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THREE LANDSCAPE-INSPIRED IMAGINARY SPACES. FROM THE SERIES *FOUND IN THE LANDSCAPE*

Art research paper



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Abstract

The article is a continuation of a series presenting the results of scientific and artistic research on the reading of spaces perceived in nature. The theoretical considerations expounded in the previous issues have been transferred to creative activities: interior design incorporating the principles of biophilia, which resulted from the application of three methods of intertextual interpretation of nature: imitation of the form (alluding to the external appearance), mimicking of the principle of operation, and negation (alluding to immanent features of the object of inspiration and undermining them at the same time). A design path encompassing various artistic means is presented. The spaces found in the landscape are installations that can become the basis for the design of residential and utility interior architecture.

Keywords

interior architecture, landscape, installation, biophilia, intertextuality

Introduction

...it is a more worthy thing to imitate the works of nature, which are the true images embodied in reality, than to imitate the actions and the words of men¹.

Nature as a source of inspiration is like an inexhaustible well, with water constantly flowing in. However, it is never the same water as Heraclitus wrote, back in his time. A human work is constant by its very nature, and it the action of the environment (light, humidity) exposes it to transformations. Therefore, the search for inspiration in the landscape leads to original solutions in each case.

... Truly this science [painting] is a legitimate daughter of nature, for painting is born of nature. Or to put it more correctly, let us say that painting is the granddaughter of nature, for all manifest things are born of nature, and among these is painting. We can rightly call painting the granddaughter of nature and the close relative to God².

In these words, which elevate painting from nature, Leonardo da Vinci referred to Thomas Aquinas's idea concerning the properties of the Holy Trinity, in which the philosopher, following St Augustine, attributes "beauty" to the Son of God. Today, we can say that not only painting, but also other means of expression, including architecture, imitate the divine nature, thanks to which they can be qualified, after Dion of Prusa (called Chrysostom – Golden-Mouthed) as a source of the concept of deity in humans³.

The architectural projects which I described in earlier issues of „inAW Journal. Multidisciplinary Academic Magazine” often serve as places of worship and pilgrimage. Inspiration in nature makes them more accessible to the public, easier to assimilate, more comprehensible. They come from the well-known world of nature, they are a translation of its section into a different – human language.

Japanese architects' works, mentioned in issue 3, originated from the use of three methods of interpretation of nature: imitation of the form (alluding to the external appearance), mimicking of the principle of operation, and negation (alluding to immanent features of the object of inspiration and undermining them at the same time). These methods became the basis for the creation of three authorial concept designs which are described below, supplemented with digital and drawing forms of recording ideas, as well as photographs of sketch models.

1 L. da Vinci, *Traktat o malarstwie*, [in:] *Myśliciele, kronikarze i artyści o sztuce. Od starożytności do 1500 roku*, ed. J. Białoostocki, Gdańsk 2001, p. 424.

2 L. da Vinci, *Traktat o malarstwie*, p. 423.

3 W. Tatarkiewicz, *Historia estetyki*, vol. 1: *Estetyka starożytna*, Warszawa 2009, p. 335.

Imitation of the form. Decayed wood

[...]

Everything here is small, near, accessible.

I can press volcanoes with my fingertip,
stroke the poles without thick mittens,

I can with a single glance
encompass every desert

with the river lying just beside it [...]⁴.

The description of the map, poetically phrased by Wisława Szymborska, is very close to my way of reading the spaces recorded in photographs. Here, too, lines can change into rivers, planes into plazas, stones into mountains and houses; a moment later, the same signs become paths, floors, tables, and wardrobes. It all depends on the adopted scale, which is not specified, as in the case of maps. There is no top-down limitation for imaginary spaces. They reveal themselves along with the desire for a new place, the sensing of the desired configuration of solids, materials, and light.



Fig. 1. Sketches of an interior inspired by decayed wood, 2022, J. Łapińska.

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W. Szymborska, *Mapa*, [in:] *Wybór poezji*, Wrocław 2019, pp. 459–460. [English translation by Clare Cavanagh and Stanisław Barańczak, in: *Wisława Szymborska, Poems, New and Collected*, Faber & Faber, London 1999 – transl].

