

MAREK FIREK\*

## MEDIATION IN ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING AND ITS TEACHING

### ZAPOŚREDNICZENIE W RYSUNKU ARCHITEKTONICZNYM I JEGO NAUCZANIU

#### Abstract

Mediation in architectural drawing and its teaching, and in general in art and didactics, is a phenomenon that occurs constantly but with different intensity and at different periods of time. Then, the meta- prefix appears and we obtain 'meta-art', 'meta-drawing', etc. The article covers this issue in relation to the ever wider use of computers in present times. Due to external determinants it is sometimes perceived as pejorative; however, it does not necessarily have to be true. In this work the author analyses the above-mentioned phenomena in reference to manifold criteria of defining and the description of architectural drawing, as well as on the basis of theories concerning designing. Simultaneously, an attempt is made to include these ponderings and conclusions in an outline of the theory of choice that the author is currently elaborating. The theory assumes the possibility of a positive assessment of mutually contradictory theories, which, paradoxically, might lead to interesting results in the sphere of didactics.

*Keywords: architectural drawing, mediation, meta-art, theory of choice*

#### Streszczenie

Zapośredniczenie w rysunku architektonicznym i jego nauczaniu, a ogólnie w sztuce i dydaktyce, jest zjawiskiem występującym stale, z różnym nasileniem w różnych okresach. Pojawia się wtedy przedrostek meta- i mamy metaszukę, metarysunek itd. W artykule zostało to omówione w związku z coraz szerszym obecnie zastosowaniem komputera. Uwarunkowania zewnętrzne sprawiają, że czasami jest to odbierane jako pejoratywne. Niekoniecznie tak musi być. Autor w pracy analizuje powyższe zjawiska w odniesieniu do różnorodnych kryteriów definiowania i opisu rysunku architektonicznego oraz na bazie teorii dotyczących projektowania. Jednocześnie zostaje podjęta próba wpisania tychże rozważań i ustaleń w opracowywany przez autora aktualnie zarys teorii wyboru. Teoria ta zakłada możliwość występowania pozytywnej oceny sprzecznych wzajemnie teorii, co paradoksalnie w sferze dydaktyki może prowadzić do ciekawych efektów.

*Słowa kluczowe: rysunek architektoniczny, zapośredniczenie, metaszukanie, teoria wyboru*

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## 1. Introduction

Architectural drawing is mediated in its nature. When it comes to the term *mediated*, it would be the best to confine to a general statement that it occurs when we want to overtake or convey something via something else. It should be also added that it is the becoming of something between something and something else, without going into the possible philosophical interpretation of the term. The first definition seems to be simpler but it is tainted by the word *via*, which might require further defining but is not necessary for these ponderings.

The term of an architectural drawing, however, should be addressed. Is it enough to say that it is “an architect’s drawing as well as a drawing depicting architecture” [3]? It is, but only if we introduce certain limitations and extensions. It is obvious that a nude drawn by an architect is not an architectural drawing, but it becomes one when it constitutes a design sketch of a body- shaped building. Such a drawing has to possess features that can be described as preliminary for further designing based on it. A painting depicting, for instance, a lip- shaped sofa, which was created by Salvador Dali, is not a design drawing, even though an actual piece of furniture was manufactured based on it. A landscape, in turn, is not an architectural drawing, even if it is created by an architect who intends to design a building in this particular location. Thus, an architectural drawing is a drawing made by an architect in connection with his professional work as well as a drawing depicting architecture. A drawing connected with the didactics of the profession of an architect also belongs to the category of drawing connected with their professional work.

It needs to be noticed that there occur two categories of the title drawing. In reference to the already mentioned didactics, there arise situations that are not fully defined. What are sketches of figures drawn by architecture students as their assignment? Considering the fact that the purpose of the correction of students’ works during classes is, among others, to include the construction (“architecture”) of a human figure, their works partially fit these categories. Even though they are created by future architects.

Having made these attempts to define the term ,one can consider the development of teaching architectural drawing, including the changes taking place in the field of technology (computer drawing) along with introducing the assessment of these changes.

