

The Stamp of Architecture: Post-marking the Architectural Drawing

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The professional view of architectural drawing is perhaps that best expressed by Edwin Lutyens, who, when writing to the Lady Emily Lytton in 1897, declared his exasperation at the misunderstood nature of the architectural drawing:

*I was not cross only very dictatorial and impressive. They never realise that a working drawing is merely a letter to a builder telling him precisely what is required of him - and not a picture wherewith to charm an idiotic client.*¹

Lutyens expresses a belief common throughout the practice of architecture that the drawing serves as a neutral bridging device that allows the architectural idea to be transformed into the architectural project. Typically this transaction is seen as a projection and is often loosely referred to as a translation.² Implicit in such an assumption is the hypothesis that the surface of the drawing corresponds in some direct way to the surface of a building. Robin Evans has noted this "Through the miracle of the flat plane, lines transfer with alacrity from paper to stone and the wall becomes a petrified drawing, inscribed or embossed to lesser or greater degree."³

In this way the architectural drawing is described, through inscription and embossing, as a particular type of relief carving, as a mark or stamp.⁴ Architectural drawing is simultaneously the marking and stamping of architecture into drawing, perhaps a drawing towards this stamp (*fig 1*).

Evans conditions this transfer as 'simple' and 'primitive,' but not without some sense of appropriateness to the origins of drawing. This origin is generally understood to derive from Pliny the Elder as a function of projection and tracing. The occasion is initiated by Butades' daughter who is about to be separated from her lover. Placing a lamp in front of the young man she drew around the profile cast on the wall behind. Butades then pressed clay onto the silhouette to produce a relief of the young man's face.⁵

This moment is at once one of drawing and of stamping. The young man is a soldier being sent to another part of

the empire, he is literally being posted (*fig 2*) and it is for this reason that Butades provides the relief. Without the posting of the soldier there exists no reason for the action of drawing so that we may say casually that drawing and posting already define each other at this point of origin (*fig 3*). In this way all postings are to some extent a drawing, a drawing out, or drawing towards, just as all drawing must contain an element of the post in order to satisfy some moment of transfer, or translation.

But this genesis also contains an inevitability of loss, and death. Butades draws the profile of his daughter's lover so that she need not forget both who he is, and who he was, a condition concerned with locating place and time and motivated by the prospect of his loss. Without this drawing the soldier suffers an inevitable death at his new posting, a death through posting (*fig 4*). Represented in this way the soldier is relegated to an action of memory, but this too is an act of dissolution, a separation through time and space. The relief of the soldier is, in fact, a death mask (*fig 5*). This original drawing, the proto-type of the architectural drawing, marks the occasion of a crime as Butades, knowing of the soldier's posting, seals his fate with a particular type of stamp (*fig 6*), a die. Butades is an accessory to the soldier's premeditated death where the drawing marks the site of a murder. This he does with relief, or more specifically a relief, a device capable of leaving an impression or imprint, it is a stamp that makes a mark, but significantly this is an ornamental mark (*fig 7*).⁶ The memory of the departing soldier, of his posting, is etched into memory, a drawing towards and simultaneously away from the memory of contact. As the origins of architectural drawing this story serves to point out the distance that occurs between the mark and its referent, a distance so wide that it may almost be criminal (*fig 8*).

Alberto Perez-Gomez has described the distance between architectural drawing and building as having always been opaque and ambiguous; because of this drawing is erroneously understood as a tool of reduction (*fig 9*). He notes:

*The original architectural ideas were transformed into universal projections that could then, and only then, be perceived as reductions of buildings, creating the illusion of drawing as a neutral tool that communicates unambiguous information, like scientific prose.*⁷

Seen as a device of reduction the architectural drawing begins to exhibit the attributes that Claude Levi-Strauss reserves for the miniature (fig 10). He contends that the illusion of the miniature is not only a projection of the object but it actually constitutes an experiment with an 'original' (fig 11). As a reductive tool the architectural drawing attempts the illusion of the miniature, producing a projective facsimile of the architectural project (fig 12). Seen in this way the drawing is other to its own self by providing a representative moment of itself, essentially it provides a souvenir signature of its own originality. The architectural drawing makes a promise towards its own origins, and in doing so invites a search for this origin. Thus the architectural drawing is a mark of desire, and a souvenir of this affinity (fig 13). In a discussion on the souvenir Susan Stewart comments,

