far from vintage, rustic styles, and sustainable reuse in interior design or architecture, it is real and honest. As a solution, it is not a matter of efficiency in resources, but not having any at all.

It does not represent a stylistic option but an only choice. It is tempting to think of this type of practice as truly sustainable.

A danger lies in presenting it solely as an art object.

Perhaps, a more appropriate use is simply the presentation of itself into sympathizing better with this

reality and questioning the use of it as a trend. In making such a statement, is a step forward to blur lines between, art, architecture and life.

A significant example of this is Rural Studio, part of the Auburn University in Alabama. Founded by Samuel Mockabee, this academic program's goal is to find concrete solutions for a town of poor people. Their creative solutions often transform repurposed materials into real forms of architecture. Yet, a further challenge would be to see examples in urban contexts rather than only rural.

The essence of this improvised aesthetics could be traced to the rudimentary, some may say primitive, practices often seen in developing contexts. We can relate the gathering of available discarded material to the use of the local natural resources that characterizes vernacular forms of architecture. One example of this are retaining walls built out local quarry stones all with different shapes and fitted together as well as steps built for a sloped terrain out of old tires.

An essay by Frederick Steiner titled 'Toward an Ecological Aesthetic' refers to Robert Smithson's concept of entropy and how making this visible and framing it, is a step forward into embracing it and heading to the reversal process, negentropy. He explains this aesthetic involves sensual connections to natural and cultural process in what he calls socio-ecological practices, those which are aware of the wounds of the world. In a similar way, Pope Francis draws connections between the planet's ecological depletion and the sectors of society most in need, highlighting their common fragility and their state of abandonment.

The aesthetics of the improvised suggests a renewal of thought that changes the way we perceive certain finishes or products. Rather than compromising certain pleasures, embracing this aesthetics beyond the current trend, might bring permanent solutions for a more sustainable future. In the meantime, it pretends to find reconciliations between new and existing into creating hybrids which hold an improved collective and integral balance.

[on development]