

III Drawing and Architectural Practice Revisited

Is Western architecture, as Reyner Banham argues, specifically characterized by “the persistence of drawing—*disegno*—as a kind of meta-pattern that subsumes all other patterns,” and are architects “unable to think without drawing,” because, as he goes on to suggest, “drawing is the true mark of one fully socialized into the profession of architecture”?¹ And, if drawing is the true mark of a professional architect, is it more a concomitant of the privilege and control it provides the profession, or is it, as those interviewed here would have it, primarily because drawing is a powerful conceptual tool and only secondarily because it is a social instrument?

Certainly the social position of architects is based on their capacity to create and develop the conceptual framework for the making of building. And it is through the drawing, for the most part, that they produce their creations. Is it any wonder then that the architects spoke so eloquently about drawing as an internal dialogue, one that serves, depending on the architect, as a theoretical basis of design, a test of one’s conception, or as both conception and critique?

This does not mean that these architects are unaware of the social role of drawing. In the interviews, they speak with great concern about how the drawing links what they do as individuals to others (architects in their offices, clients, engineers, and builders) with whom they work. The drawing is a form of communication and a basis for social inter-

actions without which what they design would not be realized as a built form. How and when one joins one's creative energies with those of others is a central concern of all the architects interviewed. And for all of them, too, but in different ways, it is an issue of balance. On the one hand architectural design requires open, free, and mutual discourse with all those involved in the making of the design in order to get the best from them. On the other hand, architecture must be a managed and directed process that will eventually lead in a reasonably efficient and organized way to the realization of a design. For the architect, the empowerment that drawing provides is first and foremost the ability it gives to conceive, test, and realize the best possible design. Thus what might be seen as a form of social control may be understood by the architect as a natural concomitant of the act of conceptual realization. If the drawing appears privileged to others, it is, for the architect, part and parcel of the creative act and discourse so central to what society asks the architect to do.

Whether the architect uses drawing openly and unselectively with clients or provides only a carefully chosen sample, for the architect it is a matter of how best to educate and involve clients in the process of design. The use of drawing is a way to open up a dialogue, to focus it and to offer laypersons a way into the design. Of course, what the architect might understandably see as education can for others represent manipulation and control, or possibly a

kind of professional mystification. Whatever the intent of the architect, setting up one's own form of discourse as a central instrument of communicative interaction sets limits, defines agendas, and creates social hierarchies. What can be an opening into the architect's world might instead become a closing off of that world to others. Education implies a choice about what it is that should be learned and from whom. Moreover, working through drawing closes off some possibilities of learning about building as much as it opens up others. This problem is not unique to architecture; it is a problem for all professions when using technical languages, symbolic systems, or jargon.

As the interviews show, different architects draw differently and use different types of drawing in creating a design and communicating it to others. This suggests that, as in all processes of creation and its theorization, there is room for different notions about just what the creation should be and how one best realizes and communicates that creation. Given different goals in design, different backgrounds, the variety of ways of working through a design, and the different biases toward drawing, it is no surprise that architects use drawing differently. These differences are motivated by individual character and choice and, given the nature of architectural creation, have no particular social implication.

At the same time, though, differences in the use of drawing represent highly political choices about how design

should be defined and who it is that should define it. If architects were content to use drawing as an instrument of creation as they quietly pursue their work, their different uses of drawing would not be an issue. However, feelings about the uses of various styles of drawing run high; they form a significant part of the way jobs are obtained, competitions won, and reputations made within the highly competitive world of architectural practice. Thus, drawings and the different ways they are used to define a practice are as much about finding a way to produce a design as they are about creating an individual identity.

Drawing, if mostly about the creation of design, is also about the management of that process. Who draws what and when, who holds the pencil in any architectural dialogue, who gets to see what drawings and at what point in the process of design are fundamental to defining an architect's position in the social organization of architectural production. If drawing is central to conceiving, it is also central to defining how that conception is managed as it moves from its initial stages through its actual development and realization as a material form. For the architect, this is not so much an issue of social control as one of using the instrument that best enables all those working on a design to contribute to the final product. The social uses of the drawing are epiphenomenal to the realities of design as a process of making. Nonetheless, as this process involves a socially hierarchical division of labor, the drawing plays

a critical role in defining one's place in that process and the means through which that process is controlled.

As part of the creation of a design, drawing is about risk, vulnerability, and the sharing of the most tentative as well as fully formed thoughts in a process that involves testing, critiquing, reiterating, and transforming. It is a process of offering to others what the architect has produced through much work and involvement. Through the drawings offered by the architect, others are made privy to the interior world of architectural creation and are asked to comment, correct, and reshape that creation. At this moment, architectural dialogue is the most open, generous, and sharing of dialogues, as each participant not only provides insights into his or her ideas but shares with others the way those ideas came to be what they are.

