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DG Cabin and the hut of Baba Yaga: historical and theoretical parallel

DG Cabin (DJ Cabin) is at first glance a highly technological work of art, but looked at closely, it reveals some astonishing parallels with one of the most famous habitations in Russian and Slavic folklore--the hut of Baba Yaga.

The hut of Baba Yaga is a small dark country house, built in the old Russian style and standing on a remarkably original foundation: large-size chicken legs. Sometimes it spins and speaks to visitors. At the intersection of artistic disciplines, the hut is so far an interactive construction, or practices the spectator a very specific navigation between game and reality. It answers only to those who know a certain secret incantation; others are devoured by the wily witch, Baba Yaga. (Of course we can criticize the undemocratic nature in this approach to the visitor and spectator, but since they are supposed to have recently become dictators,* we may assume they wouldn't mind.)

The hut incorporates many features of her master and creator, Baba Yaga, brilliantly overcoming the simplistic division between good and bad. In discussing this specific construction in the deep forest, facing different realities, we cannot refrain from describing its owner--an authentic celebrity in the Slavic mythological world, a fearsome witch with cannibalistic inclinations. Despite her advanced age, skinny shape, big nose, and ferocious appetites (she is the complete opposite of Lara Croft!), Baba Yaga is a strong woman with supernatural powers, and she is a severe judge of the surrounding world and its human characters.

She also shares some important features with shamans (she regularly keeps in touch with spirits and different worlds, and she predicts the future), all of which obviously raises the question of her artistic nature. At least since Joseph Beuys, the profound link between shamanistic and artistic practices has become an important theme, not only in discussions of art but in the real-life collaboration between the Yanomani tribe and contemporary artists at the Fondation Cartier in Paris.

Of course we don't know what Baba Yaga's reaction to our fascination with pixels would be, but we do know that she was very sensitive to issues of visual culture and artistic creation. Who might be the worthy counterpart of this impressive personality in our world? Or, to put it differently, given its internal structure, coherence, and specific activities like flying and creating interactive environments, would artists or curators be the contemporary personification of Baba Yaga?

On the one hand, her very suggestive, sensitive, and technological place of habitation can be considered her real creation, her work of art. There is a strong mental link between her and the hut, which responds to her need for information and sublimation and reveals the visitors' real nature. The hut has been programmed for a deep understanding of human characters, a desire to play, and a weakness for killing.

Further analyzing the hut's functioning, we will discover strong links with the most contemporary topics of art theory. The image of the hut contains one of its most prophetic topoi; the windows of this interactive house are sometimes described as its "eyes." In several fundamental art texts of the Renaissance,** we can find a comparison between paintings and windows to

the world. The hut of Baba Yaga went much further and predicted some future developments of visual culture. In contemporary terms, its windows are clear prototypes of actual video images, which can be described as "observing pictures." What was supposed to be a material expression of our look is suddenly looking at ourselves, recording our actions, and preparing consequences. The window to the world becomes just what it was--a reflection of ourselves.

We must also comment on another window, very important to the context of the DG Cabin. One of the famous references in Russian history is the image of St. Petersburg*** as a window on Europe. It is no secret that the current windows on the world are digital. The DG Cabin opens for us such a digital window with a slightly Russian reference to the occidental mutations between real, surreal, and digital, caught in the specific mythological reality of the fairy tale.

On the other hand, Baba Yaga's concerns about art theories and different realities bring her close to contemporary curators, who since the end of the millennium have questioned the very existence of reality. Has reality disappeared? Its constructions, reconstructions, limits, layers, and horizons concern curators from every country. The current generation of frequent flyers seems to have discovered that reality is not to be found in airports. Compared to Thomas Krens, the director of the Guggenheim Museum, Baba Yaga has one big advantage--the hut. It could serve her as an airport as well. (It is well known that flying was her favorite means of transportation.) Thus she can be considered as a founding mother of a revolutionary invention: the airport as work of art, or in a larger sense, the airport as museum.

To take the most important features of the hut, the DG Cabin not only questions the rules of the game in contemporary digital folklore but points out the current paradoxes of different realities. The deluge of images is an actual fourth dimension. Nowadays, when we look through the window, we might wonder if it is a real tree outside or a picture on a screen. The issue today is to define the place of the spectator under these new conditions. The DG Cabin makes a proposal and follows one of the best traditions of western art: the spectator is definitely in the picture. And the picture is a battlefield.

* "Dreams and Conflicts. The Dictatorship of the Viewer" is the title of the current Biennale de Venise.

** To find also by Alberti

*** St. Petersburg is the birthplace of Olga Kisseleva, the DG Cabin initiator.