

Reference

TRACES OF LIGHT. LINES OF THOUGHT. ON PAVEL KORBIČKA. Mário Caeiro, Lisbon, 2019

Surface engraved with a narrow stroke, path
imagined between two points. Of singular thickness,
a glib remark, a fragment, an unfinished phrase.
It is any one edge of a shape and its contours
in entirety. Melody arranged, a recitation,
the ways horizons are formed. Think of leveling,
snaring, the body's disposition (both in movement
& repose). It has to do with palms and creases,
with rope wound tight on someone's hand,
things resembling drawn marks: a suture or a mountain ridge,
an incision, this width of light. A razor blade
at a mirror, tapping out a dose, or the churn
of conveyor belts, the scoured, idling machines.
A conduit, a boundary, an exacting
course of thought. And here, the tautness
of tent stakes, earth shoveled, the depth of a trench.

Tim Ingold

Every space contains hidden orders and meanings which define it from the inside. If we activate its inherent focus, the space resonates or enters synergy with the object of activation. This "meeting" of light and space can have a spiritual or emotional dimension.

Pavel Korbička

It is necessary in all things to arrive at a central meaning from which the others derive.

Giuseppe Panza di Biumo

Pavel Korbička's take on Minimalism is developed by means of an assertively defined luminescent linearity. It works as an (en)light(ening) object input, which inhabits particular spaces while manifesting some sort of hidden order and meaning. In this move, art activates space; space itself resonates with the synergy between meticulously located physical contingencies. In this sense, the work is a very clear and straightforward appropriation of material reality, if not - as I believe - a revelation. In other words, these are particularly exceptional spatializations of light (to paraphrase the title of a famous work by Lucio Fontana, Spatial Light - Structure in Neon for the 9th Milan Triennial at the Palazzo dell'Arte in Milan, 1951).

As invitations to meditative voids that no photograph is capable of capturing, these works suggest a wide range of mental paths. But what might be the ways to acknowledge the cognitive, emotional, and even spiritual dimensions these luminous traces and membranes weave into the architectural fabric? Be it in indoor venues or the open landscape, (the philosophy of) walking is a precious model to help one to grasp the essence of their presence. If, as for Frédéric Gros, whatever liberates you from time and space alienates you from speed, Korbička's highly contextualized minimalism performs a paradox; it breathes a sort of inaudible music into space, eventually inviting the immersed spectator into a non-discursive dialogue - a (visual) dance.

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Such art of light - certainly a contemporary expression of the apex of Light Culture - echoes groundbreaking

experiences, such as the aforementioned swirling shapes of Lucio Fontana, or Dan Flavin's industrial installations with industrial lamps, commercially available since the 1960s; but more importantly, it is the result of a personal approach of the power of the luminous line to surprise us and make us wonder. Now. Today. Maybe that's the reason why we feel that these lines (and the shades and nuances they generate on the surfaces they transform) convey a fresh aesthetic; they don't seem to interpret some sort of stagnant Minimalistic maniera, but rather a highly principled, formally purified, and witty attitude of performative discovery of the built. In such a process, Minimalism remains the perfect vehicle to express the logos of Light, since the gesture of drawing and designing a rigorous technical installation project (as we may witness when we survey the revelatory preparatory sketches and technical plans) mutually emancipate the artist's drive to cast light upon the world in a definitive way.

In such a persuasive, pedagogical and above all lived rhetoric of drawing, Korbička's formal grammar may appear as a static counter-architecture of stiff traces (Berlin 2019), a line sensually courting the walls and the ceiling (Helix, 2018) or a statement of artificial verticality commenting on the natural elements (Parallels, 2012). In its contextual multiplicity, Korbička's futuristic art - as if actualizing Richard Wagner's notion of the total work of art in a particularly well chosen set of sceneries of the urban - is still (and no less than in Fontana's or Flavin's era) a challenge to the actual viewer... even if the latter is possibly less naïve, and even less open to the new, than art publics of previous epochs.

