

On the Multivalence of Drawing

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Abstract

The paper explores fala's process of drawing, not as a daily routine, but as a source of breakthroughs and reconsiderations in established projects. It expresses a preference for drawings that exist for their intrinsic value, embodying intangible ideas, concepts, and reflections on form, space, and intelligence. The paper contends that a project unfolds through a plurality of drawings, highlighting the importance of single lines, collages wireframes, and renders. Referring to Charles Jencks' concept of multivalence, it posits that each drawing influences and informs others, creating a multivalent experience that adds depth and meaning to the project. fala proposes that their built work is a byproduct of the drawing process, challenging the conventional view of the drawing's dependence on clients, commissions, or sites. Each drawing is an independent entity, and the building itself is a form of drawing.

Drawing parallels with Kazuo Shinohara's perspective, fala argues that the act of communication and rhetoric surrounding architecture is as crucial as the built form itself. The paper posits that drawings and representations hold a social value that transcends the physical existence of the architecture. In conclusion, the paper presents a compelling argument for the autonomy of drawings, their multivalent interplay, and their central role in shaping the narrative and cultural significance of architectural practice, echoing the idea expressed by Kazuo Shinohara in viewing architecture as a beautifully choreographed fiction.

Keywords: drawing, multivalence, fiction, architectural practice, rhetoric.

Within fala [1], the act of drawing, or better, the action of rationalizing what a drawing can be and how it could be understood, became a fascination. It is not as if we wake up thinking about it every day, or for every drawing we do; most times, with the daily rush of clients, contractors, and permit applications, we don't even find the time. Nevertheless, occasionally, it happens: a small breakthrough, another possibility, a certain mistake that raises a new possible reading of an old project. From there, discussions arise over the "what" and the "why" of a representation. We like to draw. Many drawings, of different kinds, mostly the unnecessary ones for the client or permit. Mainly the ones we want to do, not the ones we have to do. The drawings that are drawings before being anything else. The

ones that represent something intangible, an idea, a concept. Drawings that reflect on form and space, on ideas and intelligence, on intentions and contradictions. Drawings about geometry and about gravity. Drawings with no gravity. Drawings that have a deep rationality, others that are profoundly illogical.

Within our inventions and appropriations, we could argue that single line drawings are more important than wireframes, that collages prevail over renders. Comprehensive drawings come and go. A project could do without butterflies while execution drawings are somewhat a necessity. We could go into details and elaborate on specific aspects of every kind of drawing. Indeed, all are different. All address a particular side of one project.

Fig. 1. 087, house without idea, Lisbon, pt, 2022 (photo by Giulietta Margot).



Single lines are abstract and didactic. Butterflies are drawings of very few lines. Wireframes are snapshots of three-dimensional models built solely from lines. Renders are humble and straightforward low-resolution images, while collages are abstract and ambiguous.

We could assume that all is one. The project is unfolded only through a plurality of drawings. In *Meaning in Architecture* (1969), Charles Jencks wrote about multivalence of meanings [Jencks, Baird 1969]. Perhaps this discussion could be extended to drawings. One cannot separate different lenses and tools because they have grown together and become linked through a process of continuous feedback. And these multivalent links set up a condition where one drawing modifies and informs another in a continuous series of references. The plurality of drawings create a multivalent experience where one fluctuates from drawing to drawing always finding further meaning and depth. Through drawings—single lines, wireframes, renders, execution drawings, collages, photographs, butterflies—the project is experienced as a multivalent whole.

As such, it could be a valid point to suggest that our built work—a “building”, or “house”, or something else of that nature—is just a side product of a drawing process. Some could defend that, to exist, the (architectural) drawing would need a reason, a client, a commission, a site. Some others, that the site, the client, and the commission need a drawing to be answered. A sort of dependence.

We like to think otherwise, that each drawing is an entity on its own. Free, independent, beyond its pragmatic purpose. Moreover, if a building is seen in the same way, as a drawing and, consequently, as a free entity, it being used as a house or as a chapel is of little interest to us. Space is space, and lines are lines, regardless of everything else one might want them to be.

Fig. 2. 087, house without idea, Lisbon, pt, 2022, 'wireframes' drawing.

