



BEDFORD SQUARE

MORWELL STREET

the designed surface.

e.l.jones

There are those who believe the role of graphic design in architecture is a superficial one; that it is a vapid practice serving only to 'prettify' architectural projects that would otherwise, in many cases, be unconvincing. There are also those that decry the increasing importance of graphic design in the education of architecture as a move away from 'substance' toward a visual superficiality, signifying a commoditisation of architecture itself. I suggest, however, that these views can only be formed in the limited context of an understanding of graphic design in architecture as a purely representational device.

Already, the role of drawing as merely a means of transmission of the architectural project that exists a priori has been repeatedly questioned (through the drawing-as-architecture projects of Tschumi, Libeskind, Eisenman, et al.), so that now we may comfortably speak of the drawing *as* the architectural project, not merely as its retroactive graphic representation. But this understanding may equally apply to words, as graphic design encompasses much more than the drawing; it also concerns the relationship between text and image within a composition. Jacques Rancière, in *The Future of the Image*, speaks of graphic design as "a common physical surface where signs, forms and acts become equal." Upon this flattened plane of paper, billboard or screen, individual objects yield to the dominant force of the shared surface; "a surface of communication

where words and images slid[e_] into one another". Upon this surface of communication, image, text & object are projected onto a non-hierarchical topography, where they begin to overlap: Words become forms and forms take on the temporal & narrative function of words. Graphic design used in this way can become a means by which the cross-pollinated devices of drawing, image and text cease their subordination to representation, becoming types of architecture in themselves.

The shared surface of graphic design is a collapsed and corrupted surface where expressions of pure art are muddled by a projected assembly of words and objects and signs, and where the traditionally separated roles of all these arts - of writing and of drawing and of architecture - are confused and disordered.

The role of graphic design in architecture, when understood in this way, shifts from a representative after-effect to a 'first act': a register of potentiality, not a retrospective representation.

Freed of its signifying function, we would no longer need to look, to borrow an analogy from Robin Evans, for what is 'behind' the designed surface, but rather for what is 'ahead' of it. Freed also of its function as an apparatus for the representation of a *yet-to-be-built* reality, graphic design might then be used to effect an architecture of maximum possibility.

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writing architecture: a new kind of drawing.

a.kloster + r.shaw

"Are they given any design problems at all? Are they given any buildings to design?"

"That starts, I think, in the junior year with a skeleton problem. But later in the senior year they design buildings. But we didn't like the word *design* at all, we *develop* a building."

MIES VAN DER ROHE (IN AN INTERVIEW WITH PETER BLAKE, MAY 1961).

We are undertaking a visual-based education. This does not mean that we are fine artists. In the absence of actual construction, imagery is our currency. If the project is the image, why do our drawings require so much explanation?

We have grown tired of a lazy reliance on seductive imagery that ignores our research. If the image is superficial, so is the project. There is a gap between the project and the image, which we attempt to fill with words. Instead, the image should be bound to the project, and express the idea without the need for any further explanation.

The best parallel is with writing. A good essay stands alone and makes clear to its reader an argument without the need for auxiliary explanation. This is not the case with current visual production. The formulation of an architectural argument, we all agree, is the culmination of a long process of assimilation, rejection and reordering. By this we are not referring to the endless pages of banal,

chronological process documentation that seem to grace the pages of so many of our portfolios. They are a poor substitute for sharply edited pages that convey a subjective position. A year's worth of work should be represented by more than a dazzling render that says little of the complexities of its underlying thoughts, but merely visualises the bricks & mortar of the finished product.

We propose an alternative to this kind of autonomous illustration. Image is one and the same thing as the written word, inseparable from the unfolding of the critical argument. The conclusion of an essay condenses the point to the essence of the argument. In the same way, the final image of a project should express the fundamental quality of the project.

We envisage a kind of drawing that can elegantly communicate a level of complexity that matches the project itself. If Mies was right, and projects are developed, not designed, one should be able to read the development of the project through the drawings. We can easily hide behind line weights and textures. It takes more guts to argue clearly a polemical statement through the drawing. It makes us more vulnerable to criticism, but it is the only way to progress the discussion.

Let us make a new kind of drawing that writes architecture, rather than merely depicts it.

Have the courage to reject our safe vocabulary of pretty drawings for a new sensibility where substance is expressed. This way our drawings will evolve with a revived splendor.

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