GUEST CURATOR
Drawing Forth: Mediated Practices
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Designs on History

Drawing Forth

In contemporary discourse and practice it is familiar to discuss design research as if it is new to architecture. But this is to ignore the history of the architect. The methods and means of design research have been invaluable to the architect for over five hundred years. The history of design is interwoven with the history of drawing. The term "design" derives from the Italian *disegno*, meaning drawing and suggesting both the drawing of a line and the drawing forth of an idea. *Disegno* allowed the three visual arts—architecture, painting and sculpture—to be recognized as liberal arts concerned with intellectual labour, a status they had rarely been accorded previously. The command of drawing—not building—unlocked the status of the architect, establishing the influential myth that architecture results not from the accumulated knowledge of a team of craftsmen working together on a construction site but the artistic creation of an individual architect in a studio. The architect as we understand the term today was established in Italy in around 1450, in France a century later, and in Britain in the early 1600s.

In the new division of labor, architects acquired additional means to practice architecture that were as important as building, namely drawing but also writing. To affirm their newly acquired status, architects began increasingly to theorize architecture both for themselves and for their patrons, ensuring that the authored book became more valuable to architects than to painters and sculptors, whose status was more secure and means to acquire commissions less demanding. In contrast to the architectural drawing, which is seen in relation to other drawings and a building, the painting is unique and need not refer to an external object, thus appearing further removed from the material world and closer to that of ideas.

Written in around 1450 and published in 1485, Leon Battista Alberti's *De re aedificatoria* (On the Art of Building in Ten Books) was the first thorough investigation of the Renaissance architect as artist and intellectual. Francesco Colonna's *Hypteromachia Poliphili* (1499) was the second architectural book by a living writer published in the Renaissance and the first to be printed with illustrations, establishing the multimedia interdependence of text and image that has been essential to architectural books ever since.[1]

One model for the architectural book, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* is a fictional narrative illustrated with pictorial representations. A second model is the analytical manifesto justified with historical examples and illustrated with orthogonal drawings, such as Andrea Palladio's *I quattro libri dell' architettura* (The Four Books of Architecture) (1570).[2] A further literary model, the manual conveys practical knowledge and is illustrated with diagrams and calculations. But these models are not hermetic and many architectural books refer to more than one.

Often a design does not get built and an architect must be persuasive to see that it does. Sometimes a building is not the best means to explore architectural ideas. Consequently, influential architects tend to write and draw a lot as well as build. Palladio is a notable early exponent of this tradition, and Le Corbusier and Rem Koolhaas are more recent ones. The relations between the drawing, text, and building are multidirectional. For example, drawing may lead to building, writing may lead to drawing, or building may lead to writing and drawing. If everyone reading this text listed all the architectural works that influence them, some would be drawings, some would be texts, and others would be buildings either visited or described in drawings and texts. Studying the history of architecture since the Italian Renaissance, it is evident that researching, testing and questioning the limits of architecture occur through drawing and writing as well as building.

Design Histories

In the Renaissance, ideas were understood to be universal and immaterial. Emphasizing this distinction, the buildings drawn in *The Four Books of Architecture* are each an ideal, not those actually built. But in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), John Locke dismissed the search for ultimate truth. Accepting that there are limits to what we can know, he argued that conclusions must be in proportion to the evidence: "Our business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct."[3] In the eighteenth century, and significantly due to empiricism's influence, a design could draw forth an idea that was provisional, changeable, and dependent on experience at conception, production, and reception. The emblem of this temporal process was the ruin, which was understood to represent potential as well as loss, the future as well as the past.

Just as the eighteenth century transformed the meaning of designs and ideas, it altered and expanded the two model publications formulated in the Renaissance and adjusted their interdependence with building design. Describing actual events and others of his own invention, Giorgio Vasari's *Le vite de' piu eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori* (The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects) (1550)[4] was the first significant history of art and architecture, initiating a new discipline. In the sixteenth century, history's purpose was to offer useful lessons; accuracy was not necessary. Empiricism gave greater emphasis to the distinction between fact and fiction, which came to transform historical analysis. Admiring Francis Bacon, Giambattista Vico's *Scienza nuova* (1725)[5] was the first modern history, which employed a comparative method to characterize changing cultural, social, political, and economic processes rather than Vasari's focus on individual achievements. By the nineteenth century, history was naively assumed to be a science capable of objective statements, which led to an emphasis on archival research. Science is supported in its claim to objectivity by the presence of its objects of study before the scientist, while history is an understanding of the past written in the present. Any archive, however complete, cannot return the historian to the past and no analysis is more than an interpretation. Any history expresses a particular ideology, as does any scientific statement; they cannot be neutral. A history may explicitly refer to the past in order to implicitly project an idea of the future as well as the present.

