

AESTHETICS PORTFOLIO: "UNEXPECTEDLY ADRIFT"¹.

Made by Massimo Briani.

The "UNEXPECTEDLY ADRIFT" portfolio, like Guy Debord's work, invited us to emphasize the condition of "drift" and the very need to "derive". The trait of Debordian situationism is in fact the interest in the "de-situation", a condition in which it is necessary to "de-situate oneself". The "de-situating" in art refers to a clearly Duchampian sensibility, to "doing work" starting from a displacement, from an estrangement to which the object is subjected. A urinal becomes a work of art when it is "un-located" to its horizon of meaning, to what is expected of it, to its use value. The very act of putting it on display, its dislocation in a context that is not its own, produces the spark of the artistic experience. With the "un" we mean a modality of artistic doing that breaks with the classic myth of "pure denotation", according to which the aesthetic representation should be able to restore reality without waste as it necessarily gives itself, in an attempt to get as close as possible to mimetic perfection. On the contrary, "de-situating" claims contingency over necessity, referring to a dimension in which we do not expect what will manifest itself, be it event or discourse, but we are ready to listen to everything that could happen. This is where the concept of signature comes into play, through which the attention moves from the object - be it a statement, event or work - to the contextual conditions that determine its meaning (the urinal becomes a work of art when it comes to be where it shouldn't, in a place where its presence is in no way expected). Already in its own name, Debord seems to distance itself from the "edge", from the "limit", from the "shore". The "drift" is such when a distance is taken from the "shore" as an inherent limit in the object of the gaze, the moment in which the real "happens" as a relationship between observer and observed. The movement of the French Situationists frees itself from a condition that is defined to the extent that it crystallizes and imposes various forms of "sensitivity control" as approaches to the definition of experience². What contemporary art wants to escape is to "finish" the work of art in its context, in the scenography, in the criticism, instead of leaving it "defined", that is, capable of constantly entering into a relationship with what surrounds it, redesigning to each use the routes of its own meaning. If we start from the assumption that art has

¹ The following text is the result of a multidisciplinary "drift" which saw the unexpected collaboration of: Massimo Briani (architect-urban planner and Ph.D. of the Department of Urban and Land Planning, University of Florence), Andrea Sartini (Philosopher and Ph.D. in "Telematics and Information Society" at the University of Florence), Francesco Gori (graduate in Aesthetic Philosophy at the University of Florence) and Tommaso Tarani (Ph.D. in Italian Studies in co-tutorship between the Universities of Pisa and Paris 3 "Sorbonne Nouvelle").

² As regards the reason for the "sensitivity control", please refer to Sartini, A., (2008) *L'esperienza del fuori*, Clinamen, Florence, in which the author tackles the theme from an interdisciplinary perspective.

always been contextualized in the place where it is exhibited, in being expected and perceived as a work, critically analyzed and historically contextualized, then we feel the need for an artistic work experienced as a performance in which the entire opening of its temporal horizon is condensed: the time that precedes it (the artistic memory deposited over the centuries), the work of art itself and the moment following its celebration (exhibition). What was previously "a priori" and "a posteriori" of the work is neutralized by the artistic experience that allows itself to permeate and permeates the formal and perceptive contexts, leaving the infinite gazes of which it is composed free to interact, subtracting the work from the stasis of its own objectivity, to restore it to its becoming nature, of incessant experience - the name says - "in progress". But there is in the artistic experience itself a need to distance itself from its own context of definition, which takes it beyond the space-time limits in which it takes place, allowing it to proceed, in some way, beyond itself, to project itself. constantly in its "outside" [dehors], remaining, by its very nature, an open work. I remember with a smile an attack by Agamben on the museum, when he laughs at the tourist who haunts the museums. Mocking involves an increasingly necessary distance; we are always observers, and as it happened when reading Foucault we have the feeling that the experience surpasses us, we insist on trying to understand it, we insist on its continuity. As Calvino advised, you can not help but try to make room for it and try to make it last. The artistic experience cannot be defined because it does not have a beginning and an end but is a continuum, insofar as the "un" that intimately inhabits it restores the opening of its own possibility. Precisely as unfinished a work of art can be said to be such, it can continue to have something to say: its incompleteness is what allows it to be enjoyed. The keystone of the "universe of possibilities", as quantum physicists teach us, was placed with the Theory of Relativity where "nothing is created or destroyed but everything is transformed". The "contingency" is a "temporal act" and allows an experience to be momentarily photographed in an instant and in a place, capturing a movement that makes it constantly tend towards an elsewhere, which is only indicated by it. Initially, the experience of contingency is lived with anguish, it is distressing that we cannot draw from elsewhere in any way. The "deriving" gives us the possibility of finding that elsewhere in the immediate aftermath, to the extent that one is aware of the openness of the experience one is living. So memory gives awareness to the gaze that allows us to be contingent with respect to reality, de-situating ourselves with respect to it and projecting ourselves ceaselessly already elsewhere. We find ourselves constantly "wandering", both us in contemplating it and the work in offering itself to our gaze, always able to be put back into play by the unexpected. The result is a fourth dimension, apparently imaginary, where

