

PATRYCJA OCHMAN\*

## DECONSTRUCTION AS A METHOD OF SHAPING SPACE. DRAWING – THE ARCHITECT’S MEDIUM

### DEKONSTRUKCJA JAKO METODA KSZTAŁTOWANIA PRZESTRZENI. RYSUNEK – MEDIUM ARCHITEKTA

#### Abstract

The author discusses the process of deconstruction in architecture and the accompanying drawing process, interpreted as an architect’s medium rather than merely a tool for signification, a method of communication between an artist/architect and the world. The architect’s mind finds delight in space, a fleeting thought, idea, concept, a non-verbal shape of future material substance. Drawing, while being an immanent part of the work, is the work in itself, the language that allows for space to be described in its own categories. Drawing as a method of experiencing space reveals the mechanisms through which architecture is shaped.

*Keywords: deconstruction, drawing, space*

#### Streszczenie

W artykule omówiono proces dekonstrukcji w architekturze i towarzyszący mu proces rysowania – rozumiany jako medium architekta, a nie jedynie narzędzie sygnifikacji, metoda komunikowania się artysty/architekta ze światem. Umysł architekta – zachwyt nad przestrzenią, przelotna myśl, idea, koncept, niezwerbalizowany kształt przyszłej materialnej substancji. Rysunek, będąc immanentną częścią dzieła, jest dziełem samym w sobie, językiem pozwalającym opowiadać o przestrzeni w jej kategoriach. Rysowanie jako metoda doświadczania przestrzeni ujawnia mechanizmy kształtowania architektury.

*Słowa kluczowe: dekonstrukcja, rysunek, przestrzeń*

\* MA Patrycja Ochman, Faculty of Interior Design, Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow.

At the beginning there is a thought. It appears out of nowhere and spreads around itself the thicket of other thoughts; it grows simultaneously with them, building the tissue of space in the designer's mind. The reality which is being designed has a long way to go, from its author's imagination, through a sheet of paper to the actual world, and in the process it undergoes a number of trials, tribulations, doubts and errors. It often returns from a stage of preliminary models to the flat surface again to find better coordinates for itself. The process it undergoes is a key to shaping space without charging it with the schemes of ready-made template solutions; in fact the right door will open through the search, tracking the inner tensions concealed in the space, the cracks that delaminate it, the invisible network of correlations and cleavages between the nodes that define its structure. Deconstruction, interpreted as a process of this kind, implies a particular type of play, based on continuous analysis, a tracking of what is taking place, of what provokes action – at the same time calling for an image of the forever-unfinished building of the Tower of Babel. Deconstruction is therefore about experiencing the designed space without imposing meanings and interpretations, while remaining convinced that unequivocal and schematic perception immobilizes and restricts any insightful thinking. Deconstruction as a method of shaping space freely, searches for new boundaries in well-known, familiar matter, but it does not define them for good, which allows it to stay away from the old habits and relationships between concepts that comprise a system of thought. An analysis of architectural space does not therefore close a design path but leaves it in a dynamic form, ready for new transformations, suggesting a dialogue within the shapes and surfaces that build it; as if a button has been designed that sets off the machinery of architecture in motion, because it has been stuck motionless for a moment, as if paused. This is what Frank Gehry's spaces are like. There is no strict division into roles, into an interior and exterior, which present ready-made content on the stage of life; instead they brush against each other, permeate each other, enter into interaction. They are open to 'otherness', are tolerant and unique. Whether it is the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao or the design of the Louis Vuitton Foundation Museum in Paris, these – just like many other buildings which had originated in the architect's mind before they found their place in the real space – underwent a lot of drawing and modelling trials before making it into reality. A giant made of steel, titanium, stone and glass gives an impression of being moulded by a light gust of wind; while the sparkly surfaces of its shape bend to allow light to sculpt permanence into flux, so typical of Gehry's buildings. Although the project itself was aided by the use of the Catia software, the architect himself emphasizes the indispensable role of sketches and modelling, which are like "drawing in space". A flat visualization on the computer screen is incapable of reflecting the fullness of reality or of the shape of the air filling an empty space. Gehry's uniqueness stems from the fact that by moving in space he considers *difference* – which according to Derrida's is something shapeless that does not exist, the *difference* which is not a specific state or form; it cannot be known through senses but it is still right at the centre of things. Owing to this centre, this difference, this emptiness, it is possible to obtain a coherent image and therefore space, which by comprising a precise mechanism gives an impression of the ambivalent positioning of its components, immobilized in space, as if it encouraged free interpretation and further intellectual deconstruction. The Louis Vuitton Museum situated in the Bois de Boulogne is only/as much as another step/stage/of deconstruction, previously acted out in drawings and models. When realized in the 1:1 scale it sows the seed of further,

individual, uncountable thought deconstructions. Just like a cloud, swirling through the air, which will change shape in a moment; like glass sails, filling with wind to raise the building above the earth.

