In his essay *Visualization and Cognition: Drawing Things Together* (2012), Bruno Latour explains a complex relationship between visualization and cognition, employing drawing as a crucial tool in describing a specific geographic place. In this respect Latour tells a significant story: in the 18th century, the explorer and geographer La Pérouse travelled along the Pacific Ocean following Louis XVI’s request to ‘bring back’ a map of the discovered places. After reaching a land called Sakhalin, he asked an old Chinese man to describe it. La Pérouse was surprised to see a peninsular drawing traced on the sand; the tide was about to come in and a youth, to help with the task of bringing ‘in’ and ‘bring out’ — in Latour’s own words — when describing a place graphically. The way we employ to outline the geographical and anthropic features of a context — in other words how we synthesize the main characters by drawing — has a long history and today it seems to be gaining a new interest in the fields of architecture, urban and landscape planning. This paper intends to face this issue both investigating the theoretical framework around the relationship between visualization, drawing and cognition, and bringing significant examples coming from the current graphic production.

Keywords: drawing, place and design, visualization/cognition.

1. Disegno e intelligenze multiple
Il sociologo Bruno Latour, nel saggio *Visualization and Cognition: Drawing Things Together* (2012), narra un episodio riguardante l’exploratore La Pérouse che si presta a utili approfondimenti sul ruolo del disegno, sui suoi valori cognitivi e naturali e, in modo più specifico, anche sulla funzione che può rivestire nell’esercizio progettuale dell’architetto, dell’urbanistica, del paesaggio. Il contributo intende affrontare e sviluppare il tema sia approfondendo l’impianto teorico che riguardante il rapporto tra visione, disegno e cognizione, sia portando esemplificazioni significative provenienti dalla produzione grafica recente.

Parole chiave: disegno, luogo e progetto, visualizzazione/cognizione.

Nel saggio *Visualization and Cognition: Drawing Things Together* (2012), Bruno Latour argomenta le complesse relazioni tra visualizzazione e cognizione ricorrendo all’uso del disegno come fondamentale strumento per la descrizione di un luogo geografico. In proposito, narra un episodio che assume un valore esplicativo: l’esploratore e geografo La Pérouse durante un viaggio effettuato attraverso il Pacifico nel XVIII secolo, dietro esplicito incarico di Luigi XVI di “portare indietro” una mappa dei luoghi visitati, giunto nella terra nota come Sakhalin, chiede a un anziano cinese di descrivere la sua regione. La Pérouse assiste con sorpresa all’esecuzione di un disegno fulmineo tracciato sulla spiaggia, e un giovane, per assolvere il compito di “portare indietro” la mappa del luogo, si affretta a riprodurlo con esattezza il disegno a matita su uno dei quaderni di schizzi di La Pérouse. L’episodio si presta a riflessioni di diversa natura, prima di tutto relative alle differenze tra le culture occidentale e orientale: immediata risulta l’analogia con l’arte dei giardini zen i cui disegni sulla sabbia vengono costantemente rieseguiti, per contro è noto che, in Occidente, dall’età moderna in poi, l’esercizio grafico e il parametro visuale sono-cardini del progetto. Tuttavia, il punto che si intende sottolineare riguarda piuttosto cosa il disegno deve “portare”, “fare arrivare”, e cosa invece deve “portare indietro”, “restituire”, ovvero *bring in e bring back*, per usare le parole di Latour, al loro spessore interpretativo e antropico di un contesto, della sintesi dei suoi segni essenziali; attraverso la pratica del disegno, ha una lunga tradizione e sembra oggi riacquistare interesse nei campi dell’architettura, dell’urbanistica, del paesaggio. Il contributo intende affrontare e sviluppare il tema sia approfondendo l’impianto teorico che riguardante il rapporto tra visione, disegno e cognizione, sia portando esemplificazioni significative provenienti dalla produzione grafica recente.