past, present and future coincide, and where we can simultaneously experience both the three temporal dimensions and a fourth, that of the unexpected. This dimension opens up infinite margins of freedom: driven by the need for truth, truth as the effect of letting ourselves "drift", as an act of availability that is offered to the unexpected, as a reflection of the being of abandonment, as an opportunity for gratuitous to the extent that each of us makes the experience of the possible in all its forms his own, only at that point will we be able to go beyond contingency and therefore give continuity to the experience itself.

Speaking of the concept of "otherness" it is necessary to refer to the concept of "exposure"³, to the "courage of the exposure". We cannot speak of "the courage of exposure" without speaking of "drift" and vice versa. In this sense, it becomes interesting to explore the link between "exposure" and "drift", which translates into an unintentional act: we can consider the state of "drifting" or being "adrift" only when we are willing to inhabit the exposure⁴, condition of self-abandonment in which one is capable of the act as a moment of total gratuitousness. To be "adrift", therefore, we must disregard expectations. Aware that we are not allowed to understand what we act, we can finally prepare ourselves in anticipation of the future of meaning.

It is Melville's "Moby-Dick" that accompanies us in these reflections. Ahab's drift to the vast ocean and the inevitable shipwreck⁵ which it encounters are, from the beginning, moments of a single path, teaching us that it is the "shipwreck" that confirms the productivity of the "drift". The "shipwreck" implies the ability to inhabit the abyss, the absence of a "bottom", of a neutral horizon that would allow us to objectively evaluate every occurrence of the Other, to "identify" it, and that is to assimilate it, to the already known, normalizing it, controlling it. But even this alleged "view from no where" can only be a "view from now here"⁶, our changing perspective of shipwrecked people adrift in the immensity of the ocean, always exposed to its winds, to its boundless otherness.

The security syndrome that today runs through our societies, on the other hand, only translates the inability to relate to what is Other, condemning them - to use the words with which Derrida commented on the events of 9/11 - to screw themselves into a movement of "suicidal autoimmunity". Living in the abyss, the absence of any foundation that legitimizes our actions, implies the courage of responsibility, in front of oneself and in front of others. It is with this basic assumption that architecture and urban planning should be confronted in

³ On the theme of "exposure" and the "courage of the exposure" the reference is still the discussion contained in Sartini, A., (2008) "*L'esperienza del fuori*", Clinamen, Florence .

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ In Moby Dick the shipwreck has a double aspect, one is the search of Captain Ahab that if it were not already a shipwreck from the first sea mile that he does it would not be such, and the other is that of the author of the book himself who it could tell other story than a shipwreck.

⁶ Nagel, Th., (1986), "*View from no where*", Oxford University press, New York.