The French philosopher Jack Derrida does not discuss reality as such but the ways of its perception, which -according to him – can be revealed through literature and, which can also perhaps be extended to such media as drawing. “Deconstructionism comes down to the process of applying a specific linguistic and artistic model to the reality – it is in no way gaining knowledge, reading or contemplation” but rather “deconstruction of the opposites: the objective world and its human (true or false) interpretation” which leads to “thinking in the space of irresolvables”<sup>1</sup>. Could it be then that drawing space is not about creating new models or alternative versions, not in order to gain the ultimate knowledge of it but to experience it continually, getting to know it as if incessantly. Taking on the semantic play of Derrida’s texts and thinking about literature, which on the destructionist view is a practice of reading and writing, we could perhaps think about drawing by practicing both the writing/designing of space and the reading/interpreting of it. Following this trail, deconstruction is about an exhaustive drawing analysis of architectural space, in order to disclose the places that destroy its superficial cohesion, to reveal the in-built, insoluble dissonances which are particularly privileged in the process of deconstruction. Why? Because they create the area in which new solutions can be discovered. To an architect, drawing is a medium that serves the purpose of discovery. In the drawing matter, unlimited by an impossibility of actualisation, Zaha Hadid shortens or extends distances between designed objects, stretching them, showing their movement, as if trying to work out their form by sculpting it from different viewpoints. One could, after Rem Koolhaas, who called Hadid “a planet moving round its own orbit”<sup>2</sup>, describe every architect in this way who closely listens to the inner voice that moves her hand while drawing. What Hadid brings to life are creations that stand out with their controversial form, worked out through endless drawings and spatial reliefs, defining dynamics of lines, edges of space, emotions relating to the fluidity of form. The design process is based on her virtuoso skill in bringing out synesthetic sensations, coded inside the machinarium that pulsates with its own life, which – just like the Museum of Modern Art in Cincinnati -swiftly changes and crops its inner space with unexpected shots combining various floorings. Zaha excludes computers from the first phase of designing, using only sketches and conceptual drawings, which will lead you from one shot to another to the final effect, not unlike a storyboard. The Vitra Fire Station in Weil am Rhein is defined by, rather than occupies, a place in space, by a linear and layered gradation of walls which suggests a frozen movement, implying the tension of the expectation of a sudden, violent change of dynamics in the structure. The Abu Dhabi Performing Arts Center rises up like a natural form and, as if it were a developing organism made out of pedestrian paths crossing the new cultural district; it spreads out, creating a structure that locates its layers along the axes marked out on the drawing.

<sup>1</sup> *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, red. Andrzej Maryniarczyk, t. II, Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, Lublin, 2001, s. 494.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.magazyntrendy.pl/Trendynew/podglad.php?id=234> (access: 02.04.2015).

Drawing, in the spirit of deconstruction, is a record of an exceptional dialogue with space, which is also an object of its analysis/processing/investigation. An author of a drawing (text) is not the only source of its meaning; deconstruction undermines the traditional interpretation of the subject to the effect that language can express ideas without changing them. An architect's drawing is like a philosopher's text – hardly a static structure but more of a building under reconstruction, continually changing internal relations between the constituent opposites of emptiness and fullness, interior and exterior, totality and fragment, content and form. Architecture, in all reality, just as in design drawings, is entangled in a net of correlates which means that its self-deconstructing goes beyond the designer's intention. With the use of the medium of drawing, an architect carries out a deconstructing “disassembly” of space, yielding to doubt the elements that combine it together, such as unity, harmony and balance and, in this way, presents multiple points of view, a distribution of forces working from the inside. Drawing to an architect is a search for new perspectives, horizons that have not been conquered before. Drawing enables the giving of shape to the non-verbalized matter, which provides a stimulating impulse of unpredictability, so needed in deconstruction. It smashes, reverses the way in which reality is seen, manipulating it in the same way a designer manipulates surface and shape; by changing directions and building contrasts, it leads into an area of thinking which is free of rationality.

