

# Example of a Blog as a Research and Academic Toll About Drawing

Hugo Barros Costa, Salvador Gilabert Sanz, Pedro Molina-Siles and Javier Cortina Maruenda

**Abstract** The blog *a fresh drawing everyday* started in a classroom, 5 years ago, when I suggested my students doing a drawing every day. After the general answer “that is impossible”, I proposed uploading a daily drawing in the web, so they could check if it was possible. Since then, I am sketching every day and posting a “fresh” drawing at this blog, alternating them, occasionally, with some old sketches. Starting with black and white sketches, color has instinctively started being protagonist in this illustrated and personal diary that reflects my personal and academic life and the evolution of drawing on it.

**Keywords** Blog · Drawing · Diary · Communication

## 1 Introduction

The academic and personal blog *a fresh drawing every day* ([www.hugorc.wordpress.com](http://www.hugorc.wordpress.com)), was generated in a classroom in 2010 after proposing the students of the subject Analysis of Architectural Forms to make a drawing every day.

As a result of the general negative response from students who, terrified, almost in unison, invoked the impossibility of such a task, I proposed the publication of a series of daily drawings through the future blog, created at that time, in order to prove that such work could actually be possible.

---

H. Barros Costa (✉) · S. Gilabert Sanz · P. Molina-Siles · J. Cortina Maruenda  
Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Valencia, Valencia, Spain  
e-mail: hubarda@ega.upv.es

S. Gilabert Sanz  
e-mail: salvadorgilabert@gmail.com

P. Molina-Siles  
e-mail: pmolina@ega.upv.es

J. Cortina Maruenda  
e-mail: salvadorgilabert@gmail.com

## 2 The Blog

Given the continuous difficulties of communication with the students (concerning the basic concepts of the above mentioned subject), another—and equally important—goal of the blog *a fresh drawing everyday* was the attempt to create a communication channel teacher/student, as a strategy teaching. That is, since the traditional ways of communication were not working, we thought that the web could be a better way to approach to students.

Consequently, an exchange of drawings (teacher/students) was also proposed through the blog, subsequently allowing comments and questions on-line.

Although this exchange with the students was not as fruitful as expected, it remains an involvement of personal research on Drawing, which has been extended to other subjects and teachers of Graphic Expression and other means of representation such as the laser-scanner.

Thus, although the main materials used to feed the blog are usually “traditional”, no door is closed to digital tools, either in the execution or in supplementary processing of the drawings.

Since this is a communication channel dedicated to Drawing, it also features occasionally news, videos and images from different artists.

## 3 The Process

One can research on Drawing by two means: studying the works of others (in libraries, museums, archives, exhibitions, web...) or through their personal process drawing, i.e. theoretical or empirical knowledge. We are not arguing that these activities are independent, since to develop our personal drawing is essential to learn from the others.

For this purpose, internet, as just mentioned, is fundamental, as it allows us to visualize every day, through groups such as the Urban Sketchers, thousands of different drawings on a global scale. Here, comments on techniques, materials, among other issues, leading to a direct or indirect communication with a very large universe. Recently, I had the great pleasure that, in his nineties, Czech architect Yona Friedman, commented some of the drawings presented in the blog.

Also, this research through the drawing, has been complemented (in parallel with the doctoral thesis of Hugo Barros costa) with the physical and virtual visit to numerous files, such as Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Library Riccardiana in Firenze, Portal of Spanish Archives, Archives Moma, Archives of Cooper Union Art School, Torre do Tombo, Vatican Archives, OAC (on line Archive of California) or UCSB (Santa Barbara).

However, the main element that feeds this research is a result of the experience to test multiple scenarios through (literally) thousands of drawings where have been

experienced materials, compositions, viewpoints, climatic conditions, developing the ability to interpret reality translated by personal codes.

As we write these lines, five years passed by since the first drawing was published in this blog. We find this material enough (or too much, considering the reduced limit of the article) in order to perform a (summarized) effective analysis of its basic content.

The content of enables detailed information (statistics, tags, categories, comments, etc.) relative to the introduced entries, providing relevant data for this analysis.