In his essay *Visualization and Cognition: Drawing Things Together* (2012), sociologist Bruno Latour explains a complex relationship between visualization and cognition, employing drawing as a crucial tool in describing a specific geographic place. In this respect Latour tells a significant story: in the 18th century, the explorer and geographer La Pérouse, during an expedition in the Pacific in the 18th century, was explicitly commissioned by Louis XVI to ‘bring back’ a map of the discovered places. After reaching a land called Sakhalin, he asked an elderly Chinese man to describe his region. La Pérouse was then surprised to witness the execution of a detailed drawing of the peninsula traced onto the sand; the tide was rising, a young man quickly reproduced the drawing on La Pérouse’s notebook in order to ‘bring back’ the sketch of the place. The story is open to many diverse considerations, pointing out the differences between Western and Eastern cultures as regards drawing: a clear analogy with the sand drawings in the Zen Gardens where the signs are traced and constantly remade; on the other hand, in the Western modern Age we can see, a way to use drawing for design deeply rooted in graphical practice and visuality. Anyway, in my opinion the most relevant point is strictly related to the ‘things’ that drawing should ‘bring in’ and ‘bring out’ — in Latour’s own words — when describing a place graphically. The way we employ to outline the geographical and anthropic features of a context — in other words how we synthesize the main characters by drawing — has a long history and today it seems to be gaining a new interest in the fields of architecture, urban and landscape planning. This paper intends to face this issue both investigating the theoretical framework around the relationship between visualization, drawing and cognition, and bringing significant examples coming from the current graphic production.

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cognitive sphere, an expression of multiple intelligences – according to Howard Gard-ner – which includes both the experience of the space and the sphere of visual abilities and manual skills.

The viewpoint to focus on regards the poten-tial of drawing as graphic intelligence, as the ability to connect the use of the eye, mind and hand to solve problems and create effective products, aimed at acquiring new knowledge (Cicalò 2016: 30). This virtuous circuit – eye, mind, hand – that has characterized Western construction prac-tices since the modern age is cyclically 'pre-sumed dead' whenever a new technology is defined that is capable of speeding up certain execution procedures or of adapting to the challenges of globalisation, for example allowing people to work in synergy yet 'remotely' on the same project.

On this specific point David Ross Scheer, in an eloquently titled text – The Death of Drawing: Architecture in the Age of Simulation (2014) – contrasts traditional drawing with BIM tech-nologies, where the former supposedly ena-bles us to move from the idea to the form, and the latter from the behaviour of the building to its experience. To quote word for word: “whereas drawing allowed architects to represent ideas in form, BIM and computational design sim-ulate experience, the ‘analytical’ value of drawing as graphic intelligence, as the ‘death’ of BIM, laddering the idea to the form and the second one, from the comportment of the edifice to its experience: either we can see it as a formal representation which makes rather than takes photographs” (Treib 2008: ix).

2. Making Drawings or Observing Procedures?

The question of freehand drawing in the for-mation and the practice of design in different scales is nothing new and has been under dis-cussion for over a decade. One point of refer-ence we can consider is the seminar Is Drawing Dead? (2012) organised by Yale University for a vision of the architectural and watercolour exhibition by Massimo Scolari The Representation of Archi-tecture 1967-2012. Participants in the seminar included authors of opposing theories: on the one hand Juhani Pallasmaa, Drawing with the mind: Pen, Hand, Eye and Brain, and on the other Antoine Picon, A New Sensornia: Digi-tal Culture and the Eclipse of Drawing.

A recurring aspect of the issue of the supposed ‘death announcement’ of drawing is it being considered an alternative to digital, thus form-ing part of the broader question of the com-parison/contrast between the digital world and the sphere of craftsmanship. Sociologist Richard Sennett has devoted par-ticular attention to the concept of craftsm-an.
ship: “It is a very difficult term to translate – writes Sennett –. In English it means the desire to do a job well as an end in itself”. On the contrary, a technical procedure cannot convey to us what it feels like to do it or what it means to perform a certain action: “We give a lot of importance to denotative language, a type of procedural language that provides precise instructions, but it often does not help us to move from the information to the execution of the practical act”. And to better explain the differences between craftsmanship and the digital procedure, he points to computer-assisted drawing: “There is a magnificent program, CAD – continues Sennett –: you enter the coordinates and it does the drawing. If used badly, however, it prevents you from learning how to know an object” (Sennett 2010: 10).

Traditional drawing – craft – is what leads us to acquire some knowledge, in line with the assertions of architect Renzo Piano, whom Sennett quotes to back up his theories: “I make very complex buildings, but I always draw by hand; that is how I learn how to know the object I am working on” (Sennett 2010: 10).

