

Vesper No. 3 Wildness | Nella selva

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The sylvan returns to European culture both as an image, capable of distilling the character of places and the modalities of crossing them, and a reality: forests are advancing and the presence of wild and untamed areas within cities are a constantly expanding fact. The two levels of reading of the sylvan – the one taking it as a figuration through which to interpret reality and the other analysing it as evident space – require a codification of the tools and modes of inhabiting such an unknown locus.

The “sylvan” imaginary refers to a presumed original condition ruled by violence and lack of order: previous or foreign to the civitas and its conduct. The configuration of the relationship between sylvan and city depends on the philosophy of history, oriented towards decadence from a primordial natural condition or towards the progressive emancipation from minority towards nature. In both approaches, the conception of the sylvan (and of nature) is polarised between a benign or malignant view. After years spent reading the forms of the city, attention returns to a forgotten world: it is the world of the inland territories, not only geographically but also in the broad sense of neglected, obscured places. This way it is possible to discover diverse natures and their transformations: from the tamed that turns savage, to the inhabited that encounters unforeseen appearances, or to the vast forests that advance silently. As the creeping guilt for commandeering and consuming nature accumulates, the wild has gained ground, transcended its boundaries and made its way into the city. To inhabit the sylvan means increasing the capacity for recognition, defining modes of coexistence; fundamentally, a “new alliance” is called for.

Design responses to these changes start from the awareness that it is impossible to handle everything. This entails a paradigm shift resulting in the definition of new tools. Dense and obscure nature has been the subject of theories and design practices that have insisted on nostalgia for what has been lost and on the consolation of artificially reconstructing a part of it. New outposts can now be established as ramparts or passageways to break through already uncertain boundaries. And, what is more, arks can be built to safeguard “seeds” of indispensable natures or traces of cultivations. It is a matter of putting concrete images into play and no longer of evoking metaphors of a necessary architecture.

Ultimately, the return of the sylvan marks the return of a new sense of the “archaic”, of yet another mixture of architecture and earth, a conscious combination of the conflict between the reason and the uncanny, adventure and comfort, memories of the city and the forest ways of life. The term “sylvan” denotes precise and concrete realities and multiple imaginaries but also indicates the possible trajectory of future time as well as the turning towards a very distant past: it is an arrow whose direction establishes the connotations of a possible new “natural contract”.

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