

The Acts of Drawing: ‘*procedere*’ and ‘*cedere-pro*’

Riccardo Florio

Procedere

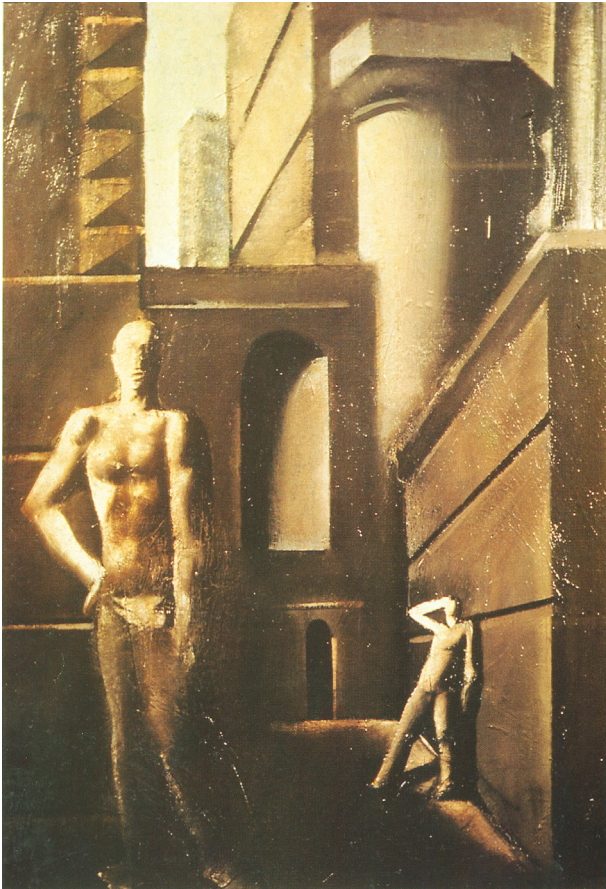
Wanting to start with the meaning of the Italian verb ‘*pro-cedere*’ (to proceed) in the sense of going forth, of projecting, but above all of moving forward, I would like to turn to the figure of the Greek architect and sculptor Callimachus, the master par excellence of ‘*leptótēs*’ (‘grace,’ ‘subtlety,’ ‘refinement,’ ‘delicacy’), whom Marcus Vitruvius Pollio (80-15 B.C. ca.), in reference to the myth of the origin of the Corinthian order, indicates as the artist whom the Athenians, for the refinement and delicacy of his art of working in marble, called ‘*chatatēxítechnos*’ (who ruins art by exhausting it; perfectionist) [Vitruvio, IV.10, p. 373], a term composed of ‘*katatēkō*’ (‘consume,’ ‘destroy,’ ‘melt,’ ‘exhaust’) and ‘*téchnē*’ (‘art’), expressing the perfectionist tension of

the artist, which leads to the exhaustion of art [Vitruvio, IV.10, p. 429]; Drawing, like the tension of Callimachus’ art, establishes a processuality, according to a syntagmatic and ordinal ritual, that exhausts the architectural design by proceeding toward one of its many possible solutions.

This indissoluble relationship between drawing and design is sanctioned at the moment when the figure of the architect-builder (fig. 1) undergoes a scission, a laceration, which, already expressed in the last phase of the Middle Ages, in the fifteenth century was realized in the acceptance of the practice of drawing as an activity exclusive to the architect. Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), in the *Prologue of De Re Aedificatoria (On the Art*

This article was written upon invitation to frame the topic, not submitted to anonymous review, published under the editorial director’s responsibility.

Fig. 1. Mario Sironi, *I Costruttori* [The Builders], 1929.



of *Building*), promotes the intellectual qualities of the design activity by recognizing it as the decisive moment of man's cultural experience and history, while further on (figs. 2, 3) in *Book One*, devoted to *Drawing*, he states, "Architecture as a whole is composed of design and construction" [Alberti 1452, I]. He contrasts "the carpenter, *fabrum tignarium*, and the master mason, *maitre maçon*, with the definition of the architect as he *qui certa admirabilique ratione et via, tum mente animoque diffinire, tum et opere absolvere didicerit*" [1] (fig. 4).