Here, it is perhaps worth trying to understand better what kind of knowledge we are talking about in terms of drawing, for which the American sociologist himself offers an interesting metaphor: the drawing process leads to the object we are depicting being sort of ‘embedded’ in our minds; it thus determines a ‘deep’ knowledge of what is represented in the author’s mind by the same hand moving a mouse. “The hand drawing on the piece of paper, and, in contrary, a technical procedure cannot communicate the difference between the action of producing the drawing and its essential role in design, taking up both by a digital platform dedicated to architecture and design – CommonEDGE – and by a recent monograph, mentioned by the same online resource” (Sennett 2010: 10).

In the heated debate about digital representation as the opposite of traditional representation, a few months ago on CommonEDGE Michael Crobie once again defended drawing and its essential role in design, taking up main issues already at the heart of the 2012 Yale seminar: is the study and practice of architecture already ‘beyond’ drawing? Is it still necessary to draw to be an architect? Taking its cue from these questions is the book Draw in order to see, a cognitive history of architectural design by Mark Alan Hewitt, who, explaining his cognitive own approach, reminds us that the ‘connection’ between the hand and the eye, between the soft pencil and a thin sheet of paper, is how architects actually ‘see’.

Michael J. Crobie also highlights how Hewitt refers to that part of research into the field of neuroscience that examine the complex relationships between cognitive sciences and visual perception. In a recent article published in a national newspaper, Maryanne Wolf highlights the difference between ‘fast’ reading on a computer and ‘deep’ reading from printed media: “I am a cognitive neuroscientist – she states – and I have learned as much from Proust and Calvino as I have from the brain’s imaging techniques when it reads. Both perspectives have alerted me to the fact that, in a digital world, what we read and how we read are changing, with important implications for how we think” (Wolf 2021).

Reading from printed media and drawing could probably share a ‘deep knowledge’, with consequences on the formation of thought and language, even if this does not imply having to give up the potential of digital media, as Wolf herself points out: “Screens offer extraordinary opportunities for the spread of information, but they also encourage superficial reading […] Ever-increasing research into digital reading shows that comprehension, critical analysis and empathy are compromised when sufficient time is not devoted to these processes” (Wolf 2021).

3. Draw in Order to See

The question of the relationship between free-hand drawing and digital technologies from a neurocognitive perspective has recently been taken up both by a digital platform dedicated to architecture and design – CommonEDGE – and by a recent monograph, mentioned by the same online resource.

In a certain way, both the sociologist and the architect already ‘beyond’ drawing? Is it still necessary to draw to be an architect? To acquire some knowledge, in line with the assertions of architect Renzo Piano, whom Sennett himself points out: “Screens offer extraordinary opportunities for the spread of information, but they also encourage superficial reading […] Ever-increasing research into digital reading shows that comprehension, critical analysis and empathy are compromised when sufficient time is not devoted to these processes” (Wolf 2021). The sociologist Richard Sennett has dedicated a particular attention to the concept of craftsmanship, a type of linguaggio denotativo, a term that is defined in our minds; it thus determines a ‘deep’ knowledge of what is represented in the author’s mind by the same hand moving a mouse. “There is a magnificent program, CAD – continues Sennett –: you enter the coordinates and it does the drawing. If used badly, however, it prevents you from learning how to know an object” (Sennett 2010: 10).

The digital tradition – artisanal – is that which loves to peer into a consciousness, in line with the affirmations of an architect as Renzo Piano, who Sennett himself points out: “Screens offer extraordinary opportunities for the spread of information, but they also encourage superficial reading […] Ever-increasing research into digital reading shows that comprehension, critical analysis and empathy are compromised when sufficient time is not devoted to these processes” (Wolf 2021). The sociologist Richard Sennett has dedicated a particular attention to the concept of craftsmanship, a type of linguaggio denotativo, a term that is defined in our minds; it thus determines a ‘deep’ knowledge of what is represented in the author’s mind by the same hand moving a mouse. “There is a magnificent program, CAD – continues Sennett –: you enter the coordinates and it does the drawing. If used badly, however, it prevents you from learning how to know an object” (Sennett 2010: 10).

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between the ‘self’ and the outside world: “Our brains have evolved to compare our store of embodied experiences in the world, the images we carry with us, and our personal memories as raw materials for the invention of new forms, visions, amalgamations, and realms beyond us” (Crobbie 2021).

