

Massimo Gasperini - Alessandro Melis

**SHINING  
DARK  
TERRITORIES**

100 thoughts on architecture

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In copertina  
Alessandro Melis, *Il ritorno* 4, 2012 (detail)

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# Foreword/*Prefazione*

Gerald Bast - *Rettore Università di Arti Applicate Vienna*

## Subjectivity, volatility, fuzziness, imperfection – and the ‘truth’

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In his paintings, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Picasso disintegrated the visual and intellectual interrelation between material, form, time and space. A person falls apart or can be viewed from different points at the same time. A few years later Albert Einstein wrote his theory of relativity, Werner Heisenberg published his uncertainty principle and Arnold Schoenberg dissolved traditional harmonies in music. Uncertainty was the paradigm-breaking topic at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two World Wars and a dramatic world economic crisis strengthened the conviction that neither god nor man can provide security and predictability – the all-time desires in human history.

The rise of technology seemed to be able to satisfy these desires. Scientification (mainly understood as providing quantifiability) and economization (also understood as the rule of economic figures) increasingly took over social reality and every day life. More than any other power, machines seemingly guaranteed security and predictability.

The quantification of intellectual and artistic achievements globally is on the rise. Thus effecting the neglect of areas that eludes quantification because of their self-understanding or because of specialized knowledge production processes.

The dominant global ranking systems for universities are not only suspected in (educational) policy terms to promote hegemonic interests, but their influence on educational policy decisions on governmental and university level dramatically changed and still change the understanding of the nature and mission of universities and of tertiary education.

The logic of industrial production processes, which demands measurability, is steadily



*To heaven*, Gerald Bast, 2010

infiltrating educational policy theory and practice. Adam Smith's "invisible hand of the market" is even preparing to take over the command in the art system. Financial investors, real estate developers and project managers are standing behind the steering wheel of architecture. Even in the worlds of academia efficiency and measurability are the leading qualities. In this context a monopoly over innovation has become held by economics, science and technology. Only few warned that our societies thus would run into a dead end.

For Walter Benjamin art was the governor of utopia and the – neuroscientist Wolf Singer notes: "In a scientific theory we know even before it is proven that it is correct, because it is aesthetically pleasing. Hereby we use criteria that go far beyond what is called logical reasoning. In the scientific field, creativity is usually the ability to watch something together, which has not yet been seen together. ... What the artist and the scientist are doing is nothing more than to give in to curiosity and the desire for the combinatorial game – separate from the utilitarian everyday business of life. This results in models of the world"<sup>1</sup>.

Eliot Eisner, the leading thinker on art education in the USA, provoked with the following words: "The tacit view is to create an efficient system, a system that will help us achieve, without surprise or eventfulness, the aims that we seek.

The arts, in contrast, have little room on their agenda for efficiency, at least as a high-level value. Efficiency is largely a virtue for the tasks we don't like to do; few of us like to eat a great meal efficiently or to participate in a wonderful conversation efficiently, or indeed to make love efficiently. What we enjoy the most we linger over. A school system designed with an overriding commitment to efficiency may produce outcomes that have little enduring quality"<sup>2</sup>.

The natural sciences have taught us for decades that crucial ideas do not come into being along a predictable timeline of causality, but such factors as intuition, the unplanned or even "accidents" have a major impact. No doubt CAD software, translation and digital

databases are of undeniable value, but they cannot replace the human ability to uncover and establish connections and connotations in an intuitive and even emotion-driven way. “Art is magic, freed from the lie of being truth”. Theodor W. Adorno wrote in his *Minima Moralia*<sup>3</sup>. Although we live in times when truth is simulated or rather feigned by an apparent objectivity of indicators, figures and statistics, our society is not a machine, neither a mechanical nor digital one. It lives off subjects and identities. One of the main qualities of the arts was, and is, to generate identity by not only allowing but also encouraging subjectivity. More so than other tools or qualities, subjectivity, spontaneity and emotion are able to offer a glimpse of the world’s valance – better still if they, consciously or not, are combined with knowledge-based analysis.

Thus sketching ideas with words and drawings as manifestation of knowledge, intuition, subjectivity and spontaneity is so indispensable for any innovation process. As we learned from Plato, man is only able to see what we call reality in the image of a shadow cast on a wall<sup>4</sup>. So, despite all volatility, fuzziness and imperfection, sketching with words and drawings may in fact provide more reality or “truth” than any technologically perfect hi-tech imaging technique.

#### NOTE

1. Singer, Wolf, *Ein neues Menschenbild. Gespräche über Hirnforschung*, Frankfurt/M. 2003, p. 103 ff.
2. Eisner, Elliot W., *The arts and the creation of mind*, Yale University Press, Yale, New Haven, 2002, p. XIII.
3. Adorno, Theodor W., *Minima Moralia*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 22<sup>nd</sup> edition 1994, p. 298.
4. Plato, *The Republic, Allegory of the Cave*.

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