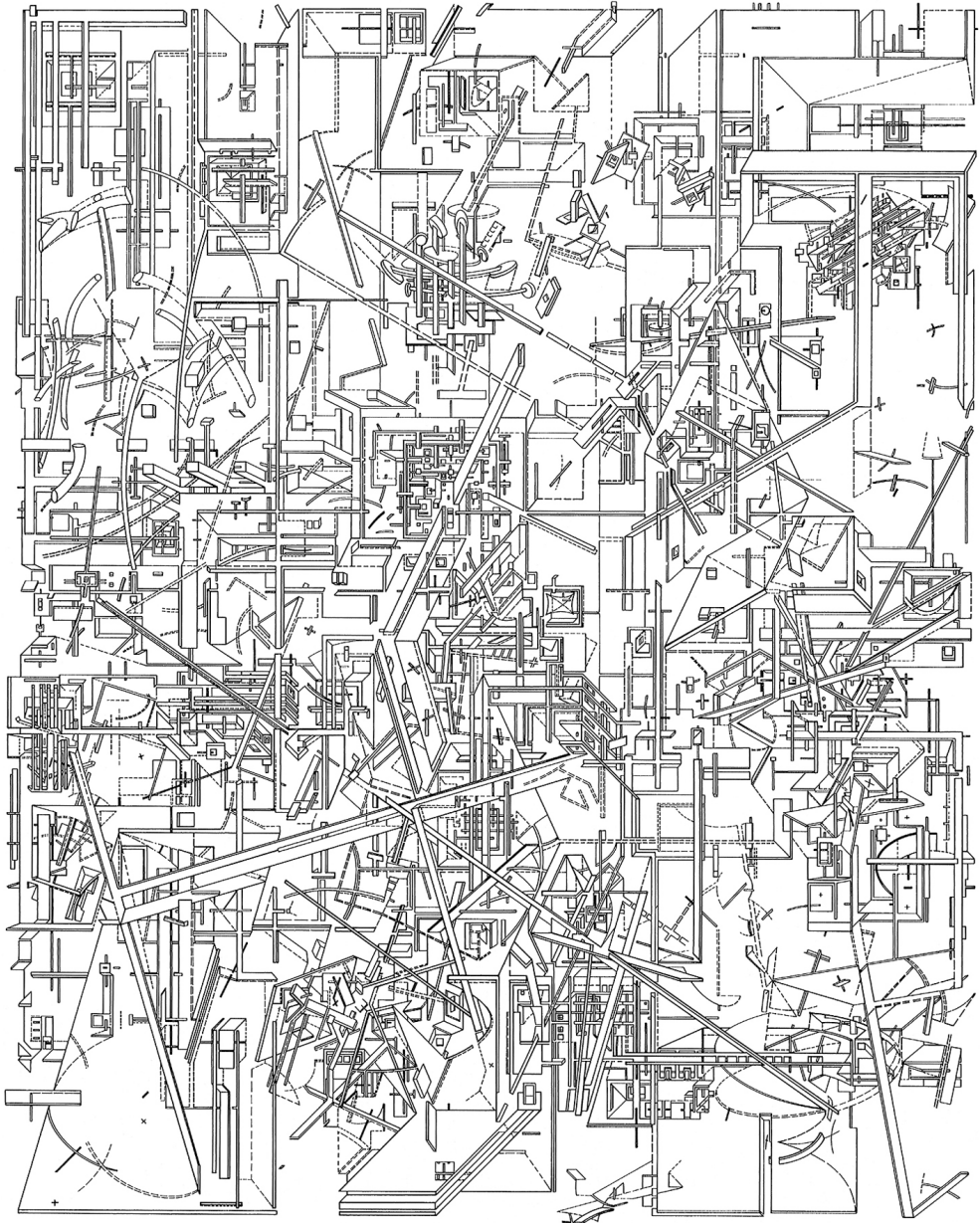
Daniel Libeskind's design space is the space “on its way”; yet it does not happen with the aid of words, so it is hard to describe it with words; neither does it make use of routine, computer solutions. Libeskind, who is often defined as an architect of sounds, relates building space to the process of composing music; in both cases the situation takes place concurrently on paper and in the author's mind. An architect touches on the form and shapes in the imaginary design space; a musician hears a melody in the musical design space which is then recorded on paper. It is impossible to replace such a mechanism of the inner projection of the senses with computer software, which is merely a tool for systematizing the visualization of the project. Libeskind draws arrangements of geometric forms on manuscript paper, while listening to the music of their spatial relations. The first works that made him famous were not any specific architectural designs but cycles of drawings, such as “Micromegas: the Architecture of Space End” (1979, ill. 1) and “Chamber works: Architectural Meditations on Themes from Heraclitus” (1983). The drawings improvise space based on intuition, blind chance and gestures, with the help of multidirectional, crossed lines, curves, circles that create an impression the penetrating, searching, tracking or marking of traces which bring to mind deconstructionist analysis. Sometimes his labyrinths suggest spaces that cannot exist in reality, as if the architect was on the trail of new dimensions, new realities, which opens broader perspectives in design thinking, undermining all tried and tested architectural theories and practice. Libeskind's drawings are reminiscent of Escher's works, in which architecture evades reality, in this way brining drawing up to the rank of architecture. In any case, this is what Libeskind wanted – his drawings are ways of experiencing “otherness” and depicting the mechanism of drawing and perception of a drawing. They go beyond directing a being towards what precedes being – otherness, questionability, a chasm, but at the same time they show drawing/a drawing as a medium and not only a tool for documenting, describing facts, the process in which a person at the user-end is passive. The innovative

