

Sol LeWitt. The Conceptuality of Drawing

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Two significant faxes can be found in the archive of the 'Pietro Vannucci' Academy of Fine Arts in Perugia: they are worthy of note both because they are signed by two well-known personalities (Sol LeWitt and Bruno Corà) and because they markedly represent a genuine manifesto which is theoretically capable of healing the fracture that traditionally separates architecture and art history in matters of drawing intended as a form of thought. In the first fax, dated March 22, 1995, LeWitt (at the time residing for long periods in Spoleto) tells his friend Bruno Corà (then professor of Art History in the Academy) about the delivery of the *maquette* of a work created specifically for Perugia [1]: an 'open cube' (the solid form most loved by LeWitt [2]) which, as an element of the exhibition project *City and Art*, aimed at injecting viral works into extra moenia urban areas of symbolic interest, was to be exhibited in the portico of the large public building built in those same years by Aldo Rossi and located on the western side of the Piazza Nuova in Fontivegge [3]. But LeWitt does not simply indulge in small talk and exploits the opportunity to manifest the difficulties inherent in the constructive translation of an apparently elementary work, recommending to Corà that he should not recruit students (as happened during the completion of the *Wall Drawing 396* along the entrance corridor of the former convent of San Francesco al Prato) but that he should commission expert 'masons' to carry out the work. The second fax [4], dated March 23, 1995, contains Corà's prompt response: after thanking and reassuring LeWitt on the professionalism of the workers who would be hired by the Academy for the construction phase, he in turn urges LeWitt to reply, asking

him to clarify some dimensions ("highness, thickness etc."), but in part also indicating a hypotheses in the form of an interrogation about the 5 x 5 x 5 metres for the work and 50 x 25 x 25 centimetres for its module. A legitimate concern, but unfortunately useless because, in spite of the concreteness which distinguishes the exchange of faxes, the work remains incomplete and the *maquette*, which has been elevated to the role of a 'work', has become part of the artistic heritage of the Accademia Museum [5]. Beyond the obvious complicity between the client and the artist emerging from the cordial tone of the two faxes, the exchange between Chester and Perugia, although apparently laconic, is actually extraordinarily dense, as it opens up a broad theoretical discourse, raises three issues that implicitly assert the conceptual value of drawing. The first question is the 'centrality of drawing', both in its formulation and construction as a work (irrespective of its artistic or architectural nature). On the other hand, for LeWitt, the role of an artist (as is the role of an architect) is not and never was to materially realise the work, but it has always been and still is to formulate the project through its drawing, controlling both its construction and its meaning via the drawing. Because in art (and in architecture) everything happens through the drawing. As mentioned in 1967 on the pages of the magazine *Artforum*, where LeWitt signs an epochal essay, entitled *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* [LeWitt 1967], which substantially changes the attitude of artists and the general public towards drawing, elevating it from a minor to a primary means of expression, imbuing it with an importance equal to that traditionally attributed to painting and sculpture.

Articolo a invito a commento dell'immagine di Sol LeWitt e Bruno Corà, non sottoposto a revisione anonima, pubblicato con responsabilità della direzione.

The second question is 'how drawing communicates'. Both axes are the subject of elucidation in the appendix concerning the axonometric representation of the empty cube, which defines the shape of the work, and the concrete block, which constitutes its constructive form. Which, by manifesting the inability of any literary description to adequately establish information useful for its construction, claims the role of drawing as a privileged form of communication. Above all in the processes of remote control [Belardi 1996; Belardi 1997; Belardi 2011]: an ancient practice, which has its roots in the humanist rebirth (just think of the correspondence between Leon Battista Alberti and Matteo de' Pasti or, subsequently, between Galeazzo Alessi and Angelo Doggio), but which, from that moment on, marks the entire history of architecture, to arrive at our present day, initially with the letters drafted by Giò Ponti and Tomaso Buzzi and later with the axes designed by Frank Gehry and Álvaro Siza. The third question is the 'randomness of drawing'. Not surprisingly, as noted astutely by Bernice Rose, the surprises inherent in dra-

wing, especially if geometric, fascinate LeWitt, because "drawings look different when done by different draftsmen. Those in which the instructions allow no individual decision as to placement look different because of different touch. Those in which the draftsman is left to decide on the placement of the lines within the system will look completely different each time there is a change of draftsman or location. The fact that this will happen is something that LeWitt finds interesting—and he finds these pieces more interesting than they would be if he drew them and redrew them, even with variations. It is one way of admitting chance into the work." [6] But that is not all. Because, on closer inspection, the three questions raised by the axes written by LeWitt and Corà (but basically also the three qualities of the enunciated design i.e. centrality, communication, randomness) are not exhaustive, but are parts of a greater quality, in some ways all-encompassing: the 'conceptuality of drawing'. Indeed, for LeWitt (as for Franco Purini [Purini 1990]), the drawing is not simply the idea, but it actually 'is' the work itself [7]. Everything that comes after the drawing is 'boredom'.

Notes

[1] Sol LeWitt, *Progetto per scultura*, March 22, 1995 (Perugia, Accademia di Belle Arti "Pietro Vannucci", inv. E 534 a).

[2] "The most interesting characteristic of the cube is that it is relatively uninteresting. Compared to any other three-dimensional form, the cube lacks any aggressive force, implies no motion, and is least emotive. Therefore it is the best form to use as a basic unit for any more elaborate function, the grammatical device from which the work may proceed. Because it is standard and universally recognized, no intention is required of the viewer: it is immediately understood that the cube represents the cube, a geometric figure that is uncontestedly itself. The use of the cube obviates the necessity of inventing another form and reserves its use for invention." LeWitt, S. (1994). *Il cubo*. In Zevi 1994, p. 70. Reprinted from *Art in America* (New York), Summer 1966.

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[3] Ponti, A.C. Sol LeWitt in Umbria: tracce di un percorso. In Corà, Panzera 1998, p. 36.

[4] Corà, B. *Risposta a Sol LeWitt*, March 23, 1995 (Perugia, Accademia di Belle Arti "Pietro Vannucci", inv. E 534 b).

[5] LeWitt, S. *Scultura a forma di cubo*. Maquette, 1995 (Perugia, Accademia di Belle Arti "Pietro Vannucci", inv. 15).

[6] Rose, B. Sol LeWitt e il disegno. In Zevi 1994, p. 299.

[7] Panzera, M. Sol LeWitt in Italy. In Corà, Panzera 1998, p. 19.

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