

D²

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In recent decades, especially since the 1990s, the growing of training courses in the area of design has brought about an exceptional variety of design declinations.

A sort of euphoric openness towards the most varied thematic areas, from product to service, from interiors to fashion and, of course, to communication, a discipline transversal to multiple project spaces, has favored a pulviscular articulation also in the sectors adjacent to design, such as, undoubtedly, drawing.

In this discipline, therefore, a plural and at the same time 'unitary' experimentation has been activated which has participated in 'specializing', in practice, its own procedures and in generating important, more or less direct reflection also on the theoretical-critical level.

In other words, it was not just a methodological and technical-instrumental adaptation linked to the scalar,

formal, structural and functional characteristics of the different project contents, but a real expansion and hybridization of codes and languages, accompanied by a progressive growth of artifacts usable on an equally diversified repertoire of devices and through different methods.

Thus, alongside traditional printed products, the diffusion of digital products accessible on/off line has been consolidated, often in an interactive way –practicable through mobile interfaces of different formats and sizes– and shared on multiple platforms.

Thus, the semantic revolution of the languages of drawing and the extended application favored by the disciplinary nuances of design has continued to introduce new representations, often free from relationships of similarity with respect to the referent, often relating to

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different domains and free from the gaze of the physical eye, as in the case of mental, mathematical and verbal representations [Mitchell 2018, p. 40].

Storytelling, data visualization, maps, photographs, Virtual Reality representations, multi-code and multi-channel works, whether static or dynamic, iconic, symbolic, indexical, rhetorical etc., are just some of the types of images that fulfill the ideational and developmental dimension of the project by expressing, in extreme synthesis, new techniques, aesthetics and semiotics.

Naturally, in relation to this renewal, which has embraced the professional sphere, as well as that of teaching and research, in the university context has matured, on the part of drawing, a widespread request for disciplinary updating.

Thus, in the recent revision of the declaration of the sector—in particular, in the last paragraph where drawing is described as a “graphic, infographic and multimedia language, applied to the design process from the formation of the idea to its executive definition” [1]—the well-known design value intrinsic to the configurational dimension of drawing was confirmed and formalized, thus expanding its role in terms of formation. In other words, in the updating of the identity and of the disciplinary perimeter, that important oversense already traceable, moreover, in the etymology of the Latin term ‘*designare*’ [2]—which embraces, precisely, the idea of project—is further attested, as well as in the English expression ‘design’ [3] whose central meaning, with respect to its semantic field, is ‘drawing’ [Vulli 2016]. On the other hand, Tomás Maldonado himself, in 2014, acknowledged that ‘Drawing with a capital D’ plays a primary role in the formation of the design idea. In a conversation on the relationship between drawing and design, when urged to comment on one of his thoughts on writing, in which he stated that “the logical-semantic order [...], the linearity implicit in the relationship between antecedent and consequent, between premise and conclusion are felt in the practice of speaking and listening” [Maldonado 2005, p. 53], he pointed out its adaptability to representation. “This text deals specifically with writing, but the arguments developed apply in the same way to drawing. Stretching things a bit, it is possible to substitute the word ‘drawing’ for the word ‘writing’ without substantially altering the meaning of the discourse. My reasoning is adaptable to this terminological variation. This paper offers

a rather precise idea of my thinking on the theme of representation” [Maldonado 2018].

Therefore, in drawing, as language producing a ‘textualization’ of the idea, the necessary and progressive ordering process underlying its execution induces a clarification and coordination of the numerous project variables, thus participating in a decisive way in structuring the course of elaboration and to define the contents. Recalling a famous phrase by Cennino Cennini, ancient yet always topical, “drawing with a pen [...] will make you expert, skillful and capable of much drawing out of your own head” [Cennini 1437, ed. 1859, p. 9].

Again, that symbiotic relationship between drawing and designing is confirmed, a relationship which, in the vagueness of some terminologies, gathers an effective potential for meanings. This is what happens with Leon Battista Alberti’s famous expression *lineamenta* that Paolo Portoghesi, in the introduction to *L’Architettura*, decided not to fix in a univocal interpretation. “By the term ‘*lineamenta*’ Alberti means something less broad and more specific than the Italian ‘*disegno*’ [drawing]. However, by translating ‘*progetto*’ and ‘*progettare*’ [plan, project, design], the meaning of the text would be altered at some point. Therefore, it was preferred to translate literally because, after a few pages, the reader would be led, by Alberti’s use of the term, to restrict and specify its meaning” [Portoghesi 1989, pp. 11, 12].

In general, therefore, by skipping some steps, we can further confirm the close relationship between drawing and design that we could represent with the lexical combination: drawing by a design mindset. The verb ‘*disegnare*’ (‘to draw’), compared to the noun ‘*disegno*’ (‘drawing’) in fact allows an expansion of meaning which is then offered to the interesting adverbial delimitation/expansion.

If we then think of the field of visual communication, the boundary between drawing and design is naturally even more blurred. Here, in fact, the configurative value of drawing finds, precisely in the peculiarity of the sphere of design—where the components, the methods of developing ideas and the final products refer to the same codes and the same methods of use, primarily linked to the vision—a full and immediate applicative correspondence: from conception to the product, drawing is both a communicative and an elaboration medium, or rather, a language and a metalanguage.

