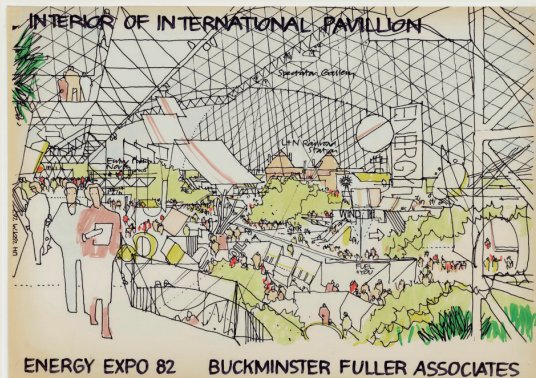


05

Communication Strategies of Foster Associates at Fitzroy Street (1971-1981): A Look at the Firm's Graphic Production Line through Birkin Haward, Helmut Jacoby, and Jan Kaplicky

Gabriel Hernández

The move in 1971 of the Foster Associates team to a centrally located office in Fitzroy Street led to a spatial configuration that led to the recognition and subsequent institutionalisation of the cross-disciplinary, collaborative and multidisciplinary ideation method with which the team operated. In this experimental environment of creation, around the meeting table that was the studio's nerve centre, emerged a series of agents whose contributions to the practice's graphic communication strategies are worth studying. This research looks at the work of Birkin Haward, Helmut Jacoby and Jan Kaplicky, key figures of what could be considered a graphic production sequence in the purest manner of the Industrial Revolution assembly lines. Through drawings by these three architects, we can unstring the 'Fosterian' strategies of graphic mediation and communication; processes applied both internally within the team and with clients and users, and externally in the outreach through publications and exhibitions.



INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT: FROM FITZROY STREET TO THE NORMAN FOSTER FOUNDATION ARCHIVE

This article focuses on the 1970s, during which Foster Associates (FA) underwent a growth spurt and its staff tripled.¹ Studying this phase that unfolded in the Fitzroy office between 1971 and 1981 involves examining how the growing success of the practice's architectural work shifts the prominence of collective thinking into the background. Moreover, we find periods and collaborators who have received uneven attention from historiography in Norman Foster's long and prolific career. The collaboration with Buckminster Fuller is an example of a well-documented and widely disseminated contribution. But this is not the case of those who become the focus of this paper, which presents a sampling of three collaborators out of the many involved in the making of Foster Associates' DNA.

The Archive of the Norman Foster Foundation (NFF), created in 2015 under the guidance of Norman Foster himself (fig. 02), has been fundamental to this research. The collections of this Archive contribute to promoting a transversal approach that facilitates new and parallel readings that are compatible with those of the already extensive bibliography around the figure of Norman Foster. More specifically, the Archive houses all the material that has been preserved from the Fitzroy period (1971-1981), making it an essential primary source of information for reconstructing the firm's graphic ideation, production, and communication processes during those years.²

The immense variety of material held in the NFF archive has enabled us to examine, through graphic work, the role played by a selection of agents who worked with Norman and Wendy Foster. This research will throw light on the complex communication strategies that formed the graphic production line at Foster Associates.³

OVERLAPPING AUTHORSHIP AMONG ASSOCIATES IN GRAPHIC PRODUCTION

This analysis lies within the theoretical framework developed by anthropologist Albena Yaneva.⁴ In her study on the ethnography of design, Yaneva distinguishes two forms of hierarchy at work in professional architectural practice. In the first, the firm is structured around a figure, the artistic genius, who is the source of ideas later developed by the team. In the second form, ideas are generated by a team, which works on them in a spirit of cooperation, over and above hierarchies, disciplines, and authorship.⁵ Archival documentation from the NFF confirms that Foster Associates –and consequently its natural evolution, Foster + Partners– is closer to the second operational structure. Although the *master* still actively produces ideas, sketches, and drawings, Norman Foster is part of a collective system in which he adopts a role more akin to that of a conductor than that of a *concertino*.⁶