It is here that the concept of architectural drawing that we still adopt today in referring to the activity of the architect originates: "an architect is he who knows best how to draw." He exercises his "ultimate manual dexterity" through drawing, the "writing of the soul that forms the matter of dwelling" [Amendolagine, Cacciari 1975, pp. 25, 26] and entrusts the execution of his work to other figures who will determine one of the possible executions. In the same way as music, in fact, architecture becomes allographic expression in that the architect writes a text or a score that will have to be read and performed, with differentiated times and modes, in order to be manifest [Goodman 1991]. It thus occurs that: "the content of the design intentions still constructively unexpressed gives the drawing an objective existence and the course of construction inverts the mimetic processes: the construction represents the drawing" [Ambrosi 1995, p. 90]. If unity between thought and action is an unavoidable prerequisite for being able to conceive the proper weighing of order and truth, to eventually arrive at *veritas* as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, the principle of harmony celebrated by Thomas Aquinas [2], then, in the indispensable need to act toward the attainment of order, architecture becomes "constructive clarity brought to its exact expression" [Blaser 1977, p. 15]. And Mies van der Rohe himself teaches us, through the words of St. Augustine, that if "*beauty* [is to be understood] *as the splendor of truth*" [Augustinus 1979, p. 634], "*nature always speaks the truth* and architectural forms speak *the truth of a certain epoch*" [Monestiroli 2002, p. 61].

What truth can be sought in the semantic process between signs of construction and signs of representation, which indeed sees the representation penetrating the architectural work and flowing into all the meanders left vacant between execution and construction? We could point to two different methods that echo the

Fig. 2. Mario Sironi, *L'architetto, autoritratto* [The Architect, Self-portrait], 1922-1924.



Fig. 3. Mario Sironi, *L'architetto* [The Architect], 1922.



differentiated times and modes of the dual relationship of representation/execution and representation/construction: the execution of the work of architecture, to be understood as the only construction possible, and the construction of the architecture as one of the possible executions. In the first case, drawing becomes the instrument of a control that makes use of integrations between numerical calculations, simulations of phenomena and graphic representations, with the aim of making execution and construction coincide, so that nothing is left to chance. In the second, “the built building is, at every moment of its existence, the changing and always authentic expression of an original idea that becomes reality in its interpretation and in life. [...] The conceptual drawing continues to constitute image in the course of construction, and this permanence [...] makes one accept and indeed makes precious that portion of expressiveness that finds realization in the diversity due to manuality, which, romantically, John Ruskin felt as the first source of life for the building” [Ambrosi 1995, p. 91]. In both cases, the distance that is, in any case, measured between drawing, design and construction (in the Latin meaning of ‘*intra*,’ ‘within,’ ‘internally’), and in which the historical nemesis of the prefigurative journey is deposited and stratified, comes to be bridged precisely by the development of the phases of elaboration, according to the times of reflection, ideational fabulation, storytelling, history, but also of the control of form, the calibration of functions, the correspondence of dimensions and the exactness of executive anticipation. A scan of the reading and learning times continually filtered through the weaves of the drawing and the enduring oscillation that is produced on these between the reality of the datum or its physical presence and the reality of its representation that, in some way, simulates and echoes the actual times of construction.

Architecture is conceived and experienced on the very boundary that separates and integrates it into the city and the built environment, stretched out like a sort of immense suspension that inevitably precipitates on the lives of men and things, making tactile and recognizable the will for transformation that they exert through their constructive work. “Any new human installation is, in a certain sense, a reconstruction of the world. In order for it to last and be real, the new house or the new city must be projected, through the ritual of construction,

into the ‘Center of the Universe.’ [...] Just as the city is an *imago mundi*, the house is a microcosm. The threshold separates the two spaces, the hearth is likened to the center of the world” [Eliade 1957, p. 382]. Its representation involves a lucid and meticulous introspection with the aim of gradually projecting oneself inside it and tenaciously trying to unveil its secrets. A profound exploratory operation that is continually being enriched with renewed certainties: the stages of representation have the extraordinary merit of revealing qualities and making them settle during the process of acquiring cognitive elements.