## 2. What kind of mediation?

Architectural drawing is mediated, as it has a utilitarian function [2]. It is a building, and not a sketch, that is a work of art created by an architect. Yet on another level of understanding, there is a mediation resulting from using a particular tool during the drawing process. Can nowadays the computer be such a tool? It must be said that at design offices the transition from developing a design manually with the rapidograph to doing it with the computer was practically smooth. Why, then, is introduction of these techniques to freehand drawing so controversial? When drawing on a piece of paper, we hold a pencil. Drawing on a tablet, we hold a stylus or we can just as well use our finger to draw a line or a nail if we want the line to be thin. Is it so hard to imagine students in a drawing room,

holding 70×50 cm tablets on their laps and drawing with styluses? It obviously concerns only one sort of drawing activity during the didactic process.

Providing such examples, one has to be careful not to make the mistake of futurologists who in 1985 drew their visions of “the city of the future in 30 years”, where cars were hovering in the air. “Rational” assumptions do not necessarily lead to rational effects. The production of butter in disposable plastic containers has not eliminated butter dishes from our lives [6].

In didactics the most important statement is that a proper reproduction of reality in a drawing on the basis of a model or outdoors, subsequently guarantees an appropriate reproduction of an idea that appears in a future architect’s mind on a sheet of paper (or a computer screen, from which it is then put down on paper anyway).

What, then, causes these mental reservations in the perception of architectural drawing? Is it only about the degree of mediation? Undoubtedly, an important aspect here is the transfer of evil from the field of morality to the field of technique [1]. Yet, as drawing experience shows, a certain easiness of lines does not necessarily go hand in hand with the profundity of art. This simple and commonly known observation explains a lot. It should also be remarked that when using the computer, one can generate images with programs (rendering) or make it with a stylus on the screen. The second way seems to be more “natural”.

We have an analogous situation in the drawing didactics, where the process of reaching a set aim is extremely significant. Easiness does not encourage reflection, and the resistance of the matter might be useful, as quantitative excess does not always develop into quality. Reflection is also fundamental in the didactic process when it comes to the correction of students’ works. However, also in this case one can come up with some positive examples of using the computer. Instead of laboriously drawing a certain theme, a student can bring numerous previously printed solutions to choose from. Then the correction would be about selection and rejection. One has to be cautious, however, so that the excess does not become an obstacle. It can be added as a digression that this method could be also applied to reaching the right form in the didactics of so called pure arts.

### **3. Meta-art, meta-drawing?**

There are conceptions determining various kinds of architectural drawing, including those connecting it with technical drawing [10]. As it is essentially freehand drawing that is discussed herein, a following division has been adopted for the sake of this paper (although it has its limitations):

- visionary sketches concerning free conceptions, which do not necessarily have to be realized and, what is more, they can constitute nourishment for other architects (Jan Głuszak, Antonio Sant’Elia) [8, 11],
- conceptual sketches connected with reaching the form of a designed building gradually,
- visualisations of a design already carried out connected with perfecting the design,
- visualisations of designed architecture made for the purpose of presenting them to a potential client.

This division ensues naturally from the designing process and is connected with it. As you can see, there is always a specific function that a drawing is to serve. Simultaneously, it is also a need that has to be satiated. It relates to defining designing and teaching as designing the designing [6]. However, this is a rather totalitarian approach that was characteristic of the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Referring to the design conceptions, what we get here is the transformation of fiction arising in a creator's mind into fiction on paper (optionally, on a computer screen).

Reconstruction drawing which depicts architecture should be added to the above division. Then, however, we are talking about the transformation of reality into fiction. Whereas, designing and developing a building is transforming fiction formed in a designer's mind, and then on paper, into the reality of a finished building.

Teaching drawing is designing a designer. When we assume that education entails imposing certain opinions, the above wording should not be considered gross. Currently, the didactics of architectural drawing is based on the following, sometimes interweaving, motifs. There is drawing either reconstructing reality or transforming it. Finally, there is also creative drawing. Here, we can discern certain similarity to Hegel's dialectics and his theory of a thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis.

The meta- prefix, in turn, means "above", "beyond" or "about" something in a different context. Colloquially, meta-art is art about art, meta-science is science about science, meta-drawing is drawing about drawing, and meta-relation is a relation to a relation [5]. Metaphysics is knowledge above physics. When it comes to meta-science, in a broader sense it is science knowledge.