*The souvenir speaks to a context of origin through a language of longing, for it is not an object arising out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia (fig 14).*⁹

As the object of an architectural nostalgia the drawing records desperate longings; the idea for its project, the architect for the building, the daughter of Butades for her lover, and the mark for the signature. Each nostalgic desire introduces a corruption that marks a deficiency of transfer to reveal dissolute practices. The drawing's desire for the building, like that between a daughter and her lover, reveals a tenuous thread of connection reaching beyond patriarchal control. The drawing remains firmly the tool of the traditionally masculine architect, and is thereby the tool of a masculine desire, but one operating within a domestic tradition (fig 15). Butades' daughter, in longing for her departing lover prefigures a drawing in, or drawing of, approved desire. The souvenired profile is a stamp of approval (fig 16) that delineates the carnal nature of desire as domestic rather than the threat of the foreign. Similarly the architectural drawing delineates between the submissive domestication of architecture and the constructed fabrications of building. The architectural drawing is simultaneously an architectural stamp capable of that interiorising that which is exterior to itself. The stamp is a mark capable of domestication which it achieves by inflicting a nostalgic provision for a simplified object of household origins, it provides the personal signature of the birthmark. Quoting Stewart again,

*Because the world of the souvenir offers transcendence to the viewer, it may be seen as a miniaturised one, as a reduction in physical dimensions corresponding to an increase in significance, and as an interiorization of an interior.*¹⁰

In this way the architectural stamp as a souvenir provides a reduced and interiorised view of architecture where representative attributes are substituted for the work itself. Further, this interiorised view makes explicit a distancing of the familiar from the experienced. This is contained within a familiar and intimate environment. It is domesticated through separation (fig 17).

Concludes Stewart, each representational sign is a kind of postcard serving to describe without ever capturing; one side always obscuring the other. The postcard initiates a distancing from, and construction of, an exotic origin by positioning itself within a field of difference. Thus it represents the representation and the mortality of the represented (fig 18). But within the subject's desire, to experience mortality, is issued the simultaneous desire to transcend death, to produce a representation with no referent, "each sign as a postcard from the land of the dead, and on the other side, the longing mark that is the proper name."¹¹

The postcard is a signature from the land of the dead, it is a death certificate that announces mortality upon receipt and as such it is both of life and death, and between life and death. It marks the borderline of life and death in the text. The representative souvenir signals, through its reductive signature, the existence of an original, authentic event. But this moment, this line, is at once broken, dotted, it gives itself up to the fatality of desire.

*No, the very idea of destination includes analytically the idea of death, like a predicate (p) included in the subject (S) of destination, the addressee or the addressor. And you are, my love, unique.*¹²

The unique maintains a singular address by readdressing the question of difference to maintain its own solitary outpost, complete with the corrupted finality that absence implies. Drawing, maintains Stanley Allen, marked with this sign of absence, is endlessly directed toward the desire of origin, or an original desire, which is thwarted as the object of architectural drawing is not prior, but immanent (fig 19). States Allen:

*It is difference, rather than a system of correspondences, which makes possible the translations between drawing and building ... Absence implies purity; architectural drawing is fundamentally impure. It carries a shadow which is translated across scale as the trace of the author.*¹³

The trace of the author, the author's proper name, survives the process of translation unscathed so that the name of the drawing's author is always attached to the drawing and the project, whether substantive or speculative. Likewise the architectural stamp remains attached to the 'truth' of an original drawing despite the indiscriminate reduction and miniaturising that portrays all building as the same size (fig 20, 21). Paradoxically, the hybridising of representation and fiscal value, that threatens the drawing's primary value of architectural representation, evokes the mixing and reassembly that Nietzsche reserved for the intuitive rather than the necessary - a condition justified by the concept of 'truth.'¹⁴ According to Nietzsche:

