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Notes on Drawn Architecture

Lino Sinibaldi

"Rustchuk, on the lower Danube where I was born, was a wonderful city for a child, and when I say it is located in Bulgaria I give an inadequate image of it, because Rustchuk was the image of a people of extremely diverse origins... in only one day you could hear seven or eight different languages. Besides the Bulgarians, there were the Turks, the Greeks, the Albanians, the Armenians, the Gypsies. From the opposite side of the river came the Romanians..." (Elias Canetti, *La lingua salvata*).

A summation of representations accomplished, of their continuous and constant rearrangements, of their impulsive and amorphous transformations: this seems to be the image of the city today. The insistent proliferation of appearances precludes all avenues of action, it superimposes itself on the pertinent intersubjectivities, transforming them into structured wholes, modular but uncertain, functional to the reproduction of already codified images. The signs of the city are representations and reproductions of schemes; they are images that stand out because of the idea of a norm which they simultaneously expose, as if it were a reconciliation of structures bleakly uniting all things. An ephemeral but crucial digression from codes, depriving the image of the contemporary city of any practical depth, was the experience of the inadvertent representatives of what has been defined as *Architettura disegnata* (Drawn architecture). This movement attempted to draw attention to the outline of a feasible reform of the real, perhaps imposing an emphatic reiteration of itself, yet justified by a deeply felt need to give figurative depth to its drawings. It poetically

converted rules, offering formal interpretations of literary, rationalist and avantgarde references, and making space for contaminated inscriptions, which constantly shifted and modified the emerging equilibriums between nature and artifice, between the city and architecture, between citation and invention.

The exhibition titled *Post-War Italian Architectural Drawings* of the Francesco Moschini Collection A.A.M. 'Architettura Arte Moderna', which took place not long ago in the Scuderie medicee of Poggio a Caiano, within spaces recently restructured by Franco Purini, seems to offer a significant opportunity to reflect on this moment in our contemporary history of architecture. For the first time, in fact, the first signs of a discipline that was to develop at the end of the 70s and throughout the 80s are here brought together. It is difficult to give a single interpretation of the exhibition. Indeed, a sense of suspension remains in the memory: a feeling of 'affectionate non-familiarity' that governs the collection's mechanism and outlines the image of something with its own autonomous nature, made of 'idols and ideas', as if inevitable fatalities had intervened and casually brought together the works of this exhibition/narrative. A pragmatic approach might make the exhibition's choices appear to be disorderly for the eyes of the visitor, somewhat skewed by their philological individuality and lacking a proper installation. We, however, would like to consider the happy coincidence of a missed setting of the space. Had this setting happened, it would have had to sift through the untranslatable, and the plethora of relations would have had to be

filtered through premeditated spaces; it would have had to consider and give formal structure to the 'frenetic turns' and the varied questions, in other words, it would have had to translate into an installation the very same peculiarities of the mind that gathered these drawings together. In this case, it has probably been more important to avoid making use of the great compromise that architecture imposes on ideas, because this exhibition shows us, more than anything else, how to distance ourselves from architecture, and its most important suggestion might be that it makes us still imagine our desires, without ever having to touch them. This indeed seems to be the kind of exercise required when visiting the exhibition. It is an account of the different determinations to 'bring together' and to comprehend, in a kind of dodecaphonic vision, a unique testimony of a moment in the most recent history of Italian architecture. The drawings and the authors have independently participated in a unified representation. Everything, however, has happened within a kind of inverted 'know thyself', which has traced the distances and empathies created by heterogeneous relations, and which has made visible, more than anything else, the history and complex dynamics of a *modus operandi* that proceeds according to the desires of someone who owns a private collection, giving it more than one logic over time. A double reading thus becomes necessary: a literary consideration and a scientific evaluation. The works shown entrust to the viewer an interpretive key, which allows for the vision of a private writing, simultaneously performed in a plurality of registers, with their meanings all

disconnected, because for each drawing one has to consider both its references and its achieved results: "in these dialogues it was our intention to put antitheses in opposition/and have them strike at each other more than once/and thus illuminate doubts this way" (Weiss 1997). If in the 70s architectural pluralism and the emergence of many realities in crisis represented an articulation of interests, a liberating displacement of inequalities, which distinguished itself through a widespread exercise towards a correct and important dissemination in different fields, they have also, however, rapidly and asymptotically moved us closer to that borderline, marked by what today is a hyper-referenced architectural nihilism, which has allowed very few people to reach a result where they could stand out, both on the formal and the theoretical plane. The evolutions of architecture's intelligentsia and its doctrinal precepts, began to control the education of those who, interested in the discipline, had to measure themselves against 'elegiac but indefinite' visions, against exclusivist considerations, entrusted to examples which take doubt into account, and teach it. An inversion of meanings has come to be required from this contradiction, such that meanings themselves have been transformed into ambiguous communicative tools. The result has been the destabilization of a series of dispositions, which has complicated a more easy understanding. In many cases we should anticipate, for the aleatory considerations of contemporary art criticism, a 'bad will in good faith'. In other words, the results seem to be made of valid but not always ethical interpretations, which