These circumstances reinforce the importance of examining the contribution of those who were the practice's leading collaborators. In 1967, after Team 4 was dissolved, Norman and Wendy Foster set up Foster Associates accompanied by colleagues who would eventually become key associates. This cast comprised architects, engineers, designers, quantity surveyors, and specialists in other fields. A group work methodology was thus established, common to all the disciplines involved, resulting in a series of shared, overlapping, and concatenated authorship. 'Associate' was the status given to the team's leading members under Foster Associates, to give way to 'partner' in 1992, when the practice was renamed Foster + Partners. Although this etymological evolution only suggests a subtle difference, what matters is the continued reference to collaborators in the firm's name (fig. 03).

Two primary forms of communication can be identified when dissecting FA's work dynamics. On the one hand, the 'internal' communication among collaborators of different disciplines, producing heterogeneous graphic outcomes. On the other hand, the 'external' communication that took place towards a wider audience through a carefully thought-out and more homogenized visual language. To understand the role that these forms of communication played in FA's work methodology, we will focus on the resulting graphic production of the practice and the role that drawings and their authors played in the equation.

To do so, we must put ourselves in the dynamic context of the Fitzroy Street office, designed as a device that encouraged interaction and communication strategies.⁷ The gradual increase of commissions and employees led to a coherent stratification of work profiles using similar logic to workflows in consecutive production processes. This analysis presents the most significant contributions of three collaborators who left a strong imprint on the graphic production system at Foster Associates: Birkin Haward, Helmut Jacoby, and Jan Kaplicky.

These three architects represent the transition from internal to external communication through the different phases and sequences of graphic production. Haward provided the concept and atmosphere drawings in the production sequence, after which Jacoby, through perspectives and vistas, increased the scheme's degree of definition. Finally, Kaplicky details the construction rationale through analytical and descriptive drawings. However, the inception, elaboration, and development sequence was not necessarily chronological, as these processes could blur, overlap, or superpose one another, just like its authorship. Nevertheless, it is worth noting how each of these agents, relying on different graphic tools, came to generate a plurality of visual techniques that demonstrate the extraordinary diversity of ways in which architectural ideas were rendered during the Foster Associates years at Fitzroy Street.

Additionally, through the three agents named above, this research aims to examine the organisational structure's evolution at Foster Associates over that decade. The gradual expansion of the work structure, in which Haward is on the staff, allows the incorporation of external collaborators such as Jacoby, the master of the perspective of the time, and attracting atypical profiles such as Jan Kaplicky, who embodied FA's fascination with technology. Hence, Foster Associates nourished itself through enlistments who made their mark on one or several phases of graphic production.

GRAPHIC MEDIATION PROCESSES: BIRKIN HAWARD'S WAVY DRAWINGS

In the Norman Foster Foundation's *Inside the Archive* interview series, Birkin Haward, Loren Butt, and Tony Hunt coincide in naming the drawing as the absolute protagonist in the early conceptualisation phase.⁸ Butt recounts how after hours spent around Fitzroy's meeting table, each agent would return to their respective workstations, individually develop their ideas, and then meet again to display the drawings they had produced. This procedure confirms the importance of the drawing as a means of internal communication.

The survival of many drawings from this period signed by Birkin Haward attests to the importance of his figure and relevance of the drawings themselves at the start of the graphic production sequence. Far from silencing his authorship, we could affirm that after Norman Foster himself, Birkin Haward is one of the authors with the most significant number of drawings stored at the NFF archive.⁹ One of Haward's most remarkable contributions has been his ability to capture and convey the initial ideas for a project through a subtle but effective graphic production, using a wide variety of graphic tools.