This process of sedimentation, not without critical choices and interpretive analyses, provides the measure of the quality of the investigation itself. Drawing is thus presented as a very ample decoding program in the ultimate need for a critical recomposition that can reveal and make understood aspects that are not immediately evident.

Drawing, therefore, an intelligent tool for unlocking the secret or the secrets that determined the final configuration of the work of architecture, whether built or in the making, that reaffirmed and confirmed the author’s poetics, that together decreed the value of the work. We have, with our eye that does not see things but images of things that mean other things, a “gaze [that] scans the streets as if they were written pages,” extended our attention to understand “however the city [architecture] may really be, beneath this thick coating of signs, whatever it may contain or conceal” [Calvino 1977, pp. 21, 22].

Architecture also becomes “infinite work that plays, however, with simple and natural, humble and poor energies [...] with very simple and almost naive effects, as if they had always been there: this is the absolute quality of an architecture as necessary as ‘cutting out the blue of the sky’” [Brusatin 1993, pp. 142, 143] [3].

The possibility of investigation offered by the incessant mutability of the phenomena of contextual reality drives us toward a very fertile interaction in which the different experiences of our human development surprisingly merge in the ultimate act of recognizability.

And it is precisely the attempt conducted through drawing, through the analytical and critical possibility that can be established with it, that allows us to trace the direction of a research aimed at the understanding of things and architectures, in the awareness that already in the phase of control a precise ideational effect is carried out

