

Antiphon for a Sabbatical: Revisiting the Mind of a Man formerly known as an Architect

ABSTRACT

This article first situates this contribution to Works+Words 2022 in the research plan of the author. Subsequently it elaborates on the positioning of ‘writing’ (WORDS) with regard to ‘drawing’ (WORKS). Then the text questions on the status of the architectural drawing as an introduction to ongoing drawing sessions and associative contemplations that spontaneously come forth from them. These contemplations are meant to stir up the mind of the draftsman, the reader and the beholder, and trigger thoughts and reactions that begin to act as a *responsorium* that can permeate the discipline and the profession.

The text is aiming to activate the upcoming research of the author, but also to suggest new avenues at the service of the Design Driven Research community.

1. ANTIPHON FOR A SABBATICAL

This contribution fits in the category of “a project proposal on a real site” according to the categories mentioned in the open call of Works+Words 2022 and is situated in the house and the landscape the author inhabits. The project puts a finger on the core research topics of the author, i.e. the fundamental relationship between Technè en Poiesis in architecture (see below), with the architectural drawing as the strategic place and moment of action and reflection.

The Works+Words 2022 project deployed here aims to establish dialogues between the maker (the author) and the beholder (the audience) , so as to “ ... present reflections in written form and discuss outcomes of research held alongside the exhibition” (excerpt from the Open Call of Works+Words 2022). Ultimately this may generate a *responsorium* that comes forth from the exhibition in Copenhagen and this article.

The author stakes this project as an antiphon¹ , as an adequate tone setter for a sabbatical year of drawing reflections that runs between October 2022 and October 2023, which requires an indispensable tone setting—an antiphon—in order to turn this sabbatical into a productive research period.

This research fits within the academic design offices The Architectural Detail (<http://www.blog-archkuleuven.be/architectural-detail/>) and Studio Anatomy (www.studio-anatomy.org), the author’s research studios at KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture, and within our research group The Drawing and the Space (www.thedrawingandthespace.info).

2. DRAWING AND WRITING

In this project the drawing pencil and the writing pen are alternately taking the lead. However, the first tone has been, and will always be set by the drawing pencil. As a draftsman ‘by nature’, I can only start from that moment of drawing that is situated in the tip of my pencil which is the embryonal place and time of thought and reflection.

The Works+Words 2022 project confronts me with the dychotomy between drawing and writing. However, writing, or rather verbalization, generates clarity and understanding. In order to investigate this dychotomy rigorously and to exorcise it, I am starting to write. The opposition between drawing and writing, that is bothering me initially, is gradually being replaced by writing and drawing as complementary activities, an enlightening merging of action and thought.

However, there is more at stake than this alone. Verbalization through writing, in fact, is preceded by the verbalization that is surfaced through *a monologue intérieur* that happens in the full intensity of the drawing process. But in order to explain this, we must first talk about the status of the architectural drawing, and the place it occupies in my work as an architect and a researcher.

¹ “ ... a short sentence sung or recited before or after a psalm or canticle” (<https://www.lexico.com/definition/antiphon>, retrieved July 6th 2022, at 12:55):.

3. THE STATUS OF THE ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING

I am revisiting the mind of a man formerly known as an architect by drawing, and looking at drawings he made earlier. This revisit requires more insight in the background of this man, and in the status of (the) drawing in his work.

The exploration of the tension field between the poetic image² and construction practice constitutes the core of this man's work as an architect, an educator and a researcher. He has critically questioned the chronological unidirectionality which is generally assumed to start from the poetic image that comes first, and that is generally assumed to be materialized only in a secondary stage in/through the architect's mastery of Technè (construction practice). In previous research this man has deciphered and described how this unidirectionality is false, how the chronological relationship between the poetic image and the architect's mastery of Technè (construction practice) can also be inverted. This relationship is much more negotiated by the two-directional transfer of information and energy between both in a design process. In this reasoning, the architect's mastery of Technè is a *conditio sine qua non* that is also capable of becoming the trigger of the poetic image (Van Den Berghe 2012).

The previous research of this man has brought to the fore that the architectural drawing can be inhabited as the place and the moment—i.e. the full and intense inhabitation of the drawing activity itself—where and when the aforementioned inversion can take place, where and when the mastery of Technè can transmutate in poetic images. It often happens in these epiphanic moments of drawing that metric time—kronos—stops and 'the right time'—kairos—enters the scene of architectural creation. Through the full and conscious inhabitation of this place and moment of drawing, then, the drawing becomes the *locus* where mere representation of architecture becomes sheer architectural presence. From a failing representation of the 'built' version of an architecture—as the status of the drawing is most often considered—the drawing's agency pupates into architecture itself. There is a chance that the subsequent 'built' result appears as the failing representation of the phosphorescent presence, potential, energy and information that seems to dwell in the drawing. Then, and in this drawing, architecture is presented in its full state of emergency. This is the condition the man formerly known as an architect wants to bring himself in by drawing. This is what he can find while drawing in the present, in the drawings he is producing for Works+Words 2022, and what he rediscovers in his drawings from the past, the ones he is revisiting for this occasion. If this condition is being fulfilled, than this man can proclaim: "drawing is architecture!"