drawing the contours of the urban space. But the abyss is frightening: without saints in heaven to whom we can refer our choices, we feel lost⁷, without a picture of certainties to assimilate it, the face of the Other always seems to threaten us⁸. And it is the very condition of fear that leads to the codification of both the ways of living a space and the space itself. But even before the need is felt to geographically trace the boundaries that constitute it as a place of living, each space forces us to confront the fear of having to cross the myriad of relationships that make up its texture. It has always been a relational cosmos, well before becoming a codified complex: the purpose of urban planning is to define places for living that encourage and improve these relationships, not - as often happens - tear their fabric. Captain Ahab is incessantly pushed to continue his wandering by the desire to reach and possess the spray, he is in search of it which sifts the horizon every day. But between its "drifting" and "dispensing" there is a substantial difference, explained by the two different spatial planes, intertwined and coexisting, in which the Moby-Dick takes place: compared to the quiet infinity of the Ocean, the path of Ahab is presented as a lost wandering, inconclusive, insane, useless; but the authentic drift - the sea route that he took without caring about the landings - is what drives him to strenuously search for the "opportunities" of that spray to which he has decided to devote himself entirely. It is in this sense that Captain Ahab can be thought of as adrift and at the same time in pursuit of his goal. In his infinite wandering Ahab is paradoxically "waiting" for the "unexpected", the event, the unpredictable epiphany of the white whale. And it is precisely with regard to this unexpected on whose traces we have set ourselves that we must ask ourselves how to relate to the expected results of drift, and more generally of "deriving" as an attitude of research: the courage of research must lead the designer to constantly strive to the project without actually ever reaching it. In this perspective, the "failure", that is the deviation from the starting ideal, shows itself as something necessary and ineluctable. Indeed, it establishes the very condition of research: only the failure of our goals, their vanishing, can reveal the secrets of the journey and produce authentic knowledge. Ahab's heroism consists in continuing the Moby-Dick "search" even at the cost of his own life. Although afflicted by the shadow of the inevitable "failure" he faces, he nevertheless feels the urgent need to set sail, the very condition of annihilation, of dispersion. And it is precisely the "spectrum of dispersion" that, in all contexts, today increasingly inhibits authentic research: but, we ask ourselves, to the extent that it sets itself and achieves

⁷ With these words we refer to the Nietzschean indication of a morality "*al di là del bene e del male*". See Nietzsche, F.W., (2001), "*Genealogia della morale*", Rizzoli, Milan.

⁸ Regarding the theme of responsibility with respect to the face of others, compare Levinas, E., (2006), "*Totalità e infinito*", Jaka Book, Milan and Levinas, E., (2002), "*Dall'altro all'io*", Meltemi, Rome.

precise objectives without deviating from it, Research can still be said such? An authentic Research should perhaps expose itself to the open sea, to the ocean of unexplored possibilities, rather than stagnating on the safe routes that connect one landing place to another. Its results should be something unexpected, unknown, rather than supinely replicating the existing⁹. The result of the Research should lead to an increase in knowledge, however a knowledge that is not knowledge of the other cannot even be conceived, for this reason we can affirm that the extent of knowledge that we will be able to achieve will depend on the gradient of exposure¹⁰ (openness to the Other) which we will have had courage. As Camus teaches us, the fall (understood as "failure"), a movement that carries within itself the germ of the revolution. Only in this way can failure be experienced as "καταστροφή", from the Greek "katastrophé" which means overturning, or as a positive renewal. And it is in the exposure to the "fall" and "failure" that that necessary departure from the goal takes place, without which the paradoxical "to be experienced" ("être éprouvé") in which the experience of truth consists could not arise. But in our age every practice of "drifting" is progressively fading away, or worse, it is increasingly experienced as a fault on the part of those who surrender to it. For years now, the apparently "dispersive" dimension of Research has been strongly discouraged: considered as an error, it has been replaced by increasingly rigid working protocols, increasingly detailed routes that connect one "landing" to another. But as we have seen, between "dispersing" and "seeking" there is a difference so subtle that it is not visible to the naked eye, but so decisive that it directly touches the heart of our knowledge and our relationships: only one science and one companies that have the "courage of exposure"¹¹ they will be able to develop in full health, otherwise they will be condemned to sterility. Even urban planning, in shaping the places of living, must understand in what sense its research can (and must) go virtuously adrift. The designer's work, the gesture with which he shapes urban spaces and gives rise to new buildings, is not a pure, self-referential act, completely unrelated to the life that actually takes place in those places. His "project" becomes part of a much more complex "process", made up of relationships between spaces, things and people; it is an invention, in the etymological sense, a discovery, a finding that presupposes a search for the other from oneself, a real drift towards a choice that ends up being itself an unexpected invention, among multiple possibilities of "discovering" the project. For this reason, designing the urban space means first of all

⁹ As Heidegger reminds us, the destiny of every scholar is to be transformed into a Researcher (in a derogatory sense).

