

Extract 2 – ‘Thinking the Minor of the Project’ from *Progetto Minore. Alla ricerca della minorità nel progetto architettonico ed urbanistico* (Siracusa: Letteraventidue, 2020).

If it is true that architecture and urban planning are ‘techniques that think’ (Assennato 2019:60). and therefore eminently political because they transform the space in which we live, we are faced with the need to question the territories common to them and to the discipline of philosophy and build a new epistemology of the project. Theory, therefore, for me remains necessary both to inhabit the challenges that the present poses to life, humanity and the planet, and to resist the easy de-qualification of critique as an ineffective and outdated *passé* practice, plastered in its hyperbolic and linguistic use. To think affirmatively about the role and necessity of criticism for urban and architectural design is to think about it historically in its failures and approximations, but also to re-evaluate it in the systematic questioning of issues that have been obscured, debates that have been ignored and to develop alternative trajectories of its tradition: from outside and from the south.

This implies thinking of the project as extended practices, as a wide field, always oscillating in the perpetual tension between intimacy and the spatial ethnographic detail located in the practices and struggles of those ‘nested’ spaces of acted lives, but also those qualitative topologies of scale, of territories made of flows, surfaces that make visible extractions and expulsions trapped in what Mignolo (2011) calls the colonial matrix. But also an oscillation between space, life and future and its aesthetics, visions and poetics in a changing, vulnerable and plural way; a territory that is not abstract, neutral and universal, but situated, partisan, often collective and collectivising.

Thinking and reflecting on the minor project means investigating a relationship, a continuous relationship with the negative, a productive relationship that allows life to be instituted, as Esposito says, while not referring to an eschatology of the project, but remaining in the precariousness ‘without deactivating it in a salvific phase, nor dissolving it in the name of a creativity so accelerated as to destroy what has just been created’ (Esposito, 2020:31). What I would like to suggest, then, is a gesture, a mode of the project not as new-always-new, nor as reuse, functionalisation or incrementality, a becoming manifest nor even a deaf anarchic purpose. Thus resisting both hegemonic alternatives and the ontologies of nomadic abundance of flux and diversity – despite the Deleuzian legacy, the challenge is to reflect on project and space that releases all its performative power not to save or recreate life again, but to change it from within by producing new horizons of meaning and new tools for critique.

Thinking minority in architectural and urban design means not thinking of it in the sole dimension of an event – professional, technical and aesthetic – nor as simply inserted in a scene in which it happens, but in that surplus of senses (an ambivalent term) in that link in that movement which, at the very moment in which it expresses itself, rearticulates the parts, redefines the relations and redraws the contours of the totality, relations and conflicts creating new ones. Dismantling the project is to think of it at the same time as that which restrains action, which defines it, hinges it, defines its limits and contours of meaning, allowing a rethinking on it and a continuous renegotiation of its form.

Adopting a minor project has highlighted the need to undertake a serious and necessary action of the decolonisation of urban planning design and the different ways of doing things, not evading into other disciplines but remaining inoperative and in-situ.

The minor project is not a design process on the margins, subtle, absent, simplified and flattened in its aesthetic coordinates and social ideologies of process, sustainability, or solutionism, or a renewed globalism. It is incapable of resisting the arrogance and will to power of the imperatives that constitute an ontology of action, an arrogance of gesture and an exaltation of the ego in making and thinking about urban and architectural design.

Progetto Minore means putting the project, its criticism and its status back at the centre, inverting its meaning by interrupting the tensions that the urban and architectural debate has built up: between the loss of confidence and its praise, between the violent embrace of technique and the creativity of poetics, between the arrogance of functions and uses and the sacredness of the uncultivated, between the loss of the city's boundaries and the ultra-confinement of bodies and landscapes.

Recentring the project with its decentralisation may perhaps restore it to an idea of design capable of coming to terms with its own crisis and with the multiple crises urban planning and architecture insist on – a refocusing on the making of the project, not autonomous and industrious but heterotonous and inoperative.

Paraphrasing what Ronchi (2017) says about philosophy, the major language of modern architectural and urban planning, that of the canon, of the pure autonomous discipline has been intimately shaped by ‘history of slavery, colonialism and racial inequalities’ (Cheng et al., 2020:4). The language of modernity defines as minor, irrelevant, peripheral any other thought to such an extent that ‘the racialisation process has formed the true essence of what modern means’ (ibid) operating with a universal ordering principle, a major language.

Therefore, the minor, is a crack, a ‘disagreement’ within a ‘constellation of thought’ that represents ‘an escape route through which [thought] has made itself momentarily a minority, contesting in a punctum its own major premises’ (Ronchi, 2017). An epistemology of position where partiality not universality is the condition for constructing new meanings. In the *grietas* of Caroline Walsh (2019), as in *la frontera* of Gloria Anzaldua (1987), or in the *caesura* of Giorgio Agamben (1999), the minor project becomes empty, a space where references are not given but are elusive, where coherence emerges, where the arrogance of the canon, of the authorial, of the major is vulnerable and requires new forms of narration and subjectification. The minor project is a backlash, an (un)emptying, which creates space for the possible. The minor project is inoperative because it is not another project that survives projects in order to deactivate and depose them, but coincides with its own dismissal.

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