

10-2016

Speculative Futures: Drawing Culture

Peter P. Goché

Iowa State University, goche@iastate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/arch_conf



Part of the [Architecture Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Goché, Peter P., "Speculative Futures: Drawing Culture" (2016). *Architecture Conference Proceedings and Presentations*. 116.
https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/arch_conf/116

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the Architecture at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Architecture Conference Proceedings and Presentations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

Speculative Futures: Drawing Culture

Abstract

Architecture's recent resurrection from the pragmatics of modernism in the wake of the technological revolution raises questions about the operative intent of drawing. This return, by engaging new digital techniques with which the draftsman is more efficiently able to figure out and describe design outcome, has yielded renewed frontiers of conceit and observation aided by exploratory drawing media and methods. Contemporary drawing practices offer generative and speculative potential in the process of making and re-making specific to our immediate culture-space.

Disciplines

Architecture

Speculative Futures: Drawing Culture

By Peter P. Goché

Introduction

Architecture's recent resurrection from the pragmatics of modernism in the wake of the technological revolution raises questions about the operative intent of drawing. This return, by engaging new digital techniques with which the draftsman is more efficiently able to figure out and describe design outcome, has yielded renewed frontiers of conceit and observation aided by exploratory drawing media and methods. Contemporary drawing practices offer generative and speculative potential in the process of making and re-making specific to our immediate culture-space.

Anthropology is the science that studies peoples past and present, their cultures, and their histories as groups. When anthropologists undertake a study of an unfamiliar culture, they typically write an ethnography. Ethnographic studies look at the patterns of interpretation that members of a cultural group invoke as they go about their daily lives. An ethnography is a highly descriptive overview of a group's knowledge, its beliefs, its social organization, how it reproduces itself, and the material world in which it exists.⁷ In short, ethnography is a process referred to by Clifford Geertz as Writing Culture. Its implementation is dependent on writing field notes; an essential occasion in which the researcher creates jottings (brief texts) based on firsthand (lived) experience while amongst the study group. The student course work, *Drawing Culture*, is one such attempt to make visual jottings to achieve a more subjective understanding of a people and the fantastical realms they embody. The purpose of this work is not only to describe and explain, but also to evoke a view of the world in which cultural alternatives can be measured against one another and used as a circumstantial guide for the spatial reproduction in the realm of our collective cultural imagination.

This course contributes to the student's ability to conduct and to apply environmental theories of perception and spatial phenomenon to the ordinary and extraordinary conditions of daily life by thoughtfully considering contributing aspect of a particular setting that increases the ambient and physical experience of its occupants through the making of drawings. The following accounts summarize the foundational logic that has informed each student's production of a single drawing specific to the culture of drawing and the drawing of culture simultaneously. In a desperate attempt to provide a foundation for architectural thinking inclusive of the contemporary image culture, this course offers a series of historical and theoretical perspectives regarding visual communication in the midst of a rapidly changing visual appetite. This course work was conducted with the belief that drawing is a foundational means of knowing.

Our readings for this course work invoked the work of Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand*, in the realm of existential and embodied wisdom in architecture (John Wiley and Sons, 2009). It follows from Pallasmaa's account that drawing is a spatial and haptic exercise - an embodied and existential act. For Pallasmaa, the act of drawing mingles perception, memory and one's sense of self and life. The author is drawn into its conceit by drawing. In other words, the ability to generate a certain kind of operational aura can be a key means of putting forth drawing as an extension of self. Along the same pursuit, I will consider the works of Teresa Stoppani - *Mapping: the locus of the project* and *Material and Critical Lines: Piranesi's Erasures*. In *Mapping*, Stoppani defines drawing as a cartographic measure that has little to do with signification but, rather, surveying realms that are yet to be discovered. And in *Material and Critical Lines*, Stoppani discusses erasure in the production of an image is often

a practice of obliteration whereby features are effaced by rubbing out or by addition and saturation. Drawing is a trans-disciplinary means of revealing verses the regressive act of depicting.

Three student works are as follows:

Objectivity and Authorship by Ali Brunn

Drawings in architecture are often relied on as neutral bearers of true information, yet are inevitably bound up with their authors, just as buildings themselves are bound to the bodies that inhabit them and bring them into being. The tendency of “objective” imagery to renounce evidence of its vantage point and author in order to better convey reality extends a misconception that embodiment pollutes objectivity. The real objective power of the drawing lies precisely in the specificity of its location, the finitude of its view, and its autographic capacity.

