INSTAGRAM AND THE TEACHING OF DRAWING: THE REPRESENTATION OF TIME

P.J. Juan Gutiérrez
University of Alicante (SPAIN)

Abstract

This research is based on a teaching experience carried out during a full academic year: the use of the social network Instagram as a complement to the teaching of various drawing subjects of the undergraduate degree in Architecture and Technical Architecture at the University of Alicante. Originally thought as a platform to investigate the problem of the representation of time in drawing, the application for smartphones created in 2010 has served as a connector of the network of competencies and capacities of the different graphic subjects involved.

Shelling and explaining each of the set of drawings used, the article analyzes the innovative teaching methodology carried out. The starting hypothesis defends that the process of construction of meaning of the drawing is an inseparable part of it and, therefore, must be taken into account during the stage of creation, application or analysis in which, in one way or another, all the subjects involved participate.

It ends by relating the graphic results produced by the students in two ways: between the different subjects with each other and, at the same time, with the history of publications on Instagram that guide the aforementioned innovative experience. The conclusions show the importance of the human agents involved in any teaching-learning process as well as the possibilities that the community and interactivity have in it. In addition, the versatility of the digital tools that we have at our disposal and the importance of the concepts that, independent of them, must be worked during a teaching that aspires to excellence is demonstrated.

Keywords: Social networks, Instagram, drawing, teaching.

1 INTRODUCTION

"The images, like the colors, are also a tragic game that opens windows that look out onto small patios, with lucid monsters that watch over our dreams." [1]

This research is based on a teaching experience carried out during a full academic year: the use of the social network Instagram as a complement to the teaching of various drawing subjects of the undergraduate degree in Architecture and Technical Architecture at the University of Alicante. Originally thought as a platform to investigate the problem of the representation of time in drawing, the application for smartphones created in 2010 has served as a connector of the network of competencies and capacities of the different graphic subjects involved.

The main hypothesis that has driven and guided this research has been the one that considers that the construction of the meaning of the drawing is, also, a fundamental part of its nature and therefore must be taken into account during the teaching-learning process of the graphic issue. In this way, it is underlined the importance of not only the abilities and skills necessary to create the drawing (understood as a graph on a support), but also the intellectual process necessary to decode the graphic symbols in images, and relate them culturally and socially from the contemporary.

2 METHODOLOGY

Shelling and explaining each of the set of drawings used, the article analyzes the innovative teaching methodology carried out during the experience. The starting hypothesis defends that the process of construction of meaning of the drawing is an inseparable part of it and, therefore, must be taken into account during the stage of creation, application or analysis in which, in one way or another, all the subjects involved participate.

In the following sections we present the stages that, also from a teaching point of view, have been developed are presented textually. The process began with a theoretical approach to, fundamentally, the ideas of Paul Klee (2.1 theoretical context) followed by a practical application that began from the
teacher himself (2.2 interaction and social networks) and ended with implementation in the classroom itself, hand in hand with the students (3. Results).

2.1 Theoretical contexts - digital environments (reversibility)

The current experience of teaching innovation begins, as we said above, where a research process ends that has, as its axis of articulation, the problem of temporality. The spatial vision but, before it, the awareness of understanding the graphic as a process and not as a means to achieve a result, have made possible a series of investigations related to the common denominator of the emerging project entitled “the representation of time in the drawing” (financed, in public concurrence, by the University of Alicante). One of the most obvious results has been the one that we already published in Disegno magazine in 2020, and which reads the following: “By defining the distance between the eye that reads and the hand that draws as temporal, we place the reader in a necessarily active position (by understanding the meaning of the drawing as the result of a positioning, also with respect to the anachronism it proposes). In a graphic and architectural context, then, temporal vision plays as important a role as spatial vision”. [2]

This is the previous theoretical approach: In a graphic context “the main activity is also temporary in the viewer” [3]. Which leads us to consider two very important facts:

a) The relevance of a temporal analysis in the drawing
b) The consideration of the reader (the viewer) as a fundamental part of the nature of the drawing

And it is precisely these two conclusions from previous research (hypothesis in this one) that have guided decisions in the environment (digital and social networks) in which we have worked. Next we will reel off the drawings (of work and obtained) but first it seems important to us to underline the vindication that the use of hand drawings entails in a digital environment (in the same way that the use of digital drawing is pertinent and necessary in traditional -but in search of excellence- contexts, such as the academic one).