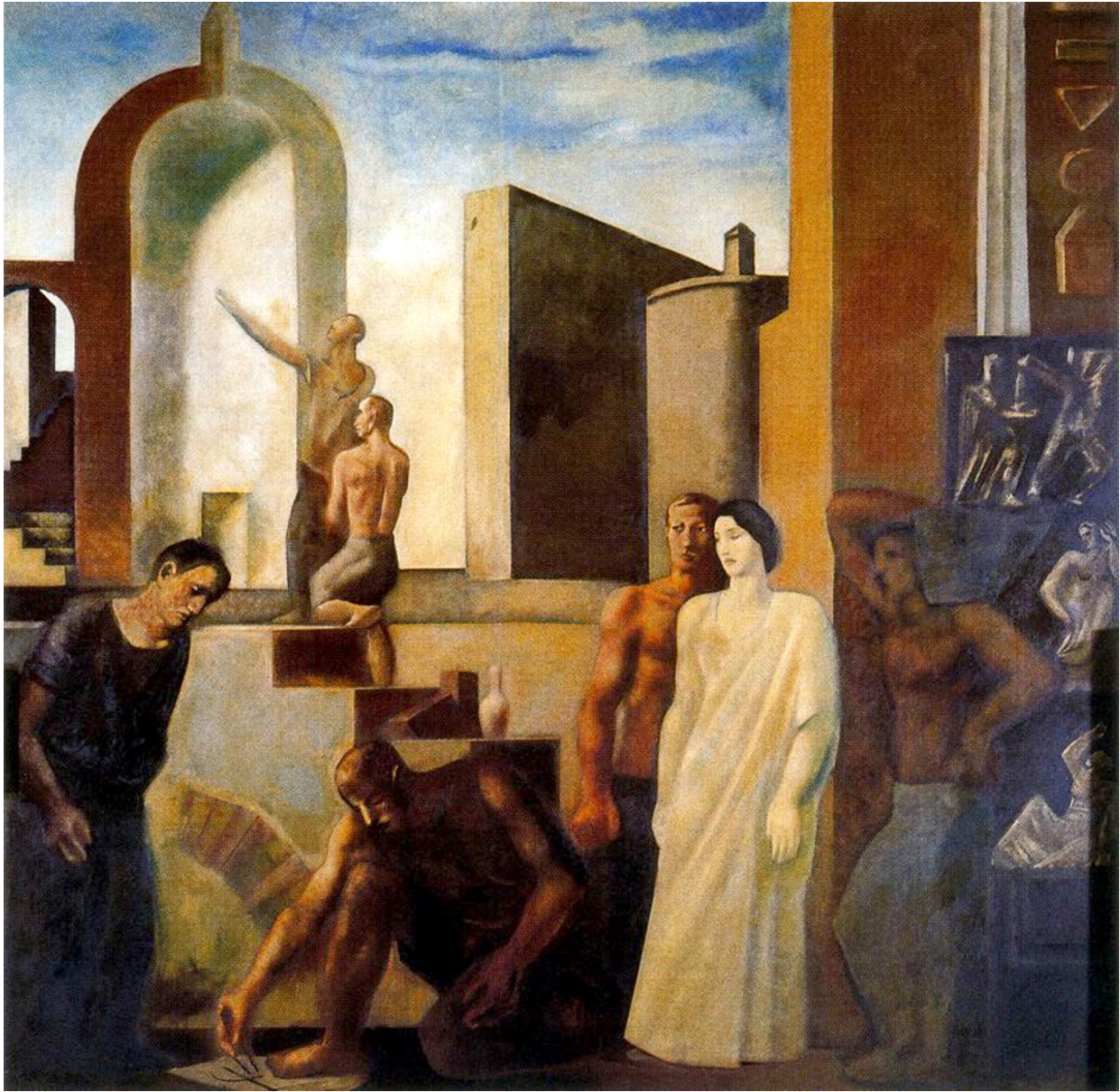


Fig. 4. Mario Sironi, *L'architettura. Il lavoro in città* [Architecture. The Work in the City], 1931-1932.

and a type of design process is triggered. "What results is this marvelous consequence, that the most powerful 'creations,' the most august monuments of thought, have been obtained by the conscious employment of voluntary means of *resistance* to our immediate and continuous 'creation' of subjects, relations, impulses that substitute one another without any other condition" [Valéry 1957, Tome I, p. 1470]. Resistance exercised through "canons and proportions, rules of harmony, laws of composition" [Valéry 1957, Tome I, p. 1470]. In the creative act, in fact, all components of human activity come into play at the same time: the irrational, unpredictable, uncontrolled ones, the logical ones that have to do with the preservation of relations, to the concatenation of transformations, and also the coordinating will, which tends to anticipate the properties of the system being designed [see: Venezia 1978, p. 107].

Is it still possible today, even with clear reference to the formal characterization of contemporary architecture, to speak differentially and distinctly of the terms 'drawing' and 'design'? Is it not, now more than ever, the time for these two phases of one and the same elaborative process to show themselves in an absolutely indistinguishable manner, especially when referring to the prefiguration of an architecture that does not yet exist?

If it is true, as it is, that drawing derives its value and quality from its intrinsic potential as a moment of synthesis and, therefore, of communication and explication of the ideational elaboration, it is also true that this role of 'intermediary' originates from the strength of its belonging to the whole process of the construction of architecture in prefigurative terms. "A project is for the architect what the character of a novel is for its author: it constantly gets beyond him. It is necessary not to lose it. The drawing keeps up the chase. But the project is a character with many authors, and it only becomes intelligent when it is dealt with like that, otherwise it becomes obsessive and impertinent. Drawing is the desire for intelligence" [Siza Vieira 1995, p. 51].

This indissoluble link between idea and transcription, between intuition and the will to block the creative act, in which signic vocabularies and imaginative projections, mathematical verifications and economic evaluations appear to be equally involved, shows itself even more firmly within contemporary architecture. The formal and figurative research that permeates the architectural choices of our times, thanks also to the possibility of

using IT tools that astoundingly accelerate the restitution of mental processes, proposing results that for their speed of execution and completeness of meanings can compete only with the sketch, seems to have found precisely in the osmosis of the interchangeability between idea and its immediate verification, between imagination and sudden representation, one of the keys to its best expression.

Therefore, it is still possible to ask ourselves whether infographic elaboration, accompanied more and more often by the sequels of photo-realistic and pseudo-substitutive simulations of the reality placed "under observation," is itself a determining component for design indications. Are we aware of the value of architecture unencumbered by predetermining illusions? Or, on the contrary, is the technique of representation of our times, thanks to the enormous aid of all these tools, of such scope that it necessarily exceeds the exclusive limits of mere drawing, subservient to design, and does it contain, in its becoming graphic space ever closer to the real condition, yet never reaching it, some of the gestational processes of the design concept?