participate of the hopes, but also of the sadness, of a circle that closes in on itself. The outcomes can be verified by considerations of "refined and failed qualities", the very same ones synthesized by Manfredo Tafuri, with a reference to Carlo Ginzburg, in the figure of the dog biting at its tail. Subsequently, what has positively remained of the will to build is the encouragement to reconsider "discussing about the relativity of meanings, and to recompose what has been shattered" (Tafuri 1988); the encouragement to evaluate the emergence of a creative complexity with regards to probable and reciprocally comparable trajectories, not only in relation to the schemata of apparent formal solutions, but also on the basis of a personal and subjective quest. These have been, in brief, the theoretical premises of what, in the 80s, came to be defined as Drawn Architecture: an almost autonomous discipline, a chimerical structure persuaded of, and almost entirely obedient to, a kind of nietzschean mannerism and disenchantment, which characterized its recourse to a poetic exile from any act of building. This alternate reality allowed for the existence of mental spaces, where artificial forms and substances were better specified and individuated than the natural ones, because they were characterized by extremely subjective aspects, which have contributed, with an uncommon endowment of new figures, to keep a fugitive architecture alive, an architecture of literary cities, cities flattered by the drawing, seduced by one and only rule: "to dream knowing that one is dreaming". Consequently, the qualities of the qualities of the drawn space were not exclusively determined by

existing objects, cities, or geographies. Held against reality, these theorized cities and forms seem to be destined to fall back onto projects that can be understood only in relation to those self-referential evocations, which Aldo Rossi with extreme precision defined as "scientific autobiographies." Exemplary moments of these have been the intellectual urban planning experiences of *Roma interrotta* (Rome interrupted) (1978), and the last moment of the laboratory of Cerreto Sannita (1988). The task of describing, of figuring and narrating, the city, and of representing an architectural whole with its new rules, led a whole generation of architects to express themselves through visionary means, accomplished both through literary and historical sensitivities, and through the exploration of artificial morphologic properties, which returned new ideas of architecture and of the city. In the exhibition everything is unified by a contaminated rule, which, through the order of a cataloguing logic, has brought together architects become artists, valorizing all learned implications. Fortunately the movement has now let go of the masks and costumes which 'dressed' a great part of its architectural research, revealing itself for what it has come to represent: an institution, the yet to be exhausted result of a never happened, though deeply desired, confrontation between the architects and the city space. In the theory of Drawn Architecture the problem of the relation between subject and object requires to let go of an epistemic relation predicated on an immediate analytical understanding, to let go of an exact vision of images, which instead become provisional. To inhabit and 'to think the city'

becomes to plan for a world made of many different and non-axiomatic languages. It is not by chance that the tension towards utopia and the treatise, both inscribed in the very concept of Drawn Architecture, has offered a valid thinking ground for contemporary architectural articulations, with regards both to altering theoretical cores, and to legitimizing some of the structuralist assumptions of contemporary criticism, and always finding in Francesco Moschini and his gallery an important reference point. Today, twenty years after the first and not casual exhibition on the drawings and writings of Edoardo Persico, these relationships represent an institution to be studied, a starting point for studies that could go beyond the obvious and common sense architectural logics, for the purpose of conquering new questions. Collections and exhibitions such as these highlight the potential of becoming closely involved with the drawings' intimate openings (a potential that goes beyond the self-evident appropriateness of a comparative study, producing new personal mythologies, and validating new representational values), and invite the viewer to grasp the reflection of images capable of setting into motion a 'machine of vanities', such as the one of drawing, or the one of a private collection. The A.A.M. Moschini collection could easily translate into the reading of a manual, instrumentally helping us understand many of the results of contemporary architecture, which cannot be reduced to a simple commentary on the architectural event or of its secularized formal interpretation, but create a reversibility that can be returned to forms of critical exercise that deepen the

