

Reviews

Alfonso Giacotti

Nuovi Mondi. Il potere assoluto dell'immaginazione

Lettera Ventidue

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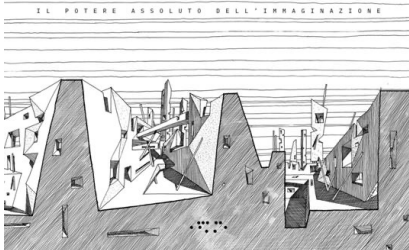
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ALFONSO GIANCOTTI

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IL POTERE ASSOLUTO DELL'IMMAGINAZIONE



The volume of Alfonso Giacotti's drawings, set in a horizontal format, is a precious editorial work, in terms of paper quality, binding and concept, especially because it appears to be specifically designed on the features of the drawings themselves. The elegant black and white contrast between text and the pages echoes the graphic quality of the sketches. The table of contents itself is conceived after a panoramic drawing with proportions of 1:5 between height and width that fills the reader's field of vision thanks to the side flaps, as also happens in other parts of the book.

The seven sections into which Giacotti's drawings are divided – *Territories*, *Soundscapes*, *Islands*, *Constellations*, *Homage to Sartre*, *(Un) finished*, *Alterations* – have titles borrowed from geography, music and literature that testify to the interdisciplinary and intrinsically poetic nature of his work. In this sense, the task assigned to the framing texts is also significant. Often quotes and aphorisms, they expand and orient the semantic exploration of the works, eventually attributing a central role to the observations of Maurizio Sacripanti, an undisputed Roman master of architecture and drawing.

From a content point of view, the drawings stage geometric-architectural configurations between the urban and

the geological. Their notable formal homogeneity is achieved through a carefully selected alphabet of morphemes, purged, for example, of curved elements, of rigorously Cartesian systems and, more generally, of those figures that could inevitably refer to specific architectural typologies. Instead, they are abstract artificial landscapes, familiar yet alien and as such disturbing, which on the one hand repel and on the other intrigue, like the ruins of a remote civilization.

Even from a formal point of view, the drawings appear very homogeneous, probably thanks to their constant and rigorous elaboration over the years (the works contained here range from 2008 to 2024) as well as the auto-graphed texts contained here. The drawings, constructed with continuous black lines in ink or marker with a constant thickness, can ideally be traced back to an overlapping of various layers of graphic information. The first layer is made up of the contours of the shapes, oscillating between monolithic masses and plates of variable thickness variously folded in space. Their external surfaces are often articulated in triangles and trapeziums by edges that connect them to the numerous quadrangular openings, like meshes of digital models. At the same time, these shapes are

crossed by thin tubular elements that support some volumes as pillars or struts would do but that much more often penetrate them from one side to the other, like pins in a maquette waiting for new pieces to be added.

The second level is instead composed of the field treatments of the surfaces that are made (from light to dark): with dots; parallel lines, often according to the contour lines or the straight lines of maximum slope of the surfaces; crossed lines; and, when the complexity of the case requires it, with black fillings. It is important to underline that most of these treatments contribute coherently to the rendering of light effects according to what we know as the Theory of Shadows, also respecting the convention according to which the shades are lighter than shadows. Despite their intuitive application –after all, they are freehand sketches often made in spare time on pocket sketchbooks– these treatments contribute in a fundamental way to the reading of the complex three-dimensional structures, highlighting even the slightest variations in the position of the surfaces.

The third level is formed by the sky, occasionally rendered with dots but more often with continuous horizontal lines at variable distances which, ideally passing behind the forms, accentuate their three-dimensional value, while, from an iconographic point of view, they seem to rework the graphics of eighteenth-century engravers.

The fourth level is that of the reflections on the bodies of water, made with dotted lines, which ideally divide the observer from the structures or, as in the case of the Islands, which completely surround them. While the surface of the water is represented by horizontal lines that thicken approaching the horizon line, the image of the landscape

is constructed not as the geometric reflection of the three-dimensional structure but as the optical reflection of its image, thus amplifying its ideal and iconographic value.

To these four ideal levels, a fifth is occasionally added, a digital layer composed of inserts of colored textures that never fill the entire drawing but that limit themselves to testing the possibility of some fragments to also express material and tactile values, the possibility of becoming built architecture. The seven sections into which the works are divided do not only describe the different origins of the drawings, such as those dedicated to Sartre's thought or inspired by listening to pieces of music, moreover through the intermediation of small summary diagrams. Despite their formal homogeneity, differences emerge between the groups of drawings, especially when one reflects on the relationship and distance between the observer and the structures.

A first group includes distant landscapes, mirages often mediated by water and reflections; a second group includes landscapes that appear closer, such as sets or ephemeral machines momentarily placed on a stage; a third group is instead formed by glimpses that show only partial views of the structures, the result of specific perspective explorations that sometimes penetrate inside the buildings, like the *Non-finiti* or the *Constellations* that, framed in their regular squares, seem to be waiting for a narration capable of chaining them in a sequence. It goes without saying that these distances and observation methods correspond to the different moments of the design action, characterized by the continuous transition from analysis to synthesis, from the particular to the general, to then identify a new point of view and start the exploration/transcription again.

A further element of formal investigation, transversal to some groups, is constituted by the vertical plane of the perspective frame that occasionally manifests itself by cutting the structures. These perspectival sections (or sectional perspectives), which unconsciously respond to the curiosity of those who explore their imagination through drawing, simultaneously exhibit constructed spaces and thicknesses, sometimes filled with parallel lines oriented at 45°, as in the case of the drawing on the cover. While inserting an epistemological distance from the observer, they reveal not only the actual proportions between the parts involved –the only case among the many drawings presented– but also the complex relationship between solid and void and between visible and hidden. It is much more difficult to probe the size of these structures, except in the case of seven pictures (out of a total of 233) in which fleeting human figures suggest a possible, approximative scale of reduction; needless to say, this incommensurability appears to be a precise intention of the Author.

A separate discussion is constituted by the digital images that form the Epilogo, where the results of two competition projects for the Château de Chambord in France and Villa Adriana near Tivoli converge. Here the Giacotti has experimented with both different languages, with great attention to the tactile value of the surfaces, and polycentric perspective views, as in the long underground section under the castle, in which the polymorphic rooms, here crowded by countless human figures, show autonomous perspective views. In conclusion, Giacotti's work inspires several considerations. It bears witness to the importance for the architects to cultivate and protect a mental place

where they can take refuge from time to time, a secret garden where they can find a familiar lexicon of gestures and forms useful for processing the solicitations of the external world and translating them into architectural propositions through the mediation of drawing. In this sense, the book constitutes a sort of call to arms of the imagination as an attitude for the architects who, in their role as a figure that is culturally sensitive to the environment and society, are capable of proposing forms that guide

their development in a mutually compatible and sustainable way. Indirectly, it also bears witness to the growing marginality of this figure in contemporary society. This is perhaps not a novelty, given that the phenomenon of “paper architecture” has its origins in the treatises of the second half of the fifteenth century, but that is not the point. The drawings contained in the volume are apparently useless: except for a small part, they are not even finalized to a project; moreover, they required a lot

of time and a years-long elaboration. And yet, this is precisely what ‘making architecture’ is. Making architecture is something that short-sighted political-economic thinking increasingly deems useless and impractical, because it transcends the mere functionality and stability of a structure in the attempt to embody the spirit of an era and a community and, above all, because it requires attempts and time, a time that today seems increasingly difficult to find.

Autore

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