Emmanuele Lo Giudice

Design and contexts

Disegni e contesti

#Sketch
Topographies of ghost towns: drawings by Emmanuele Lo Giudice

Looking at Emmanuele Lo Giudice’s drawings, I can think of two books, the first of which is entitled “Topologia di una città fantasma” (Guanda, Milan 1983) by Alain Robbe-Grillet (1922-2008). An investigation, between the topographic and the detective story, in which an archaeologist (whose identity we continuously doubt, during the reading) tries to decipher the overlapping (and contradictory) layers of a lost city, mixing observations on the life (including sexual life) that took place there in various eras, and tracing the profile of a crime, which we suspect he committed himself. The other text is “Geometry in the Dust” (Inside the Castle 2019; original title: “Géométrie dans la poussière”, 2004) by Pierre Senges (1968), with illustrations by Patrice Kilolfier. Another French author (in the tradition of Robbe-Grillet himself, but also of George Perec), which I evoke here in the beautiful English translation by Jacob Siefring. The plot is impossible to summarize, but it has to do with a géometra that tries to outline (without succeeding) the map of a city for a mysterious sultan. The very layout of the volume (laid out in two columns per page, something rare in contemporary novels) and the syncopated use of dense and creative punctuation, makes reading a topographical experience in itself. I evoke these two texts because they seem to me to be possible literary shores for reading Emanuele’s drawings, as if they were guides for unravelling the tangle of intersecting lines and fragments of architectures graphically cited, through collage or line drawing, that characterize them. This last aspect, together with the various graphic elements present in his images, the visual recurrences and symbols used by the author, all of which can be traced back to an urban or constructive dimension, let the observer understand, even if less aware, that he is undeniably faced with the work of an architect. Architectural is the choice of methods of representation used - mainly orthogonal and central projections (especially linear perspective) - but so is the graphic texture that refers to the language of the all-Italian tradition of architecture designed, especially in its happiest season, the one between the seventies and eighties. Architectural is also the idea of space suggested by Lo Giudice’s drawings, so sufficient on the aesthetics of the fragment and the structure that maintains order in chaos. In general, the composition moves from a foreground band, in which the structures most referable to a constructivist or post-modern imaginary thicken, which seem to refer both to the obsessive and minimal Purinian plot of crossed and/or oblique rivulets, but also to the hesituous atmosphere of certain drawings by Raimund Abraham. The intermediate band of the image is instead the place where Lo Giudice solves the conflict between the deflated forms a few centimetres below: here the structures become more aerial and sharp, melting upwards, in the air space. The latter is, like every area of the image, polysemic, hosting images from Mongolia detached from the geometric ground, naturalistic graphisms but also material experiments that insert a third real dimension, and no longer just allusive, in the drawing. In recent years, Emmanuele has been engaged in his project for a gaseous architecture, in which relationships prevail over form, the network radiates its spatial plots even more than tectonics: these images, although from different periods of the life of their author, seem to prefigure this vision: the one in which the fragment finds its place, in the embrace of history and imagination.
Guardando i disegni di Emmanuele Lo Giudice mi vengono in mente due libri, il primo dei quali si intitola “Topologia di una città fantasima” (Guanda, Milano 1983) di Alain Robbe-Grillet (1922–2008). Un’inchiesta, tra il topografico e la detective story, in cui un archeologo (della cui identità continuamente dubitiamo, durante la lettura) tenta di decifrare gli strati sovrapposti (e contraddittori) di una città perduta, mescolando osservazioni sulla vita (anche sessuale) che vi si svolgeva nelle varie epoche, e tracciando il profilo di un crimine, che sospettiamo sia lui stesso ad aver commesso. L’altro testo è invece “Geometry in the Dust” (Inside the Castle 2019; titolo originale: “Géométrie dans la poussière”, 2004) di Pierre Senges (1968), con le illustrazioni di Patrice Killoffer. Ancora un autore francese quindi (nella tradizione dello stesso Robbe-Grillet, ma anche di George Perec), che qui evoco nella bella traduzione in inglese di Jacob Siefring. La trama è impossibile da riassumere, ma c’entra anche qui un geometra che tenta di delineare (senza riuscirci) la mappa di una città per un sultano misterioso. Lo stesso layout del volume (impaginato su due colonne per pagina, cosa rara nei romanzi contemporanei) e l’uso sincopato di una punteggiatura densa e creativa, rende la lettura un’esperienza topografica di per sé. Evoco questi due testi perché mi sembrano costituire possibili sponde letterarie per leggere i disegni di Emanuele, quasi fossero delle guide per districarsi fra il groviglio di linee intersecantesi e di frammenti di architetture citate graficamente, tramite collage o il disegno al tratto, che li caratterizzano. Quest’ultimo aspetto, unito ai vari grafismi presenti nelle sue immagini, alle ricorrenze visive e ai simboli utilizzati dall’autore, tutti riconducibili ad una dimensione urbana o costruttiva, lasciano intendere all’osservatore, anche meno accorto, che si è di fronte innegabilmente all’opera di un architetto. Architettonica è la scelta dei metodi di rappresentazione utilizzati - prevalentemente proiezioni ortogonali e centrali (segnatamente prospettiva lineare) -; ma lo è anche la texture grafica che rimanda al linguaggio della tradizione tutta italica dell’architettura disegnata, soprattutto nella sua stagione più felice, quella a cavallo tra gli anni Settanta e Ottanta. Architettonica è anche l’idea di spazio suggerita dai disegni di Lo Giudice, così bastata sull’estetica del frammento e della struttura che mantiene un ordine nel caos. In genere, la composizione si muove da una fascia in primo piano, nella quale si addensano le strutture più riconducibili ad un immaginario costruttivistico o post-moderno: sembrano rimandare sia all’ossessiva e minimale trama puriniana di rigatini incrociati e/o obliqui, ma anche all’atmosfera neghittosa di certi disegni di Raimund Abraham. La fascia intermedia dell’immagine è invece il luogo dove Lo Giudice risolve il conflitto tra le forme deflagrato qualche centimetro più in basso: qui le strutture si fanno più aeree e acuminate, si sciolgono verso l’alto, nello spazio aereo. Quest’ultimo è, come ogni area dell’immagine, polisemico, ospitando immagini mongiane staccate dal suolo geometrico, grafismi naturalistici ma anche sperimentazioni materiche che inseriscono una terza dimensione reale, e non più solo allusiva, nel disegno. In questi ultimi anni, Emmanuele si sta impegnando nel suo progetto per una architettura gassosa, in cui le relazioni prevalgono sulla forma, la rete irradia le sue trame spaziali ancor più della tettonica: queste immagini, anche se provenienti da differenti epoche della vita del loro autore, sembrano proprio prefigurare questa visione: quella in cui il frammento ritrova la sua collocazione, nell’abbraccio della storia e dell’immaginazione.
Il disegno essenziale

