

MASSIMO SCOLARI

*Considerations and Aphorisms
on Drawing*

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CONSIDERATIONS AND APHORISMS ON DRAWING

Metaphysics of Drawing

What most nearly fulfills a conception is a freehand drawing executed without resolving the continuity between thinking and figuration, so that the line resembles not so much the thing that wants to be contained as the thought to which it refers. In freehand drawing the skein of thought, with its dislocations and accidents draws from the line solid form. The sketch, more than any other drawing, is able to speak instantly with a single logic, because through its paths the hand imitates the idea with voluntary omissions. With a few scratches the pencil deposits the traces of everything that is omitted. Manual skill precedes and at times anticipates thought, while the pencil chases after its vertiginous reassessments, slowing

down in hesitations, revising the forgotten traces, overturning the decisions and then suddenly realizing the solution.

Along this trajectory of prestigitation the materials have to love themselves and to be loved. Beware of forcing a soft lead to slither over a paper that is too smooth or a point that is too hard over a rough paper. Congruence of materials is decisive for the propriety of the language. Signs, like sounds, have meaning even before arriving at the figure, and discords in the line, like disagreements between materials, results in the idea being derailed.

One who thinks marks slowly, while one who explains can go faster because he has already thought, but in both cases sureness of hand guarantees the capturing of the ideas.

Guided hand and free hand

Nothing is more unsuited than technical geometric drawing to the commencement of a figuration. One can accept the linkage with the theme as a key to composition but not that of the hand. True, *horror vacui* chains the hand to the dazzling white of the paper, but the orthopedics of the drawing

with an instrument is even more paralyzing since it simulates a skill that it does not possess. One feels obliged to follow the idea of the certainty of inclinations and rectilinearity, which is impossible for the free hand. But instead, it is precisely that sharp rigidity that mars the idea and carries the signs away from their proper meanings. One who draws knows that in reflection the hand must follow with docility and without slowing the flash of thought; all too often ideas do not wait for us. We could say that drawing ought to proceed almost automatically and allow reason to intervene only to overcome obstacles. When the figuration is complete, when the idea is at last unveiled, only then does the hand become the docile motor of the guided line; it may rest, measure, correct the intemperance of the inventions, and render accessible to view all the hidden bits that the sketch had hurriedly left behind. During this progressive dissection the complete anatomy of the project will emerge and the gaze will penetrate with the scalpel of exactitude into the interstices of the project. But no instrumental precision, however hallucinatory it may be, can ever possess the infinite richness of the free hand, nor bring about

those extraordinary diversions in the sign which poorly prepared spirits abandon as errors. Precisely in the face of the unexpected, the hand escapes the control of thought, brushes aside the roughness and fractures of the material and attacks its adventure alone. Often it is these “incidents” that reawaken the imagination with their lightning brilliance. If we are prepared to gather these conspiracies of the hand and materials, forgetting the trepidations over technique, we may approach the true essence of drawing.

The Format of Drawing

Those who draw often underestimate the format of a drawing. I do not refer to its simple extension, but to the relation that is inevitably established between the surface and that which encloses it – between the form, the scale and the position of the drawing on the page.

A small drawing on a large surface offers a homeless and floating image, an excess of void that often enframes weak works. On the other hand, a small sheet hastily drawn and without order, puzzles and irritates us. But these conditions of density or

rarefaction cannot help us to decide if they do not anchor us to the scale of the representation and to the dimensions of the hand. The sheet of paper has a bodily rapport with the marking hand. The maker of drawings knows that to be manageable a pencil has to exceed the length but not the diameter of the finger and, in order for a sketch to preserve all its qualities, it should not exceed the dimension of the hand or of two hands.

When not guided by instruments, the hand delineates by rotating on the wrist, which is in turn guided from the elbow in the manner of a pantograph. For this reason formats that exceed twice the length of the hand involve more complex movements of the arm and thus alterations in pressure that are difficult to control.

The smaller the format of the sheet and the more diminutive the scale, the more precise the execution must be so that the intelligibility of the sign does not result in confused evocations.

In projective representations the relationship between the actual dimension of the object and its reduction becomes extremely significant; as the reduction increases, entire series of details disappear, thus determining what has to be emphasized or hidden in successive stages of the project.

Aphorisms

1

Form becomes figure when the idea abandons it.