*the truths ... are illusions which are no longer recognised as such; metaphors which have been used up, which have lost their sensual power; coins which have lost their face and are no longer valued as coins but only as pieces of metal.*¹⁵

In the same way the illusion of the architectural stamp retains the 'truth' of postage that challenges definitions of the stamp or the architectural drawing as only pieces of paper. That the stamp remains architectural is the responsibility of the signature attached to it. This illusion of truth is contextualised by the accessorised presence of the architect. The architectural signature is contractually bonded to the surface of the drawn mark, indelibly inscribed into the surface of the stamp (fig 22). The contractual letter is already drawn up between the mark and architecture, a state remarked upon by Vitruvius,

*and so that in drawing up contracts the interests of both employer and contractor may be wisely safe-guarded. For if a contract is skilfully drawn, each may obtain a release from the other disadvantaged.*¹⁶

The contractual state of the architectural stamp provides for a promise of release. It inscribes into the letter of the architect the contractual signature of emancipation but conditions this against a promise of mutual obligation. But the drawn inscription, woven into the face value of architecture by a masculine hand defies mutual agreement. Rather, following the action of Butades the inscribed mark is subject to a masculine hierarchy (fig 23).

Andrea Kahn argues that the action of drawing is more than a simple inscription of building into paper; rather, drawing provides for a structuring of architectural knowledge in which the drawing itself is a site of location, analogous to the site of building, and which can define architecture in its own terms. Writes Kahn, "Whether explanatory or exploratory, drawing as both

verb and noun is an inscription of architecture, an interpretation open to interpretation."¹⁷

Inscription then is also a mode of production that not only structures but actively restructures architectural knowledge, it continually re-draws the contractual obligation between addressee and addressor, but it does so in a masculine model. Following his reading of Plato's "Republic," Derrida has this to say of the inscription,

*Inscription is ... the production of the son and at the same time the constitution of structurality (fig 24).*¹⁸

The drawing, from the original relief by Butades, is always masculine, and of a particular kind of reproductive masculinity that defies biological sense to re-present its own self. It is necessarily accompanied by a 'constitution of structurality' as it is the constitutional condition of inscription that ensures its own survival. Butades, following the profile of his daughter's lover, inscribes not his daughter, nor her lover, rather, it is the name of Butades that Pliny passes down. In this way Butades, and Pliny, both successfully ensure their own masculine parthenogenesis by authorising the truth of their own recounted experiences. Pliny's story of Butades is constitutionally added to itself through the action of repetition so that it supplements itself with its own truth, it becomes its own accessory throwing into doubt its own truths. Continues Derrida:

*The disappearance of the Face or the structure of repetition can thus no longer be dominated by the value of truth. The true and the untrue are both species of repetition. And there is no repetition possible without the graphics of supplementarity, which supplies, for the lack of a full unity, another unit that comes to relieve it, being enough the same and enough other so that it can be replaced by addition.*¹⁹

Every architectural drawing provides for a repetition of the original drawing (fig 25), extending through a perverse truth the contractual obligation of the architectural drawing to accessorise architecture (fig 26), which it does by assigning the reproductive signature to the drawing. The drawn signature then constitutionally organises the institution of architecture in a masculine state. Constitution, Derrida reminds us, is an act of institutionalising, and therefore so too is the signature which maintains a link with the instituting act (fig 27).²⁰ Indeed the founding act of an institution has to maintain within itself the mark of signature. The uniqueness of the signature is that it gives powers and rights 'in the name of' as the signature invents the signer, "it gives birth to itself, as free and independent subject, as possible signer, this can only hold in the act of the signature."²¹ The signature becomes a point of

boundary that demarcates transgressions beyond the institution of legitimate architectural representation. To deviate outside this institutional programme is to violate the constitutional contract so that the unsanctioned signature reverts to primal shadow or trace rather than legitimate mark (*fig 28*). Thus the signature distinguishes between the living and the dead by assigning contractual value to the architect rather than the building. Delineated in such a way the signature allows for only the legitimate or the illegitimate, condemning any transgression between the two as criminal.²² Following Butades, the crime of the architectural stamp takes place between the moment of perpetration, of inscription and marking, and that of its representation, its stamp. Further, the crime is defined through, and drawn by, this relationship of marking/birth and stamping/death (*fig 29*). Notes Derrida,