2.2 Interaction and social networks: an outstretched hand (my drawings)

2.2.1 Still life (others and derivatives)

Figure 1. Still life: some drawings shared on Instagram. Source: author.
In an educational, graphic and architectural context, starting with traditional urban sketches is not, we believe, the best way to start. Facing the drawing of urban environments is a very complex challenge for various reasons and perhaps, in the early stages of the awareness of the construction of the student's graphic criteria, it is better to educate the gaze before the skills themselves (in an attempt to establish a progressive learning methodology). That is why the beginning of the experience is normally free but decontextualized. Geometric shapes or industrial designs (Figure 1) can be used to practice this approach to critical gaze that drawing requires at all stages. Also attending to the application of the concepts learned in previous subjects, graphical and technical ones, such as those derived from descriptive geometry. Thus, common and everyday elements such as headphones, gel cans, street lamps or bicycles, are analyzed (all drawing requires an analysis before, during and after) from a geometric and temporal point of view. Once analyzed, they are presented drawn in an attempt, not so much to represent reality but to engage the viewer in a kind of new reality, accessible thanks to the graphic but possible only after it. The lines are still lines and the spots are simple modifications of the support but, and here is the key, the educated viewer will be able to go beyond the abstract and connect the timeless world of Platonic geometry with the elusive reality.

2.2.2 Drawing tools (not just hands)

While in the previous section (still lifes) the protagonist was the eye (of the draftsman or the viewer), in this second stage we focus on the hand in its multiple aspects. The hand as a drawing tool that, like the pencil or the computer (and its associated software), is at the service of the artist’s intentions, insofar as it is the generator of the graphic process (digital - through the electronic devices- or manual -through material technology such as the pencil-). The hand, also, as an object of the drawing that, more complex than any of the objects represented in the previous section, is also an inevitable stage in the process of generating the graphic. The double condition of subject and object, in addition to the relationship it has with the eye through the intellect, make its consideration (in our experience) a fertile incorporation. If the eye represents reversibility during the construction of graphic meaning, the hand does the same with the irreversibility implied by the act of modifying the surface or, in other words, drawing.

In Figure 2 we present posts (manual drawings) explaining the relationship between the tool and the drawing, in a somewhat provocative way by making explicit the difference between subject and object of representation. For example, the line that comes out of the fountain pen becomes the line that is drawn by it, or the line that is drawn by the hand becomes an abstract drawing tool (the hand holds the
In addition, we find other publications that refer to the ability of the hand to hold other tools (such as the spoon or fork) and, finally, to the hand itself (in a more detail way) as a tool in itself (for example -also- useful for drawing).

2.2.3 Architecture (urban sketches)

Figure 3. Urban sketches: some drawings shared on Instagram. Source: author.

Urban sketches are, we could say, one of the fundamental themes during the construction of the graphic criteria of the student in particular (or of the architect in general). All the issues put into play so far (geometry, temporality, lighting, selection, resignations, criteria...) are presented simultaneously every single time with each urban sketch. We could say that there is nothing as difficult to draw (for an architect) as the environment (real or imaginary) that surrounds us, with all that it implies. In addition to a selection process common to artistic and visual disciplines such as photography and cinema, professional drawing of built architecture also involves a series of unwritten rules (vertical lines do not intersect, the horizon line usually coincides with that of a passerby ...) which, although they are not required, facilitate the transmission of knowledge within the discipline itself and among its professionals.

Note that the technique used and chosen for the series of drawings on display is, let's put it this way, the essential and fundamental one: pencil or pen on paper. Although on some occasions it is combined with watercolor to explicitly give it color, the tool is understood following the idea of Mario Botta “Only now do I understand that pencils primarily convey hope: they are research tools, not tools of representation. (…) they bring with them a more refined and elegant method, leaving space for the imagination and changes.” [4]

3 RESULTS

Logically, the final graphic result, in the form of an Instagram page, is accessible to students of all graphic subjects at the same time. On one hand, in those subjects in which the important thing is the acquisition of the first skills and abilities (manual and visual) the students will have the opportunity to learn or focus on the technical aspects of drawing and, on the other hand, in those other subjects in which more aspects are developed (such as BIM or photogrammetry), the students will have the opportunity to focus on the technical issues and they will be able to learn from the publications focusing on their compositional characteristics. In addition, having the publications available simultaneously allows cross comparisons about and on purpose, for example, of the waivers necessary to draw a pencil, versus the waivers required to draw the urban fact.