Two lumps of decayed wood separated by a carpet of dense moss created a composition that arouses many associations. On a macro scale, they could be two buildings that let in light in different ways, or a residential house with the façade obscured by the horizontal rhythm of the blinds and a gazebo covered with vertical slats. On a micro scale, the gazebo turned into a coffee table, while the other piece became a seat. The final version was situated somewhere in between. The triangular block is a mezzanine that can be reduced – in the case of the lower interior – to a light installation suspended under the ceiling. Oak boards, untreated, with the bark left on them, are connected with a black steel structure which goes down to the floor in the form of columns. Covering the boards with a glass pane from the top allows us to appreciate the beauty of the material while maintaining the comfort of its use; in addition, it lets light through in the vertical plane. The other block was interpreted as a cover-up of unwanted space, e.g., a bathroom or a kitchen. The horizontal strips of boards with bark left on them allow the light to flow while maintaining the privacy of the user of the unwanted space. This block can also become a bookcase separating two zones. Green moss was interpreted as a carpet in an unusual, irregular shape. A wooden bench was placed on it, introducing the impression of movement into the composition. The floor could be made of glass – for bolder users – with natural pebbles placed underneath, but light grey polished granite will also work. The walls and ceiling are in off-white. The linear illumination integrated in the mezzanine, between the boards, is directed downwards. The upper space above the mezzanine is illuminated by a standing lamp with a shade made of fabric in the same colour as the carpet.

Contrasts of materials are the main feature of this space. The roughness and imperfection of the rhythmically laid untreated oak boards with bark, referring to the delamination of decayed wood, contrast with the softness (in terms of both material and shape) of the carpet, laid on a perfectly smooth floor. Kengo Kuma used boards of this type in the construction of the Mont Blanc base camp. There, this material is treated as a vertical rhythm obscuring the glass façade: integrating the building with its surroundings and limiting the flow of light into the interior. In my design, the boards filter the light as well; however, they are the basic formal and sensual element that builds up the atmosphere of the interior. The slits left between them allow light to flow in both directions, with a significant width of the boards ensuring privacy and preventing the space from being overlit. Kengo Kuma obtained a similar effect, although in a more geometric way, at the Stone Museum in Nasu (Tochigi, Japan). There, the light gets in through evenly distributed slits in the blind-like structure of a stone wall.



Fig. 2. To the left, the interior of the Stone Museum in Nasu (Tochigi, Japan) designed by Kengo Kuma, photo by Peppe Maisto, <https://divisare.com/projects/105503-kengo-kuma-and-associates-peppe-maisto-stone-museum> [accessed 25 February 2022]. To the right, the space between the glass façade and the cover-up made of planks in the Mont Blanc base camp, according to the design by Kengo Kuma, photo Michel Denancé, <https://divisare.com/projects/315751-kengo-kuma-and-associates-michel-denance-mont-blanc-base-camp> [accessed 25 February 2022].

The materials used in the project inspired by decayed wood are natural and create a warm, relaxing atmosphere characteristic of the forest environment. The dynamic system of biomorphic bodies and rhythms brings movement into the interior, ensuring a sense of simultaneous complexity and order. The mezzanine lowers the ceiling and sections off a more intimate zone, responding to the need for shelter. The rhythmical arrangement of the boards, letting in the light and painting the shadow lines, introduces an atmosphere of mystery. Nevertheless, thanks to the direct translation of the space noticed in the landscape into the architectural language, it seems less complicated, easier to perceive.

Mimicking the principle of operation. Bystra Brook

[...]

You have saved houses from fire, you have carried off
houses and trees, forests and towns alike.

[...]

Gnawing stone, feeding rainbows,
In the sweat and the dew of the pyramids and lilacs.
How light the raindrop's contents are.
How gently the world touches me.
Whenever wherever whatever has happened
Is written down on the waters of Babel.⁵

The basic characteristic of water is its fluidity, variability, and instability. *Panta rhei*, thus nobody can step in the same river twice. It is in constant motion, even when its surface is immobile. It contains all the waters of the world. It accepts whatever falls into it. It is capable of moving things and does not always give them back. A mountain brook never seems to be still. It flows in an incessant, fast current, bypassing obstacles or sweeping them (“gnawing stone”). Thrusting forward all the time, heedless of everything around.