*Between birth and death, the spacing of the between marks at once the distance and the link, but the link according to a kind of distension.*²³

This 'dis-tension' Derrida accords to the presence of in the between of the very Being of Dasein,²⁴ "before' any biological determination ... The link thus enter-tained, held or drawn between, over or through the dis-tance between birth and death."²⁵ The 'dis-tension' opens up a structural flaw that allows a drawing to cross between birth and death in a masculine hand (*fig 30*).²⁶ Here Derrida introduces the figure of *Geschlecht* as that which passes on from one genre to another, from generation to generation.²⁷ This continued genealogical presence despite its masculine precedence is not made possible though by an action of projection, but rather through one of throwing. Notes Derrida, "Dasein is geworfen:²⁸ that means that before any project on its part it is thrown."²⁹ The sublime creative moment of conception too is characterised by *geworfen*, towards a throwing up that reveals the interiorised contents of existence. Likewise the tale of the original drawing reveals Butades, first and foremost a potter, actually 'throwing' the profile as he would a pot. In such a way Butades is able to become individually fertile, throwing out from within an immaculate masculine offspring (*fig 31*).

Through the action of this throwing, or throwing up, the nature of drawing and existence are brought together. To make the mark of drawing is also to proclaim oneself as present and distinct, but it is to do so within an androgynous male tradition where the mark is always of birth, and where it remains as a birthmark. Immutably inscribed onto the body the birthmark is immediately both attached to and inseparable from the body's surface, it is thrown onto the body from within and stamps each surface as a unique extension of the same

(*fig 32*). This original marking provides for a signature of difference. Butades describes his daughter's lover through his difference from his own self, an action indebted to surface and yet set in relief. Butades, the original draftsman, transgresses between the visual fixation of the birthmark, and the embossed signature of the death-mask (*fig 33*). It is exactly at this point of inflection, somewhere between the immaculate birth of an idea and its inevitable execution, that the criminal nature of the drawing exists. The drawing is postmarked as unlawful, illegally violating the contractual obligation of the signature. Conceived of immaculately the drawing exists outside any institutionalising construction or marriage so that drawing is always unsanctioned and illegitimate (*fig 34*). The signature of such criminal activity, the postmark, is concurrently that bastard stamp of the tattoo, demarking illegitimate production and unrequited love. Quoting Jacques Derrida,

*Phila-tely then is love without, with/without marriage, and the collection of all stamps, the love of the stamp with or without stamped love.*³⁰

The postmark, inscribed indelibly into the paper skin of the stamp, invalidates the stamp through the corruptive applied permanence of the tattoo. This incised disfigurement remarks the already incised surface of the stamp with the terminal empirical condemnation of time and place. In this way the tattoo is actually a countersignature that calls attention to the conditions of origin and termination. States Derrida,

*it all starts with the countersignature, with the receiver, with what we call the receiver. The origin of the work ultimately resides with the addressee, who doesn't yet exist, but that is where the signature starts.*³¹

We should recall here that the signature is not merely the writing down of a name but an act, the event of signing itself.³² Paradoxically the tattooed postmark, in claiming the inevitability of a birth and a death, reinscribes a moment of life, and of love, by proclaiming the immaterial instant between the two. Through cancellation the postmark grants approval (*fig 35*). Thus the postmark tattoo is a sign designed to express a paradoxical condition of both exclusion and inclusion, an exteriorising and an interiorising. In this way the origin of drawing does not lie solely in the inscriptive action of Butades, rather, it is his daughter to whom we must seek an approval as it is to her that the work is addressed, or more explicitly, it is to her longing, or nostalgia, that the origin of drawing resides as the countersignature. It is the desire of this feminine other that politicises the inception of drawing. Butades, unable to give up his daughter to her lover, throws himself into the young