It is very important to state that "drawing is architecture" is not a mathematical equation of two separate things. For this man, drawing and architecture are becoming an ontological unity, an indispensable and inseparable co-presence.

In the next section I can take this new understanding of the status of the drawing and embay it further into my reasoning about the relationship between drawing (works) and writing (words), in order to further elaborate on a deeper layer at work in this relationship.

4. WORDS AND VERBALIZATION: THE AGENCY OF THE *MONOLOGUE INTERIEUR* AND THE *INTIMATE DIALOGUE*

This presencing requires utterly obsessive drawing drenched with a constant reasoning in a *monologue intérieur* of the draftsman's 'self-as-self' who starts to talk to his 'self-as-other'³ (Birnbaum 2009, Hüsserl 1931) who shows up⁴ during the draftsman's intense inhabitation of his drawing activities and, ultimately, his drawing. This stream of consciousness is the draftsman's time of 'kairos', blessed as he is by a fully permitted remoteness and forgetfulness of the world out there. Only the togetherness of him and his drawing (as verb and noun) remains.

² The concept of the poetic image has been brought forward by Vitruvius, who called it the architectural idea, and following from this, Alberto Pérez-Gómez has further elaborated on it, "... the poetic image, called after Vitruvius the architectural idea (the images that are proposed by the architect, issuing from his or her mind's eye...)" (Pérez-Gómez 2006).

³ For further reading on these notions I refer to Edmund Hüsserl's concept of 'transcendental intersubjectivity' and the different degrees of 'self' (Birnbaum 2009, Hüsserl 1931).

⁴ The creation of these two personae, or persona creation, can be very useful in Design Driven Research. Once the design-researcher is aware of its potential, it can be instrumentalised as a method.

Associative contemplations spontaneously originate from and during such drawing sessions that make me think. Drawing is thinking. The aforementioned *monologue intérieur* is a verbalization produced in the making of the drawing and through which the draftsman's 'self-as-self' starts to address the 'self-as-other' in the form of an argument to clarify and convince. The self-as-other may sometimes 'respond', and by doing so, turn the initial *monologue intérieur*, that reasons from the drawing 'self-as-self', into an *intimate dialogue* between the 'self-as-self' and the 'self-as-other'. In this *intimate dialogue* both interlocutors act as sounding boards against which their reasoning of and during drawing is checked and validated, and if necessary adjusted and refined. This refined reasoning, in its turn, forms a feedback loop into the drawing process in which the 'self-as-self' of the draftsman, in the company of his 'self-as-other', is deeply involved.

The *monologue intérieur* and the *intimate dialogue* are the moments when the real 'words' come forth from the 'works'. Through this surfacing of 'words' language settles in the process, manifesting itself in spoken words (inaudible or out loud), annotations in the drawing (annotated drawing⁵) and eventually in written text.

The words coming forth as accurate discourse begin to form cellular chunks that firstly serve as open reflections shared between the 'self-as-self' and the 'self-as-other', and subsequently can act as an invitation towards the reader/beholder who may set foot on a shared platform of intersubjective understanding. By doing so, the associative contemplations (reflections) that originate from a drawing session, extend from the maker to the beholder and can trigger shared reflections and disciplinary debates that can reach out from the 'self-as-self', encounter the 'self-as-other' who—through the drawing and the language that 'invite'—come in touch with the 'other-as-self' and go as far as the 'other-as-other', and all the gradations in between. These contemplations are meant to stir up the mind of the draftsman, the reader and the beholder and trigger thoughts and reactions that begin to act as a *responsorium* that can permeate the discipline and the profession.

5. DRAWING TO REVISIT THE MIND OF A MAN FORMERLY KNOWN AS AN ARCHITECT⁶.

Revisiting the mind of this man formerly known as an architect is mainly done by drawing sessions in the present, combined with revisiting drawings he made in the past⁷. This man, obviously, is me. These past drawings are haunting moments that dwell in my drawing archive and my mental repository. This research is auto-ethnographical by nature (Schouwenberg and Kaethler 2021), by mining in my own architectural life that doesn't seem to be exhausted yet. There and then, in my past drawings, I rediscover dozed off architectural dreams and thoughts that had been long forgotten. However, gazing into these drawings I relive their moments of drawing which seems to make this work susceptible to creative resurrections through drawing.