From the Renaissance to the early twentieth century the architect was a historian in the sense that an

architectural treatise combined design and history and a building was expected to knowingly refer to earlier historical styles.[6] Modernism ruptured this system in principle if not always in practice, but it returned with vigor after the Second World War, when modernism's previously dismissive reaction to social norms and cultural memories was itself anachronistic. As Denys Lasdun acknowledges: "Context is not only topographical and physical, it is also historical…. My concern for context is as an agent of architectural transformation. The place you build actually has formative influences on the nature of the building. And when the building is there it has formative influences and effects on the place (where) it is made."[7] As history is an interpretation of the past formed in the present, each building is a new history. The architect is a historian twice over: as an author and as a designer.

Novel Designs

In valuing direct experience, precise description and a skeptical approach to "facts" which needed to be repeatedly questioned, the empirical method also created a fruitful climate in which the everyday realism of a new literary genre—the novel—could prosper as "factual fictions."[8] In contrast to the earlier romance, the novel concentrated on contemporary society and the individualism it encouraged. The focused investigation and precise description that empiricism demanded was applied to the novel, which emphasized specific times, peoples, and places and sought justification through reference to a combination of reasoned explanation and intuitive experience. The uncertainties and dilemmas of identity, as in Locke's assertion that "*Socrates* waking and sleeping is not the same Person," were ripe for narrative account.[9] Notably, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which is often described as the first English novel, is a fictional autobiography, as is his later novel, *Moll Flanders* (1722). Since then, often retaining the first person narrative, some of the best-known novels have imagined the past or the future in order to question and reassess the present.

The early novels—fictional autobiographies—developed in parallel with early diaries—autobiographical fictions. The novel's attention to contemporary individualism was also seen in diary writing, which Locke recommended as a means of personal development. People have written about themselves for millennia but the formation of modern identity is associated with a type of writing that Michel Foucault describes as a "technology of the self."[10] As Paul de Man remarks: "We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life?"[11] Equivalent to a visual and spatial diary, the process of design—from one drawing to the next iteration and from one project to another—is itself an autobiographical "technology of the self."

The History Man

Histories and novels both need to be convincing but in different ways. Although no history is completely objective, to have any validity it must appear truthful to the past. A novel may be believable but not true. But recognizing the overlaps between two literary genres, Malcolm Bradbury notably describes his novel *The History Man* (1975) as "a total invention with delusory approximations to historical reality, just as is history itself."[12]

Associating history writing with storytelling, Lasdun remarks that each architect must devise his or her "own creative myth," a set of values, forms, and ideas that stimulate the process of design, which should be "sufficiently objective" and also have "an element of subjectivity; the myth must be partly an expression of the architect's personality and partly of his time, partly a distillation of permanent truths and partly of the ephemerae of the particular moment." Indebted to the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1917), in which T. S. Eliot remarks that the present alters our understanding of the past as much as the past influences the present, Lasdun concludes: "My own myth … engages with history."[13]

Objective as well as subjective, fictional as well as factual, a design is a reinterpretation of the past that is meaningful to the present, transforming both, like a history. Equally, a design is equivalent to a novel, convincing the user to suspend disbelief. Part novelist, part historian, the architect is the history man. We expect a history or a novel to be written in words, but they can also be cast in concrete or seeded in soil. An architectural book can be a history and a novel, and so can a building and a landscape.

Ben Clement and Sebastian de la Cour, *The Forgotten Follies of Sølyst*

An archaeological fiction, *The Forgotten Follies* remind us that history is often dependent on hearsay and the gossipy art of storytelling. Cast in a ruined state, the "follies" were a series of oversized, dismembered classical architectural elements that visitors to Sølyst Castle, Denmark, stumbled upon in the woods, having been led astray from its manicured lawns by a dilapidated colonnade. The giant flutings, ruined columns, emerging dome, and hieroglyphic reliefs take inspiration from the dreamlike, eroticized architectural descriptions in *Hypnerotomachia Polyphili*. Like Polyphilo, that book's protagonist, visitors were invited to decipher the fragments and piece together their own stories. The follies have since been demolished and only their formworks remain, implying that the picturesque ruins may have been fabricated by the original owners of the eighteenth century castle. But if the formworks are conceived as casts, which came

Figure 1. Ben Clement and Sebastian de la Cour, *The Forgotten Follies of Sølyst*, photograph, Anne Haaning.