Time to clarify, with Peter Weibel in the Foreword of Jo Joelson's Library of Light - Encounters with Artists and Designers:

The evolution of light art in the twentieth century can be summarised as follows: Phase 1, colour as light: classic artistic genres such as painting employ colour as a means of representing natural light. Phase 2, light as colour: modern art employs artificial real light as a design medium. Suffusing spaces with light and colour - by means of fluorescent light, electric light and other illumination technologies - they continue painting with the help of artificial light. Phase 3, light as language and code: urban landscapes with signals, symbols, texts and images. Phase 4, light as a medium of information: everything we know, we know through light. Light enables insights into the spatial and temporal depths of the universe.

Isn't it easy to recognize the origins of Pavel Korbička's ongoing research - and how grounded in tradition it is? Isn't it exciting to imagine where he's heading to - straight to the future?

In any case, this series of works ends up becoming a pretext for the perceptual engagement of the wandering spectator, if not the very performativity of arriving there: walking into a dark corridor, arriving at the apse of the temple, contemplating the shape of the trees against the sky... These (co-)presences apparently demand very little from the public, but in fact demand a fundamental disposition to interact and accept this abstract beauty. Just look at the viewers' expressions in the pictures documenting White Point (2012).

So ultimately what is at stake in this refined aesthetical proposal is to attract the pure movement of the gaze, so that fascination might unleash a vast and complex language of spatial realities: palaces, walls, churches, gardens, white cubes... Vertical № 3 (2012) is in these terms a gem: the line remains a line(drawing) but at the same time paints the surrounding ruins with a semblance of tactile quality.

Below, I now risk some slightly more diagrammatic lines of thought about Korbička's work. They should be considered as simply eight concurrent entry points to Pavel Korbička's spatializations of sculpture. Hopefully, they will help new publics to acknowledge his important contribution to the publicness of Light (and) art. In my perspective, as a curator, a programmer, and a cultural activist, Korbička's language has a specific potential for a richer urban life, and in these simple entries, I shall try to capture its fundamental dynamics. It's a modest task, compared to the experiential complexity these beautiful spatial interventions generate. In addition, the following paragraphs are my own intuitive cartography of a set of places (also in the sense of ideas, sites and, crucially, the mental space in between both - it is there where art happens).

SILENCE

It might be important to start with noticing that this art avoids sound. Why? Maybe in order for the artistic gesture to remain a pure visual act, drawing a sharply defined connection between the straightforwardness of the idea and the urban spectacle's profanum. In a way, this silence establishes a semiotic emptiness, stretching the critical tradition of minimalistic drawing to express the possibility of a lasting (Classical?) cultural perspective on the image of the city. These works' silences are thus the opposite both of the visual messes that prey on our cities, and of the cold, hygienic strategies which kill their souls in the name of an obsessive order eventually negating human engagement. Furthermore, these are basically lines made by thinking (not just by walking, as in the title of Richard Long's 1967 iconic work). Puns aside, we know that thinking demands silence, for the meditative process to happen (to us) and for individual and collective conscience to rise.

ARCHITECTURE

The architectural spaces intervened by the draughtsman-artist Pavel Korbička seem to have been waiting for long for these delicately unheimlich geometrical tracings in order to fully shine as the cultural concretions of history and time they are. The very subtle embedding of the work - a luminous addition to the surrounding materiality, just a line of light (or a veil of color) - is a powerfully assertive gesture encompassing the existing (structured) urban and spatial elements. The action (which, as we have seen, is not much more than the index of the mental gesture which the work renders a body) allows the elements of the built environment to define clear situations of co-presence of the viewer: things become closer/farther, present/absent, visible/invisible, illuminated/darkened... beautiful. And viewers themselves become the performers of the architectural preexistence and, at the same time, and to certain extent, followers of the artist's daring ascetism. The essence of architecture - arguably based on conceptual and functional drawing - is challenged by a strange ephemeral atmospheric element. The brick, stone, glass hosting the neon tube just like the Home of Humanity (the planet) would long to be lifted by these technically simple but culturally refined luminaires.