testo di / text by Diego Repetto

The essential design In Lo Giudice’s drawings I re-read the contradictory duality described by Robert Venturi in “Complexity and contradictions in architecture”: openness and closure, simplicity and complexity, unity and dispersion, evidence and implicit content, wholeness and fragmentariness, exclusivity and inclusiveness, order and chaos, clarity and darkness, measure and immoderation. Visual paradoxes, generated by a “simultaneous perception of multiple levels”, that condition the observer, thus making the experience more incisive. Torri Rosse, Una piccola finestra azzurra and Racconto Veneziano, a new historical map of Venice, define complex landscapes that reveal a relational structure between signs and meanings, nature and artifice, narration and conception. In the operation that Lo Giudice carries out through the designed architecture, I find the creation of an interpretative tool of the dynamic evolution of the anthropic landscapes, in which the complexities and contradictions are represented by the stratification of signs and meanings and by the interpretation of values. His work therefore highlights the “commitment to strive for difficult unity” that we also find in Venturi, inspiring new operational strategies. As Franco Purini reminded us in a lectio magistralis held at the Scuola Politecnica in Genova, entitled “Un’idea del disegno”, drawing is an essential element for conceiving an architecture, because, unlike international codes relating to other arts, for example music, in which there is no obvious relationship between sound and the signs of the staff, the design of a house has an immediate relationship with what it is showing. For this reason, we can therefore say that drawing is the most effective means of representing oscillations, corrections and errors of thought in real time. Drawing is internal thought that becomes external, an ideative laboratory.