man's profile in an attempt to substitute his own desires for that of his daughter's (*fig 36*). Inevitably such an incestuous perversion manifests itself in the work as the inscribed degenerate signature of the tattoo, post-marking the drawing as masculine (*fig 37*). But insidiously the tattoo disguises an already existent birthmark, solicitously covering it up. Intimately inscribed within the drawing is the feminine desire for an absence, a mark of repressed production (*fig 38*). The architectural drawing contains an essence of feminine desire concealed within it, encrypted and occult.³³ It is this desire of Butades' daughter for her lover that countersigns the young soldier's relief as the origin of drawing. The countersignature of desire is carried within the signature of the architectural drawing as the moment of addressee, of mortality, longing, of the mark.³⁴ Suppressed within the origins of drawing this desire is an unheard domestic violence, a silent voice speaking from behind the tattooed criminal (*fig 39*).

Edwin Lutyens, in the final bed ridden weeks of his life, found his own voice failing due to the degenerative effects of bronchial cancer. During this time he wrote a letter to his wife, Emily Lytton, in which he asked the question, "Can you hear my writing?"³⁵ Lutyens died soon after, surrounded by his architectural drawings. He was survived by his wife, one son, and four daughters.

To my knowledge he was not tattooed.

NOTES

- 1 Edwin Lutyens cited, Lever and Richardson *The Architect as Artist* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), p. 1. This axiom is commonly attributed to Mies Van Der Rohe who stated architectural drawings are 'simply letters to Contractors.'
- 2 For an introduction to these arguments see Stanley Allen, "Projections: Between Drawing and Building," *A+U* (1992), n. 259, p. 40-47; Stanley Allen, "On Projection," *Harvard Architectural Review* (1993), v. 9, p. 122-137; Robin Evans, "Architectural Projection," *Architecture and its Image: Four Centuries of Architectural Representation, Works from the Canadian Centre for Architecture* eds. Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman, (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1989), p. 19-35, Robin Evans, "Translations From Drawing To Building," *AA Files* (1986), n. 12, p. 3-18.
- 3 Evans proposes this in his discussion of the possibilities of projection in discussing an elevational drawing for the Campanile of S.Maria del Fiore, Florence. Alternatively he proposes the drawing as guided directly, as quoted above, or, as using projection as 'guide rails' that allow some degree of manipulation without 'emancipation.'

- Robin Evans, "Translations From Drawing To Building," *AA Files* (1986), n. 12, p. 8.
- 4 Stamp: "To mark (paper or textile material) with a device either impressed in relief or intaglio, imparted to the surface by ink or pigment, or produced by both processes combined. Also to impress (a device) on paper, etc. by means of a die or engraved plate." *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989), v. XVI, p. 483
 - 5 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History: A Selection* ed. John F. Healy, trans. John F. Healy, (London : Penguin Books, 1991), p. 336.
 - 6 The term stamp applies not only to the tool of stamping but also to the ornamental mark produced by it.
 - 7 Alberto Perez-Gomez, "Architecture as Drawing," *Journal of Architectural Education* (Winter 1982), v. 36, n. 2, p. 3.
 - 8 Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968)
 - 9 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 135.
 - 10 Stewart, *On Longing* p. 144.
 - 11 Stewart, *On Longing* p. 173.
 - 12 Jacques Derrida, "Envois," *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 33.
 - 13 Stanley Allen, "Projections: Between Drawing and Building," *A+U* (1992), n. 259, p. 41.
 - 14 Stephan Meier, "To Signify Oneself! On Lies in Architecture," *Daidalos* (June 1983) n. 8, pp. 10-13, 16-20.
 - 15 F. Nietzsche cited, Meier, "To Signify Oneself! On Lies in Architecture," p. 20.
 - 16 Vitruvius, *The Ten Books of Architecture* trans. Morris Hicky Morgan, (New York: Dover, 1960), p. 10.
 - 17 Andrea Kahn, "Disclosure: Approaching Architecture," *Harvard Architectural Review* (1992), n. 8, p. 4. emphasis added. Kahn continues: "Only when drawing is seen to inscribe its own architectural ground is it possible to accord it both a definitive role in shaping the conception of architecture and a substantive tectonic relationship to built form." p. 18.