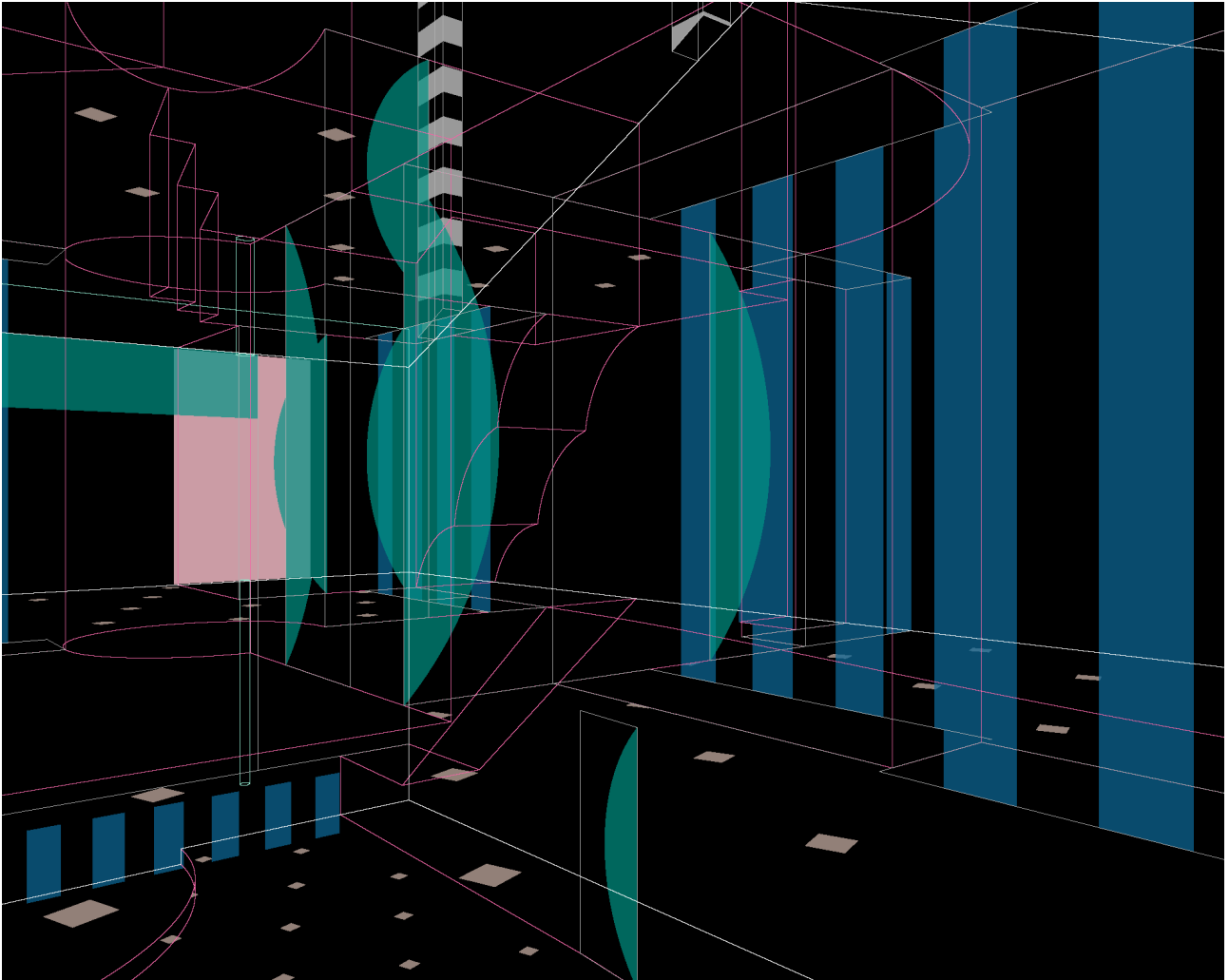
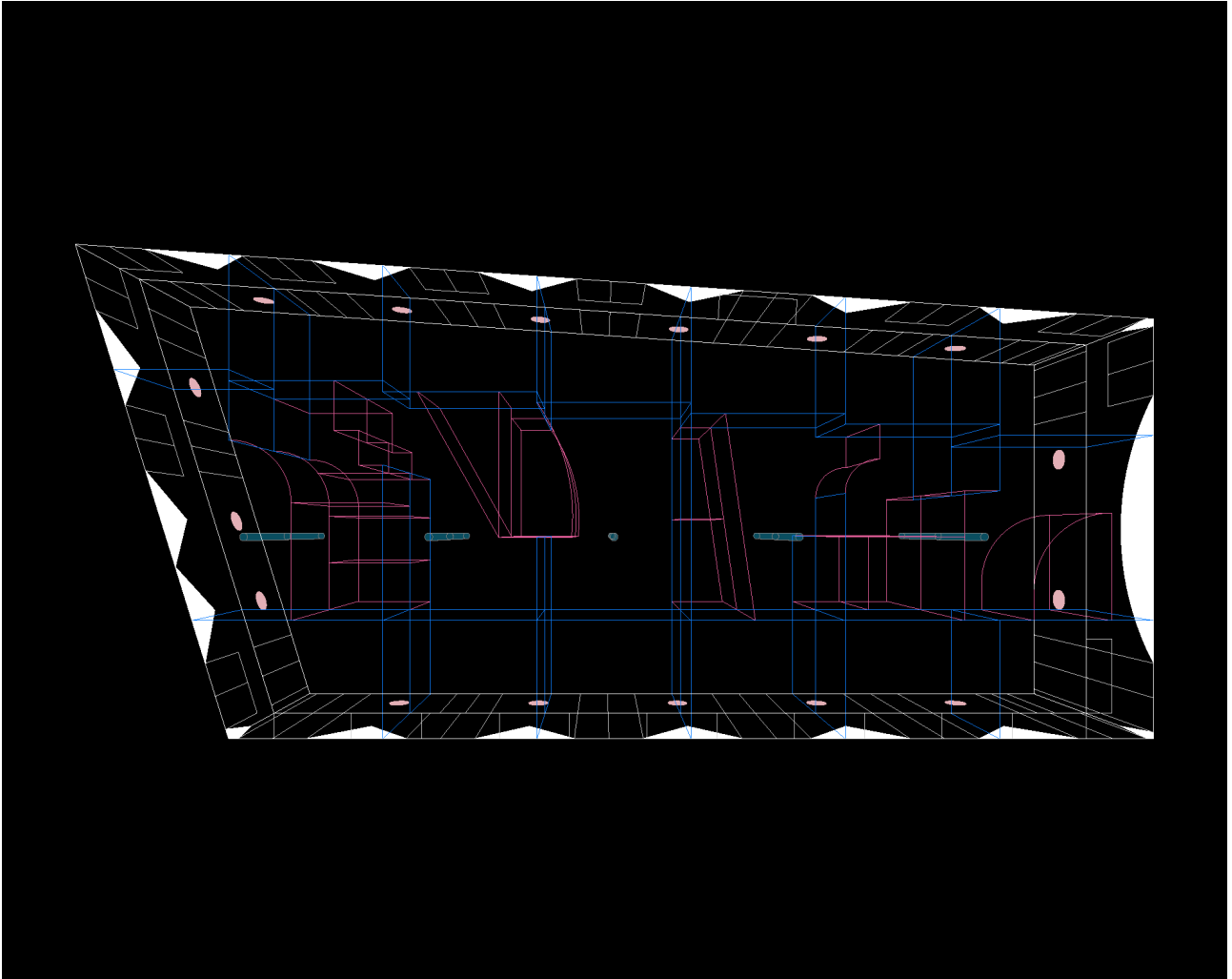