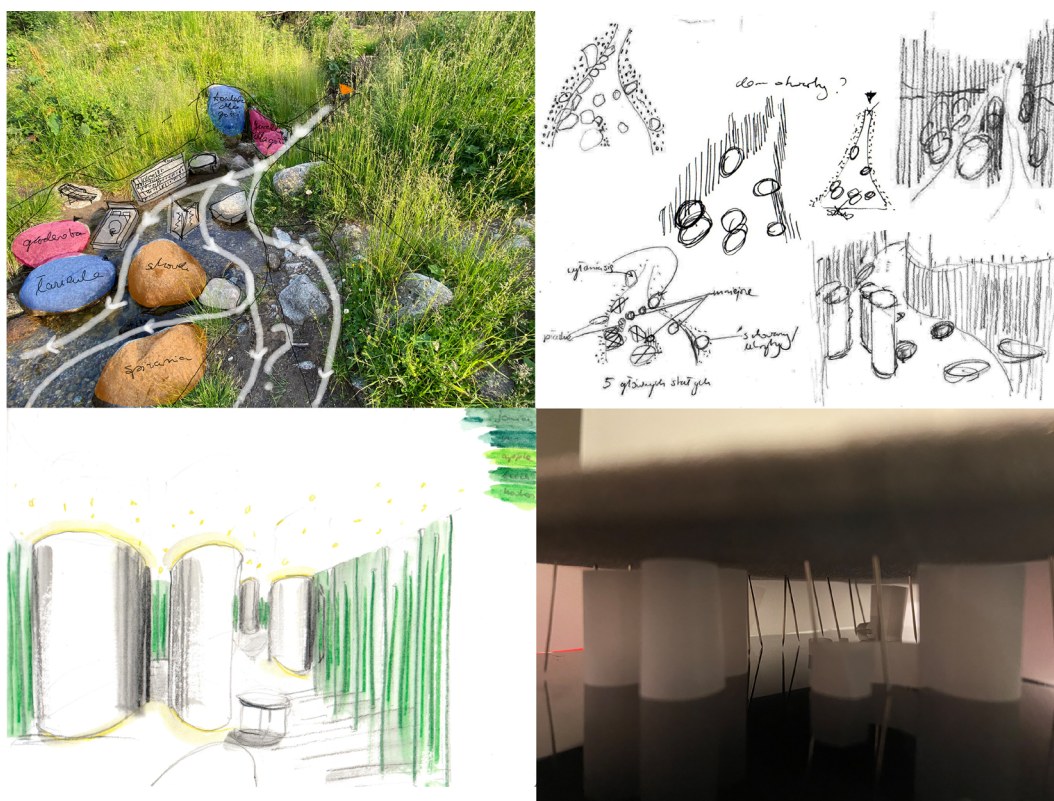


Fig. 3. Sketches of an interior inspired by the Bystra Brook, 2022, J. Łapińska.

The designed space is based on a photograph of a fragment of a landscape with the Bystra Brook in Zakopane. The space replicates its layout without becoming its literal formal interpretation, as the case was for the previous project. The inspiration came from the variability and fluidity of the water, opposed to the persistence of the stones. Vertical rhythms of the grass enclose the space, complement it by marking a boundary.

The plane of the water in the photograph corresponds to a flexible space in the design – it remains empty in the arrangement, taking on any form and function possible to implement without closing it. It was divided into sub-zones by placing solid bodies inspired by boulders and stones. Its widening shape, dictated by the spillage of water on flat terrain, creates sub-zones of different sizes which can

serve as a place of work, rest, and recreation, an area of meetings or partial retreat. The dark, polished granite floor reflects the surroundings, containing them like the water contains the sky.