SCALE

There is in these works a wise sense of scale. Since these drawings' appeal derives from the fact that they pull us into a geometrical dimension of the urban spirit, these lines are very much aware of an ethical imperative: true freedom follows necessity. It therefore seems that they solely aspire to highlight their very presence as a comment (from inside) of the architectural space. They play with the oblique, the straight, the vertical, the curve, the ellipse, within large-scale geometries but without touching (destroying) the physical infrastructure. They defy the everyday of the spaces where they are

with a closeness - a caress of light - that is only possible with a bold understanding of scale. Although unavoidable, these presences never surrender to hubris; they prefer to politely build a distance, not only/exactly between the sculpture's materiality and the site's floor and walls, but more between the ensemble's new dynamics and what we know (or imagine) as having existed before or will remain afterwards. In other words, these works have the exact scale to avoid the pitfalls of dream or the abyss of apathic nightmare.

COLOR

In times of hectic confusion and superficial opinion, the highly sensitive and balanced craft behind Korbička's work finds in the color red a communicative anchor for its effectiveness. Korbička's red lines, a trademark of the artist's language, become particularly relevant when in contact with the ruin and the sky (Vertical № 3, 2012) or the natural elements (North Line, 2008). Urgent, erotic, feeling, burning, essential, carnal, the projected shades of red help establish a protocol for empathy. Color attracts the passer-by - the nomad spirit in search of the light, or simply the lost soul intrigued by the sudden likeness of the lighthouse. But if red is certainly the most prominent luminous pigment in Korbička's language, also blue - the shiny, the futuristic, the beatific, the mysterious - and occasionally yellow - the playful, the cynical - or green - the aerial, the mental, the visionary... they throw us into a whirlwind of impressions during which a self-performed dive into these clearly artificial atmospheres leads one into a blissful state of contemplation. Because, in the end, when it comes to the heart, it is color, not geometry, that takes our breath away, and cares for it as we go out of the installation site. And we take with us, in our memory, holding them within the corners of our memory, the irreducible vibrations of these vibrant threads of color.

SIGNS

But still, what is crucial is the way the reductionist color palette eventually emerges more like an intelligible iconology than a stable cultural form; for again, it is there more to reveal than to occupy, and in all its conceptual and formal self-constraint it demands effort from the viewer to come out of the lazy and passive comfort zone of today's visual culture - the rapid, image-focused world - so that the redemption is nothing less than a dromology of the abstract. The images these works carry (out) with them are (unfortunately for me, who has seen only one work of Korbička live) a specific entanglement of the dimensions of sign, index and symbol. It is not that important to recognize the Ur-shape behind these cultural gestures; it is even more irrelevant to search for their processual tracing (and they are what they are, forms as signs, not discursive testimonials of their processualism); in other words, it is unrealistic to read them as symbols. As such, resilient against all appropriations other than the very surrender to their charm, they are portals to a parallel reality, with no meanings attached. Contextual art, even considering its Minimalist genealogies, rarely has been so graceful.

SEISMOGRAPHS

But what does this particular palette render visible? I am tempted to see these luminous threads as somehow recodifying the built matter around them, as if this could be the language of a sensitive comment on the historical-architectural heritage or simply the spatial given. They are the event. This fact - stones becoming a sort of skin of the city, walls, membranes, and portals for magic - is not the result of a metaphorology (Korbička is really not interested in the dense history of the meanings, be it of Light or of Shadow). It is more of a mediology to allow geometries to appear. The work Platonic Spin (2011) by Nathaniel Rackowe (realized at the Bella Skyway Festival in Toruń, among others) comes to my mind, but where the British artist reminds us of the omnipresence of the abstract notions of Platonic geometry, Pavel takes us to future worlds right happening in front of our inner eye - simply by means of letting spaces resonate with the viewer's will to follow the lines. These sculptural presences are thus the direct experience of inner horizons. And because of that, they are visual seismographs of interior events which may happen in the very urban form, enlightening us about the urban fabric(ation). Their sensitive-cognitive dimension is indispensable as a public mechanism for shared semblance.

