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Tell Him He's Dreaming: The architect's drawing in postwar Melbourne

Keywords: Architects' Drawings, Melbourne Modernists, Melbourne Postmodernists, Boyd, Four Melbourne Architects

Introduction

Architects' drawings are integral to the field of architecture. They are easily recognised even by those outside the profession, as they would have little difficulty, with, say, construction drawings, identifying them by their scales, line-weights, and title blocks; or, with design drawings, identifying them by their perspective views, discreet colour palette, and vaguely anthropomorphic forms. These features are characteristic, and, on the face of it, keep architects' drawings apart from other forms of drawing, and, indeed, other forms of visual art.

But architects' drawings, when viewed through subtler lenses, raise issues more complex than line-weights or title blocks. This paper examines some of these issues, by using, as examples, architects' drawings by prominent Melburnian architects who practised in the postwar era, coinciding with the Modern and Postmodern architectural periods. This paper will, firstly, give a brief overview of what I consider the three definitive moments in the history of architects' drawings; this will be followed by contextual and interpretative analyses of architects' drawings.

This paper is part of a PhD research project, which, in contributing to knowledge of the architecture of Melbourne in the postwar era, underscores the capacity to understand the architecture of a particular place and time, along with its wider context, through analyses of its architects' drawings. So far as it can be ascertained, there have been few attempts to study architects' drawings in an Australian context, and none in a Melburnian context.

Critical Views: Three Moments in the History of Architects' Drawings

The history of the expression of architects' drawings, reflecting the different places and times in which they were made, has continually changed. The history of architects' drawings has been, at least in terms of the key elements and purpose of architects' drawings, largely static. It is plausible even this partial constancy has helped cement the particular current perception of architects' drawings. The concatenation of plan, elevation, and section has remained more or less unchanged for centuries; likewise for the common functions of architects' drawings, where they

are part of the design process, instruction for the construction of the design, or depict the design after construction.

The three critical moments in the history of architects' drawings are critical in more than one sense of the word; they are moments of change and frisson, and are, subsequently, also the foci of critique and discussion. The first of these moments occurred during the mid-fifteenth century, when Alberti published his treatise *De Re Aedificatoria*. Here Alberti gave precedence to drawing over the craft of building, the latter of which had been, up until that time, the force behind architecture: 'In Alberti's theory of design, the architect's drawing is the original act of creation; the physical building that may follow is only a copy, devoid of any intellectual added value.' (Carpo 2013, p. 128).

The second moment, which marks the beginning of digitisation in architecture, is somewhat more diffused. It occurred incrementally from the late 1950s, when the plotter had become commercially available (Bruegmann 1989, p. 140). I argue no other technological development in the depiction of architecture has likely equalled digitisation in terms of impact. Of course, there may be little doubt other technologies, such as printing and photography, were also acutely felt in the field of architecture, and were harbingers of change in architects' drawings. But it must be noted many of the architect's drawing instruments were, for much of history, essentially identical; even the architect's posture and gestures, while drawing, remained much the same, before the hand put aside the pen to take up the mouse. This latter aspect is explored in Hartoonian's essay 'The Drawing Position', which discusses how a previously horizontal position, for creating and viewing drawings, transitioned to a vertical one (Hartoonian 2009, p. 248).

The third critical juncture is the inevitable response to the one preceding it. Market forces, and an overall kind of sluggishness, meant digital technology was not immediately adopted. All in all, the last thirty years or so have seen the rise, dominance, ubiquity, and eventual saturation of digitisation. With these conditions came the corresponding reactions of cautiousness, excitement, complacency, and introspection. The last of these is exemplified by a rekindling of interest in traditional, non-digitised architects' drawings, and a number of prominent architectural journals have, in recent years, published special issues dedicated to traditional drawings. These include *Architectural Theory Review* (2009), *Footprint* (2010), and *Architectural Design* (2013).