Boulders and stones, i.e., permanent places, allow for the implementation of a full program of a living space, but also some types of utility space, such as a bookshop, clothing shop, children's playground. The present project relates to the living space, so the individual bodies house: a bathroom with a dressing room, a pantry, a storage room and a toilet for guests. According to the first design decisions, the bodies were not to touch the ceiling, which would strengthen the impression of having been put in the open space, while maintaining the detached nature of their location. For structural and functional reasons, however, they are connected with the ceiling; still they can be cut off visually by withdrawing the cornice and letting in lines of light. They were designed to be built of cardboard-gypsum boards painted off-white. Smaller stones, which can move with high water flow, have been interpreted as semi-permanent elements of the arrangement: larger furniture and partitions.

The rhythm of the grass was reproduced thanks to the use of densely spaced structural columns with a small cross-section, supporting the ceiling. Between some of the columns, the visitor can move like a ladybird among the stalks.

The space can be illuminated zonally with spotlights integrated into the ceiling. The arrangement of points inspired by the rhythm of grass stalks, does not build a specific form, determine directions, or suggest a specific way of using the space.

The flexible space between the bodies-stones implements the principles of biophilia to a large extent. Thanks to this approach, the interior can be perceived positively. The lack of tight partitions allows to maintain thermal variability and air flow. The eye can wander across planes situated in different distances, exploring surprising views and perspectives. Numerous corners and recesses arouse the sense of mystery and provide shelter at the same time. Variable lighting, divided into zones, builds an atmosphere close to nature, with diffuse, dynamic light.

A similar principle of liquid space was implemented by the SANAA architectural team in the Rolex Learning Center in Lausanne (Switzerland) and in The River Building – Grace Farms in New Canaan, CT (USA). An open plan with separate necessary zones allowed for the creation of a space where places are determined by users depending on their needs and disposition.



Fig. 4. To the left, the interior of the Rolex Learning Center in Lausanne (Switzerland), <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/lausanne-switzerland-sanaas-rolex-learning-centre-opens> [accessed 25 February 2022]. To the right, a view of The River Building – Grace Farms in New Canaan, CT (USA) designed by SANNA, <https://projects.archiexpo.com/project-29424.html> [accessed 25 February 2022].

The space created as a result of the interpretation of the mode of operation of a fragment of landscape carries many meanings; however, the forms and materials are not as unambiguous as they were in the case of a project created by direct imitation of nature. The solids have been simplified, and the colours limited to shades of grey, allowing for greater flexibility of the space.

Negation. Clouds

[...]

the clouds will part
in the cleared-up sky
and they'll be once more
what clouds overhead ought to be:
lofty and rather lighthearted
in their likeness to things
drying in the sun—
isles of bliss,
lambs,
cauliflowers,
diapers⁶.

Clouds are an alternative form of water, fleeting, but also variable. Light and shiny, they float just beneath the stars, obscuring the sky, casting a shadow. They take various forms: from densely convoluted cumuli to flaccid circus streaks; from strati covering the world with a grey blanket to cirrocumuli

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W. Szymborska, *Do arki*, [in:] *Wybór poezji*, p. 306. [English translation by Clare Cavanagh and Stanisław Barańczak, in: *Wisława Szymborska, Poems, New and Collected*, Faber & Faber, London 1999 – transl].

resembling tiny lambs to cumulonimbi of extremely rich forms, bringing cities, mountains, and volcanoes to our mind. Their charm often inspires designers, which can be exemplified by the *Blur Building* Diller/Scofidio+Renfro pavilion presented at EXPO 2002 in Switzerland, the *Cloud Pavilion* in Tokyo from 2021 by Sou Fujimoto, the *Cloud Cities* by Tomas Saraceno and the levitating tea pavilion by Kengo Kuma. In 2021, on the occasion of the Tokyo Olympics, Junya Ishigami produced his *Kokage-gumo* installation, inspired by clouds as well; unlike the previous examples, it undermines the physical and visual lightness of what is above us. Using charred wood, he created a structure filling the void between the clouds, depicting rather their shadow, vesting it with materiality, density, and weight.