## 4 What Is Published

The content (excepting a few entries reintroduced from other *blogs*) is totally made by the main author of this article.

They are divided into two big groups, the academic and the personal.

The academic content is related to the subject Analysis of Architectural Forms, that is one of the most visited subjects on the Blog.

1182/Maison Carré—Alvar Aalto//Geometry (172 views) <http://wp.me/pLtki-1YV>

1233/Archaeological Museum in Vitoria/Alava//Spain (141 views) <http://wp.me/pLtki-236>

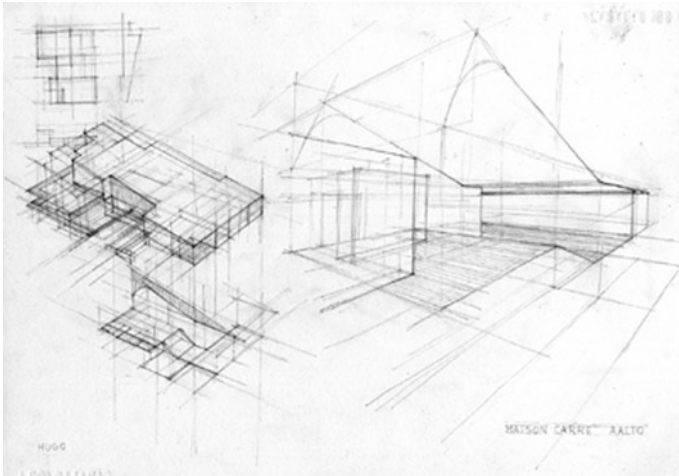
1241/Analyzing the Archaeological Museum in Vitoria/Alava//Spain (136 v.) <http://wp.me/pLtki-23C>

This content is destined to support students by providing didactic materials for each proposed exercise in class. They are simple examples or visual references that aim to support the drawings executed by the students. This implies an effort of the teacher who must perform all the drawings requested to students, but also allows him to be prepared to support students in eventual questions relative to the proposed exercises, once he has had to overcome the same difficulties from own experience.

Relatively to this topic Frank Ching says: “When teaching, I am forced to articulate the reasoning for what I normally would do in an instinctive and intuitive manner. Teaching requires that I explain in a very short time what I have gained through many years of practice and experience.” (Costa and Hidalgo 2015) (Fig. 1).

In this “Academic Content” I also included drawings done for my PhD thesis, *History of the graphical representation of Castle Peñíscola, from graphite to laser*, some of them published in this *Blog*.

Although the laser scanner was the main graphic tool for architectonic survey and representation basis of this thesis, the use of various types of sketches contributed to better assimilation of the studied object. We believe that the direct contact with the subject is still fundamental, along with traditional field notes and data reference. They are, in our experience, essential when drawing in CAD the cloud points generated by the laser scanner. Unlike the laser beam, whose only criterion is to measure the distance to the first object it finds in its path,



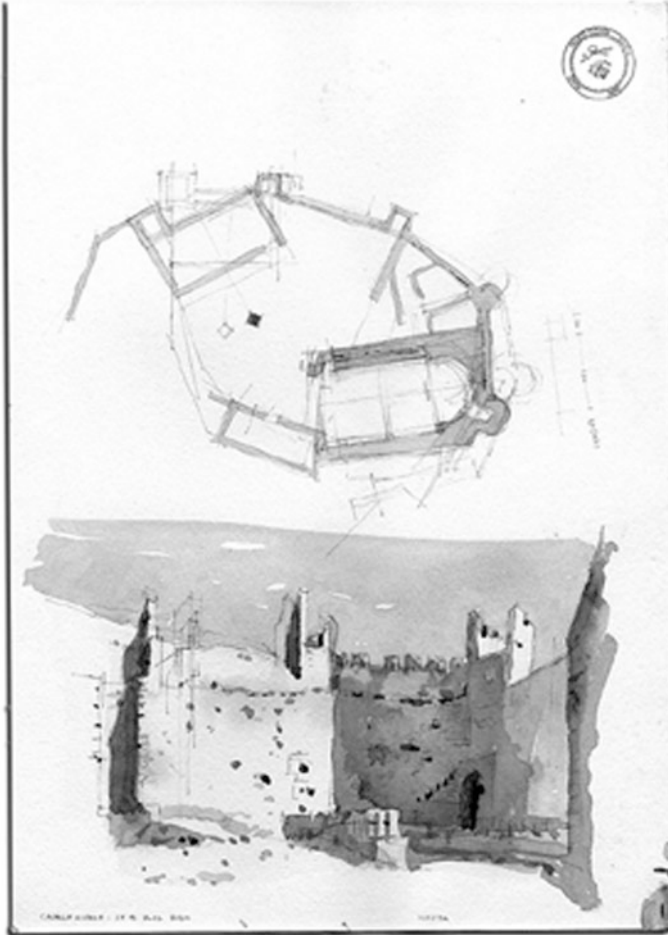
**Fig. 1** Hugo Barros Costa. Analysis of architectural forms (subject UPV). Analyzing the complex geometry of the Maison Carré