If we were to try to answer these questions by examining and considering the work of some contemporary architects we would have to answer, without a doubt, that architectural thought does not appear to be absolutely conditioned by its becoming representational elaboration, in any of its elaborative moments of high infographic density. We might otherwise say that the architect's work, on closer inspection, would appear to be far from any form of subjugation, if not those unavoidable of drawings that pertain directly to the sphere of the architect's ultimate manual dexterity. Nonetheless, one cannot consider that the architectural genesis of the project design is not based in a deep exploratory path totally internal to the sign elaboration, as evidenced, above all, by the numerous autograph drawings and sketches that increasingly reveal the singular condition of poetical belonging.

This is a condition that leads the principle of ideation back to the possibility of a physical control of the returned traces of one's thoughts, in a balance of pondered alchemy in which signs and physical simulacra skillfully anticipate forms, dimensions and charm.

The relationship that has been emerging between so-called 'traditional' drawing and 'digital' drawing is entirely embedded in this distinction: refined systems of

simulation of the world that deal with two different conceptions and modes of anticipating future time or restoring the present-past. If on the one hand, the former traces surfaces restoring value to freehand drawing through a capacity to contain visual and metrical restitution perimeters, the latter responds through a temporal compression that proposes every thing as inexorably inscribed in a future or feasible dimension. "Virtual reality presents itself not as what can happen but as what just happened, like an accelerated present" [Purini 2000, p. 108]. The fact remains unquestionable that any digital representation cannot contain within itself or, in any case, express the meaning of germination of the initial idea of a long elaborative process, which instead is completely internal and condensable in the sudden sketch "embryo full of potentialities to be explored. [...] Iconic projections that trigger the compositional process and constitute the same number of genetic codes of a formative process that digital drawing can foster and even enrich, but that it cannot completely resolve in itself" [Purini 2000, p. 108]. It would be necessary today, at a time that seems to celebrate smart culture and aesthetics, to go back to celebrating the enduring intelligence linked to the pondered exercise of reason and cultural reflection, and in the field of drawing or more generally, of representation addressing architecture and the city, which today are progressively losing their physicality while taking on a deliberately virtual dimension, this consideration seems more relevant than ever. If architecture has, due to the nature of its own long, complex work, made up of many clashes and changes, of various contributions, of a multiplicity of dialoguing subjects, the need to extend, over the entire design process, the action of image construction, we must recognize that Aristotle's assertion that art is the faculty of creating truth through reflection "is interpretable for us precisely in the sense that imagination and reflection in their continuous exchange can still build new pieces of reality, modifying and enriching the world of our experiences" [Gregotti 1992, p. 99].

The corpus of Drawing is expressed, therefore, through a succession of representations that, carefully accompanying the prefigurative journey, support and enliven it, arriving at the definition of a method capable of intellectualizing objective and operational data and that, in compliance with precise laws within which to operate, serves as a stimulus for the elaboration of new

and different configurations. Drawings that require an adequate adherence to operational tools and their modernization, and that produce a series of infographic representations that must make 'traditional' drawing become topical and contemporary without betraying the qualities of the work: unnatural visions, infinite distances, unusual, inhuman eyes that, projected onto hypothetical ideal planes, see the true dimensions, the exact angular ratios and the specificities of each of the elements contributing to the configuration of a final image that re-proposes, rigorously and methodically, without any concession to graphic sensationalism, the formal characteristics and the dimensions of the work.

In addition, the possibility of using IT tools that also speed up the restitution of qualitative and quantitative data sampling and recognition processes densifies the increasingly tenacious link between data management and restitution modes.

If the term 'integrated' derives from the meaning of "to make whole or entire, complete and conforming" [4] then we cannot refrain from expressing the need for representative registers to confirm the vast new potentialities of the procedures put in place by algorithmic computation and increasingly define new and surprising ways of re-presenting observed realities, determining a cognitive surplus value that proposes ulterior forms of representation that complete and complement the 'traditional' ones.