The reception of meta-art in contemporary art criticism is not always positive. It results from desperately clinging to terms that were applicable to the 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde, and not discerning the transformations in art in a general context. The valuation of architectural drawing has to be considered against this background. As you can see, it has a servicing character to a large extent. Thus, it can be objectively assessed, unlike non-applied art, which can be only assessed subjectively. Yet, this is not a clear-cut distinction; while design(applied) arts satisfy people's physical needs, pure arts, as they are sometimes called, also satiate some needs. These, however, are psychological needs. As it turns out, there is also some type of application in this case.

#### **4. Conformity in architectural drawing and its teaching, and the theory of choice**

The notion of conformity needs to be introduced in reference to the above considerations. Yet, our understanding of the notion is not tantamount to the one used in social psychology or sociology, where it sometimes has a slightly pejorative meaning. Just as in the case of meta-art, certain limitations have to be adopted. Therefore, let us agree that it is simply an attitude compliant with the prevailing views, norms and values.

Selling a design is a key issue for an architect. They do not have to be concerned about being accused of conformity in the presentation of their design, i.e. in an architectural drawing. Such a drawing is to be nice so that a client likes it. Similarly, in didactics it is wrong to apply the same measure as in the so called pure arts. An architectural drawing can be

impressive, or even “showy”. Obviously, it has to follow all the aesthetic rules characteristic of its epoch.

Despite appearances, an artist creating a painting is in a similar situation because they always want to sell it. If they create a war-related painting, then, no matter what their intentions were, they earn on other people’s suffering when they sell it.

A question that arises is whether an architect designing a building in the style of an epoch he lives in is a conformist. And is he a non-conformist when attempting to introduce a new style? Well, introducing a new style is a willingness to rise above others, and thus, a desire to be noticed. Then one can sell a project at a higher price. It seems to follow that a willingness to introduce a new architectural style (and it refers to pure arts as well) is pure conformism. But this is not the subject of this paper.

In non-applied arts (e.g. painting) the beginning of abstraction meant the end of objective assessment. Till then, everyone looking at a painting could assess themselves, without the help of critics, whether a horse was painted well or badly. It simply resembled a horse to a bigger or smaller degree. With the coming of the non-figurative art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, critics felt they were the most important. As a result, opinions were passed that, for instance, a red spot painted on a white canvas in Krakow was worse than the same spot painted in Paris. Surprisingly, everyone believed critics. What is more, certain theories were formulated that assessment in art is only subjective. These theories still persist but is this the way it should be?

What does the above have in common with the theory of choice developed by the author hereof? According to the theory, we now have at our disposal a certain historical stock of ideas, art styles, philosophical conceptions, etc. And everyone can choose from them the one that most suits and serves them. It can be also a compilation of a few of them. The key statement for the theory is that each of these ideas, etc. is right and true. It means that if an *X* chose some theory and claims that it is true, they are right. Analogically, a *Y* who holds a contrary idea, is also right. It is like Schroedinger’s cat but for the assumption that it is unverifiable. One of its consequences is a different, multiple understanding of being, time, truth, etc. [4]. The latter can have a significant bearing on didactics of, say, architectural drawing.

The theory of choice [7] concerns various disciplines; does it, then, assume the possibility of choosing either freehand or computer drawing? It would be too simplified an understanding of the theory. It might be better to state that it is about choosing the most appropriate solution. In fact, one type of drawing should coexist along with another one. Moreover, as it was previously suggested, these types of drawing can (in terms of a definition) overlap and, therefore, it is inadvisable to present this issue too explicitly.

## 5. Conclusions

Undoubtedly, freehand drawing in the didactics of the architect’s profession will persist and develop. What can actually change is the way it is presented and made. However, the issue of using the computer should not be demonized. Drawings made by artists as preliminary sketches for programmers creating new computer games can serve as an example. It turns out

that in this bastion of what is “new” freehand drawing is crucial. Programmers can perhaps amplify artists’ sketches and are proud when new software can, for instance, strengthen light representation and distribution.

It is worthwhile to address the remarks on beauty made by Witelo, who lived and worked in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (according to researchers some of Leonardo da Vinci’s observations resemble them) [9]. In fact, they should constitute a model guideline for programmers dealing with programming or computer art. This observation correctly establishes the proportions when it comes to the use of new media in architectural drawing and its didactics.

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