2

*A drawing always has to be ungrateful toward
the person who makes it.*

3

*Inexplicability of lines is the signal of excess;
a beautiful drawing is silent.*

4

*The eye observes only if the memory
accompanies it without being seen.*

5

*Imagination consists in the desire for deformation
and the deformation is the image of the desire.*

6

*Observation permits one to calculate
the imaginary network of references.*

7

We recall only the forms that we have judged.

8

*If careful observation is not a lightning unveiling,
it becomes contemplation and a relaxation
of thought.*

9

*Classifications serve to bring the empirical
to the idea.*

10

*Geometrical reasoning in thought leads
to inadequate ends.*

11

*Thought cannot travel through spaces; the hand
has to show the secret of the labyrinth*

12

*Art corrects and simplifies nature. It reveals and
reunites in one particular place and, according
to a particular perception, everything beautiful
and spare that our consciousness can grasp.*

13

13

*The study of history must not reveal to
us the terse disenchantment of forms.*

14

*Architects commit many errors in their works
that are always the richest episodes in teaching.*

15

*The borders of the poetic are the centers
of what follows*

II

Axonometric Drawing

The discomfort we experience before a tilted picture or a wall out of plumb tells us that the force of gravity is also an aspect of form.

The drawing of things, by habitual usage, has always traced its lines with geometric adherence to this force: it binds the body to the world, orients all things, and propels the perpendiculars of the drawing toward the ground line. Architecture too, as the human object *par excellence*, is oriented and orders itself within those invisible lines of force that project it onto the earth toward the center of the world.

Vitruvius defined as *Ichnografia*, *Orthografia* and *Sciografia*, the projections that render universally intelligible the design of a work of architecture.

But it is in the famous letter of Raphael to Pope Leo X detailing a plan for surveying the ancient monuments of Rome that this codification is made precise and is completed in a modern sense. Alongside the meticulous description of Vitruvius' three projections as "plan," "elevation," and "section," Raphael introduces perspective drawing and, at the same time, dismisses it as the tool of painters. Raphael regards perspective as unnecessary for the architect, yet useful for "more effectively satisfying the desire of those who love to see and properly understand everything that is designed..." In fact, he represents the perspective drawing as a seductive feature for those who do not understand the real architectural drawing: "dolce prospettiva" seems to have exhausted its symbolic burden.

Consigned as a technique in artists' studios, the mathematical spirit of perspective would return at the dawn of the exact sciences. But neither the magic anamorphoses of Nicéron nor the triumphal prospects of the Bibbienas were able to extract it from Raphael's "modern" devaluation.

When the century of the Enlightenment turned its back on *tricking the eye* in favor of the truth of sentiment, then perspective would ingest defi-

natively the more modest path of a seductress in Beaux-Arts juries and professional studios.

A house with walls that are not perfectly parallel and which does not conform to the original project may yet remain habitable.

But in the world of machinery those inexactitudes are almost always fatal. Deformation of a few tenths of a millimeter is sufficient to disrupt a rotary motion, while microscopic casting defect may cause a cannon to explode.

So it is not by chance that the type of representation that Meyer first called axonometric should have originated in the world of mechanics. The marvelous mechanical inventions of Taccola, of Valturio, Leonardo, Ramelli, and the mining machinery of Agricola tended necessarily to preserve the conditions of parallelism and measurability in their representation as functional machines. It is different for architecture. One may not properly speak of a “machine for living” because the building is inevitably in arrested motion at the moment of its greatest functionality and beauty. Resistances and the forces of gravity are kept in equilibrium so that all may function in the steadfast immobility that welcomes the mo-

tion of life and distributes it throughout the plan, guides it in the sections and reveal its beauty in elevations.

The eye takes in this immobile enigma with the deception of foreshortening, even if the weight of the body directs it to recognize the parallel and orthogonal lines that imprison the gravity. And it is this weightiness that bears the conical catastrophe of sight to the reality of the parallels of axonometry. This is why military architecture, as a war machine, is primarily represented in *military perspective* (oblique axonometry). In no other way can one measure the motion of war machines, the friction between attack and defense, the murderous trajectories of projectiles and the subterranean treacheries of mines. In this exact geometry of death the “vanishing lines” of sight are reconfigured in the separateness between constant dimensions.