Inside (Looking) Out: Contextual Analysis

The case studies in my research are Robin Boyd and the architects from the Four Melbourne Architects exhibition, who, in my view, represent, respectively, the Modern

and Postmodern movements in Melbourne.¹ The drawings they produced during this time are exclusively in traditional media, and the focus of this research. Boyd is overwhelmingly the most iconic architect of Modern Melbourne, and known for his writings as much as his architecture; the Four Melbourne Architects, namely Greg Burgess, Peter Crone, Norman Day, and (Maggie) Edmond and (Peter) Corrigan, exhibited together under that appellation in 1979, at the Powell Street Gallery in South Yarra, and continue to practice in Melbourne.

Architects' drawings are highly recognisable as a type, and are virtually synonymous with the profession itself. Realistically speaking, not all of the architecture which is designed will eventually be constructed; thus the drawing could supersede, at least in terms of the hope invested within it, the building. This may be one of the threads leading to the debate over whether drawing is the first act of creation by the architect, and, therefore, a kind of architecture in itself (Bafna 2008, p. 536). However, there can be little doubt, should a design never be built, or is altered or destroyed to any extent, then the drawing of it becomes its most valuable record; in fact, in such instances, the drawing figuratively fills the void left by the absence of the building.

Of architects' drawings, the question can be asked, 'who is the hand behind the drawing, and why'. Any attempt to respond to this question in a meaningful way must go beyond the simple answer it is the architect who is the hand behind the drawing, and the drawing exists because it either develops or communicates the design. Consequently, this analysis seeks to introduce two different and new aspects to this question: polemical and post factum drawings, both of which promote the architect's position. Polemical drawing is my own term, having found no equivalent in existing literature. Polemical drawing is defined as having such an objective, which may not necessarily be the sole purpose of the drawing, and, similarly, may be latent rather than clearly expressed.

Exemplary of the polemical drawing genre is Boyd's work for his book *The Australian Ugliness*. It is arguably Boyd's most influential work, and through which he coined the neologisms 'arboraphobia', 'Austerica', and 'featurism'. Since its initial publication in 1960, it has maintained a firm hold on the Australian consciousness, and is never far from discussion among academics, critics, and in the mass media. Furthermore, Boyd, as architectural provocateur, has been compared to such parallel figures from the past, including Pugin (Tibbits 1992, p. 52), Ruskin (Tibbits 1992, p. 52; Menz 2010, p. 13), Morris (Tibbits 1992, p. 52; Menz 2010, p. 13), and Loos (Menz 2010, p. 12).

1. As this paper is part of a PhD research project, it discusses only the works of Boyd, Day, and Edmond and Corrigan.

The drawings in *The Australian Ugliness*, in being produced exclusively for the book, differ from other published drawings, which may begin, so to speak, on the drafting board, but eventually find their way into journals, retrospectives, or the internet. In this instance, the architect produced drawings to support what is, essentially, his view of the world in which he lives, and for which he has little liking. The arguments in this book are all the richer and more persuasive for the inclusion of these drawings. It is difficult to imagine this book's written word achieving the same level of notoriety sans drawings. Moreover, given the expectations of an architect as being able to produce drawings, it is likely it would seem unconvincing, even perplexing, if this book were devoid of drawing. If the test of an architect is whether he or she can communicate graphically, then clearly Boyd met the challenge.

Frasconi, in his discussions of architects' drawings, identifies, as a key concept, its act of cosmopoiesis, or world-making. This quality engenders drawings, where they become rich in suggestion and establish a dialogue with the viewer: 'the drawing process is a cosmopoiesis that can help to invent better futures and make potential worlds.' (Frasconi 2007, p. 4). If, from this, it may be surmised every act of drawing is world-making, then there is no doubt Boyd's drawings for *The Australian Ugliness* were no less acts of world-making.

The more common forms of architects' drawings present an idealised view of the world, with its subject, the building, depicted in, literally, the best possible light (Evans 1989, p. 19). Thus, the more undesirable features of the environs, such as fire hydrants and power lines, typically receiving little attention in everyday life, are summarily eliminated. But in Boyd's drawings for *The Australian Ugliness*, these same features were not only retained, but emphasised. Ultimately, Boyd's drawings portray what he sees as the ugliness which surrounds him, by simultaneously condensing and multiplying its various calumnious aspects, to an almost surreal effect.