relations between subject-*poesis*-planner and object-city-plan. Today both the subject and the object of architecture no longer speak the same isolated language to which they had happily confined themselves at the end of the 70s. Quite the opposite, their most significant accomplishments juxtapose a second isolation, the more creative the more it has become cognizant, or actively aware and in wait, al-most as if putting things in brackets, of the necessities mastered by the long and disciplined practice of drawing. Manfredo Tafuri's critical comment about "turning one's back to the city", which was anticipated by Ludovico Quaroni in his participation to the building of the Tiburtino district in Rome (1951), seems to be the first romantic legacy of this contemporary tradition, which has allowed the city to interpret itself, to insert itself in a play of transformations that will become new subjects of study, moving away happily and heedlessly from a strict professional stance, and invading different domains. The epistemic paradigms of the building certainties of the 50s and 60s will be reconsidered, although it is important to remember the exceptional experiences of Mario Ridolfi and Maurizio Sacripanti, whose technical certainties of building already participated of intellectual corrosions, conceded by the expansion of the ideations of a highly sophisticated instinct. The drawings in the Moschini collection emphasize the compatibility of more than one 'story', and show the kinds of involvements undertaken by people who took up the task of 'creating new cities'. Thanks to the availability of its offered readings, this collection has the merit of revealing how each drawing measures its own high

degree of scientific quality, obtained through a commitment to transversally assemble, in personal and critical interventions, a series of consoling projections. These drawings then become 'reactive objects', of which we consider the forms and changes that interact with that complex system of relations we call city, where all subjective representations inevitably present ambiguous visions. The formalizations of the gesture, as pure event, but most of all the revolution of language began on the drawing sheets, offered an important support for a series of important theoretical inputs against the fragmentation of cities sensed by Argan, Benevolo and Gregotti. At the end of the 70s the studies by Aldo Rossi, whose most intimate drawings can be admired in the exhibit, on the city, understood as a "great artifact, a research of paradigms which would verify meanings" (Rossi 1969), and Carlo Aymonino's visions of "cities that lend themselves to evaluation only if reinterpreted in a project" (Aymonino 1975) constitute points of theoretical support for a mode of planning where typology, morphology and mental representations faced each other, and sketched the beginnings of a new vision that contests the given and compulsory connections to specific modes of recuperating places. They also gained a new dignity of thought through a subjectively elective recuperation of the meanings of the urban space. The parallel drawings produced by Aymonino and Rossi for the Gallarate residential complex in Milan (1967-72), are a clear and extraordinarily descriptive index of this new mental attitude. It is in these drawings, also present in

the exhibit, that the two architects' initial attempt to reform begins to unravel. Here one can see the beginnings of a deepened principle of individual ricomposition of the project of architecture. These drawings can be read at the first real and representative examples of Drawn Architecture. It is also because of the quality of these first experiences that Drawn Architecture has become a kind of specialized discipline: for the knowledges of those few who know the truth, the architectural drawing has become an artistic event emerging from a direct experience and moving towards new explored interpretations, which no longer correspond to the given model of living and of dwelling, but move the object in a game of passionate and transformative relations. The most important contribution of the period of Drawn Architecture has been, in fact, that of the rediscovery in architecture of the 'category of wonder.' It has avoided labels and conventions, prompting schemes no longer inhibited by an exclusively pragmatic vision. It was an opposition, wanted and imposed by the times and by a negligent grasp of formal and figurative superstructures, which have found asylum in a metaphorical and documented notion of the urban spaces. Given their importance, it would be proper to make a complete list of all the drawings exhibited, however it is worth recalling the extraordinary analyses of Costantino Dardi's drawings. There are the artistic incursions of Dario Passi's *Immagini della città* (Images of the city), true evocations of the urban subject; Franco Purini individualistic plates; the extraordinary

reduplications of signs in Franz Prati's plates, true story-plotting of different cities; or the literary urban intimacies present in Arduino Cantafora's plates; "the different destinies drawn for every space" (Criconia, Mondaini 1994) by Michele Beccu and Filippo Raimondo, and Efisio Pitzalis's tense urban asymmetries, which belong to a different historical moment. The same possibilities are present and expressed in the exhibition, by the plates of the GRAU group (Alessandro Anselmi, Anna Di Noto, Pierluigi Erolì, Roberto Mariotti, Massimo Martini, Francesco Montuori, Giuseppe Milani, Franco Pierluisi), and in the drawings of the Studio Labirinto (Paola D'Ercole, Paolo Martelletti, Giuseppe Marianelli, Pia Pascalino, Antonio Pernici). The widening of the aesthetic domain in the plates of Drawn Architecture, which has allowed architects to not reduce the experience of drawing to the important but limiting technicalstylistic aspect, has made architecture "divest itself of its own completeness" (the phrase is by Vattimo, and, behind him, Heidegger). Thus historicity, technology and stylistic identity seep into the sheets of paper in order to found an individualistic and poetic subject of study. Each and every idea, each and every plate exposed, deprived of the practical act of building, concrete and legitimate end of architecture, has found refuge in a narcissistic relation with the drawing. In this, however, these works have avoided intellectual vagrancy and have carried through and interpreted a work of 'constant and crossed looks', which, not by chance, also represent the defining aspect of the Moschini collection. In conclusion, these