In reality, the greatest demand for precision, exacted by the pressure of industrialization can be satisfied only with the support of orthogonal or oblique axonometry

Its efficiency and adequacy for the imperatives of the machine has made it the system of representation *par excellence*. Through it, the artistic

penetration into functional form encounters the unyielding intransigence of calibrations, which mercilessly reveal uncertainties and approximations.

Like the machine, axonometry is cold, ill adapted to the human figure, reorienting our approval for the promise of a precise execution – but it does not call for our attention. And it is probably this cold sureness of it that, in August Choisy's *Histoire de l'architecture* fascinates and at the same time repels us. Because in the 1700 axonometric drawings packed into the book, every emotional appeal is blocked, as if in encountering the infinite parts of a gigantic complex of machinery without time and without aim.

Here axonometry paradigmatically displays its ascetic character and peremptory mechanistic symbolism. For this reason it cannot be useful to casual architecture. It always expresses an anti-artistic will, as it did for the architects of the nineteen-twenties who celebrated the rites of the New Objectivity with neat axonometric drawings, as if seeking to dehumanize the excesses of the perspectives of Beaux-Arts designers.

Aphorisms

16

Some architects pretend that the forms that they have expropriated as an exercise of repetition are a homage to history.

17

Architecture proceeds by means of great forgetting; a bad work never surprises us.

18

A construction becomes architecture when it offers traces of truth. It is hard to say what truth is: mountains, water and the sun are truths.

19

The concept is always more perfect than the realization because the latter imitates the former; and imitation never occurs without some omission.

20

*The greatness of a work is grasped more rapidly
than the comprehension of it.*

21

*For a work of architecture to become a theme
in a painting it must cease to be a project.*

22

*A work of architecture is understood
as architecture and a painting as painting; a good
architect who paints a bad painting becomes
a bad painter.*

23

*A poorly painted landscape doesn't keep us from
admiring it; a building poorly designed will
surely be a sorry landscape.*

24

*Some architectural works live on only if they are
spoken of in literature; they make bad literature.*

25

*Certain modern buildings improve only when
they are imitated.*

21

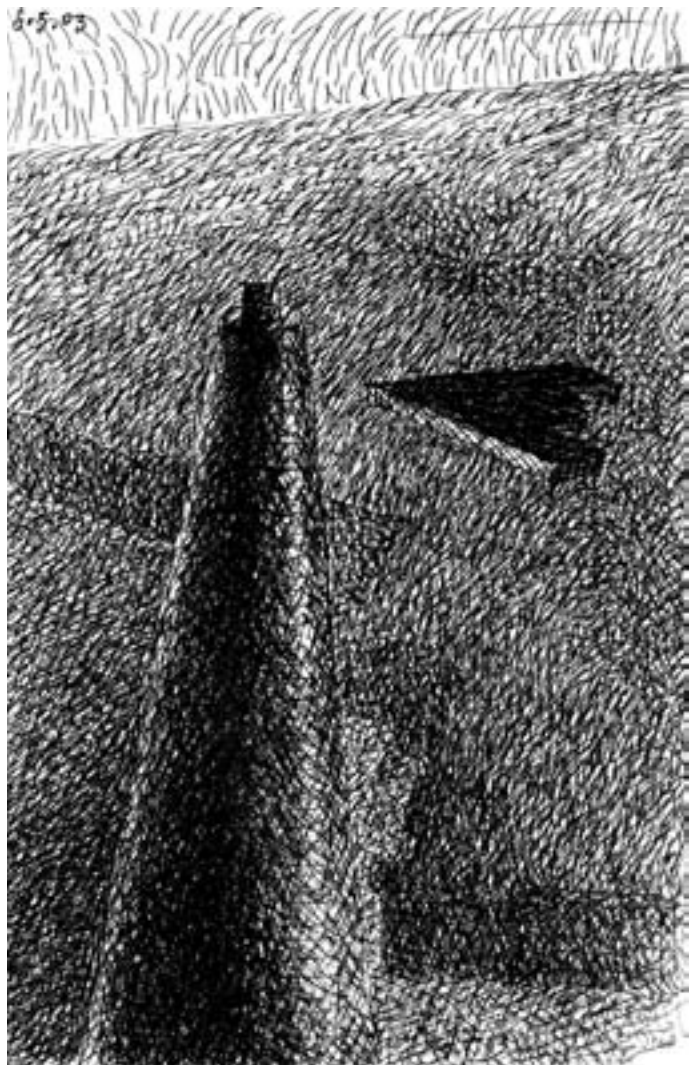
Obsessive repetitions of an error often cause it to be forgotten; in this the modern masters are inimitable.