character of the Micromegas series initiated a new way of perceiving space; it became a portent of the broken line of the Jüdisches Museum in Berlin and foundation of the famous theoretical project the “City Edge” (1987). The competition-winning vision of building in the area near the Berlin Wall did not go along with the general trend of masking the fissures, the tearing of the city tissue, but went for a deconstructive reversal of the situation, searching for a solution within the structure which was already in place, ripping and splitting it from the inside and at the same time binding the fate of the new object with the fate of both East and West Berlin. Architecture as the record of the memory of a place is clear in the design model, in which elements of the old buildings were covered with the paper photos and texts, and so above the preserved structures an object rises on the set of three intersecting lines at an acute angle. The space, visualized with the use of a model, makes us aware that the scars of the past are impossible to erase but the reorganization of this space is only possible thanks to a deconstructionist analysis which imposes a prevailing significance on the new building, almost suspended against gravity. Libeskind based the design of the Jewish Museum also on the sounds of Schoenberg’s unfinished opera; looking for a deconstructionist opposition to the historic building of the Kollegienhaus, he created a raw metallic shape with sharp cuts, suggesting suffering. The shape of the building, searches for its own path in the space to be able to express with itself more than a mere presence. Drawing has allowed for the extraction of additional layers of space; as Libeskind says, drawing is not only an invention that leads to a clear record or creation, but it comprises an explanation and interpretation of text – a reality existing independently of an architect<sup>3</sup>.

Designing and creating in the spirit of deconstruction is not a method which should be used according to pre-specified rules; it is more of a willingness to take on a new interpretation, depending on a design situation that is already in place. The architect’s mind should be entirely free of rigid frameworks that restrain the design reality and the prejudice rooted in it in the shape of established definitions, concepts or meanings. From the very first line, an architect tells a story about space and the laws it is ruled by, about the contrasts defining its character, about chiaroscuro searching for its altering mood, about the emptiness and silence which balance the density of architecture against a white sheet of paper, about the people that will reside in the space. A drawing is a language which lets express space in its own categories, it comprises a medium for deconstructing architectural reality, an architect’s method of communication with the world, not only a tool for signification. Together with modelling, it is an additional sense for an architect, which enables the experiencing of space, experimenting with the possibilities it offers, and marking out new coordinates for architecture, which is a value in itself. A drawing illustrates the structure of thought and inventions before they are verbalized, ascribed to specific concepts, charged with meanings. A drawing can be read as a whole, without visually linking the connected points, like letters. If an architect loses his voice, he can still talk: using points in place of words, lines instead of sentences, fragments of pure white on a piece of paper instead of punctuation.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ch. Jencks, K. Kropf, *Teorie i manifesty architektury współczesnej*, Grupa Sztuka Architektury, Warszawa 2013, s. 311.



III. 1. Daniel Liebeskind, *Micromegas* (caption: *The Burrows Laws*), 1978–1979 (source: <http://mediacentre.kallaway.co.uk/architectural-association-school-picture-library5.asp>)

## References

- [1] Jencks Ch., Kropf K., *Teorie i manifesty architektury współczesnej*, Grupa Sztuka Architektury, Warszawa 2013, s. 311.
- [2] *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, red. Andrzej Maryniarczyk, t. II, Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasz z Akwinu, Lublin, 2001, s. 494.