As the legacy of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, the production of complex structures seems to have developed as an exercise in problem-solving rather than as the creation of places of beauty, the expression of the human spirit. If we are the heirs of processes of abstraction concerning design and construction, it is also true that such conceptual instrumentation seems distant from those cognitive powers – made evident by recent research in the field of neuroscience – which enable to draw – moving our fingers, hands, arms, torso, eyes – this action is ‘incorporated’ into ourselves: so drawing, as a cognitive action, is ‘incorporated’, ‘rooted’ in the subject. We develop a sort of ‘muscular’ memory – as dancers, violinists or athletes do in their disciplines – which links the design gesture with the definition of neural networks, unlike what happens today “moving and clicking a mouse, as the physical act of ‘drawing’ in architectural design is indistinguishable from buying sneakers on Amazon” (Crobbie 2021).

4. Drawing the Place of/for the Design

Of the various still-open issues linked to the cognitive practice of drawing, in the conclusion of this contribution we are going to dwell upon a reflection on the graphic expression of the geographical and anthropic features of a place, on that synthesis of essential signs made possible by traditional, manual exercise – eye, mind, hand – which today seems to be the subject of renewed attention in the fields of architecture, landscaping and urban planning.

At an educational level, we will refer to two viewpoints from the English-speaking world, one closer to urban design, the other referring to architecture: the first point of view is necessarily disegnare per essere un architetto? (fig. 1) sono Sketch in perspective sul luogo riguardano analisi dimensionali preliminari per il progetto o l’analisi di un sito, quando ben condotta, richiede uno studio sullo “accompagnato” dal disegno. Il tipo di disegni proposto dalla Dutoit raccoglie sia informazioni oggettive (hard data) cioè dimensioni, quantità, geometrie, orientamenti, sia soft data (esperienza, uso, attività). In genere gli schizzi sul luogo riguardano analisi dimensionali preliminari per il progetto o l’annotazione di esperienze di viaggio. Sketch in perspective e serial vision (fig. 1) sono al centro della metodologia didattica della Dutoit, che utilizzando tali tecniche sollecita gli studenti a convogliare quanto osservato su mappe di percorso e scorei prospettici, analogamente a come una pellicola cinematografica
from Allison Dutoit, expressed in Looking as Inquiry: Drawing the Implied Urban Realm (2008), about drawing as a study. This urban designer looks to a type of representation that does not necessarily have to be based on accuracy to convey the conditions of the built environment but prefers drawing as a tool capable of revealing the relations between the qualities (dimensions, proportions, scale, construction, materials, etc.) and lifestyles in urban spaces, fostering a ‘deeper understanding’ of the city determines individual differences in the way people that constitute it. The everyday encounter with the city determines individual differences in how to interpret the urban structure, the effect of usage on its form and to observe the connection between memory and interpretability: all this falls outside accurate mapping, the main parameter of urban surveying. In short, it is an ‘explorative’ drawing that demands personal involvement through the visual, phenomenal and atypical aspects of cities, fostering a ‘deeper understanding’ of the many, disordered but irreplaceable qualities of places. The second viewpoint that we can offer here is that of the American architect Frank Harmon, professor at North Carolina State University; at the end of his professional career, Harmon collected his drawings in the book Native Places (2018), which has the same name as the digital platform on which it is possible to view lots of sketches commented on by the author himself. Both the text and the website render the places Harmon visited and captured in words and pen strokes during his journeys all over the world. As he hitchhiked as a student, observing nature and buildings, Harmon discovered that he could remember a place better by drawing it rather than photographing it: by sketching a shed or a castle, he remembered the place longer and ‘more deeply’, describing “the architecture of a place by feeling it through his fingers and the point of a pen, or via the quick wash of a brush”. If drawings enable us to capture the spirit of the place that inspired the artist profession, Harmon has riunito i suoi disegni nel libro Native Places (2018), che porta lo stesso nome della piattaforma digitale su cui è possibile vedere molti schizzi commentati dall’autore stesso. Sia il testo sia il sito web restituiscono i luoghi visitati da Harmon nel corso di viaggi in tutto il mondo, e catturati con parole e tratti di penna. Quando da studente faceva l’autostop per viaggiare, osservando la natura e gli edifici, Harmon scoperti che avrebbe meglio tenuto memoria di un luogo se lo avesse disegnato piuttosto che ritratto in fotografia: schizzando una capanna o un castello, ricordava così il luogo più di lungo e più “a fondo”, descrivendo “l’architettura di un luogo sentendo attraverso le dita, la punta di una matita o una pennellata». Se gli schizzi consentono dunque di cogliere lo spirito del luogo che ha ispirato l’architetto, ancora di più questo risulterà autentico se riporterà le tracce di una presenza abitata; è infatti tramite gli oggetti ordinati che i luoghi assumono un carattere straordinario: «sedie, cassette postali, una zanzariera, finestre, porticati, scalini, colonne, balconi sono resi con lo spirito del luogo e del le persone che li hanno usati […] I disegni di Harmon sono un modo per vedere la dimensione umana presente in tutta l’architettura» (Crosbie 2018, figg. 2, 3). Il disegno, in entrambi gli esempi riportati, veicola dunque una comprensione più profon da del luogo, è capace di suscitare empatia, at tivare la memoria, cogliere l’intera dimensione dell’abitare umano.