Brought up in a creative family (his mother was a teacher and a specialist in textiles, and his father an architect and painter), Birkin Haward (born in 1939) attended the AA in London. His artistry is evident in his freehand drawings, nicknamed by his colleagues as 'wavy drawings'¹⁰ (fig. 01). The high degree of abstraction in them enables their use as a tool for dialogue with the future users of buildings. From the start, Haward has combined his architectural interests with those as an artist and a painter, the latter of which he continues to develop today.¹¹

When he joined the practice in 1969, his affinity with Norman and Wendy Foster soon made him one of their closest collaborators. The engineer Tony Hunt, another key figure at Fitzroy Street, compared Haward's role and influence in Foster Associates to that of Richard Rogers in Team 4.¹² Furthermore, Haward became one of the first associates, and was fundamental to the development of FA's graphic identity. Deyan Sudjic described Birkin Haward as "responsible for some of the most memorable drawings coming out of the office at the time."¹³

Haward's graphic production connected the studio to the avant-garde artistic context that was buoyant in London during the Fitzroy years. His drawings stood out through a wide variety of

sketches, depictions, and diagrams because of a constant human presence and the inclusion of spatial sensory aspects, which resulted in colourful, optimistic depictions. Using magazine cuttings, stencils, and collages, many of his drawings show a kinship with those of his peers, connecting us to Archigram's illustrations, Cedric Price's sketches, and Alison and Peter Smithson's collages.

His drawings collection unveils the internal forms of communication between team members and the operating strategies towards clients and users. On occasions, Haward would develop a series of small, cartoon-like drawings to illustrate the programme, circulations and interactions produced by new spatial configurations. Although following a distinctive approach, this strategy has some precedents, both inside and outside Foster Associates.¹⁴

In the NFF archive, one can find pairs of drawings of the same concept which reveal a clarification process in crafting a graphic narrative. Of particular note in this context is the exchange of drawings, notes and indications addressed to Birkin Haward, in which his task is to improve the ideas' graphic quality (fig. 04). The first sketch (left) may have emerged from brainstorming at the meeting table, serving as a 'draft' and basis for the second (right), which Haward converts to FA's graphic identity with the probable intention of presenting it to the client. Sometimes, these tiny vignettes would make up panels proposing a comprehensive visual storytelling journey that makes explicit the concepts behind the design process (fig. 05). The humanistic approach of these drawings is particularly evident in projects addressing social or educational programs, such as the Open House in Cwmbran and the schools in Hackney and Palmerston, in which Wendy Foster was directly involved.

Haward himself describes how some of his drawings were intended to serve as a means of direct communication with the user:¹⁵ We can verify this by looking at his sketches for London's Hackney school, which tried to show the users –the teachers– the advantages of the specifically designed space for the sluice room. In a 'wavy drawing,' Haward used colour to emphasize the natural ventilation and the direct view of the garden (fig. 06). These drawings provide the basis for encouraging dialogue with the users and involving them in the project decisions based on their experience or specific needs.

MATERIALIZING THE DESIGN: FROM HELMUT JACOBY'S PERSPECTIVES TO JAN KAPLICKY'S AXONOMETRICS

Once the concept and the project's atmosphere have been resolved, the following step in the graphic production line corresponds to the drawing produced to develop the way the architectural proposal could be perceived. Helmut Jacoby's graphic production, halfway between interior and external communication, is the leading representative of this stage. The fruitful collaboration of Helmut Jacoby (1920–2004) at Foster Associates lasted almost three decades, from 1971 to 1999. German in origin and with architecture and engineering studies achieved in Germany and the United States, Jacoby soon stood out thanks to his ability to combine both disciplines. He elaborated large-format *vistas* and perspectives to express the scale of a project, its insertion in the urban fabric, and its material quality. Based in New York during the 1950s and 1960s, and with the autonomy that having a practice of his own gave him, Jacoby collaborated with many of the significant figures of the American context, among them Gropius, Mies, Breuer, S.O.M., Saarinen, and Rudolph. Although most of his contributions had to do with the very early phases of competitions, Jacoby's role was not limited to that of a draftsman as he took an active part in conceptualisation processes.