Figure 2. Ben Clement and Sebastian de la Cour, *The Forgotten Follies of Sølyst*, photograph, Stamers Kontor.

Figure 4. Melissa Appleton and Post-Works (Matthew Butcher), *Writtle Calling / 2EmmaToc*, photograph, Tim Brotherton.

Figure 3. Ben Clement and Sebastian de la Cour, *The Forgotten Follies of Sølyst,* photograph, Anders Sune Berg.

after not before the ruins, the chronology of Sølyst is inverted, establishing a prehistory of the site in which the follies are older than the castle.

Melissa Appleton and Post-Works (Matthew Butcher)

Writtle Calling / 2EmmaToc

Writtle Calling / 2EmmaToc was a temporary radio station by artist Melissa Appleton and Matthew Butcher of architectural practice Post–Works, which broadcast from an Essex field during September 2012. The new radio station was located near to the site of the original 2EmmaToc station, which broadcast from the Marconi laboratories at Writtle in 1922. The 2012 structure took its form from the original hut and the agricultural vernacular sampled from the local area. Imagined as a ruin, and speculating on the past, present, and future, the radio station hosted a series of live broadcasts by artists, musicians, scientists, and writers, including specially commissioned new works and recreations of past works. In the transmission of live performances, the physical limits of the temporary radio structure were extended through the ephemera of radio waves. A parable on technological futurism and the non-identical return of the past, the "found" elements were not reconstructed in their original form but assembled into an incomplete and fragmented whole, indicating that a technology that was once modern and is now nearly archaic was conceived in a building that was little more than a garden shed.

Tom Noonan,

John Evelyn Institute of Arboreal Science

In the Royal Society's first official publication, *Sylva, or A Discourse of Forest-Trees* (1664), John Evelyn emphasized forestry science, sustainable development, and a more reserved attitude toward the modification of nature.[14] The John Evelyn Institute of Arboreal Science is built around the site of Evelyn's house in Deptford, where the royal dockyard was once located. Countering those who still believe that anthropogenic climate change is a fictional construct, the new

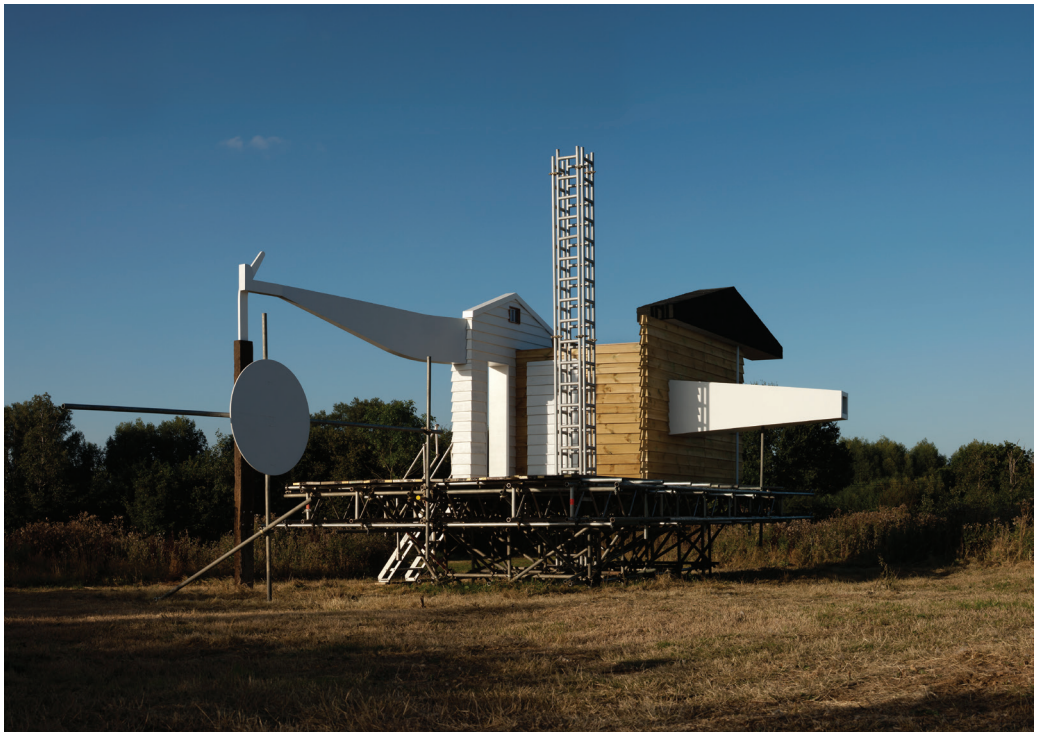

Figure 5. Melissa Appleton and Post-Works (Matthew Butcher), *Writtle Calling / 2EmmaToc*, photograph, Tim Brotherton.