**Fig. 2** Hugo Barros Costa. Laser scanner point cloud. Peñíscola Castle. Castellón

“field sketches” are conducted in accordance with specific objectives and criteria oriented to a certain purpose of the survey, which, although personal, makes them very analytical and selective regarding the required information.

The method of working with this tool, that can quickly identify millions of points, exemplifies how digital tools can be integrated with traditional ones. Thus, in developing this method of field work/processing of digital data, we have found, paradoxically, that the supports of traditional records, starting as simple schemes of



**Fig. 3** Hugo Barros Costa. Plant and perspective. Graphite and watercolor. Xivert Castle. Castellón

scanner location, were increasingly supplying us with valuable information of shapes, colors, materials, details ...

These drawings, in parallel with the unequivocal effectiveness of the scanner, question where and how the digital accuracy need mental and physical support of the traditional drawing. We must accept that it is possible to perform such architectonic surveys without the support of the drawing, however, we think this is a complement that increases informative and analytical value to geometric analysis (Fig. 2).

The second large group, *personal drawings*, can be classified into 5 main categories (architecture, travel, people, events and a last one, harder to specify, which I would define as *living or urban atmosphere*) (Fig. 3).

## 5 Architectural Drawings

Architectural drawings, are highly represented in the Blog and are undoubtedly the most viewed:

11/Therme Vals\*Peter Zumthor/Graubunden//Switzerland (1890 visitas) <http://wp.me/pLtki-1x>

45/Boa Nova tea house\*Siza Vieira/Leça da Palmeira//Matosinhos (1096 v.) <http://wp.me/pLtki-4y>

117/MAC-Niterói/Oscar Niemeyer//Brasil (1086 visitas) <http://wp.me/pLtki-am>

These *Post* are mostly accessed through search engines (Google, Bing, Yahoo ...), indirectly, by users that seek information about the architects and works related to the above mentioned drawings.

## 6 Travel Drawings

According to the conclusions of the last International EGA Congress at Gran Canaria, whose main theme was *Architects Travel Drawing*, this field “is a vast field of study within the Architectural Graphic Expression” (Figs. 4 and 5).

In the same text is also stated that “The *real travel* and graphic recording has been a constant activity of the architect throughout history...”. “Regarding the travel drawing in the architectural education, the link between the action of travelling and drawing remains significant and recommendable to students, either incorporated into the academic curriculum and as an individual activity of the student.”

My personal *real travel* and respective graphic record were for years the main motivation for the practice of drawing. Travel activity is a pause and abstraction of everyday life; it keeps the senses awaked and opens the door to new perceptual discoveries. It is remarkable to note how differently two individuals can understand and represent the same space.

In addition, the impressions that are recorded in the memory, after the drawing process become part of our personal cognitive baggage, which most likely would be lost by not being registered.

Since drawing every day, my amount of travel drawings have been gradually reduced, relatively to all the total records made. I do not want to say that I draw less on travel, but that everyday drawings are obviously the most frequent.