We must also say the obvious: Instagram is a social network and, as such, enables and encourages interaction. Not only do students have a channel (which they rarely use) to communicate with the teacher, but they can also see how the teacher relates to a medium commonly used for trivial and banal topics. This alleged decontextualization is the starting point of the teaching-learning process but it never replaces any of the natural steps that its methodology traditionally implies. However, it is not difficult to find certain connections between the results, that is, the students' drawings, and the history of publications of the social network that have been present from the beginning.
Of the innumerable drawings that the students have made during the three academic years that have passed since the experience began, we will dwell on several of them with the aim, not so much to endorse the line of research, but to highlight the possible connections that are made and happen. In Figure 4 we see a series of wonderful architectural collages presented in the form of conical first-person perspectives. Made as a complement to a sequence of infographics, they show great maturity in combining manual drawing (imprecise but suggestive) with photographic textures (precise but inaccurate). The resignations that any graphic experience requires are shown, in the sheet of paper that concerns us and it is reproduced above, as a tool to emphasize the (also necessary) selection. In the same way that, following Rilke's idea, “the thing is not, it is not there, given” but “it must be done, and done precisely in its forcefulness, and done, in each case, in the precise medium that for this it has been chosen.” [5], the drawings are presented as incomplete, precisely to require an active role in the viewer. This active role can also be understood as an extension of the interactivity made possible by social networks in general and by Instagram in particular.

On the other hand, the series of drawings in Figure 5 start from a different assumption. Made using the orthogonal cylindrical projection system (plan or section views) and comprising larger areas of territory, they seek, precisely like the imperfect and unfinished Instagram drawings (which require, as we say, an active viewer to finish resignifying them), not so much a precise definition of the city but to use the drawing as part of a dialogue typical of graphic research. In this sense, Mansure's words are especially relevant: “Drawing, in the precise sense we are talking about it here, is exactly like that wave that -hurls- the buildings in a dynamic topology between -the frost of the past- and - the crest of the future-, whose meaning and contours change and oscillate in time, to a point where the building itself irreversibly becomes or rather expand into drawings” [6].
The drawings have been consciously proposed as tools that, started in an ephemeral present, will travel to the future and will require a duration (space of time) in which the active role of the viewer will be fundamental. This idea has articulated graphic research and teaching experience in such a way that the results are not understood as definitive or closed drawings but, by definition, as changing parts of a learning and research process. Thus, the students, although aware of the irreversibility of the graphic process, have understood that the goal is not so much to get a hypothetical teacher to rate them positively but to know themselves, as draftsmen and architects, also responsible aesthetic judgment and the assessment of the acquisition of graphic skills. In the same way that the teacher has exposed himself on the social network, as one more draftsman (and, therefore, as one more student), the student has seen himself as a teacher. This change of roles, only possible in the last stages of academic and university life, is, we believe, one of the fundamental experiences that the professional of architecture and drawing, sooner or later, must carry out.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions, traditionally understood as the end of this research work and beginning of the following, show the importance of the human agents involved in any teaching-learning process as well as the possibilities that the community and interactivity have in it. In the same way that "Painting from nature does not imply copying the objective, but materializing one's own sensations." [7], the use of the social network has not been so much a way to have a repository where the student has the example to follow, but rather to share a (personal) way of understanding the relationship of drawings with our profession to, precisely, try to help the student to find his (or her) own. The vindication of the manual drawings in a digital context (all the original drawings have been made by hand on a paper support and subsequently scanned) has been accompanied by another, less obvious, that underlines the competences of the students and the doubts of the teachers.

We can summarize the final conclusions attending to three fundamental ideas, namely, the drawings themselves, the representation of time they make possible and the digital tools that have been used during the experience:
• The drawings themselves, both from the point of view of the teacher (during the beginning of the experience) and the student (at the end of it), are understood as encapsulated and latent graphic investigations (and not definitive, closed and inert results).
• The representation of time can be understood as a metaphor during the review of the sequence of images hosted on the network but also inserted as part of the graphic proposal. Every single drawing has, derived from its implicit imperfection, a strong ability to suggest ideas and images that have not been considered by the draftsman. This capacity develops over time and thanks to the time of contemplation and the time of reading them by an active viewer.
• In addition, it is demonstrated the versatility (also the limitations) of the digital tools that we have at our disposal. They are useful both for the banalities of our society in general and for seeking the excellence and develop the important concepts that the academic context required. We think that combined (and in symbiosis) with our traditional tools is where its greatest strengths reside.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
This work is developed as part of an R + D + I project entitled "The representation of time in graphic expression", with reference project-emergent-GRE18-10 and funded, in public concurrence, by the Vice-Rector’s Office for Research and Transfer of Knowledge of the University of Alicante.

REFERENCES