

Error Earth: Displaying Deep Cybernetics in «The Universitas Project» and *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 1972

Abstract

Can *being* have a form? What is the relationship between ecology and cybernetics? And which ontological implications are instigated by the Sacco beanbag chair? This thesis examines cybernetics, ecology, and ontology in postmodern design and architecture by investigating two groundbreaking events at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York City in 1972, curated by architect Emilio Ambasz. First, the interdisciplinary symposium “The Universitas Project: Institutions for a Post-Technological Society” and second, the exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, both of which can be considered key events in the early stages of the postmodern movement. The thesis proposes that postmodern architecture and design—for example flexible modular homes for an adaptable lifestyle and inflatable plastic chairs—should not merely be considered a new stylistic development, a new aesthetics, or as expressing new conceptions of sociopolitical ideologies; rather, they should be understood as new forms of being.

The first part of the thesis discusses how the new forms of being displayed at MoMA in 1972 materialize a new kind of ontology; an ecological form of cybernetics—what I suggest be termed *deep cybernetics*. Through new readings of air-architecture, plastics, and the concept of “display”, I propose that these three concepts stage, in a remarkably vibrant manner, deep cybernetic ontology. By examining *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* and “The Universitas Project” the thesis discusses the dialectics of “deep cybernetics”, and shows how apparently different ideological, political, and critical positions can be understood as converging on a common position: an all-encompassing uncertainty regarding the status of human beings.

The second part of thesis argues that the materialization of deep cybernetics shows a dangerous way of understanding the world. Modular plastic shelves and inflatable furniture point to a conceptual notion of continuum that, in today’s climate of global capitalism and global warming, can no longer be sustained. In response, the thesis argues that concepts such as fractures, resistance, and “errors” are crucial to breaking out of this dangerous understanding of the world—a danger materialized by the Sacco beanbag chair.