- 18 Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," *Dissemination* trans. Barbara Johnson, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 161.
- 19 Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," p. 168.
- 20 "The constitution and the laws of your country somehow guarantee the signature, as they guarantee your passport and the circulation of subjects and of seals foreign to this country, of letters, of promises, of marriages, of checks - all of which may be given occasion or asylum or right." Jacques Derrida, "Declarations of Independence," trans. Tom Keenan and Tom Pepper. *New Political Science* (Summer 1986), n. 15, p. 10.
- 21 Derrida, "Declarations of Independence," p. 10.
- 22 "The crime has taken place (and every *hymen* intervenes, like a crime, 'between perpetration and the memory of it:' here I draw a veil over 'La double séance'), and its dissemination dissolves or absolves it in the crowd only by multiplying it incalculably." Jacques Derrida, "Living On: *Border Lines*," trans. James Hulbert. *Deconstruction and Criticism* ed. Harold Bloom et al (New York: Seasbury Press, 1979), p. 154. We should remember here that in Greek and Roman mythology Hymen is "The god of marriage, represented as a young man carrying a torch and veil." *The Oxford English Dictionary* v. VII, p. 549. Hymen then is also a God of drawing, carrying as he does, the two devices of drawing, the torch to allow the projective practice of drawing, and the veil upon which the projection is made. But the hymen is also a signature of death, or more correctly a counter signature as the hymen gives life precisely to announce death. The death that is 'given' is always requested, demanded, by the one who receives it, and who immediately signs the death of the other, the other death in order to live-on (*survivre*).
- 23 Jacques Derrida, "Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, ontological difference," *Research in Phenomenology* (1983), v. 13, p. 77.
- 24 Literally 'existence' or 'presence.'
- 25 Derrida, "Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, ontological difference," p. 77.
- 26 We should remember here that accessory is originally linked etymologically to access; as in "Coming to or into; coming into the presence of, or into contact with, approach, entrance." *The Oxford English Dictionary* v. I, p. 72.
- 27 "Within the path of his writings too, and the marked impression or inscription of the word *Geschlecht* will not be irrelevant. That word, I leave here in its language for reasons that should become binding in the course of this very reading. And it is indeed a matter of '*Geschlecht*' (sex, race, family, generation, lineage, species, genre/genus) and not of *the Geschlecht*; one will not pass so easily toward the thing itself (the *Geschlecht*), beyond the mark of the word (*Geschlecht*) in which, much later, Heidegger will remark the 'imprint' of a blow or a stamp (*Schlag*)." Derrida, "Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, ontological difference," p. 65.
- 28 *geworfen* is the past participle of the word *werfen* in the sense 'to throw:' "*jdñ ins Gefängnis etc werfen*, to throw somebody into prison *etc. ... etw in den Briefkasten werfen*, to put something in the letter box;" *Collins German Dictionary* (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 758.
- 29 Derrida, "Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, ontological difference," p. 78.
- 30 Derrida, "Envois," p. 56.
- 31 Jacques Derrida, "The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 19.
- 32 "the signature is something other than merely writing down one's own name. It is an act, a performative by which one commits to something, by which one confirms in a performative way that one has done something - that it is done, that it is I who has done it." Derrida, "The Spatial Arts," p. 17.
- 33 Etymologically the word 'occult' is used to mean hidden and refers explicitly to those lines "drawn in the construction of a figure, but not forming part of the finished drawing." An obsolete usage describes "a dotted line." *The Oxford English Dictionary* v.X, p. 680.
- 34 Signature: "A person signs a document when he writes or marks something on it in token of his intention to be bound by its contents, commonly by subscribing his name. Illiterate people commonly sign by making a cross." *Osborn's Concise Law Dictionary* ed. Leslie Rutherford and Shelia Bone, (London: Sweet and Maxwell, 1983), p. 305.
- 35 Edwin Lutyens cited, Mary Lutyens *Edwin Lutyens: By His Daughter* (London: John Murray, 1980), p. 282.