Figure 6. Melissa Appleton and Post-Works (Matthew Butcher), *Writtle Calling / 2EmmaToc*, photograph, Heather Phillipson.

Figure 7. Tom Noonan, *John Evelyn Institute of Arboreal Science*, river perspective.

Figure 8. Tom Noonan, *John Evelyn Institute of Arboreal Science*, undercroft.

dock is conceived as an ever-changing stage animated by the institute's activities, which include a timber yard and research institute for timber building construction and renewable energy systems. The extensive reforestation of the Thames estuary is proposed as a means to counter global warming and increase timber production. London will be rebuilt in the only truly renewable building material and the Thames will once again be a working river, transporting raw materials, goods and people.

Embellishing facts, the follies, institute and radio station weave their fictions around historical peoples and places. Of the three projects, the John Evelyn Institute is most evidently a fiction, manifesto, and manual, pursued through an environmental narrative that defines history as both a reinterpretation of the past and a prospect of the future.

Notes

1. Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988); Francesco Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili: The Strife of Love in a Dream*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999).
2. Andrea Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture*, trans. Isaac Ware (New York: Dover, 1965).
3. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), bk. 1, ch. 1, 46; first published in 1690.

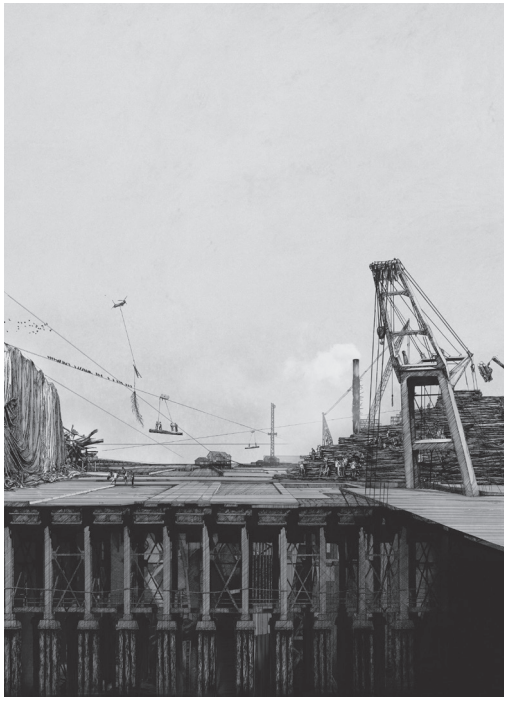

Figure 9. Tom Noonan, *John Evelyn Institute of Arboreal Science*, lecture preparations.

4. Giorgio Vasari, *Vasari on Technique*, trans. Louisa S. Maclehose (New York: Dover, 1960).
5. Giambattista Vico, *New Science* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1999).
6. Denys Lasdun, "Preface," in Denys Lasdun, ed., *Architecture in an Age of Scepticism: A Practitioner's Anthology Compiled by Denys Lasdun* (London: Heinemann, 1984), 7.
7. Denys Lasdun, "Interview with Denys Lasdun," in *Agreed Draft* (London: Lasdun Archive, RIBA Drawings & Archives Collections, V & A, June 27, 1979), 4.
8. Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 213; refer to Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1987), 62.
9. Locke (note 3), bk. 2, ch. 27, 342.
10. Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Random House, 1984), 369.
11. Paul De Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 69.
12. Malcolm Bradbury, "Author's Note," in *The History Man* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975).
13. T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Points of View* (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), 26–27, Lasdun archive, RIBA Library Drawings and Archives Collections, V&A, London; Denys Lasdun, "The Architecture of Urban Landscape," in *Architecture in an Age of Scepticism: A Practitioner's Anthology Compiled by Denys Lasdun* (London: Heinemann, 1984), 137, 139.
14. John Evelyn, *Sylva, or A Discourse of Forest-Trees, and the Propagation of Timber in His Majesties Dominions* (London: Royal Society, 1664), 112–20.

Figure 10. Tom Noonan, *John Evelyn Institute of Arboreal Science*, London reforested.