Aside from polemical drawing, post factum drawing also receives relatively little attention. As is sometimes the case with polemical drawing, post factum drawing occupies a place outside the accepted idea of architects' drawings. In 'Solidifying the Shadow', Macken posits Evans' description of architects' drawings, before exploring drawings which disagree with this (Evans 1997, cited in Macken 2009, p. 334):

Drawing in architecture is not done after nature, but prior to construction; it is not so much produced by reflection on the reality outside the drawing, as productive of a reality that will end up outside the drawing.

In the early 1990s, Day's practice produced a number of post factum drawings.² These may be classified as such because they were unequivocally produced after the projects were completed, but they upset the status quo in other ways as well. Firstly, they were neither a platform for further design thinking, such as sketches, nor part of the construction drawing set. As such, they were freed from any convention and need for accuracy, and so may be, and indeed are, highly abstracted. Secondly, and tying in with their regard for accuracy, they were not intended to be reliable records of architecture, in the same sense, for example, Classical ruins were accurately measured and drawn by architects. Thirdly, they were not produced with the client, or, in fact, any specific viewer, in mind. These drawings were for the practice alone, to function as codas to projects which were already finished.

Both the Boyd and Day drawings, as polemical and post factum drawings respectively, anticipated the shifts in status of architects' drawings, occurring in the final decades of the twentieth century, and persisting today. To be sure, architects' drawings have had a long history of being the subject of competitions, exhibitions, and publications (Lipstadt 1989, pp. 109-110), and, since the 1970s in Great Britain at least, have been traded among auction houses and collectors in much the same way as antiques and artworks (Richardson 1983, pp. 14-15). But underpinning much of these occurrences is the elevation in status, particularly when speaking of traditional drawings, from communication and marketing tool, to socio-cultural artefact. As a result of this phenomenon, a drawing may have two lives which run concurrently, when, for example, a perspective shows how the building sits in the landscape, but is also imbued with socio-cultural messages in its choice of entourage and media; in addition, a sketch may no longer be confined to the archive at the end of its lifecycle, because, when it shows the hand of the architect, it may be displayed and celebrated.

Much of this shift in perception and viewership may be due to the nature of architectural representation post-digitisation, when it became possible to separate non-digitised drawings from the vast array of architects' drawings, where before they were one and the same. As such, it may be argued, fetishisation can only come about through differentiation. Moreover, as Mottram (2007, p. 196) writes:

So why is the trace of the hand of the artist such a powerful concept in relation to drawing?...One explanation might be that we know some talented person has made the marks that we are viewing – we are attributing value by association.

2. For the post factum drawing of the Konindaris House, in Brighton, Victoria, by Norman Day Architect, see Luscombe & Peden (1992, p. 37). For the post factum drawing of Mowbray College, Melton, Victoria, by Norman Day Architect, see Luscombe & Peden (1992, p. 169).

The anecdote of clients enjoying watching their architect sketch a design is not without meaning; it is, in fact, symptomatic of a much wider-spread and more powerful condition.

From Mind to Hand to Paper: Interpretative Analysis

Any reflection of projection techniques in architects' drawings must necessarily turn to Evans, who wrote extensively on the subject of architecture and its depiction. For Evans, there are, broadly speaking, two kinds of architects' drawings: orthographic projections and perspectives (Evans 1989, p. 21). But, rather disappointingly, the sketch, as a type of drawing, does not fall easily into either of these categories: 'It is impossible to decide, except by dogmatic means, whether [the sketch] is a projection or not.' (Evans 1989, p. 33). The fact Evans himself was cautious about defining sketches is not accidental. While the divergent characteristics of orthographic projections and perspectives may be carefully delineated, the sketch is, by contrast, highly individualistic; it is also often spontaneous and lacking in convention, and, therefore, defies categorisation.