Drawing, for me, is inseparably entangled with the status of the architectural drawing, as described above, in which the drawing is the *locus* where architecture is presenced. This is the true theatre of operations and the embryonal scene of forthcoming associative contemplations.

With my contribution to Works+Words 2019, *My Black Mariah and the White Chapel in the Fields: a Dialectical Cartography* (Van Den Berghe 2019) I could establish a more cohesive understanding of a set of micro narratives that had appeared to be too anthological to me until then. They are imbedded in the landscape and the house I live in, that I could begin to read and understand as/through a vertical topographical section.

⁵ Here, I recall the concept of annotated drawing that seems to recur in history, from the annotated 'scientific' drawings and design sketches produced by Leonardo da Vinci over Giambattista Piranesi's etchings filled with written comments and clarifications to Le Corbusier's 'thinking' in his drawing, translated into hand-written contemplations, or the aphorisms produced by Juliaan Lampens during his most intense and intimate design and drawing sessions I could witness as an intern in his practice.

⁶ I have put my practice on hold in 2018. By doing so I seem to have disregarded the urgency for me to draw and to build, and to draw like a builder. Consider this work as revisit of the eye and mind of a man formerly known as an architect, driven by homesickness. But one might also consider this endeavour as a first step back, out of academia and into architectural practice again. Wanting 'to go back home'. Since "... a man can never become whom he has never been" (Juliaan Lampens 2019: personal communication in a telephone call between Juliaan Lampens and the author, October 29th 2019).

⁷ I became an architect because I draw, so I don't draw because I am an architect. The draftsman is who I am, the architect is what I eventually became.

For my contribution to Works+Words 2022, that is continued research on my Works+Words 2019 contribution, I need to revisit two of these micro narratives: my own house, in which I am further developing WoSho⁸ Architecture, and My Black Mariah⁹. Evidently they are both situated in the same topographical section. WoSho Architecture has been the concluding case of my PhD research (Van Den Berghe 2012) that was announcing future directions for my work, and on which I need to continue now, based on sketches and drawings I have been making for it ever since 1999. My Black Mariah is continuing on drawing research I did on it in 1999, 2016 and 2019. Now I relate the bodily and material presence of the landscape and my house with drawing experimental windows in respectively WoSo Architecture and My Black Mariah.

Through drawing out these two research cases I want to refine and deepen my understanding on how the material and dimensional presence of my work relates to the material and dimensional presence of the landscape it is imbedded in, and ultimately how I can come closer to the material and bodily co-presence of the landscape and my work, in order to become a better architect, educator and researcher. Presencing my work through drawing is compelling and bodily (1) through the physical presence of the drawing itself (see above: status of the architectural drawing), (2) through the physical act of drawing by hand, and (3) through the physical scale of drawing architectural details—the co-presence of Technè and Poiesis—on full scale (scale 1/1) which is the scale of the drawing hand of the draftsman, and scale 1/10. The scales 1/10 and 1/1 are ‘the scales of presencing’, and I adopted these drawing scales from Juliaan Lampens at the time when I was an apprentice in his practice between 1984 and 1987. Scale 1/10 is the scale of the architectural fragment and meant for understanding the onset of the topographical section and the context of the architectural body in which the detail is further developed on scale 1/1. In this respect, the experimental windows I am drawing in two places in my house are very suited as a drawing theme, because the window detail is pre-eminently one of the architectural elements for full scale drawing, dimensional studies and materialisations ‘to the limit’ and Technè-Poiesis investigations.

Oscillating between these scales by drawing layer after layer, the drawing is becoming a palimpsest that pervades the experience and understanding of the draftsman, who generates new discourse through verbalizations (see above) and produces new communicable knowledge for both himself and for the discipline and the profession.

I start my drawing process with an Etude for WoSho Architecture¹⁰, into which I further develop Variations. The Etude is the mother drawing and is a *deepening* research by drawing. Once this mother drawing is beginning to take a momentum, Variations on details in the Etude begin to pour in. Variations always spring from and return to the mother drawing of the Etude. It is important to ‘grasp’ these Variations by drawing them systematically. Variations are *broadening* research on and within an Etude by drawing variants through variables for which I find inspiration and data coming forth from projects—often as drawings—from my archive that are haunting their architect for quite a while, calling to come to the present. Their invocation in new drawings appears to come forth through redrawing versions of their architectural details, materializations and the evaluation of their architectural expressions, not from conceptual or typological differentiations. This results in utterly obsessive drawing sessions that generate drawing palimpsests that permit to look through all their layers, both by drawing layer after layer and by reading all the layers in conjunction in the way a conductor of a symphonic orchestra needs to be capable of reading the scores of all the instrument groups and solists together in order to come to a cohesive understanding and balanced distribution of musical presence and meaning by each instrument.