## 7 Drawings of People

These sketches made in public or private spaces, in static or dynamic situations allow me to more easily integrate characters in the subsequent drawings of urban environment. They are usually made in small format and allows me to quickly test

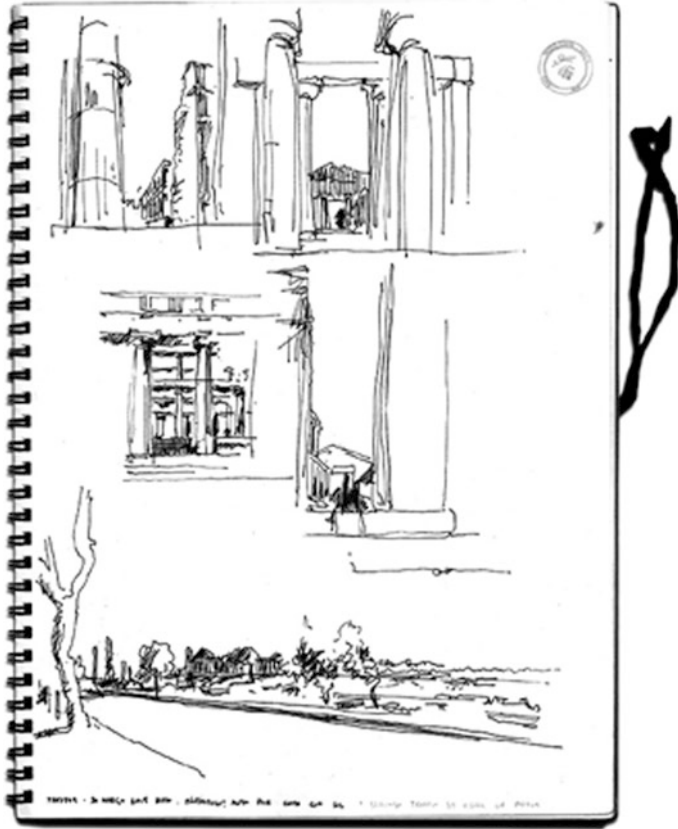


Fig. 4 Hugo Barros Costa. Graphite. Therme Vals. Graubunden. Switzerland

materials, media and techniques, depending on which can be more abstract (suggestions of forms) or concrete. Thus, the bodies or body parts can be represented by lines, shadows, spots, color or any combination of these (Figs 6 and 7).

Some external comments to the blog confirm that this intention is sometimes achieved.

A *zoom* in certain drawings of the blog frames the fast and Abstract lines that maybe contributed to escape from the excessive and static information, when the goal is suggestion (Fig. 8).

## 8 Drawings of Events

The drawings of events, including concerts figurations, dinners, conferences and of course, like all the other above mentioned categories, can sometimes be included in any of the other mentioned groups.