In spite, or, perhaps, because of this resistance to classification, the sketch is an intriguing subject for analysis. It is interesting to note it does not generally receive the same attention afforded to other kinds of architects' drawings. The sketch also has an integral relationship with traditional media, as one of its significant criteria is it should have been quickly executed. Therefore, this implies digital media cannot be satisfactorily used for its production. In the present day, when digital media are considered to be almost universal in architects' drawings, they are still not widely used for the sketch.

Therefore, it may be suggested digital media can rarely be a perfect substitution for traditional media, when the many and variable qualities of the latter are considered. While any question of one technology being intrinsically superior to the other is not within the scope of this research, it may be acknowledged the act of drawing in traditional media can never be adequately replicated with any form of digital media. The marks, smudges, and even the literal drawing of, for instance, a crayon across paper, are unique, whether in adjudging the difference between traditional and digital media, or considering the individuality each drawer brings to the act of drawing.

In the post factum drawings by Day's practice, the choice of using the airbrush technique ultimately achieved more than appearances. To be sure, there is a range of vivid colours, which sometimes craftily show, through the spatter, the white canvas beneath, and there are different tones coalescing with one another. The use of the airbrush was also a highly visceral experience, and so the production of these drawings, whether at the moment when it occurred, or even in its recollection, becomes significant (as Day describes in an interview on 5 February 2015):

This is a very painstaking process, because usually these things would be done on computer, nowadays, but this was all done by hand with spray...It's a work of art, in my view.

This paper discusses the exclusion of elements in architects' drawings, which, for one reason or another, are regarded as hindrances to the aesthetic of either the design or the drawing itself. But of greater relevance is the inclusion of elements, such as the human figure, vegetation, and vehicles, and which are collectively known as entourage. The anthropocentric nature of architecture demands the use of the human figure in its drawings. Frascari names three functions of this aspect of drawing: to facilitate an understanding of the project; to address the dimensions of the architecture through anthropometry; and a combination of the former two functions, which manifests as 'representations of the human figure based on pseudoformal abstractions generally favoured by architecture students.' (Frascari 1987, p. 124).

The majority of architectural manuals, and, admittedly, architectural schools, will adjure, in architects' drawings, the human figure must be subservient to the architecture. It must never dominate the drawing, whose 'star' is, unreservedly, the building. Thus, the 'pseudoformal abstractions', as described by Frascari, are commonplace, and appear as somewhat indistinct forms, with their four limbs intact, but their faces not. In a similar fashion, much professional architectural photography entirely omits human users from the scene; or else it renders them as no more than high-speed blurs, where their expressions, and sometimes even gender, are indiscernible.

At the intersection of cosmopoiesis and the use of the human figure are Boyd's drawings for *The Australian Ugliness* and Pearce's drawings for Edmond and Corrigan.³ These two examples, though separated by some decades, are able to be considered together, and almost form a kind of dialogue with one another. In cosmopoietic terms, Boyd would have abhorred the world Edmond and Corrigan have made, and it is imaginable he would even have regarded it as *infra dignitatem*. But Edmond and Corrigan, through the works of Pearce, revelled in it, and it was where their architecture found a home. The people in this world are grotesque, distinct, and, defying convention, placed front and centre. Naturally, Boyd, too, put his people in the foreground of the drawings, but where he caricatured these people for critique, even derision, Edmond and Corrigan seemed to hold them close to their hearts.

3. For examples of drawings by Robert Pearce, see Hamann, Anderson & Callister (1993) and Hamann et al. (2012).

Conclusion

This paper discusses two types of architects' drawings, polemical drawings and post factum drawings, which are outside the usual understanding of drawings, and emphasises Frascari's cosmopoietic function of drawings. Through contextual and interpretative analyses, this paper aims to establish the foundation for a more considered study of architects' drawings, and their potential to reflect the place and time in which they were made. While this research project considers only drawings by Melburnian architects in the postwar era, it is suggested its methods can be applied to other contexts.

The traditional drawing has become an object of comparative rarity and perceived intricacy, worthy of scrutiny and, eventually, celebration. Yet for the most part, architects' drawings lie in archives, and their potential is never fully realised. The cosmos which has been created is never fully explored, let alone inhabited.

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