Note


(2) Ibidem.

(3) Lectio magistralis di Franco Purini tenuta il 10 maggio 2016 nell’ambito della Giornata di Studi Di-Segnare Ambiente Paesaggio Città, presso l’Aula San Salvatore, Scuola Politecnica di Genova, Dipartimento DAD.
Verso un corpo gassoso.

Tre stanze: Torre rossa, Racconto Veneziano, Una finestra azzurra
testo di/text by Emmanuele Lo Giudice

Towards a gaseous body. Three rooms: Torre rossa, Racconto Veneziano, Una finestra azzurra

The idea of the city and of architecture, as we have always thought of them - in their spatial conception of a determined, planned and programmed place - no longer seems to respond to the social structures towards which society is evolving today. Postmodernism’s responses to urban problems formulated by modernity have not been exhausted either in the various theoretical models or in the concrete realizations that they have inspired, always developing new formulas and proposals. The urban and social condition, both industrial and post-industrial, has remained critical. Even though the various proposals contain interesting theoretical alternatives, in fact the productions that have been developed in architecture since the end of the war, today can be traced back to a slow and widespread restructuring of the modern city, which we could read as the project for a continuous updating operation of a “modern” Renovatio Urbis. In this sense, as Edward Docx points out in his article in La Repubblica of 3 September 2011, we could read postmodernism as “the late blossoming of the oldest seed of modernity”, already present in the 1920s and 1930s, in the works of the Dadaists and other currents. Since the end of the 1990s, and in particular in the last decade, various scholars, such as Carlo Bordoni, Edward Docx, Umberto Eco, Maurizio Ferraris, Yves Michaud, and many others, have introduced new arguments that show us the weaknesses of postmodernism, proposing theses that abandon postmodernism. One may or may not agree with these positions, but in any case they highlight the acknowledgement of the failure of postmodern promises, demonstrating, if not the end, at least the crisis of postmodernism, highlighting its evolution and transformation towards a new condition yet to be defined. What seems certain today is that at the end of modernity, the post-modern crisis has also accompanied. If we choose to use Zygmunt Bauman’s happy metaphor that links modernity, and what precedes it, to a solid condition, and postmodernism to a liquid condition of a liquefied world, always in search of a new condition of stasis, we could say that the crisis-evolution of postmodernism marks a further passage of state, from the liquid to the gaseous one. The prevailing trend today is that of the dematerialization of every possible link, between individuals, between places or the territory, exalting its volatility and the continuous transformation of relationships. From creators of object-forms, we are increasingly passing to producers of experiences, the result of a continuous process in progress that is not established in the territory, but that crosses it without wanting to leave a trace. Our
“solid” certainties, which were the foundation of reality as we have always known it, have thus been replaced by devices and procedures. The material, which has now become gaseous, no longer needs moulds in which to pour it, as at the time of the liquid state, but being now gaseous, insinuates itself into any structure of thought, invading every possible fracture and interstice. Every condition that can be traced back to a stable form is fiction, it is a sad constriction ready to explode like a balloon full of gas. The urban and social matter that composes this reality of ours has been fragmented and broken down into particles and atoms of programmatic density placed in a network between them. Being on the net, however, does not mean talking or communicating, but rather being inserted into a chain of stimuli and reactions of attraction and repulsion that structure a continuous dialectical process. Their relationship with space and time is no longer solid and sedentary, but always, temporary, a mirror of a disintegration of the very principle of identity, in a universe of transient molecular singularities. It is the relationship between its molecules that constructs a gaseous material body, in which in each molecule we find the dialectic formula of the urban fragment. What we live today is essentially the triumph of the fragment no longer as a “part of”, but as an element of multiplication. A triumph of our complex society, which dissolves and implodes formulas and rules within one or more elements that, as fragments themselves, become a document of a “parcelled memory”. The fragment thus becomes the entity of a list of other fragments, which coexist within a multiple, polyphonic, granular system where the connections constantly vary. If the compact city of the past