

TITLE

Questioning images: digital collage as an instigator of design driven research.

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KEYWORDS

photography; digital collage; design driven research

ABSTRACT

The advancement and popularization of image processing techniques in the last twentyfive years has provided architects with a powerful tool to merge research and design. If the history of photography is the history of the duplication and recycling of reality, then the history of the digitization of photography can be read as the history of the possibility of blending the duplicated real and the virtual. By intervening seamlessly on photographs, it is now easier than ever to conflate a particular reality and its potential transformation, thus interrogating the very essence of said reality by providing an apparently plausible version of it.

Some of the prospects of this design driven research methodology are exposed here through the analysis of a speculative project that was produced for the XV Venice Biennale of 2016. The project used digital collage to initiate a collective conversation on the landscape of naked objects exposed by the building crisis in Spain, questioning the underlying processes made visible by the abandoned constructions –in short, a model of urban development that maximizes profit through the repetition of the same, ‘exclusive’ private units. In order to transform this reality into an expression of a community generated through difference, the conversation focused on the imaginary appropriation of twelve unfinished units of an interrupted development in L’Enova, a small village located 55 kilometers south of Valencia. Each interlocutor acted on a photograph of each unit with the only constraint of using the same graphic ingredients: a selection of 100 pictures to use in the digital collage. Beyond this constraint, the only limits were those of each individual approach to the project.

The most interesting aspect of this landscape of distinct voices is that, when placed in parallel, they revealed the potential of the conversation when it becomes a project. The twelve colonized photographs no longer appeared as a melancholic witness of what could have been, but as a tangible document that materialized a possible model, showing that the debris of an exhausted system of urban development can be reused as the foundations for an alternative form of urbanization. In so doing, lacadenadecristal elicited a new set of questions on the role of digital collage in contemporary design and research, for it proved to be a methodology that simultaneously serves as a design tool, a method of interrogation of a specific reality, and a prime communicative asset to engage multiple audiences.