Figura 2

Figura 3

Figura 4

DOI: https://doi.org/10.15168/xy.v6i11-12.2511
Le considerazioni sulla versatilità del disegno del luogo per trarre fonte di ispirazione per il progetto trovano un interessante riscontro nella pratica dello Studio RCR (Rafael Aranda, Carme Pigem, Ramon Vilalta), che ha fatto dello schizzo la tecnica privilegiata per esprimere la forza di un concetto in modo conciso e accattivante. È Rafael Aranda a ricorrere in modo particolare al disegno e all’acquerello nel rappresentare le diverse scale e le differenti fasi del progetto. Con l’impiego di un pennello, talvolta spesso, altre volte sottile, tramite l’inchiostro nero o i colori, sulla base di un disegno a matita eseguito con tratto deciso, la freschezza di questa tecnica e la compattezza dei segni e delle pennellate rendono l’architetto capace di tradurre infinite suggestioni. Si tratta in definitiva di una sorta di calligrafia disegnata che comunica il farsi del progetto (figg. 4, 5).

Lo schizzo condotto attraverso la tecnica dell’acquerello consente all’idea iniziale di “cristallizzarsi”, rivelandosi particolarmente adatta al processo di “materializzazione” del progetto. Inoltre, lo schizzo si rivela fondamentale nello stabilire criteri comuni e per condividere lo svolgimento del progetto tra i componenti dello studio RCR. Lo schizzo può rivestire un carattere intuitivo o evocativo, niente viene precluso attraverso questa forma di rappresentazione che è in definitiva un modo per iniziare un viaggio dal buio alla luce, rappresentando una appros-

Figura 4

Figura 5
Studio RCR (Rafael Aranda, Carme Pigem, Ramón Vilalta Arquitectes), Bell-lloc winery, watercolor, 2007 (https://www.area-arch.it/hell-lloc-winery-2, ultima consultazione 27/1/2023).

Figura 6

DOI: https://doi.org/10.15168/xy.v6i11-12.2511
chitect, this will be even more authentic if it contains the traces of an inhabited presence. It is through ordinary objects that places take on a special personality: "chairs, mailboxes, a screened door, windows, porches, steps, columns, balconies are rendered with a spirit of the place and the people who have used them [...] Harmon’s drawings are a way to see the human dimension present in all architecture" (Crosbie 2018, figg. 2, 3).

The drawing, in both examples, thus helps to provide a deeper understanding of the place and can arouse empathy, stir the memory, and capture the entire dimension of the human living environment.

Interesting observations about the versatility of drawing a place to find inspiration for the design can be found in the practice of the RCR Studio (Rafael Aranda, Carme Pigem, Ramon Vilalta), which has made sketching the preferred technique for expressing the power of a concept concisely and attractively. It is Rafael Aranda in particular who turns to drawing and watercolours to represent the different scales and the different phases of design (figg. 4, 5).

The Thinking Hand

The Finnish architect sees how our present-day, globally linked culture puts major emphasis on vocation, drawing and architecture that conscious craftsmanship and artistic work based on vocation, drawing and architecture can be fulfilled.

In The Thinking Hand Juhani Pallasmaa accompanies his reflections on the multi-sensory approach to architecture by paying great attention to the vast potential and the relevance of the hand in the field of design.

The Sketch made using watercolours 'crystallizes' the initial idea revealing itself particularly from darkness to light, representing a gradual approximation from an idea, the origin of a future development (Peltason, Ong Yan 2017).

5. Conclusions

We can conclude this contribution on the subject of the visualisation/cognition relationship that drawing can foster with some observations by Juhani Pallasmaa taken from the book The Thinking Hand.

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