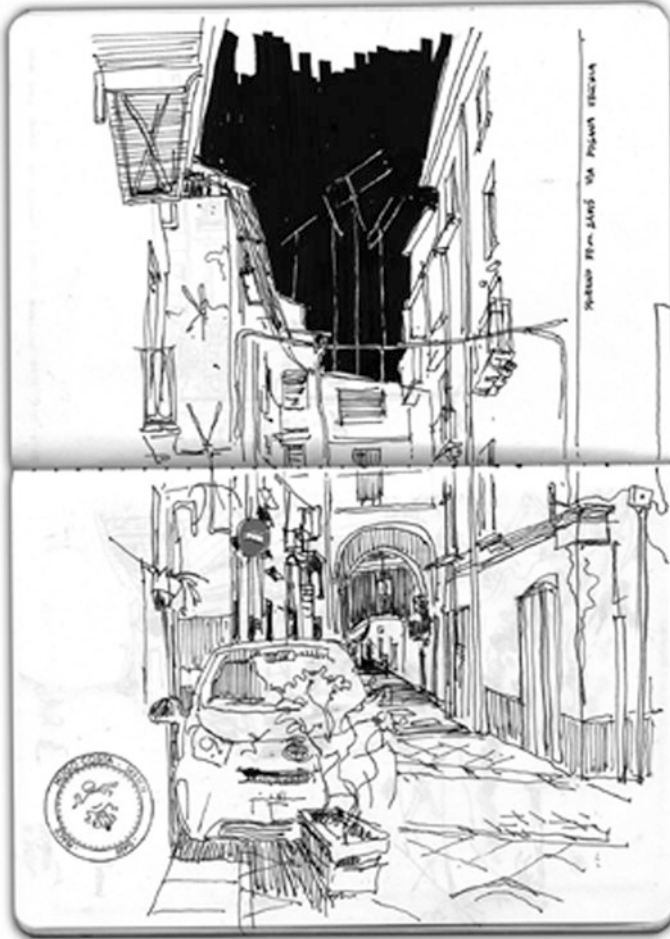


Fig. 5 Hugo Barros Costa. Fountain pen. Salerno. Italy. 2015

## 9 Drawings of Urban Atmosphere

These are the most difficult drawings to specify. The main conclusions that result from the analysis to the compositions published in the Blog, can be specified in an increasing attention to the detail, to the composition and smaller presence of “isolated object” in favor of more generalist compositions, where a set of elements in various scales define a spatial set or certain experience.

Using the concepts of Norberg-Schulz, the “level of objects” has been unconsciously extended from a more superficial perception of the phenomena to a more detailed one, in this way, the “new” experience to a higher level, of the properties of





Fig. 6 Hugo Barros Costa. Brush and pen. Ballet class. Valencia. Spain. 2015

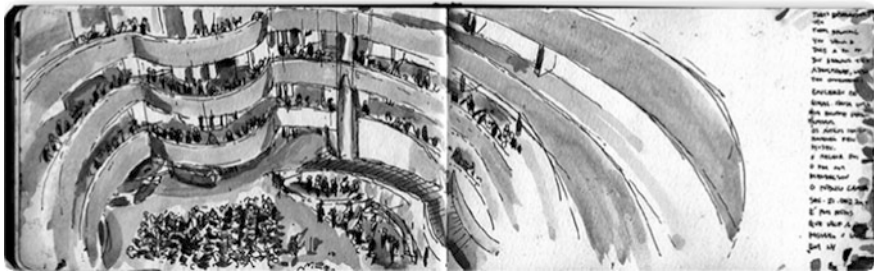


Fig. 7 Hugo Barros Costa. Brush and pen. Concert at the Guggenheim. New York. USA. 2015

these phenomena is reflected in these compositions I call *Drawings of experience or urban atmosphere*, or also *visual epistemology of the contemporary environment*.

According to Frank Ching, “regular and continuous practice is necessary to learn to draw, which is actually about learning to see. (...) To draw encourages us to take the time to pay attention to things and relationships that often go unnoticed.” (Barros Hidalgo 2015)

However, I have always tried (I wonder if I reached that goal) *not to* “display” all the intelligible elements in my scenario. I do prefer to transmit “a suggestion”, like I fell on Wong Kar Wai movies atmospheric *Frames* to the indiscriminate and non-selective representation.



Fig. 8 Hugo Barros Costa. Brush and Pen. 5th Avenue. New York. USA. 2015

## 10 The Main Materials

I do not intend in this article to make a compendium (more) of drawing and painting materials, but to expose my personal experience with some of them, and how some of their characteristics, reaction to the paper and climatic conditions, escort and sustain this research on drawing and communication.

In addition, this is often a central issue in blog comments.

The graphite pencil (from B to 8b) has been one of the favorite materials for published drawings, the toughest for detailed representations, and the softer for rapid and *organic* drawings.

Although I normally use softer pencils, lately I have been using a 1B. I combine it with watercolor with high absorptive capacity and heavy weight paper (fine grain).

To combine pencil and watercolor, by own experience, seems far more complex than to use ink (pen, roller-ball ...) and watercolor. When the outline that defines the forms of the drawing is performed with pencil, not only the colors but also the forms are left open, sub-sequently being concretized (shapes and colors) with

watercolor brush strokes. In contrast, when these lines are made with ink, forms result me, in general, more defined, as if the following watercolor only brought color and light values.

In addition, the ink tends to work in a drawing as the internal structure of a stained glass window, highlighting their colors. On the other hand, to obtain the same color intensity, I felt I should apply more pigment when the geometric base composition is made with graphite.