Configuring Non-figural Space by Matthew Darmour-Paul

Discovery is central to drawing as an exploratory act: drawing as finding a way, not representing what is already known. Marks evidence an entropic energy exchange: from a solid cylinder of graphite to an array of visual beams, vectors, and apparatuses laid across a page. Lines themselves are never built, yet necessary for the construction of concepts. Painting, by contrast, overlays and conceals in a simultaneous revealing and obscuring of form. Here, black paint only ever articulates a black field, pushing back that which was ‘drawn’ forth, continually configuring non-figural space.

These drawings takes cues from Ad Reinhart’s ‘disinterested’ *Abstract Painting* with the enigma of non-objective subtlety and interpretive resistance; the work of Malevich; enlightenment critique by Peter Sloterdijk and Michel Foucault; a small but poignant history of architectural “others”: Vidler’s genealogy of the Uncanny, the theoretical work of Lequeu and Darden and the abysmal realms of the ‘Blacks’: Lebbeus Woods, Raimund Abraham and John Hejduk.

The Expansive Contract imagines a post-enlightened civilization where a deliberate obfuscation has visually re-sealed the landscape. This reversal imagines darkness as utopia: as a means to recast symbolic meaning, mystery, and intimate presence through void and in-articulation. The map of the archipelago is an operative construction of an inert unconscious. It remains susceptible to constant modification and the connection of disparate fields. New circulation routes move silently among hidden fragmentary landmasses. Each island is historically layered, containing infrastructures with their own desires and allegiances.

Operative quotes:

Truth becomes like a solid, rather small fortress in which the critical thinker resides, and outside the fortress stupidity and the infinite, falsely formed and falsely informed consciousness rage. (Peter Sloterdijk, The Critique of Cynical Reason)

All architecture carries the germ of the defensive and exclusionary, but it is through the fortress that we may observe construction in its most boastful and ultimately most pathetic state. (Wellington Reiter, Vessels and Fields)

Darkness is the revealer of form. (Douglas Darden, Condemned Buildings)

Within the evolution of Western global imaginings has been the precarious boundary between known and unknown space. On a flat map, the known can be extended to the very edges of representational space, leaving implicit the question what lies beyond the frame. From antiquity the bounds of the earth have been drawn to distinguish humanity from the rest of nature and to register imperial claims over both natures and peoples. And yet, with historical distance and perspective an alternate reading is made obvious: the discovery of the 'New World' as seen through these maps signals a self-undermining consumption of spiritual resources. It was not the horrors of the unknown, that blackness of fear that was pushed towards the edges of the world, but rather the systematic devouring of an edible psychoplasm; a sacral feast, as physical as non-physical, seen through this shrinking fog of mysterious nourishment. One can only imagine the adventurous, and devoted men nibbling at the edges, attacking from all directions, conquering a bit of truth here, a bit of truth there, only to find their appetites grown larger and more difficult to satisfy. When nothing is 'sacred' to the enlightened consciousness anymore, it becomes greedy, a world of instruments lies at the feet of this amorphous and imprecise greed, but it finds no real enjoyment in them.

The Expansive Contract imagines a post-enlightened civilization where a deliberate obfuscation has visually re-sealed the landscape. This reversal imagines darkness as utopia: as a means to recast symbolic meaning, mystery, and intimate presence through void and inarticulation. With our knowledge of the violence of Enlightenment and the reduction of a world "globalized" and therefore empty, will we partake in a second feast?

Suddenly a world before the world begins to transpire; a vague, ethereal universe taking shape, as delicate as breath, pre-discrete. The salty night remains safe in its unspeakable density, and its circle sealed with no possible exit; and yet organic somethings begin to stand out, like sculptures of black mercury against a black background. Within the undifferentiated, sketches of areas diverge, and in the intimate closeness a first *yonder* polarizes itself, enabling an incipient *here* to return. In the middle of the therapeutic monochrome the monadic field conjures up the black primal scene in which the speechless subject is pre-linguistically contained and nurtured by an encompassing milieu. As a black basalt ball, my being is an uncreased heaviness. I rest within myself, brooding in my milieu as if it were a night made of stone. And yet, as self-sufficient as I might be, some inkling of difference must already have dawned inside the dark fortress in which I live and weave. If I were merely a basalt black, how could it be that a vague sense of being-in is taking root within me? What is the meaning of this feeling, this floating bulge? If my black were seamlessly joined to the fortress' eternally dead interior of the same black, why would I feel a hasty beating stirring within me, and above it the slower distant drum? If I were indistinguishably merged with the black substance, how could I already be something that senses a space and makes movements within it? Can there be a substance that is simultaneously sensation?