Considered the European Hugh Ferriss, Jacoby was anointed as a reference in architectural drawing after publishing his influential *New Techniques of Architectural Rendering* in 1969.¹⁶ It spells out the graphic variety in the architectural practice by a run-through

of styles and drafting techniques, going from Otto Wagner to Gordon Cullen and including Jacoby's drawings. Aware of the power of the drawing as a communication tool, Norman Foster contacted him the same year the book was published in English, 1971, inviting him to visit the recently completed IBM office in Cosham. Enthused by the material quality of Foster Associates' architecture and by the firm's spirit of collaborative thinking, Jacoby accepted the opportunity to collaborate with them, initiating a period that undoubtedly influenced the studio's graphic production.

Jacoby's arrival at Foster Associates underpins the strategy of expanding the operational structure built around the importance of the drawing and the image as part of the architectural ideation and communication process. Jacoby's enlistment in FA would stimulate that expansion through the pursuit of larger commissions. To this end, Jacoby's large hyperrealist images played a fundamental role as instruments of persuasion to use with future clients or developers.

The format of his drawings had a direct connection with the space where they were presented and from where they were looked at (fig. 07). The clients, seated around Fitzroy's meeting table, are simultaneously spectators and consumers of the graphic production strategically placed around them. Packed with plans, drawings, and photographs, these Herman Miller's Action Office II panels unveil Foster Associate's communication strategies.

As in Haward's drawings, the spaces were bustling with activity, showing a lively and humanised context. Both draughtsmen chose a viewpoint that coincides with that of the human eye, inserting the viewer into the scene. On the other hand, the two main differences between both lay precisely in the way their drawings are perceived. The first had to do with the use of colour: where Haward used a wide gamut of warm tones, Jacoby resorted to a monochromatic range of grey hues that reinforce the textures and wefts' qualities he drew. These subtle details lead us to the second difference, which we can directly relate to the position that the drawings took within the graphic production sequence: Haward's strokes were freer and perhaps more expressionist, a result of the lack of definition at the start of a project, whereas Jacoby's were more rigorous, more defined, given that his contribution is at a more advanced stage of the production line.

We can find several versions of the same drawing among Jacoby's contributions, with varying definition degrees. Unlike what we previously noticed with Haward, different team members participated in the same stage of definition (fig. 04). Looking at the drawings of the interior views of the Willis Faber and Dumas curtain wall (fig. 08), we can assume that the first (left) is the outcome of a brainstorming process played out at the meeting table. In contrast, the second (right) is the final product, remotely elaborated by Jacoby from his office – a reminder of his role as an external, outsourced agent of FA. Paradoxically, this dynamic could also cause overlapping authorship within the same drawing, a *cadavre exquis*. In the drawings for the competition of the new Lloyds Bank headquarters in London (fig. 09), we can identify Jacoby's skill in the drawing of the urban environment (left), where he leaves a blank area for later incorporating the proposal scheme (right) drafted by Norman Foster.

Moving on to the last stage of the graphic production line, we can identify another drawing archetype born with an explanatory purpose and which became the medium used to communicate the projects once the conception phase was over. Of particular significance in this phase of external communication were Jan Kaplicky's descriptive, at times surgical drawings. Of Czech origin, Jan Kaplicky (1937-2009) migrated to the United Kingdom after the Prague Spring of 1968 and established himself as an architect. He landed in Foster Associates from Richard Rogers's firm, where he took part in projects like the Centre Pompidou. Though his stint at FA was brief compared with Haward's and

Jacoby's, it is perhaps Kaplicky who best represents the fascination with technology and science fiction and the connection with emerging graphic techniques.¹⁷ Through sharp, accurate lines, detailing, exploded three-dimensional construction details, and axonometric views, Kaplicky's drawings reinforce FA's strategies for external communication.¹⁸

His presence at FA from 1979 to 1983 confirms the relevance of drawings and images as primary tools in architectural communication. Kaplicky rarely took part in the early stages of the production line. Most of his drawings were elaborated during a subsequent phase, working on projects already conceived sometimes as much as a decade later. His graphic work did not admit inhabitants and was, therefore, the complete opposite of Haward's and Jacoby's depictions. Coherently, his contribution came towards the end of the graphic production line, when the inception drawing gave way to the purely analytical diagram (fig. 10).