Fig. 5. In the upper row: to the left, *Cloud Cities* by Tomas Saraceno, <https://www.metalocus.es/en/news/tomas-saraceno-cloud-cities> [accessed 25 February 2022]; on the right, the *Cloud Pavilion* in Tokyo in 2021. Sou Fujimoto, <https://www.interactiongreen.com/cloud-pavilion-sou-fujimoto/sou-fujimoto-cloud-pavilion/> [accessed 25 February 2022]. Bottom row: to the left, *Kokage-gumo* by Junya Ishigami, <https://arquitecturaviva.com/works/kokage-gumo-kundan> [accessed 25 February 2022]; to the right, the *Blur Building* Diller/Scofidio+Renfro, <https://www.designingbuildings.co.uk/wiki/File:Blurbuilding2> [accessed 25 February 2022].

Inspiration is the source from which inspiration was once drawn; today, we rather talk about interpreting properties. However, interpretation does not necessarily mean full affirmation. It can also take the form of negating the perceived feature or emphasising the negative, as was the case with *Kokage-gumo*.

Umberto Eco, in his essay *On the Shoulders of Giants*, explains the mechanism present in art history and consisting in the rejection of the immediately preceding style in favour of the even earlier one. He explains it by man's innate tendency to rebel against his parents, supporting it with numerous examples from history and literature.

Without bothering the psychoanalysts, we do admit that sons are inclined to kill their fathers⁷.

After rejecting the fathers' ideology, one can base one's own actions on the reasoning of grandfathers, who are already far enough away. This is also the genesis of the emergence of new directions in art: patricide.

Negative interpretation is one of the actions coming precisely from that current. Denial of a characteristic property is a contestation that undermines the existing state of reality, puts other people's imagination to the test, puts the author in a higher position in relation to the rest of society – as a selected individual, as one who could look at something at a different angle, understand it differently.

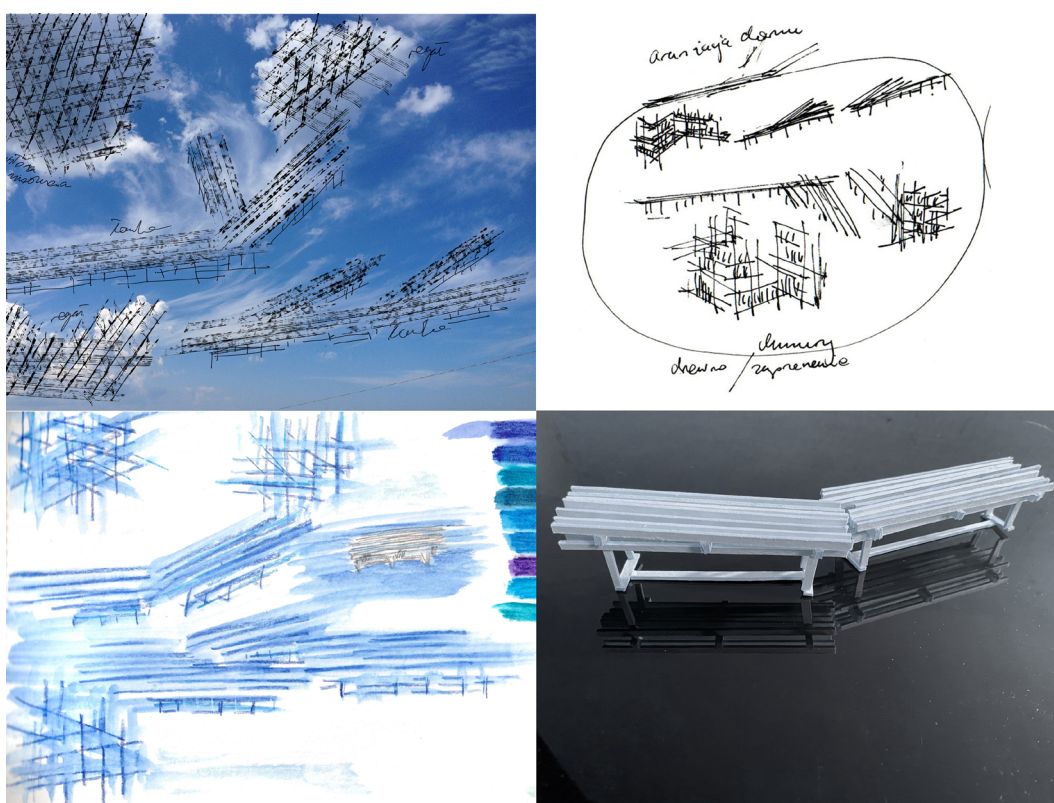


Fig. 6. Sketches of an interior inspired by clouds, 2022, J. Łapińska.

