

Through a Glass, Darkly

Marc J. Neveu
Woodbury University

As we know, architects do not make buildings; we make representations of, and instructions for, the making of buildings.

In our somewhat litigious professional world, the ideal model for the relationship between drawing and building is that of transcription. Similar to Morse code, in which a system of beeps literally stands in for letters to form words, contract documents and specifications are intended to directly represent the built project. The system of representation is not affected by the intention of the building—its objectivity is, in fact, its value. Differences between drawing and building do, however, exist. Issues of fabrication, installation timing and technique, material behaviors and tolerances, as well as the relative abilities of contractors make the direct pairing of drawing and building impossible. Translation, it seems, is always required.

Historically, this translation was seen as necessary and even celebrated. Filarete (Antonio Averlino) wrote about this in his fifteenth-century treatise, *Libro d'architettura*. He suggested that from conception to realization, a building changes. And further, that there is a potentially enriching process involved in translating the drawing into a building. Filarete used the analogy of the architect as both mother and midwife. A building gestates for seven to nine months, during which time the architect dreams about the building. Finally, it emerges as a drawing or model that then must be reared through construction and finally inhabitation. In this regard, the drawing is not a one-to-one notation of the intended reality. The drawing was never, and could never be, the building.

Even a few centuries later, the relationship between drawing and building was still not direct. Palladio's drawings, famously, do not match the buildings. This was by no means a mistake. Rather, the status of the drawings conveyed an intention of the work and not simply instructions for making. The plan drawing for the town hall for Vicenza, for example, shows a translation of a Roman Basilica. Rooms are perfectly proportioned. The reality of the built work, however, could not be further from the truth. The existing plan of market stalls does not come close to the purity of Palladio's proposed plan.

The status of drawings as informing but not directly determining a future project continued. Piranesi certainly understood this when he proposed the *Carceri* etchings. Many examples exist over the 250 years since Piranesi printed his architecture: The heroic imaginings of Ledoux and Boullée; the dystopias of Gandy; the formalisms of the Russian Constructivists; the painterly expressions of Theo van Doesburg; the collages produced by Mies van der Rohe; the comic book capers of Archigram and, more recently, Wes Jones and Bjarke Ingals. Tschumi, Libeskind, Eisenman, and Hadid have all produced work that was not intended as an analogue to a future built work. This opens up the space that architectural representation may be something more, or at least other, than instructions for building.

In his Editorial to *JAE* 61:1, George Dodds introduced "Design as Scholarship" as a category for essays that could "demonstrate an exploration of innovative buildings or projects ranging from academic-based studios to installations and exhibitions. The key schema that

binds these varied submissions, and by which they are judged, is how well they explore critical issues in contemporary design, practice, education, and discourse." The intention of the renaming of content that had previously been referred to as "Design Articles" was to recognize that the rigors of traditional (read: art history) scholarship could just as easily apply to buildings and projects. The mirroring of the names "Scholarship of Design" and "Design as Scholarship" implied a level field.

What is surprisingly present in the shift is the continued trope of representation as a direct translation of the thing in the world. What is surprisingly absent in the shift is the recognition of the image as the thing produced, valued, and judged. Can images also explore critical issues and be discursive? Perhaps not surprisingly, the issue's cover intentionally did not include any images. Given the copious and varied examples of what is often, and regrettably, referred to as "paper architecture," why is it that we continue to value the representation of work as the vehicle through which we see a project or building? This issue of the *JAE*, devoted entirely to Design as Scholarship, invariably must ask and answer some of these issues, lest we continue to look through the glass, darkly.