¹⁰ Sartini, A., *L'esperienza del fuori*, cit.

¹¹ Ibidem.

"discovering" what is already there, just as for Michelangelo the invention of sculpture consists in discovering the figure that has always inhabited the block of marble. Each form of planning acquires meaning only to the extent that it opens up to the unexpected dimension of the other. Thus a building, if designed to fulfill the functions for which it was commissioned a priori, is unusable precisely because it is unable to contemplate the unexpected guest who will have to constantly redesign, inhabiting, the space. In this sense, the only project that underlies a large margin of "imperfection" can be considered "perfect", such as to allow those who will experience the work, of whatever nature, the conditions for a constant redefinition of the space itself. Otherwise, by limiting themselves to living the experience of space as a necessity, users will not be left with any margin for evolution, nor will they be able to experience the change in openness. We are all beings in constant evolution, therefore even space must be designed as such, opening up suitable degrees of freedom that make it survive its mere functional meaning. Thus we return to the need for "waste" as a distance from the limit, in which moving away and "deriving" become fundamental concepts. The "de" indicates how to take that distance that leads to the other from oneself, which allows the work to become aware in time and space, allowing itself to be memory and continuity. Only in this way can it be narrated. In fact, the process of drifting takes place only in the courage of the sinking, which is a necessary condition to release, in the shipwreck, the "memories of difference" of which every open work is composed, as well as to give organicity to those frames that memory itself has assembled and "insist" in the work. Only the catastrophe as an instance of renewal can guarantee the memorial release of the experience, so as to induce in the subject who experiences the drift the necessity of the shipwreck, the latter understood as a sort of revolution whose aim is always to mature memory and awareness. of oneself and of what one has experienced. It is still the courage of exposure that pushes us to "derive" and avoid the Orphic act of turning around to see if destiny is fulfilled. Instead, it is turning back that prevents this from happening. The act of shipwreck, in its founding meaning, is also the release and revelation of the inevitable contradiction inherent in the tragic dialectic between desire and its object, the other and the same, which by definition excludes any happy possibility of synthesis. Using the metaphor of "Moby Dick" we see the novel end with the shipwreck of Captain Ahab, but in reality the captain, in the projections that approximate him to the object he is chasing and that he desperately wants to possess, completes a shipwreck predicted from the first page. The hero of the "Pequod" never ceases to be shipwrecked by the desire of Moby Dick. The allegory of this shipwreck is ultimately the reunion with the object of Love, which, far beyond the metaphor of the whale, represents the highest

aspiration towards which human nature has always tended. We constantly nourish the desire to rejoin this object, from any field of research it may be, human, scientific, technical, architectural. In any case, we must know how to tend towards the otherness towards which we approach. But understanding it also requires exposing ourselves to an eternal disregard on the part of the other, to the inevitable shipwreck and to the peculiar joy that is linked to it, in which we, violently led back to the differential discharge with which the object of the hunt belies and surprises us, finally we are forced to constantly recalibrate the horizon of our search, as well as to always chase the spray of the whale a little further. This is because already in the metaphor of Moby Dick, and in the shipwreck itself, we find the aspect of constant withdrawal and the violent imposition of the principle of freedom in the difference which, affirming itself, denies the captain the monomaniac and solipsistic tragedy of the self-determination of he. The really difficult movement to reach the awareness of the freedom and joy inherent in the experience of the shipwreck is to dwell on what this freedom means and to understand, again, that it is not about one's own freedom with respect to oneself, but about the freedom of other than itself, of its inevitable escape, as different, from the gaze of the researcher. To correctly set up a search, therefore, it is necessary to let the other person be free to be other than oneself and not to be assimilated to anything other than oneself. The first step towards freedom, a freedom of which the shipwreck represents the tragic and liberating experience, is precisely the assumption of the freedom of the other, the only one from which it is possible to define our freedom. Therefore, failure (shipwreck) in itself turns out to be a fundamental phase of the process that leads to the awareness of freedom, and as such it is a phase that the researcher must necessarily go through.