CITYSCAPE

The cityscape is the landscape of the city. In this sense, these works themselves are the punctum of a landscape resilient to the culture of the screen. To my weary eyes, these installations are fragments of a landscape articulated by imagination, with which the artist (and we with him) can split the city's hard wares [pun intended] just for the sake of a non-discursive sort of aphorism to interrupt the city's rather fixed textuality. A social form of graphic imagination rises from these colorful, dynamic, musical scapes, which are a revealing layer in the idea of the city, a notion which has only recently started to become a more widely public matter. In the urban fabric, these sculptures seem to remind us of the need to know more about ourselves as Humans in Transit, strolling across these consciously enlightened rooms and surprisingly pure urban paths. This is possibly why Korbička's formal repertoire is sometimes almost deceptive; his lines are no more than the tracings of thoughts, drawing a visual take on the surrounding scapes. Drawing itself becomes the possibility to mentally evade the city. But also for spatial cognition. In the aura of color, across the future of the lines, beyond (and before) the plastic veils of the material everyday. As if a sort of urban communication aesthetic suddenly became visible. Somehow elementary - rarefied - but with maximized visual impact - highlighting spaces - Light drives surfaces to accommodate clear emotions, without which the fabrication of our cities and no less the reinvention of our built and inherited heritage would be an impossibility.

LINE

All this is a scenography of the line. Year after year, Korbička's threads across a range of spaces have been accumulating, as if to weave a virtual world made of geometrical resonances. It is about adding virtual (and real) traces

of light to the surrounding reality; they are now the path of a mind wandering around and capturing many different places' potential identities. As if providing a provisional home for the never-ending line. In the case of the somehow theatrical work scratched on the pavement, the abstract temporarily cedes itself to a vernacular translation of a natural phenomenon of light. In Korbička's work, this is an atypically organic line (reminding me of Nicola Evangelisti's lightning). But besides this atypical move to the ground, more importantly it acknowledges how Korbička's lines have always a nomad potential. For instance, when one looks once again at Vertical № 3, what we witness is a total artwork of light which is both a line drawn in the landscape and a large scale installation including the environment. And, well, if there is the ultimate line in culture, isn't it a straight line? In Toruń, there were even two. Two bold red traces heading toward the sky like arrows of Human courage, alongside two trees as tall as buildings (Parallels, 2011). So yes, the line is possibly what takes us to a virtually endless play with space and its givens, cutting through every dimension in our experience of life, the world, the universe. And one must finally not forget that these lines are autonomous, both during daytime situations, or when the night comes. Their specific magic gets stronger as the evening comes, but they won't automatically lose their power at daybreak.

Be it in Toruń or Brno (Place in the Place, 2010), the line demonstrates that there are implicit structures everywhere, and these might be relocated for the sheer pleasure of perceptual décalage. Like in the research of an artist like Alessando Lupi, about whose optic marvels I have written a few "lines" which now sound premonitory: The continuum of Lupi's work is like a delicate but steady line of thought where the present allies itself to a vision of the future, in order to give sense to the past. In the fabric of the built environment, Lupi points us all a fuller reality and it's now time for the public to do their job. The point is that the line - in Lupi and even more in Korbička - might be there as if to remind us of how drawing may ground the absolute power of the imagination, of the creative act, capable of both contesting the everyday and enlivening it through the structuring of atmospheres. And of course, there is sometimes a literalness in this drive that illuminates spaces in a multi-dimensional way - as in 15° (2010). This is a work that takes the vision behind The False Angle (2008) to another level of consciousness and communicative impact.

Time to draw my line and finish the text. But one more idea must be scribbled, recalling the words Gertrude Stein wrote about Picasso: A creator is not in advance of his generation, but he is the first of his contemporaries to be conscious of what is happening to his generation. This is in fact about art acknowledging how there is a magic thread connecting the past's built heritage and landscapes, our experience of the present time - a time during which the line became straight, to use a notion I have found in Tim Ingold's brief history of the line - and the possibilities of urban text to be expanded by our reception of what the artists draw. Again with Ingold: As in life, what matters is not the final destination, but all the interesting things that occur along the way. For wherever you are, there is somewhere further you can go.

Mário Caeiro