Fig. 3. 094, house of countless windows, Lisbon, pt, 2022 (photo by Giulietta Margot).



Fig. 4. 101, houses of cards, Marco de Canaveses, pt, 2021, 'wireframes' drawing.



Even more, we could argue that a building is a drawing of its own, necessary to explain the plan and section as they intend to explain the building. As if the plan required a building to make sense. And a collage. And a text. Or vice-versa. All drawings depending on each other, all completing one another.

Maybe in this tension, of edifices as drawings and drawings as edifices, we can find a complete narrative, a "second language with many meanings", like the one theorized by Koji Taki [Linuma 2020]. Maybe, by assuming what does and doesn't matter in each drawing, we can find some sort of cultural purpose, to make sense beyond our simple role as architects.

Kazuo Shinohara wrote, in 1964, a text on seven points for his architecture [Shinohara 1964]. He stated it was not for the site, for the city nor for the client. Yet, after six negatives, the only affirmative point was the idea that architecture, his architecture at least, was intended as a beautifully choreographed fiction. That the selection of drawings, photos and words that he would use to describe it in magazines, were as important, or even more important, than the buildings they referred to. For him, architecture became tangible when it was communicated and rhetoric. His images and representations could have a social value, since they would reach further than his buildings (that would belong to a single person or family). He could express something



bigger than the bricks and doors and windows that composed his houses. His architecture could even disregard the built work: in many cases disappeared already, although the multivalence of the representations he left still allows us to read and understand his oeuvre.

We feel the same.

Fig. 5. I 14, house within a few lines, Porto, pt, 2022, (photo by Francisco Ascensão).

Fig. 6. I 14, house within a few lines, Porto, pt, 2022, interior collage.