Kaplicky's collaboration with Foster Associates came to an end after the firm's move, in 1981, from Fitzroy to a larger office on Great Portland Street. The period that ended in Fitzroy reflects the creation of an operational structure capable of absorbing, processing, and enhancing the qualities of the broad range of agents involved in the conception, production, and graphic mediation processes. Not surprisingly, this open structure had a springboard effect. Some team members – including Michael Hopkins, David Chipperfield, and even Haward and Kaplicky – left Foster Associates to set up their own practices and act as pollinators of the FA methodology of graphic production and communication.

The success of this graphic production sequence made it a model for collaboration that has since stayed in force. We could suggest that Haward, Jacoby, and Kaplicky's contributions were the immediate predecessors of the current work of the Design Communications team at Foster + Partners, which is exclusively devoted to architectural practice's visual and communication aspects. Moreover, these three collaborators could foreshadow roles that have arisen in the graphic production of today's architecture practices. Firstly, the art director (Haward); secondly, the external collaborator for renders (Jacoby); and thirdly, the figure who connects with the editorial media to increase the dissemination of the firm's work. In a way, this analysis identifies how the FA team was a pioneer in understanding and harnessing the power of the image as a tool for architectural communication.

CONCLUSIONS

The graphic production sequence that Foster Associates set in motion during Fitzroy's period explains the reasons for the blurring of the collaborator's authorship, and the lack of awareness of the specific part played by each agent involved in different stages. Through the graphic production and examining the communication and mediation strategies that FA applied, we have been able to identify and highlight the contribution of three key collaborators: Birkin Haward, Helmut Jacoby and Jan Kaplicky. The decoding of the overlapping authorship in the production line involves assessing the critical role of a more extended list of collaborators engaged in that period at Foster Associates. In this sense, there is still much to do in this direction.

Delving into and analysing the role of these three team members has been possible thanks to the documentation stored in the NFF archive, whose holdings enrich the study through graphic items produced by them. Taking their drawings as a starting point, we have been able to track a collective work mechanism's internal functioning and observe how closely linked FA was to global trends. Hence, through Haward, we discover its strong bond with the graphic avant-garde and London's architectural scene. With Jacoby, we verify the success of a structure and scale of innovative corporate management. And Kaplicky throws light on FA's link to the technological currents that were on the digital age threshold.

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Notes

01. It is practically impossible to lay down exact figures, given the number of sporadic collaborations. In private conversations, Birkin Haward recalls how there were 30-35 team members when Fitzroy was set up, but 80-90 at the time of moving to the next office.

02. This article is part of a doctoral research project conducted within the Architecture and Urban Design Doctorate Program of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM), under the direction of Javier Girón Sierra. The author has been closely connected to the creation of the Norman Foster Foundation and its archive, serving as its Archive and Projects Coordinator (2015-2017) and later as Head of Education and Research (2017-2019).

03. According to data gathered in the Foundation's 2019 Annual Report, the NFF Archive contains 193,778 items, among which 31,151 are plans and drawings.

04. A disciple of Bruno Latour, Albená Yaneva is a Professor of Architectural Theory at the University of Manchester and director of the Manchester

Architecture Research Group (MARG). Her most recent publication, *Crafting History*, is already a benchmark in her field. See YANEVA, Albená, *Crafting History. Archiving and the Quest for Architectural Legacy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2020.