Cedere-pro

A further thought might be suggested at this point in our considerations: the Italian verb '*procedere*' could be read backwards, in reverse, though not rigidly inverted, in the locution '*cedere-pro*,' which takes on a meaning of great significance when referred to Drawing.

'*Cedere*' (to cede, to yield) means 'to surrender,' 'to withdraw,' 'to retreat,' but also 'to concede' and, I would add, 'to foster a loss in favor,' 'for the benefit' of something else.

Since the operation of representation is an expression of the office of substitution, it must be emphasized that there is no possibility of substitution without preliminary experience of a given object and without the preserved memory of its internal image. The substitutionary action presupposes an imitative reciprocity from

which the ultimate significance of the transfigurative *iter* is clarified; the semantic relationship established between 'figures' and 'referents' is a reductive one, in that it necessarily involves a decrease in the level of initial information. "There is a *déficit* (deficiency) of imitation in each mode of imitation," Antoine Quatremère de Quincy rightly said, adding that "the necessary condition for every sort of imitation is that it should be lacking in one aspect of reality" [Quatremère de Quincy 1840, p. 5]. A lack that decrees the level and degree of investigative capacity in the need to initiate a selective and, therefore, elaborative action that produces re-cognition and pondered exaltation of the components that characterize and possess quality.

Whoever draws, at the moment of the delineation of a form immediately realizes how many it excludes, and how more and more numerous are the forms that will not come to light in the process of his work. "The practical and visible reflection of this process can be seen in the so-called *pentimenti* (repentances, second thoughts)" [Pierantoni 1999, p. 128]. '*Pentimento*,' that in its ethical meaning implies the realization of the will to extract a 'good form' from chaos, in the indecision between different forms.

This condition contains the deep and necessary sense of loss, that is, of the decrease in the level of initial information, which finally produces, starting from the overall representational matrix, a codified sign precipitation, which becomes distinctive feature of heuristic sedimentation and ability of de-signation.

This distance between reality and representation becomes necessary, to the point that if we try to deplete it through a representational burden so excessive that the portrayal shows "no 'open patches' where our imagination can penetrate the image [...] then the portrayal itself becomes the object of our desire [...] the portrayal no longer holds a promise. It refers only to itself" [Zumthor 2003, p. 11].

It appears, therefore, inevitable to insist and intervene on the concept of distance that defines and measures the quality of the representational act in the complex modes of re-presenting reality.

Drawings celebrate 'distance' in a gestural and ideational process that the final design elaborations and even built architecture often conceal and, at times, forget.

Drawing is the field in which distance and proximity, absence and presence are intertwined, in a continuous

oscillation between disappearances and appearances, implying what will no longer be there when we later look at the final, finished drawing [see: Elkins 2008, p. 132] in which the thoughts, the uncertainties, the changes of course, the return after an "infinite journey" are condensed [see: Magris 2013, p. XXI] becoming a truly Ulyssian challenge, in the progress of a journey-writing for which each sign becomes a proof, a testamentary bequest, toward the hoped-for or hopeless solution.

"The act of drawing [...] produces, in the manner of a superficial transparency, ghosts at the limits of reality" [Guillerme 1982, p. 13] and the drawings, offering hospitality to the invisible company that is at our side, establish a suspension in time and space, in which presence and absence complement one other to decree the boundaries of a recreated place in which the fragmentation of time manifests itself in its solidity. A skillfully calculated set of architectural figures that stand in depth and around which, little by little, other figures emerge and resurface as citations of memory, to recompose a final form that becomes new and identity.

Drawing "is the point where blindness, touch and resemblance become visible, the place of the most delicate negotiation between hand, eye and mind" [Elkins 2008, pp. 132, 133], and while it is true that the sketch constitutes only a fragment, while formidable, for understanding the spirit of the work, but insufficient to be able to fully describe it or to communicate its design characteristics, it is also true that the sketch embodies the cryptic trace that contains the whole prefigurative idea and that, in its signic condition, faithfully transfers the poetics of its author, and expresses "all that in the work belongs to the work of meditation [...]. The sketch is the thought of the genius" [de Gérando 1799-1800, pp. 396, 397].

