

4 MORWELL ST.

36 BEDFORD SQ.

an architectural soap opera.

a.fernandez

The Latin American soap opera is a worldwide after-lunch phenomenon – not surprisingly in Spanish-speaking countries, but increasingly in many others as well, as mass migration generates an increased appreciation of cultural diversity.

In these TV shows every move the actor makes, and every word he or she says, is exaggerated to the absolute limits of human emotion. Overacting becomes a style that creates highly predictable situations of either love or hate. There is no middle, just two extremes.

Even though this format is already a Hollywood-like cliché, Latin American soap operas are its superlatives; it seems as if they are a sophisticated and subtle satire of North American dramas, where “simple” and straightforward values become the keystone of their plots. However, those moral tales develop into a never-ending monotonous odyssey of scripted emotional explosions which, when looked from a foreign culture, are laughable and outrageous.

[Love + Love = Hyper-Love] +
[Hate + Hate = Hyper-Hate] =
Novela

This fervour towards the image, and the preconceived ideal characteristic of Latin America, has its origins in the amalgamation of the bloody and brutal Spanish colonization, local pre-Columbine Indian civilizations that praised the metaphysical on a physical level, and the syncretic religious practices of African slaves. After the era of the great discoveries and the Jesuit Christianisation of the Indians, the Crown of Spain, living a period of expansion soaked on dreams of greatness, decided to apply a formal or architectural colonisation of style over the “savages”. A colonisation that would teach them how to read and see the truth and how to represent and idolize “good-taste”. The style that architecturally colonised Latin America was the Churrigueresque; an excessive

and over-sculptural (not ornamental) version of Baroque. Although conceived in the Iberian peninsula this style flourished on the other side of the Atlantic. The buildings (mainly churches) were conceived in Europe, more specifically by the Churrigera brothers in Valencia, and built in the Americas by Indians. It was some sort of joint collaboration. In order to represent a movement, an emotion, an event, excessive corporal language and architectural form was being used by this Latin American colonial Churrigueresque.

However, this style that was exported by the Spaniards and built by conquered peoples became part of a new identity, thanks to the same colonial reciprocity that can be seen in the Nike factories of Malaysia. The alien brand, or icon, was being built by those that once ate and mutilated it because they believed it was that of the devil. In this scenario, cannibalism is the ultimate act of love; they became a reinterpretation of what they ate.

Popular culture is part of the fabric of architecture, and subsequently architecture defines how human beings see correctness and identity. The architectural excess of form and language that can be seen in the Zacatecas Cathedral in Mexico can be seen as a statement by those early Indian builders, not necessarily about the icons and gods they had just sculpted, but as an expression of what they were feeling – in an epic and overacted manner. Architecture as a cultural shaper that transcends the merely formal is the result of the clash between two unequally powerful peoples. One colonizes, the other one resists, yet it loses, and from the ruins, shame and pain of this defeat, rebuilds itself by culturally and architecturally digesting what was rejected before. By building upon what once was misunderstood (hated or loved... or hated & loved). Latin-American soap operas are nothing but an excessive Churrigueresque tale on a stucco façade; they are 21st-century representations of those same scenes sculpted in stone that once adorned Aztec, Maya or Incan temples. They are democratic fast food for the masses...

Alvaro Fernandez is currently a second year student at the AA.

legible simulation.

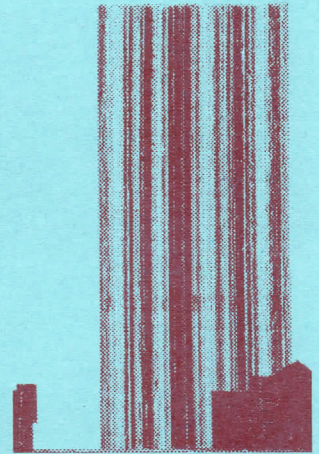
g.baldwin

An advertisement for a household cleaning supply wraps the barrier of an underpass between the West Side Highway and the South Street Viaduct. The image is composed of a housewife in her mid-thirties on her knees bending over to scrub the grime off of her tiled floor. The activity described in this amount of detail could almost be perceived as typical, however the materiality of the composition enhances the image to imply a more significant rendition of the real.

The woman on her knees had a pale complexion and wore a white suit in tandem with the tone of her skin. Her knees were aligned perfectly with the grout line of the tiles and her location within the image was on the far left, leaving ample space to view her immaculate kitchen. The tiles were also white and continued along the wall, masking the room with its immense grid. The appliances were black and finished with a matte coating, suppressing the grid and balancing the composition as a whole. The product itself appeared to be nothing more than a hexagonal shaped sponge, with symmetrical porosity.

The image as a whole takes a tangible scenario and modifies it to become interesting, making the product accessible to a wider audience. Though visually interesting, this image distorts our sense of reality by imposing an ideal image. What begins to become interesting about this image, is that it is not the activity or product that is being reinterpreted to imply another or extended use, but instead a reinterpretation of the context in which the product is placed.