Brushes like *Pentel* type, calligraphic pens and very thick fountain pens allow me to define spots and shadows as well as to color and specify certain light values. They invite to fast execution drawings and high abstraction level, where for example, the shape of an object is defined through its shadow or the negative space that surrounds it (Figs. 9 and 10).

These exercises of abstraction oblige us to an effort of reflection and assimilation of forms, escaping from our spontaneous perceptions.

Comparing to graphite, pens and ballpoint pens allow better results when scanned, which makes them a better choice if sharing in internet is a goal. Lightweight, reliable and economical waterproof rollerball pens of, featuring several colors and thicknesses, are my first choice. However my pleasure and speed increases when drawing with specific fountain pens.

## 11 The Color

Concerning to the use of color, Frank Ching, in the magazine EGA Número 25, mentioned that:

“While I realize that many urban sketchers use watercolors, I value the simplicity and portability of a Lamy fountain pen and a sketchbook, especially when traveling.

In addition to enjoying the fluid and tactile quality of drawing ink lines on paper, I believe that the use of lines to capture a scene requires a level of analysis and abstraction that can be beneficial. The idea is not to reproduce a scene but rather to render it visible. This is the magic of hand drawing—its ability to suggest rather than merely describe.

When I do want to record a particular quality of light, color, and texture in a scene, I will do so on my iPhone or digital camera” (costa and Hidalgo 2015).

Unconsciously, the older posts of this blog, were matching Ching’s opinion, although timidly, the color in a small part of those. I felt (almost) no need, but rather controlling space through the line and perspective. However, my three months stay in Rome as a visiting professor at La Sapienza, made me completely change that perspective.

To the quote “in Rome, be a Roman” I would add “in Rome, be a Roman and use color”. The vibrant pigments that invade the city under such special and distinctive light invite to coloring. Besides the sketchers I met at that city. I may risk saying that with the help Roman painters and illustrators, I learned to use, or better, to understand, how to use color.



**Fig. 9** Hugo Barros Costa. Drawing the negative space. Plaza de San Luis Bertran. Valencia

**Fig. 10** Hugo Barros Costa. Definition of the forms of a building through its projected shadows. Defining the shape of a building through its shadows. Clinico. Valencia



Trying to interpret the color and light values, forms and scenes are seen with different (I do not risk to say better) character. Thus, our perception of the environment changes. Let's say that this perception goes up in a certain scale, which had already been increased through the line (no color) drawings. We can perhaps identify here Norbert-Schultz's theory of "levels of objects." (Norbert-Schultz 1979)

While drawing and painting, that is no more than having a different attitude towards the reality, we necessarily look at certain aspects we had never understood before, enriching our perception of visual memory.

## 12 Conclusions

Although this experience in Blog format had the goal to serve a very small group (students of one group of the subject Analysis of Architectural Forms) it has come to reach a much wider audience. The (desired) response from these students was disappointing, the blog has come to reach a much wider audience (150,000 visits from over 140 countries) with respective *feedback* (some curiously, students of graphic areas, but strangers to the UPV).

However, internally, in our School of Architecture, we have managed some small indirect achievements with this website, such as the spread of the pleasure of drawing to certain students and even teachers.

Although, as I said earlier, the dialog directly through the blog did not occurred as I was expecting, these comments and constructive discussions have occurred in the corridors and classrooms of the school.

Some of the drawings submitted virtually in the web, were also physically exhibited at the School of Constructed Environments Exhibition Gallery—Parsons School Of Design, NYC (USA), Colegio de Arquitectos de Valencia (Spain), Centro Culturale Candini Mestre—Venice (Italy) and ETSA Valencia (Spain). At the ETSAV, trying to keep the original spirit of the blog, the exhibition was shared by other teachers and students works.

Other indirect results, since unpremeditated, of this blog, led to the proposal for courses related to issues addressed in it, in the Territorial College of Architects of Valencia, in the CFP (Training Centre of the Polytechnic University Valencia), as well as in other schools and even private entities. The relationship between the page *a fresh drawing everyday* and these activities results in various ways; firstly through social networks diffusion and search engines, which led to invitations to referred activities, secondly, the drawings of the blog constitute raw material and experimental source for the courses that also feed more drawing production to the blog.