05. YANEVA, A., *Made by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture: An Ethnography of Design*, nai010 publishers, Rotterdam, 2009, pp. 10-11.

06. It is possible to trace the evolution of architectural projects from the moment they were conceptualized to the final detail at the construction site in the hundreds of Norman Foster sketchbooks housed in the Foundation's Archive. Recently, the Foundation has been making a significant publishing effort to disseminate and make visible the content of these notebooks. Under the guidance of Jorge Sainz, this series of exquisite publications allows us to take a glimpse into the different phases of architectural production –sometimes collective and sometimes personal– through Foster's drawings distributed in more than 1269 of his sketchbooks. Consult bibliography.

07. The origin of the collective work dynamic at Foster Associates was intrinsically related to the evolution of its workspace. For more information on this evolution, see the bibliography.

08. *Inside the Archive* is a series of interviews led by the NFF that gave voice to individuals who have been influential in Norman Foster's career.

09. The search engine of the NFF archive attributes at least 436 drawings to Birkin Haward. <https://short.upm.es/2vc2l>, consulted on 15/06/2021

10. *Inside the Archive: Loren Butt*. Norman Foster Foundation, 2019.

11. Haward is represented by Beadsmore Gallery in London.

12. *Norman Foster: Building and Projects Vol. 1 1964-1973*, Ian Lambot, p. 170.

13. *Norman Foster: A Life in Architecture*, 2010, p. 254.

14. In 1971, Foster resorted to Frank Dickens, cartoonist of the *Evening Standard*, to explain to users of the new Willis Faber how interactions in the open-plan floors would be. In 1925, half a century before, Le Corbusier had included similar drawings in a letter to Madame Mayer almost. Coincidentally, Superstudio's 'cinematographic drawings were produced during FA Fitzroy's years.

15. *Inside the Archive: Birkin Haward*, Norman Foster Foundation, 2018.

16. It was first published in German by Hatje Cantz in 1969, but the most widely circulated version is the first English edition, published by Thames & Hudson in 1971. See JACOBY, Helmut, *Neue Architekturzeichnungen*, G. Hatje, Stuttgart, 1969, and JACOBY, Helmut, *New Techniques of Architectural Drawing*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1971.

17. The archive of the Kaplický Centre Foundation in Prague is a faithful reflection of the variety and immensity of Jan Kaplický's graphic work.

18. Some of these drawings anticipated Jan Kaplický's development in Future Systems, founded in 1979 with David Nixon. He divided his time between his practice while he collaborated at Foster Associates.

Images

01. Competition board for the International Pavilion of the Knoxville Energy Exhibition 1982 competition, Foster Associates and Buckminster Fuller. Birkin Haward, c. 1978.

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02. Inside view of the Norman Foster Foundation Archive in Madrid, 2017.

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03. Norman and Wendy Foster at the Fitzroy Street office, c. 1974.

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04. A pairing of drawings for the Cwmbran Open House (1978), Foster Associates.

Left: anonymous (unsigned).

Right: Birkin Haward, 1978.

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05. Vignettes mounted on board, Palmerston Special School (1973-1976), Foster Associates. Birkin Haward, c. 1973.

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06. Process drawing, Hackney Special Care Unit (1970-1972), Foster Associates.

Birkin Haward, c. 1971.

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07. Foster Associates meeting table area, Fitzroy Street, c. 1974-1975.

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08. Interior view drawings, Willis Faber and Dumas (1970-1975), Foster Associates. Helmut Jacoby, c. 1971-1972.

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09. Competition drawing evolution, Lloyds Bank of London (1978), Foster Associates.

Left: Helmut Jacoby.

Right: Helmut Jacoby and Norman Foster, c. 1978.

© Norman Foster Foundation Archive

10. Exploded view of components, IBM Pilot Head Office (1970-1971), Foster Associates. Jan Kaplický, c. 1979-1980.

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