A similar reinterpretation strategy occurs in the critiques on the Friedrichstraße skyscraper project by Mies van der Rohe [top right]. Here, the varying surface conditions of the façade do not simply reflect the metropolis, but critique and reinterpret it through its displacement on the fractured surface. This also provides a new way of read-



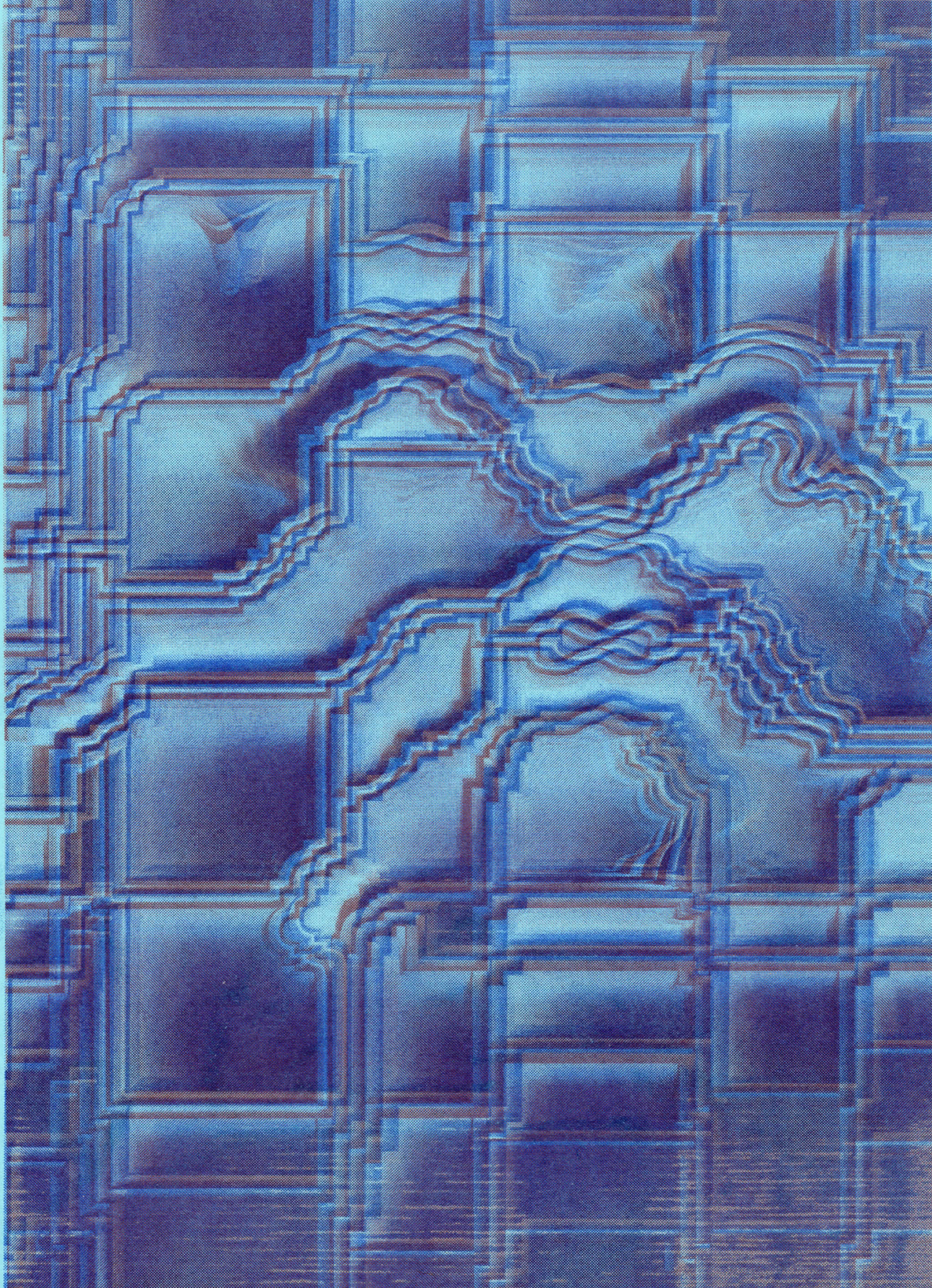
Mies' Friedrichstraße project: elevation. 1921.

ing the ideal image introduced in the scenario of the advertisement. Articulation of the planes and surfaces on the façade manipulate the reflection very subjectively, placing an emphasis on a particular way in which one is meant to read the city. By providing such a controlled simulation through the reflection patterns, the critique signifies more of an expression of the producer of the image, in this case Mies, and less attention on the production of the image for a wider audience.

The representation or simulation of reality in both examples remains consistent due to their legibility. Although they both distort reality, they maintain a resemblance with our perceived reality through the continuation of a known subject, (the sponge or the metropolis). In a reading on the Beaux-Arts movement, Diana Agrest states “to imitate in the Beaux-Arts is to produce the resemblance of one thing in another, which then becomes its image.”

The resemblance produced by imitation does not repeat the object in reality, but rather the object in image.” Although this deals with a particular style, the resemblance of one thing in another denotes a measure of simulation relevant in both the advertisement and the skyscraper project, as reality is simulated through an extension of the real.

Graham Baldwin edits Fulcrum.



"El Neo Churriguesco: Los Nuevos Materiales De La Ocupación." Relief drawing in the style of the Chipotle peoples, using CNC tooling paths to produce Baroque profiles. Jaime Alberto Sol Robles (Dipl3 2010). fulcrum@aschool.ac.uk / fulcrum.aschool.ac.uk