However, drawing, as a specialized and not necessarily shared instrument of discourse, can become a monologue, shaping agendas, creating silences, and controlling the direction of the discourse between architect and others. It can be used to reduce all potential voices to that of the architect alone and to shut out the possibility of a shared understanding.

However we interpret drawing's many uses and whatever we argue about how it should be used, the many ways of understanding drawing derive from the many and complex relationships it both produces and represents.

What I hope we have learned from what has preceded is that architectural drawing embodies the conflict between architecture as an art and as a social practice. On the one hand, architectural drawing serves as a way of investigating and discussing what the built world should or could be. On the other hand, it is a way for the architect to come to grips with the social divisions fostered by the realities of power, position, and authority associated with the making of that world. In both cases, the drawing acts as a form of empowerment.

Important for the architect, it is worth repeating, is drawing's role as an instrument for the creative discourse through which a conceptual and virtual world is made real. The drawing is an instrument that empowers and enriches the creative and conceptual potentials of the architect's practice. Equally important, if less likely to be admitted openly, is the role of drawing as an instrument of cultural power. We live in a world where the client, whether patron or consumer, private or public, institutional or individual, defines what kind of building will be built, where it will be built, with what resources, and for what purposes. The architect has few resources, little social power, and little freedom to define the underlying decisions that lead to the making of our built environment. Indeed a substantial part of that environment is produced without the intervention of architects at all.

The drawing, though, provides a cultural instrument through which architects can mediate the social division of labor, capturing a place for themselves and their art within that broader social making of the built environment. Because it is their medium and a form of language or discourse over which they have the greatest command and understanding, drawing allows architects to reappropriate a critical say in the process of decision making, and to reframe decisions initially made by others within a world of the architects' making.

If the drawing does not provide absolute power or authority, it does provide an important cultural discourse through which architects empower themselves. Using drawing, they can define degrees of freedom with which to realize what they have been asked to design. Moreover, this shared cultural discourse unites architects and provides the basis for an intellectual and conceptual bond and a place and a group to which architects uniquely belong. And if the drawing does not give underlying social power, it does, as Alistair McIntosh has told me, "allow the architect to claim a power over the interpretation of what architecture should be."

The way of thinking and acting that the drawing represents and the social role it has been given make the use of drawing a precarious cultural and social instrument. On the one hand, the design of architecture is a shared social process, one of give and take among a number of

actors from architect to client. For a conception to be realized, the architectural project demands a generosity of interaction and communication. It demands a give and take between the architect and his or her subject, and between the architect and others with different interests, temperaments, understandings, and training, and a sense that all parties to the project are integral and contributory participants. As in all art worlds, a series of individual and different skills and creative energies must be molded into a unity.²

On the other hand, and at the same time, in a world where status, social resources, and cultural authority provide one with a meaningful and powerful voice that will be heard within the cacophony of competing and different voices, what is a generous process of give and take becomes one also of competition, manipulation, and a conflict over who has the right and the authority to be heard. In such a world, our world, the ability to control not only what is said but in whose voice and within what mode of discourse becomes vital if one is to maintain any degree of freedom and control over one's cultural and social production. To the extent that architects can define the discourse of architectural making, they can also claim a lesser or greater degree of authority, reward, and social status and position. As autograph that lays claim to design and the rewards that should emanate from it, and as allograph, or open text, that allows for a broad discourse about design, the drawing sets out both the social and cultural tasks of the architect.

Drawing thus is a complex and crucial instrument for the architect. It mediates between conceptual practice and social production; it helps to chart a course between the desire for conceptual freedom and the need for cultural and social compromise. It allows for both the virtual and the real and it provides an instrument for individual creativity, conceptual communication, and social interaction. Drawing brings people together in common pursuits and sets them apart; it provides a shared discourse and a basis for open dialogue and a way to distinguish architect from other. The drawing allows the architect to compose a design, to orchestrate it, and to conduct the many players who will realize it. But like any good conductor, the architect must balance between the cultural and social control that drawing gives and the need to be receptive to the many and often discordant voices that go into the making of architecture. In the final analysis this demands not only control but restraint, and the ability not only to command but to be commanded.

In the end, for better or worse, without the empowerment drawing provides architects to take conceptual command over what they are designing and without the authority and the concomitant control this gives them over the making of architecture, the practice of architecture and our built environment would not be what they are today. Nonetheless, opening up a dialogue about drawing between anthropological outsider and architectural insider, even to

the degree that one voice, the anthropologist's, appears critical, can only help broaden architectural possibilities. The way we use and understand media, and the relation of the virtual to the real, are today being rapidly transformed. As a result, how we allocate social responsibility and position to those cultural actors who use these media and deal with the relation of the virtual to the real will also be transformed. If architects are to play a role in these changes and if they are to realize the full potential of what lies ahead, they must examine their practices in the present. A dialogue about drawing among architects and between architects and others is a crucial place to begin.

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