Amaranthine: Drawing (as) Agency for New Architectures by Michael L. Spory

The drawing...became a steady task of moving across...from one corner to the other, rather like painting the Golden Gate Bridge. From this description, you will gather that such a drawing is in no way spontaneous, but already a year or more into the thinking on the project and a season into its execution.
– Peter Cook, *Drawing and Motive*

This drawing is a drawing. It is a physical entity with a persistent presence, composed of crystallized intuition where pencil and eraser and pen and tape, vellum and glance and

focused attention landed on a 16x22 piece of white Strathmore. This drawing is digitized and copied, transferred to the original, drawn over, covered and revealed and rediscovered within the formal solids and voids, disrupting the perspectival position of the viewer outside and within the drawings (Perez-Gomez, 374). Through the copying and transferring and redrawing and persistent rediscovery of the familiar, this original-drawing-copy deepens the complexities along the digital and analog edges—reinterpreting with duplicity, with blurring boundary markers, through fractured combinations of what is and what could be (Carpo, 53).

This drawing is an aggregation, built and composed of intuitive bits, covered and recovered with architectural references and visual compositions—domes, horizons, the edges of walls—that are dismantled, reconstructed, overridden. Like Mehretu's drawings and paintings, such marks delineate abstracted maps of intuition, revealing the mind's wanderings through the streets of real and imagined spaces. Rather than taking time as a photograph would, this aggregation is 113 days of mark making on a single page, encompassing those 113 days into a continuing memoir of tracery (Taussig, 266).

This aggregation is a posture, a surface for the drawer to unearth new spaces, and a dim aperture through which the drawer navigates unexpected worlds. It is uncomfortable and off-putting, fighting against the perspectival lines that inform the way things *should* look. This posture excavates unmined architectures—experimental expositions, spatial recompositions, accidental landscapes—architectures of the present and ambient, the distant and unknowable. It is semi-dimensional and dynamic, unrecognizable and familiar. It is elusively here, sitting right on the table in front of us. Deliberately accidental, intentionally surprising. This posture is original, about the first act that extracts being-ness out of nothing-ness, about the origination of representative possibilities. The residue of a pencil, the quick line, the measured following of a straight edge, the combination of consideration and evocatively planned chance.

This original is a copy, a copy of a copy of a transferred and modified drawing. It remains a blurry edge between the unapologetically unique and the digital replication. Through a repeated, self-referential, and cyclical process of drawing, layering, digitization, printing, acetone transferring, and redrawing, this drawing has begun to assert itself as a formidable presence—it speaks up, it fights back, it resists suggestion even as it oozes possibility. It has, in some way, risen above and through and beyond the surface, into something with character, with multi-directionality, with the ever-growing suspicion that it will never completely resolve.

Conclusion

In the wake of these excerpts, it would be difficult to conceive of a foundations studio as any particular thing such as a room, a complex or an extended learning environment, but rather a trans-disciplinary engagement with the cultural make-up of a student's realm. We might think of such base-line studies not as a threshold but rather a continuum whereby each inquiry functions to point to something that has consequence. An outcome that is only knowable through process and born of a rigorous attempt at working through the fundamentals of a field of knowledge. Objectivity and Authorship by Ali Brunn argues for an embodied practice in pursuit of the autographic capacity. Configuring Non-figural Space by Matthew Darmour-Paul suggest a transition from drawing as a pictorial practice of assigning value and composition in effort to describe a utopic condition. This comes to be based on a series of modulated drawings that offer a spatial condition that is void of outline and figure but rather is a monadic situation whereby aspects of a setting are undifferentiated.

Amaranthine: Drawing (as) Agency for New Architectures by Michael L. Spory is the result of 113 days of mark making on a single page – a memoir of tracery. Just as the amaranth flower, the drawing accumulates attributes and never fades. It is a record of a series of graphic operations. Collectively, the three student works evoke foundational landscapes that lay bare the most basic, vital, and dynamic processes of foundational development specific to drawing so as to speculate on futures of experiential engagement through traditional visual media which employ lines and values in the quest to pioneer new spatial territories.