The only thing architecture needs is everything that does not refer to it.

DRAWINGS

2001-2006

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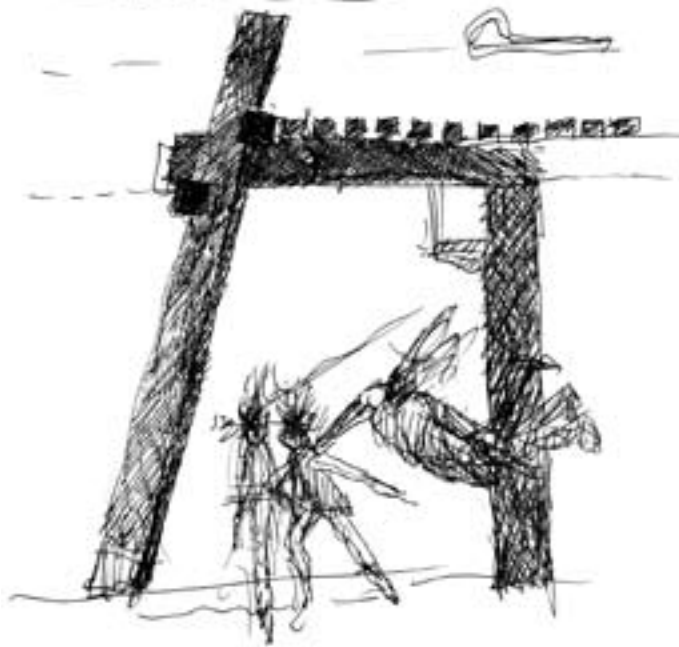
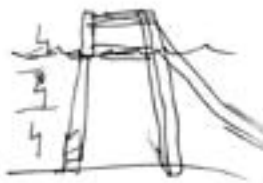