In this particular area of design, then, I find it interesting to recall the lexical modification which frequently sees

the expression 'drawing' replaced by the term 'image,' one of its many synonyms that is very broad in meaning and equally extensive in its applications [4].

A lexical change that seems functional, in the reference context of visual communication, to better understand that repertoire of values actually implicit in the drawing activity or consequent to it.

Image, therefore, as a virtual image *stricto sensu*, or mental image, representation of the ideational 'vision'; as an image-medium, an exploratory drawing to clarify the pre-figuration of the idea; as an image-message, or rather as a signifier; but also, forcing the reasoning a little, as an image-product, as artifact. Image being understood, naturally, as a hybrid artifact that embraces different expressive registers, interacting with each other, serving to create reciprocal semantic saturations and to coordinate various sensory elements.

However, although dealing with an inter-code scenario that can be traced back to three main categories of signs: texts, images (in the strict sense) and accessory graphic signs, with some simplifications we can state that, in terms of the gaze, the approach to the fruition of artifacts is to a large extent, and in any case in the first instance, of an exploratory type, that is specific to looking. This depends on two main factors relating respectively to the formal level and to that of the content. On the formal level, in fact, as can be seen, for example, in many works of visual poetry, in becoming writing "the word mixes again with that same real, and therefore also visual, world from which it was originally separated, through the mediation of voice" [Barbieri 2015, p. 11] and also visually conveys the message it carries. Still continuing to reflect in the context of poetry, it can be noted that writing, in particular the graphic composition of the text, is first of all a fundamental guide for reading and understanding. "A poem in hendecasyllables transcribed in full (like a novel) would be distorted in essence; for many texts the rhetorical and rhyme structures are above all things to be seen before being heard" [Falcinelli 2011, p. 271].

From the point of view of content, then, it is worth mentioning the strengthening of the visual plane brought about by the frequent use of rhetoric, which, precisely, transfers the verbal plane to the figurative one. "In yet other terms, it could be said that the performativity of the word derives from and is realized through its transformation into image." [Vercellone 2016, p. 50].

In general, therefore, in the image, even when expressed by the heterogeneous articulation of text elements and graphic components, the visual seems to absorb the textual, looking seems to dominate over reading, the simultaneity of vision seems to anticipate the temporal succession of reading.

The gaze, free from proceeding according to a linear order, thus passes from an overall exploration of the composition to a progressive deepening of the signs and levels of meaning. From plastic to figurative analysis, the image is filtered through multiple 'scans', at first faster and rougher, then slower, more circumscribed and precise, which reveal the essential relationship between the technical methodological procedures of drawing and the definition of compositive structures as well as the relationships, in the page, between the different elements that form it. In the observation, through voluntary or reflex saccadic movements, the eye, oriented towards the elements of attention, acquires that information which in the phases of fixation is systematized thus allowing access to the grammar and to the complex syntax of visual language, and ultimately understand the meaning of images.

In this way of using the visual, it will be possible to detect the central role of the perceptive and projective foundations in the formal tracing of the sign components, in the attribution of their positional and dimensional hierarchies, in the choices relating to their semantic value also in consideration of the socio-cultural context of the community for which they are intended.

If, therefore, drawing, through the adoption of methods, techniques, codes, is an active gaze in directing the idea, is its original and ordering act, the binomial Drawing-Design still seems to well represent that extreme conceptual proximity between the act of drawing and that of designing which, in some poetic creative dimensions, converge and cancel each other out in a full unity of aesthetic and technical sense.

Starting from this hypothesis, it is necessary to continue to outline –while confirming the fundamental theoretical unity– the specificities of drawing in the context of the various declinations of design and, of this variegated sphere of design, to detect, through the reading of the images, some of the more significant cultural traits, hoping, in the final analysis, to identify further data and deepen knowledge for a chronical and a history of 'Design Drawing': D² [Bistagnino 2010].

Notes

[1] The Declaration of the Scientific Disciplinary Sector ICAR/17, which can be consulted on the Unione Italiana Disegno website, states: "The scientific-disciplinary contents concern the representation of architecture and the environment, in its broad meaning of cognitive means of the laws that govern the formal structure, of a tool for the analysis of existing values, of an expressive act and of visual communication of the design idea to different scaled dimensions. They include the descriptive geometric foundations of computer design and modelling, their theories and methods, also in their historical development; survey as an instrument of knowledge of the architectural, environmental and urban reality, its direct and instrumental methodologies, its procedures and techniques, including digital ones, of metric, morphological and thematic restitution; drawing as a graphic, infographic and multimedia language, applied to the design process from the formation of the idea to its executive definition". <<https://www.unioneitalianadisegno.it/wp/sample-page/>> (accessed on 7 December 2022).

[2] *Designare* –composed of the prefix 'de', indicating completion of an action, and 'signare' from *signum*, sign– therefore indicating in a specific way, destining, assigning, representing imagined or existing things.

[3] The verb 'to design', derived from the Latin '*designare*', contains like the Italian '*disegnare*' a similar ambivalence of meaning.

[4] I am thinking, for example, of the term 'image' in its ordinarily accepted meaning as a set of signs used to depict an absent object; I am thinking of the projective image, therefore linked to geometric methods for the representation of reality and of the elaborative imagination; or again, I think of the image as an icon, symbol or index, therefore a medium to represent the referent according to different levels of figuration or abstraction that bring into play aspects relating to the visual code, and much more.

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