We learn to draw by practice and experience and the personal practice is the best way to anticipate questions and understand the possible difficulties of our students.

Since that first invitation to my students to draw every day, I am still struggling to sketch each day. Even originally starting with monochromatic line drawings, with pen or pencil, the use of brushes, color, washes or other graphic values began gaining prominence in this personal and illustrated diary.

We learn new ways of seeing (shapes, colors or absence of them) and how to transmit emotions; I have enriched my personal and academic relationships: the world is now different, more beautiful. In the end, according to Niemeyer's words, is the pursuit of beauty that moves the architect (Barros and Navarro 2012).

When analyzing the drawings published in the last five years, it is clear that the current ones are more generalist in their content, but also more concrete and precise in the definition of shapes, colors and light values. Furthermore, they have been adapting to social networks and diffusion in the internet, in its framing, materials and physical positioning of the theme (light/photography).

On a personal level, the *blog* has become a daily chart where I often return, like to consult an illustrated agenda that renders my past. It is also a vehicle of compilation and dissemination of the graphic work of students and teachers, with a gradual impact over the years, resulting in a mirror of personal development and collaborative research on Drawing, currently being complemented by a parallel investigation with the use of digital technologies and representation, supported by other teachers in the UPV.

## References

- Barros Costa, H., and F. Delgado. 2015. Conversando con... Frank D.K. Ching. EGA. *Revista de expresión gráfica arquitectónica* 25: 20–31.
- Barros Costa, H., and I. Navarro Camallonga. 2012. Conversando con... Oscar Niemeyer. EGA. *Revista de expresión gráfica arquitectónica* 17 (19): 20–37.
- Norberg-Schulz, C. 1979. *Intenciones en arquitectura*, ed. R. Recht. 1995. *Le dessin d'architecture*. Paris: Adam Biro.

## Author Biographies

**Hugo Barros Costa** Doctor in Architecture (ETSAV). Currently lecturing at the Superior Technical Architecture University of Valencia, (ETSAV) teaching the several subjects Bachelor's Degree in Architecture and M.Sc in Architectural Heritage Restoration, UPV. Researcher at the Heritage Restoration Institute (IRP) of the UPV. Visiting Researcher Scholar at Sapienza—Università di Roma. Visiting Scholar at Parsons School of Design NYC. Worked, among other offices, at Santiago Calatrava (Valencia), Péripériques (Paris) and MVRDV (Rotterdam/Paris), overlapping these activities with personal projects related to architecture, 3d laser survey, urbansketching and illustration.

**Salvador Gilabert Sanz** Doctor in Architecture (ETSAV). Currently lecturing at the Superior Technical Architecture University of Valencia, (ETSAV). Project manager at EMBT, working at the Spanish Pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo, at a social housing block at Barajas or the extension of the Parque Diagonal Mar of Barcelona. As personal projects, he completed several bioclimatic buildings and is researching on European sustainable development programs of "Horizonte 2020" and the Climate-kic program.

**Pedro Molina-Siles** Technical architect, MFA in Artistic production, PhD from Universitat Politècnica de València and teaching at the same university. Overlapping these academic activities with personal projects. Member FabLab Valencia. Author of several articles and from the book *Grasshopper's Anatomy. Taxonomy of its components, y de questions regarding parametric design and new technologies*. He has done architectural parametric design courses at Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid (ETSAM) and at the MIT (Massachusetts).

**Javier Cortina Maruenda** Architect degree from ETSAV. Teaching at Universidad Politécnica de Valencia. Guest lecturer at USAT Perú. Researcher at the Heritage Restoration Institute (IRP) of the UPV, member of FAME (Fotografía y Arquitectura del Movimiento Moderno en España), PhD from ETSAB and ETSAV, articles on EGA, VIA, TC, Vx2, European, Progreso Arquitectura, Scalae, Exhibitions at CTAV, COAC, among others. Grant for a stay estancias at Rome and Brasilia.