

# HYPNEROTOCHMACHIA NATURAE

Giacomo Pala

"It happens, that these things, being by their own nature difficult, as if in a pleasure garden filled with all types of flowers, are explained, with a certain pleasingness, in sweet prose and are revealed in figures and in images they are exposed to the eyes and are reproduced."

Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, 1499

I.

Excitement and apprehension. We have found ourselves living in a strange world: a superorganism made of technologies, narratives - different and divergent realities converging in the present. It is as if eternity was looking at us from a place outside our time and space, leaving us vanished and misplaced in the now. In this world, we recognise that something is taking place, but we cannot identify its historical determinations, nor we can understand where we are going, while we - as humans - become something other than what we think we have been until now. We look for signs of what we will be, while we constantly re-write our histories and myths; constantly redefine our arts and develop new sciences and technologies. It is the adventure human culture, driven by both what "was" before today and what "will be" tomorrow.

Humankind and technology; traditions and progress; myth and innovation: close friends living in a difficult, but mutual relationship - at least since Prometheus stole fire from the gods cosily living on the Olympus. It is a strong bond, all but peaceful: we imagine a new kind of super-human, by using myriads of prefixes (post-/hyper-/trans-/meta-), or we see a dark future at the horizon of history; it goes by the name of "extinction".

In front of this reality, many see two only viable options: to follow technology and innovation, or

to go back to an idealised past and glory. Similar positions emerge in architecture. Either the effort to renew architecture's ideological mask by transforming our discipline in the deterministic outcome of technological processes, or the ultimately impossible attempt of living in an equally ideological anachronism. Such a dichotomy should be questioned: it is impossible to act like positivistic magpies and follow the shiny promises of innovation, as it is unbearable to renounce to new ideas, techniques and forms. But still: how can we escape such a dialectic?

II.

To think about this question, we propose a concrete and dream-like reverie - a hypnerotomachia (a strive of love in the form of a dream): an allegory where elements are used as parts of a 3D hieroglyph that must be decoded, composing a collage of physical figures. It is a fragmentary, imperfect and possibly incomplete composition telling the story of Nature finding itself in a dream where it encounters all the things of the world - technologies, myths, histories, humans, abstract visions and, ultimately, love. Myths, legends, dreams and technologies find a coexistence, accepting the fact that culture incubates ancient, mythical and archetypal instances arising from the world of dreams, while being inseparably linked to new technologies, new possibilities, new languages and new opportunities. It is a world where the archaic and the utopian - the past and the future - seamlessly come together, shaping our reality.

III.

If this is true, then, a provocation. If these realities come together under the form of figures images, forms and shapes, then we must deal with a specific form of theory; a theory that becomes speculative. Theory is usually un-



derstood as a form of discourse submitted to the authority of history and language, tied by the mutual restraint between what can be read, seen or experienced and what can be written. By becoming image and form, theory can deal with the production of reality, showing glimpses of what is not known yet. In this realm, that is neither design, nor writing - theory reveals the limits of both criticism, and design; the first circumscribed by the rules of discursive meaning, the second constrained by pragmatic needs. Theory, by overcoming its usual form, can produce an alterity: an opening within the architectural discourses, making the case for transgressions of meanings. The world does not speak only through its possible significations, but expresses its weird reality in the folds of its forms, images and through its aesthetic. Critical theory has taught us how to read and interpret the world, even though - sometimes - it blends into commentary. And yet there are things that should be understood differently - with "pleasingness", according to the Hypnerotomachia - a joyful and erotic lively drive towards the production of contents and forms.

For now, all it is needed to think about is a possible answer to the following question: is it possible to imagine a kind of theory going beyond the critical model? A positive answer anticipates the definition of a kind of theory as a form of invention.