Doing so, I keep the different Variations together, preferably in or as closely as possible to the Etude in her role as mother drawing for two reasons.

⁸ WoSho is the abbreviation of Workshop. The idea of making my workshop there germinated in 1999. I cannot chase this idea away, apparently.

⁹ I elaborated on this case in my contribution to Works+Words 2019 (Van Den Berghe 2019).

¹⁰ At the moment of writing this article I am making for WoSho Architecture. At the moment of writing, the drawings for My Black Mariah are still in preparation (see Fig.1, 2, 3 and 4), so I will not discuss them here. However, they will be exhibited in Works+Words 2022 in Copenhagen.

Firstly it permits for a comparative assessment, which feeds the aforementioned *monologue intérieur*, the *intimate dialogue* and the subsequent stages of verbalization (see above), through which the associative contemplations, and possibly the public discourse and debate with the audience are animated (*responsorium*).

Secondly—and in my view more importantly—deepening the Etude by drawing Variations, and keeping the Variations preferably in or as closely as possible to the Etude, permits the draftsman and his audience to experience their co-presence in one drawing. Consequently, the drawing gains intensity through architectural realities that can coexist in one drawing in a way they never can in the built reality. One might contend that this way of drawing Etudes, and expanding the research on each Etude by drawing Variations on it, generates an architectural presence of the second order that is truly becoming ‘an architect’s architecture’¹¹, on the one hand only accessible for those who are wanting to make an effort of reading these palimpsests, on the other hand however making a myriad of architectural solutions experienceable and debatable in a way that would never be possible otherwise.

Critically comparing drawings and their buildings in examples from architectural history—by savouring drawings and comparing them to their built outcome, and in the practice of this elderly architect—by revisiting his mind and his archive, one may remain disappointed by the built result that often appears to be the failing representation of the embryonal energy, information and phosphorescent promise that dwell in the drawings of the architect. By drawing Etudes and Variations for Works+Words 2022 I am preparing a sabbatical research period in which I aim to further develop these utterly obsessive ways of drawing in order to make an amplified architectural presence visible, accessible and debateable with the Design Research community.

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IMAGES

- Fig. 01 (May-July 2022). *Etude WoSho_Mother drawing_Scale 1/10 and 1/1_thin paper_pencil, marker, coloured pencil, blue ballpoint_1064 x 560mm*. This Etude is work in progress at the moment of writing this article. Scale 1/10 in pencil. Scale 1/1 in blue ballpoint. Variations are beginning to surface in the Etude drawing (early August 2022).
- Fig. 02 (June 10th 2006). *Archival drawing_instigating Etude WoSho Fig. 01_detail window WoSho_Technè > Poetic image_recycled paper_black pen_210 x 297mm*
- Fig. 03 (2012). *Drawing PhD case WoSho Architecture_instigating Etude WoSho of Fig. 01_details window WoSho_Technè > Poetic image_silk paper_fountain pen with sepia ink_210 x 297mm*.
- Fig. 04 (December 26th 2016). *Archival drawing_instigating Etude WoSho of Fig. 01_Technè > Poetic image_detail window WoSho_recycled paper_fountain pen with sepia ink, pencil, red coloured pencil_440 x 286mm*.
- Fig. 05 (May 11th 2020). *Archival drawing_Exhibition concept (unbuilt)_detail sketches for brass profiles and edged polished glass_feeding into Fig. 06 and Fig. 07_silk paper_pencil, gold and green marker_216 x 276mm*.
- Fig. 06 (October 26th 2020). *WoSho Window detail_coming forth from Fig. 05 as Variation that feeds back into Fig. 01 Etude WoSho_silk paper_pencil, gold and green marker_216 x 276mm*.
- Fig. 07 (October 23rd 2020). *WoSho Window detail and extended context_together with Fig. 06 as Variation that feeds back into Fig. 01 Etude WoSho_silk paper_pencil, gold, black and green marker_216 x 276mm*.
- Fig. 08 (July 2022). *WoSho Architecture_Variations on columns and beams. Variations feed back into Fig. 01 Etude WoSho Architecture_silk paper_pencil, blue ballpoint, yellow marker_216 x 276mm*.

¹¹ Like musicians can enjoy the complexity of a music score, completely inhabit it, and eventually share this experience of salutary inhabitation with other musicians. The complexity of it seems to exclude ‘non expert’s, and seems to be the privilege of ‘true musicians’, hence ‘musicians music’.