In autograph drawing, one can find expressed those components that Alain called the wild part and the geometric part of the one who draws, of the one who, in the act of making a mark on a surface, of drawing, executes a line and a stroke together: "But in a drawing one can grasp very well the agreement between the wild part and the geometric part; since a beautiful stroke, that is to say, free, decided all at once, inspired, is found to translate the projection of the object without any error and according to a perfect geometry. [...] there is no art in which the two opposites are so distant and independent as in drawing; as on the one hand there is

a purely intellectual aspect that measures distances and ratios; while on the other there is the free gesture that translates the aptitude that circumscribes the form on paper [...]. That is why drawing may be the most moving of all the arts" [Alain 1939, p. 154].

Drawing becomes evocative and a prelude to a layering of thoughts that flow back into the grooves etched on paper, yes, the paper, and what emerges in suspension is the fruit of a slow distillation, "[...] the mark traced on paper leads and is led at the same time, at times sewing the line to the mind and at times the mind into the line in a suturing action that grows tighter and tighter as the drawing progresses. Drawing is thus not the visible shadow of a mental event; it is a thinking process, not the projection of a thought" [Ingold 2013, p. 215].

What, then, is the role of the sketch, drawing, freehand drawing or free drawing, still without superstructures, that makes us see reality, that establishes that internal resonance between emotional state and the magic of reality, but also makes us see the extraordinary prevision of what we are imagining for that same reality?

What is the strength of its signic expression and transcriptive depth? And what is the strength of its free perception?

It is necessary for drawing, in the elaboration of the image, to leave out what is to be abandoned and to reveal all that is to be shown, in a figurative suspension that will lead to understanding and subsequent appropriation precisely in the internal tension that is established between what redraws the new perimeters in the graphic space and what remains excluded from it.

In the transition between Drawing as a mirror revealing reality and reality itself, a new dimension originates, a

recreated space in which even the space of architecture takes on a form returned through the multiplication of the occasional depths, modulated and transferred by the fixed presences of the architecture and the wandering presences of the observers. A different and always deferrable anthropophany that still needs a place, be it differentiable, multiplied and repositive, to appear and declare its presence and its shared memory.

The particular condition of the architect who "sees by drawing" places him at the same time in a state of complete freedom, a freedom that is nourished by the set of lines, which take on the peremptory force of individuating and circumscribing, of separating and selecting, of bringing out and reconstituting, of connecting the infinite layers of memory and of the interpretive measures, of uniting. Drawing thus becomes, through line, "the logical foundation of spatial continuity, the primary basis of its intelligence and description" [Purini 2000, p. 102].

We could, at this point, certainly say, in a kind of circular path that takes us back to the Act of *Procedere*, that "A line, an area of tone, is not really important because it records what you have seen, but because of what it will lead you on to see. [...] Each confirmation or denial brings you closer to the object, until finally you are, as it were, inside it: the contours you have drawn no longer marking the edge of what you have seen, but the edge of what you have become. [...] Another way of putting it would be to say that each mark you make on the paper is a stepping stone from which you proceed to the next, until you have crossed your subject as though it were a river, have put it behind you" [Berger 2008, pp. 11, 12].

Notes

[1] And again: "As for drawing, its whole object and method consist in finding an exact and satisfactory way of fitting together and connecting lines and angles, by means of which the appearance of the building is entirely defined!": Alberti 1452, Book One, Chapter I, p. 18. See also: Borsi 1996, p. 224.

[2] Tommaso d'Aquino. (1258 ca.). *De Veritate I*, 2. See: Mondin, B. (2002). *La metafisica di S. Tommaso d'Aquino e i suoi interpreti*. Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano.

[3] The phrase quoted by Brusatin "is mentioned 'verbally' several times by architect Carlo Scarpa in his lectures dealing with the 'restoration' work taking place in the Antonio Canova Gypsotheca Museum in Possagno (Treviso)": Brusatin 1993, p. 154, note 9.

[4] See Integrare. In *Dizionario etimologico Online*. <<https://www.etimo.it/?term=integrare&find=Cerca>> (accessed 17 October 2023)

Author

Riccardo Florio, Department of Architecture, Università di Napoli Federico II, riccardo.florio@unina.it

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