considerations and this mode of understanding facts and ideas appear to be the necessary premises, almost instructions for use, for envisioning the exhibition, for the individuation of doubts. The collection as whole then represents an extraordinary celebration of this visual rhetoric, and it requires a difficult effort towards understanding. However, the end result is that of finding oneself in front of individuals who have been able to consider the importance of intentions in and of themselves. One can then begin to understand and to look the diversity of faces and of signs borrowed from different semantic fields, which are again affectionately drawn to each other. Similarly to what happens with the magnitudes of an oxymoron, for each drawing, one can simultaneously and visually discern all of the mind's figurations underlying the stratification of signs, where the idea constantly returns. Paradoxically, this demonstrates that the magnitudes of pure and abstract observations coincide with the true and effective meanings of a concrete gesture. In this sense, the collection emphasizes what is irreconcilable in the thought and history of architecture and of the city, both understood as 'decorative and monumental' disciplines. Furthermore, for the recent realities of this field of study, the collection offers new forms of awareness, those very same forms of those who took on the responsibility of showing a glimpse of other possible worlds. Francesco Moschini's collection compels to recognize the importance of a practical theory, which does not simply constitute a storehouse of values, but is also a compilation of

utopias, of failures and of betrayals, the end point of many different poetics of restlessness. A collection such as this is more than a simple collection of drawings. More than anything it is a compilation of attentions, not a horizon of immutable and constant architectural value, but rather the diary of a personal history, which, in its transformations and in its constant attempt recreate its own ends and enthusiasms each time anew, gives meaning to the collection as a whole. This latter may casually have become history, finding it-self to be a perpetual metaphor of an architectural vision still searching for its own credits in the world and in the illusion of the senses typical of the language of poetry. Someone has questioned the ethics of this private collection. Here, specifically, given that the it still remains open to the latest, and still realizable, ideas of architectural drawing, and given that it incessantly remains on the threshold of an identification of its personal history with the history of Italy's last thirty years of architectural history, the collection Moschini gives credit to those who question the meaning of the word private and thus not shared. One cannot substitute ethical reasons for the idiosyncrasies of personal moralities. It probably becomes unethical, beside all pretence to truth, to interrupt a method, a scientifically intuitive self-analysis. The work of criticism, which has been promptly carried out and is evident in the collection, offers transmission of the memories and possibilities possessed by a subject in order to transcend himself. To claim an understanding of intellectual egotisms, to appropriate to ourselves a private method of keeping things together,

would likely be a useless exercise. More valid analyses would be those that pay attention to the presences in a collection. The morality of a private collection consists in the constant need to overcome within itself the limits of a single person. In other words, the author seeks with his own collection, through its oeuvre, that which is, and that which will be, he disputes the highest achievements and the inevitable debilitations; in this sense it is as if he no longer took part in the miserly corruptions. To subtract anything from this composite and private identity would somehow produce its collapse, similarly to what happens to professor Kien in *Autodafé*. The acceptance of a peculiar social identity, never burdened by its own conditions and never steeping to the compromises of its social role as gallery owner, leads to a form of survival where the means coincide with the ends. This implies that the collection, by means of collecting and considering the end results of each and every meditation, differentiated between consciousness and decisions, becomes comprehensive oeuvre and object, in the sense that it keeps for itself and in contradiction of itself. This is what happens in the drawings and the cities of the Moschini collection: each of its parts exposes, always and in all ways, its own heavy human servitude, it exposes the possibility of putting its hopes in the collection itself. It is, however, at the exact same moment when this double negation begins, when the drawings go beyond themselves while remaining themselves, suspended between human legacies and hopes of eternity, that each of these works is returned to the

greatness of its own temporal determination, projected and inverted within a mechanism that let's one in the circle of the reinterpreted image and of simulation, thus opening onto a process of inexhaustible reflections. In his autobiography, Elias Canetti tells of the city where he was born, Rutshuk in Bulgaria, where he spent his first six years. As if to legitimize is multiple identity, he writes: "I'm destined to be a being made of many people".

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