Not to look too far, clouds have also become the source of inspiration for the last project described here: in the blue sky, white cirrus threads scattered by the wind, eddying between the tangled rolls of

cumulonimbi. An obvious interpretation in this case would be a white, light-permeable installation suspended above the heads of passers-by. Negating the basic feature of clouds as floating in the sky, the described design brought clouds to the ground, preserving the visual lightness using a very earthly material, which is wood.

Cirrus threads turned out to be the basic form of shaping the solids, translated into the design language in the form of wooden lintels. Rhythmically laid, straight sections built smooth lines of two benches consisting of modules set together throughout the room. The same material was also used to construct modules consisting of larger bodies, corresponding to cumulous clouds, which can function as a bookcase, a table, or a cover-up for the entrance to a smaller room. The use of modules in building a form introduces both complexity and order: both features desirable in a biophilic-oriented architecture.

White-coloured matte wood cuts off against the background of a graphite-coloured floor made of polished granite. Walls in a white tone constitute a neutral background. Linear lighting replicates the rhythm of the benches, becoming a line of clouds on the ceiling.

Using biomorphic forms whose system was inspired by clouds, this installation may become the basis for further development of the design towards a residential or utility interior.

Summary

A work of architecture (an interior), the source of which lies in nature, is never a “vague «glimpse» of inspiration by nature”⁸.

Interaction-oriented, designed not only to be admired, but also to be used, it is the result of the conscious introduction of many factors and becomes an intertextual work. The *design patterns* theory, initiated by Christopher Alexander, orders these factors into systems – patterns that an architect deliberately introduces into a project. One of such pattern systems is biophilia, characterised, inter alia, in the article *Found in the Landscape – Introduced into the Interior. Biophilic Space in the Context of Isolation*⁹. Literally translated as “the love of life and all its forms”, it defines 14 patterns referring to nature in different ways which, if introduced to a design, positively influence its perception by users.

The three interior design concepts described above encompass these patterns, based on three selected design methods based on inspiration by nature. The first of them – imitating the form – can probably

8 B. Modrzewski, A. Szkołut, *Biofilia – teoria i praktyka projektowa*, 2014, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290818656_BIOFILIA_-_TEORIA_I_PRAKTYKA_PROJEKTOWA [accessed 28 February 2021], p. 186.

9 J. Łapińska, *Odnalezione w krajobrazie – wprowadzone do wnętrza. Przestrzeń biofiliczna w kontekście izolacji*, “inAW Journal – Multidisciplinary Academic Magazine”, 1 (2021), pp. 122–138, <https://doi.org/10.52652/inaw.62>, <https://system.inawjournal.pl/index.php/inaw/article/view/62/95> [accessed 23 September 2021].

refer to every fragment of the landscape. A skilled eye, combined with imagination, is capable of processing the image and reading three-dimensional space in it in many different ways, depending on the adopted scale. Treating the source of inspiration as a set of properties that can be undermined requires a conscious choice of a section of landscape with distinctive features. Such a method makes sense provided that the number of source elements is kept to a minimum, as in the case of the clouds. The middle method – deliberately mentioned in the last place here – interpreting the principle of operation observed in nature, is the most demanding one. However, it can yield the most satisfying results. It requires discerning not only the beauty of nature, but also the utility characteristic of a particular element or phenomenon. At the research stage, the design process should lead to full synthesis, so that the created space is clear, defined and does not raise formal and utility objections.

To sum up, design methods using the interpretation of sections of landscape in different ways, incorporating inspirations from literature – in this case, Wisława Szymborska's poetry – and integrating the patterns of biophilia, implement the creative assumptions of interior architecture on an uneven, albeit always satisfactory level. Such an intertextual approach allows to obtain original solutions verging on the artistic installation. Those solutions can become the basis of a holistic interior design of both residential and public spaces.

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