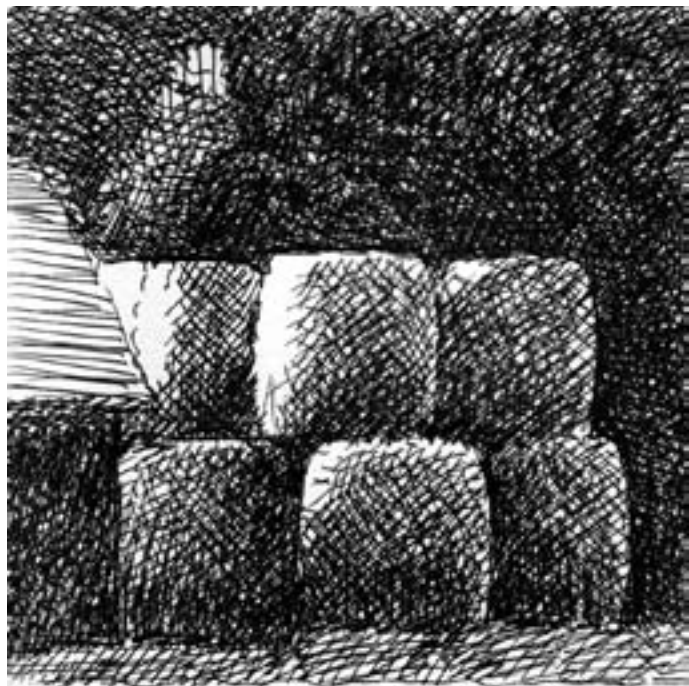


12.9.1882 Monte Cristo
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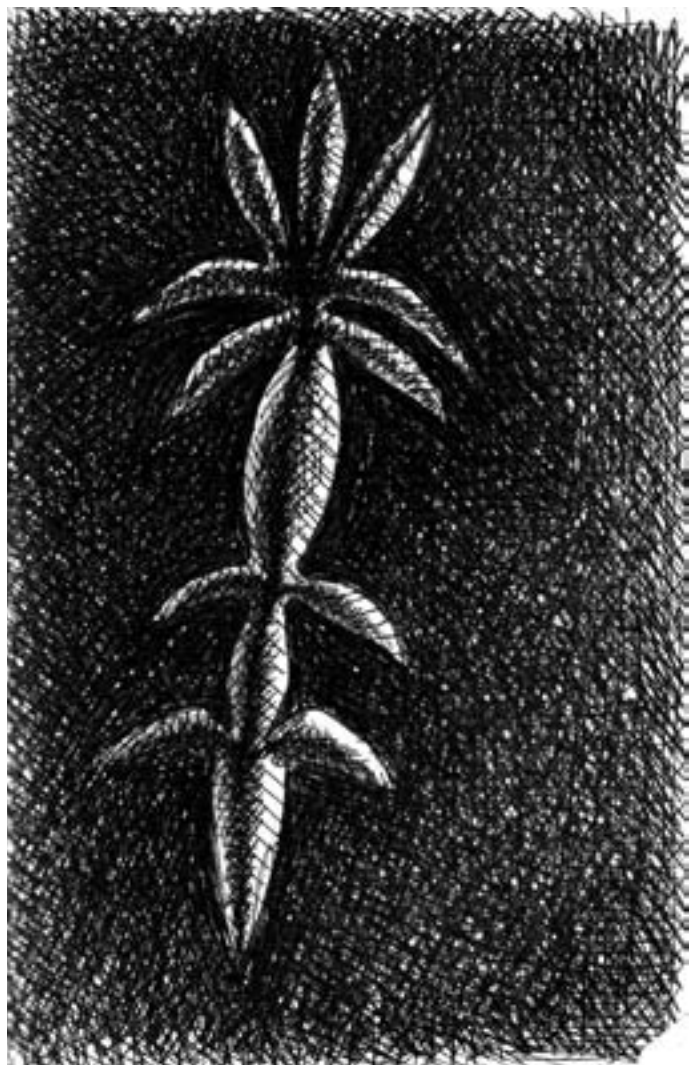
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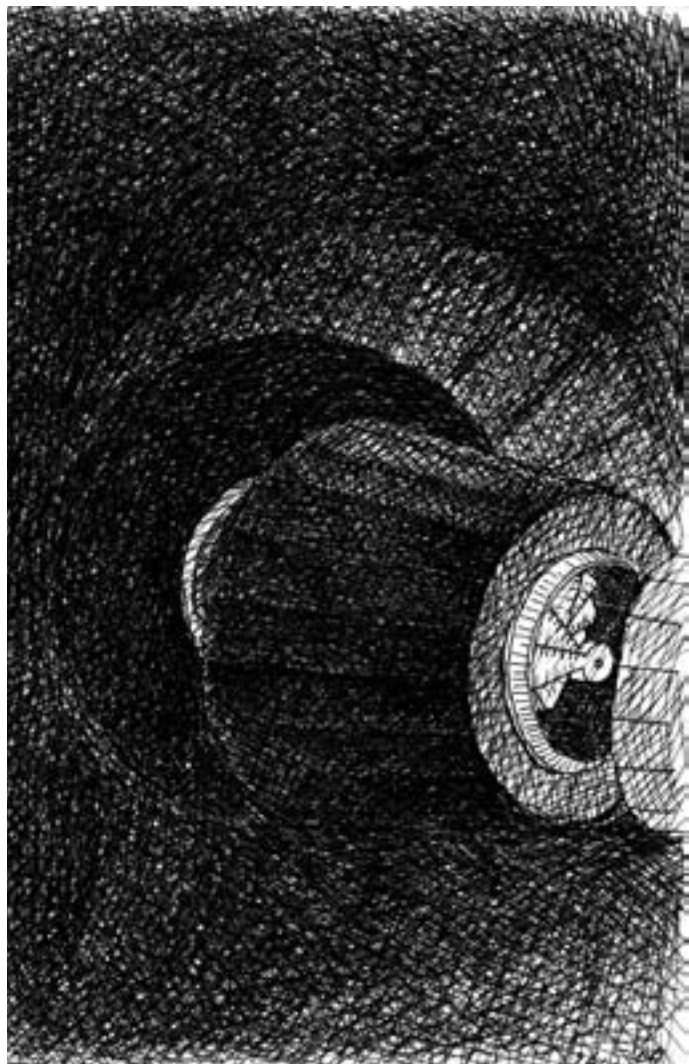
8.8.2002 Venezia



dal Duca Zianen il fieno raccolto
in i emballaggi de fustora bronco-
Gini in fondo dove i coralli
in truscuro. 15-9.

