Chapter 17
The SPACE Between:
On the Relationship between
Drawing and Design

Luigi Trentin
Politecnico di Milano, Italy

ABSTRACT

The topic of this paper is the correspondence between drawing and design, and the mental, operative and temporal space that elapses between the project idea and its final organization. We focus our attention on the design process. This activity must be aimed at the path rather than the final result, in terms of form, at the method for achieving form rather than the form in itself. Accepting this approach as valid, the importance is clear of the entire group of intermediate drawings. The evaluation of the corpus of intermediate drawings constitutes a very interesting and crucial point of view for the interpretation of the development. The paper investigates the space that is between the initial idea of the project and its formalization in the final drawings; the changes brought about by the digital revolution in the field of architectural representation are one of the key points to think about this space.

INTRODUCTION

The topic of this paper is the correspondence between drawing and design, and the mental, operative and temporal space that elapses between the project idea and its final organization.

Simplifying, it is possible to say that the area of work, in which I want to move with these considerations, has two border lines.

The first one establishes a limit between the abstract word of the thought and the moment when the thought itself starts to be expressed in concrete, even if fleeting, representations, called signs. The topic of the sign is rather complicated. From a rigorous point of view the sign is intended as base element of a language – in our case the language of the drawing – disconnected by any other significance. The sign is the base element – not further reduced. Without going into matters of semiotic, in this paper the sign is a transitional moment, even though still uncertain, between the action of drawing a sign and its meaning in terms of project.

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The second border line establishes the achievement of an accomplished formalization that is expressed through detailed and unequivocal drawings.

Going beyond these boundaries is beyond the aim of this paper. Considering the infinite field in which it should be possible to answer the basic question “where ideas come from”, it would mean entering in an extreme complicated universe that also neuroscience is trying to investigate. This field is intricate even if it is limited to the subset of the project of architecture or of industrial design. On the other extreme side we should extend our investigation to the process of realization of the project in the form of a built construction, by introducing new and different parameters.

In other words, we have defined the field of the representation and, consequently, the range of action of the designer. This range is located displaced in time and space with respect to the realization of the artifact. This displaced location defines the designer in a Modern way and the use of a code of representation and communication of the ideas is his tools (Forty, 2000). This code is the drawing in its several forms.

What has been said until now may sound obvious to those who have a non superficial knowledge about representation.

Let us now look more closely at the space briefly described and that we can call our “playground”. Let’s imagine that the left border of the playground is defined by the imaginary boundary that separates the “world of ideas” from their first translation into significant signs. If previously this border could appear clear and straightforward, from a closer observation it rather appears as a jagged line, full of overlapping and trespassing. It appears now as a liminal layer, a contact surface, area of exchange between the two parts.

The drawing has been defined as the form - thought (Purini, 1996) of the architect and of the designer, used to emphasize two aspects: the impossible precise distinction between abstract idea and clear expression in graphic sign, the nature of the drawing as a place of thought.

Let us now look at the other side. The final shape, resulting from the design process, is defined through a conventional code of representation in accordance with rules of different nature.

Proceeding by categories, we can try to break them down according to general characteristics: the abstract and coded representations (plan, section, etc.) and the realistic – virtual representations (i.e. forms of representation that simulate what potential exists, as long its realization, and thus simulates the actual or possible appearance: the perspective, now in the abused form of the rendering, the isometric, etc.)

Playing Fields

We now restrict the area of interest and we now move our boundary before the set of “final” drawing of the project. (It is a simplification, useful for the development of the issue. The phase called “final drawings” is a complex process, not discussed in this paper).

We have defined a playing field that starts from the uncertain and weak boundary where the idea is made concrete, through the drawing, in a first stable shape, which extends itself up to the point where the process of modification of the idea is crystallized in a configuration no further questionable.

The extension of this space is potentially infinite: it is the place where the project (idea) and the drawing (formalization) totally overlap.

If the charm of the observation of the first sketches done by a Master of architecture or of design, which we can trace in exhibitions or in publications, also reports a romantic vision of the revelation – the emotion to recognize the hand of the master who makes the sign – this epiphany shows, in a clear and