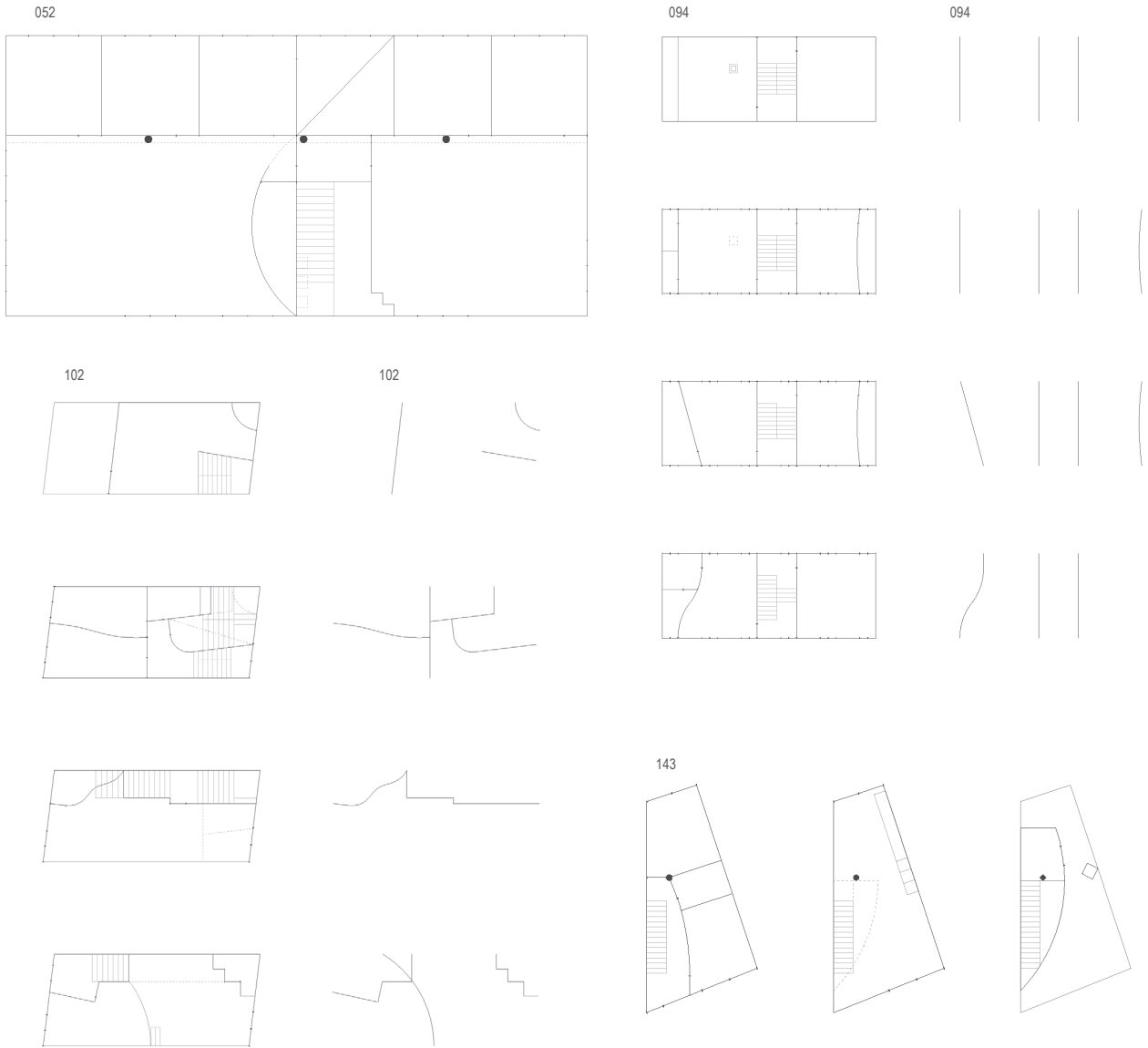


Fig. 7. 052, reasonable housing, Penafiel, pt, 2018, single line drawing; 094, house of countless windows, Lisbon, pt, 2022, single line drawing, 'butterflies' drawing; 102, housing with pink chimneys, Porto, pt, 2022, single line drawing, 'butterflies' drawing; 143, house around a column, Porto, pt, 2024, single line drawing.



Notes

[1] fala is an architecture practice. Founded in 2013, and based in Porto, the atelier is led by Filipe Magalhães, Ana Luisa Soares, Ahmed Belkhdja and Lera Samovich, together with Ana Lima, Joana Sendas, João Carlos Lopes, Catarina Vilarinho, And Eduardo Loureiro: <<https://falaatelier.com/>> (accessed 23 October 2023).

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Iinuma, T. (Ed.). (2020). *Searching for the Language of a House: Architectural Photography of Koji Taki*. Tokyo: House of Architecture.

Acknowledgements

To this text, we attach a set of representations, drawings of sorts, we could say. They are from different projects and obey to different rules. Yet, all do the same in our eyes: communicate a second language of our own work detached from the reality of our daily practice.

Shinohara, K. (1964). *The Autonomy of House Design*, In *Kenchiku*, pp. 64-72. <<https://designmanifestos.org/kazuo-shinohara-the-autonomy-of-house-design/>> (accessed 23 October 2023).