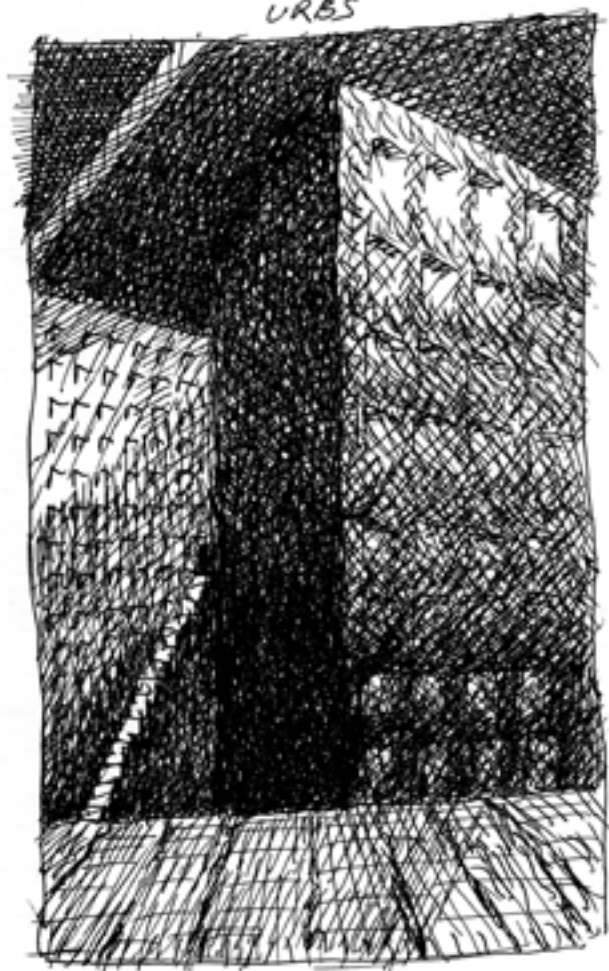




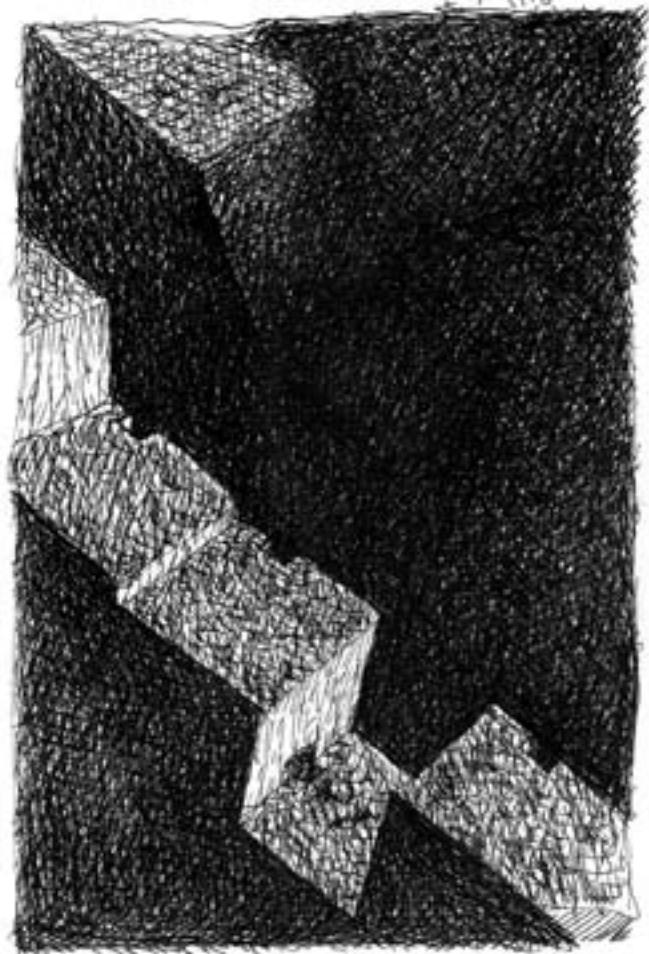


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