built spaces that wanted to live forever, the contemporary city instead builds molecular relationships of objects that would like to disappear, that would like to be perpetually ephemeral, and in this sense “gaseous”. Objects that are no longer solid, but that break down into parts, granules, molecules. It is the space between these fragments that is architecture and the city. The void is thus becoming a complex space, no longer a simple distance between objects, but a real place of interaction between political power and urban territory, between government and everyday practices. It is contemporary space. An energetic space of forces, attraction and repulsion. A space/body that is no longer linked to an object form, but to a set of forces, a body that has now taken on the material of a gaseous body. In this sense we can say that the contemporary city is a gaseous body, which has no form, which changes continuously, and its particles, its molecules are the scattered fragments of a changing reality that finds its relic in the fragment. As in Richard Rogers’ sustainable city, “gaseous” cities are ecological cities that foster human contacts, urban structures capable of beauty, in which art, architecture and landscape stimulate and satisfy the spirit. This context transports the city towards an “intelligible infinity”, which makes a graphic formula of its complete representation impossible, reducing any attempt to a simple description of some of its phenomena and not of the city as such. The architect’s operation of drawing architecture here becomes the writing of a poetic interpretation that can be divided into rooms. In poetry, the room is a part of a large composition, it is a fragment and a molecule, the granular space of a poem. The collection of drawings Torre rossa, Racconto veneziano, Una finestra azzurra, are just some of the “rooms” of a great poem for the city, which tells and preserves the representation of the program of a free critical thought for contemporary architecture. From this point of view, all the various drawings in the Red Tower room speak to us of a dialectic and polyphonic cohabitation between the energetic space of the gaseous urban body and its “molecules”, each of which stands in time and space as a powerful affirmation of itself, like De Chirico’s La Torre Rossa: a configuration that dominates the surrounding space, a landscape and the promise of a changing dramatic action. The “room” A small blue window, instead, tells the theme of the disintegration of form...
Questo contesto trasporta la città verso un “infinito intelligibile”, che rende impossibile una formula grafica di una sua completa rappresentazione, riducendo qualsiasi tentativo a una semplice descrizione di alcuni suoi fenomeni e non della città in quanto tale. L’operazione del disegno di architettura da parte dell’architetto diviene in questo caso la scrittura di una interpretazione di carattere poetico che può essere divisa in stanze. In poesia la stanza è una parte di una grande composizione, è frammento e molecola, lo spazio granulare di un poema. La raccolta dei disegni Torre rossa, Racconto veneziano, Una finestra azzurra, sono solo alcune delle “stanze” di un grande poema per la città, che racconta e custodisce la rappresentazione del programma di un libero pensiero critico per l’architettura contemporanea. Sotto quest’ottica tutti i vari disegni della stanza Torre Rossa, ci parlano di una coabitazione dialettica e polifonica tra lo spazio energetico del gassoso corpo urbano e le sue “molecole”, ognuna delle quali si pone nel tempo e nello spazio come potente affermazione di se stessa, al pari de La Torre Rossa, di De Chirico: una configurazione che domina lo spazio circostante, paesaggio e promessa di una mutevole azione drammatica. La “stanza” Una piccola finestra azzurra, racconta invece il tema della disgregazione della forma attraverso un materico fumo bianco e la dispersione di vari segni e frammenti. È tra questi segni che inaspettatamente sulla destra della composizione si incontra un piccolo frammento di una fotografia. Una finestra azzurra che con la sua presenza ci vuole ricordare che sono i piccoli elementi che costituiscono i fundamentals (3), dell’architettura di domani. La “stanza” Racconto Veneziano, nuova mappa storica di Venezia, è un disegno complesso diviso in due parti. Nella parte inferiore si vedono rappresentate varie architetture non realizzate per la città di Venezia, mentre nella parte superiore troviamo il disegno della geografia delle isole, a cui si sovrappone il tessuto storico della città rappresentato usando solo alcuni frammenti, riproposti più volte e raffigurati in scale differenti, insieme a singole architetture non realizzate. In questo disegno il mondo reale, e quello della percezione e della memoria “galleggiano”, senza alcuna corrispondenza, mostrando la possibile costruzione di “molteplici Venezia” dalle memorie infinite.

Nota