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Architecture and Allegory, A Tale of Three Sites

Architectural Narratives, Allegory and Issues of Site

The architectural narratives in this paper are used as means to interpret buildings and spatially reinterpret research material. History and/or historical events are not regarded as passive sources of information but are actively prescribed within current architectural sites and reworked as design proposals. Hence, events that would otherwise be consigned to memory or totally forgotten are retold and given new meanings. The reading of architecture over time enables multiple interpretations, depending on the physical and/or theoretical contexts in which the works are located at particular moments. At the most basic levels of interpretations these narratives revolve around programme and function or are recounted through the marks of the environment and user patterns. (Lau, 2016) These chronological shifts, and the ensuing gaps between form, function and site, create opportunities for differences of opinions concerning meaning and use to emerge.

Additionally, the notion of narrative in relation to the process of architectural design has wider implications where works of architecture are concerned. In this paper, the narratives derived from research material are expressed as experiential architectural qualities and/or literally, as physical components. Underpinned by theoretical understandings of Elizabethan and modern allegory, the study considers the consequences of didactic and dialectic approaches in the shaping and construction of the ensuing narratives. In didactic allegory the use of different readings leads to similar meanings while dialectic allegory advances individual interpretations through facilitating active user participation. In the recounting of architectural narratives, dialectical allegory acknowledges the important contribution of people, exploits the inevitable shifts and gaps, and engages the user to the extent that new meanings are created.

The Ditchley Portrait, c.1592, and the National Portrait Gallery, London where this portrait of Queen Elizabeth I is exhibited anchor these discussions through ideas of analysis, representation and design. (Fig.01) The first narrative starts with stories of and in the Portrait, a painting that adheres to Elizabethan ideas of allegory and the notion of 'lost sense of sight'. This approach to representation is manifested through issues of conveyance and includes the construction of visual symbols embedded with allegorical references as well as allusions to specific narratives. (Strong, 1977) These compositional techniques are also inherent in the construction and reading of the Accession Day Tilts, a major sixteenth-century event that is tightly intertwined with the elaborate.

Festivities concerning the inception of the Portrait. These analytical studies



Fig.01. Queen Elizabeth I, also referred to as the Ditchley Portrait, c. 1592, attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, oil on canvas, (2413 x 1524 mm).

The main composition depicts the Queen standing on a globe, specifically on England with her feet pointed in the direction of Ditchley in Oxfordshire. The remaining elements scattered around the figure of the Queen consist of storm clouds, a burst of sunshine, three Latin mottoes and a sonnet. She is positioned as a figure between England and God, thus pertaining to George Peele's description of her as a 'great Emperesse of the world' and 'Star of Englands Globe'.

(Frye, 1993; Horne, 1952, p. 232)

Source: National Portrait Gallery, London, UK

are essential for the reconstruction of Ditchley Manor and Woodstock Palace as neither building survives, and the historical site confines are not definite. Hence historical knowledge as manifested by means of associated memories and intangible allegorical narratives that can be read through the Portrait are critical to site investigations. The bequeathment and displacement of the Portrait to the Gallery in 1933 furthers the discourse on allegory through analysing the site-specific narratives derived from the original Gallery designed by Ewan Christian in 1896, and the outcomes of the major overhaul by Dixon Jones Architects in 2000 that concealed substantial aspects of the Gallery's architectural history.

These explorations demonstrate that the multi-faceted role of narrative in design practice can be enhanced through co-authorship and multidisciplinary collaborations with fields like art history and archaeology. This approach to envisioning narratives is important because it highlights the different manners that architectural narratives can be revealed through precise research material and methodologies that are discipline specific. Most importantly, these new working practices and the sharing of expertise expand the capacity for user intervention to shape the reading of the work through knowledge and use and, additionally create individual narratives.

The Ditchley Portrait: Allusion and historical presence

The larger-than-life-size painting that depicts the Queen as both ruler of England and the universe with divine powers to banish storms and usher in the sun was part of an 'orchestrated propaganda program designed to build up the crowne' at the advent of the English Reformation. (Strong, 1987, p. 12; Yates, 1975) The English monarch was subsequently proclaimed the supreme head of the Church of England. Allegory was employed to allude to certain points of view and enhance the potency of particular narratives that were apparent in the work. Understanding the meaning of key elements in works of art was a skill that sixteenth century viewers were trained in. Akin to medieval art, the allusion to specific narratives through the placement of objects within a picture plane is emphasised. Hence the term 'perspective of mind and/or meaning' is also used as the accurate depiction of scale and optical distance required for a visually unified picture is disregarded. Significantly, this approach enabled the 'unambiguous affirmation of dynastic control and power' to be articulated through portraiture, and pageantry during major state festivals. (Howard, 1995, p. 69.) The latter was most evident on Accession Day where the jousting events were staged in the tiltyard of Whitehall Palace and the public could witness the knights pay homage through exaggerated didactic enactments of devotion and loyalty. Similar to paintings, the sixteenth-century audience could understand the implied meanings embedded in the rhetorical structure and aesthetic language of the fixed narratives in these displays. Hence the term 'lost sense of sight' alludes to the fact that the ability to see and understand works of art and/or performances presented in this manner is no longer common practice.

Even though there are no existing visual images that depict the Tilts, the Ditchley portrait is hailed as a reflection of these significant celebrations. This painting was commissioned by Sir Henry Lee, who was the Queen's Champion and credited as 'one of the builders of Elizabethan mythology' for his role in devising the extravagant annual court festival of the Tilts.¹ (Yates, 1995, p. 9) Significantly, the work was first unveiled by Lee to the Queen as part of private entertainments that were stretched over two days in Ditchley and Woodstock in Oxfordshire. There are no detailed records and the geographical extents of the two sites are used interchangeably in discussions of these events.

The earliest verifications of the Portrait and Lee's 'old Elizabethan house' were recorded by the antiquarians Thomas Hearne in 1718, and George Vertue in 1762. Architectural descriptions of Lee's sixteenth-century Elizabethan manor in Ditchley which subsequently burned down, refer to a long hall in which the said portrait hung. (Strong, 1987, p. 135) The alleged site is presently occupied by Ditchley Mansion, commissioned by the second Earl of Litchfield in 1722, and designed by James Gibbs. There is also enough reason to believe that some of the organised festivities could have taken place at Woodstock Palace which Lee was responsible for as of 1573, and located in the vicinity of Ditchley Manor. Woodstock was demolished in 1720 and the reputed site, marked by a stone memorial now forms part of Blenheim Palace and Gardens.

While 'lost sense of sight' literally refers to the fact that these buildings are no longer visually evident, it also suggests a lack of inference and the ability to use works and knowledge from other disciplines to allude to and (re)construct architecture. In this instance, through analysing ideas of representation as initiated by the Portrait, the use of allegory and narratives can inspire the readers' imaginations to recreate the festivities of the Tilts, as well as these significant historical sites.

¹ While the idea of an annual event honouring the day of a monarch's accession is not exclusive to England, the earliest records of this form of celebrations date from the reign of Elizabeth I.

Ewan Christian's National Portrait Gallery: Defining 'lost sense of sight' differently

The Portrait was lost to sight for the next century until its displacement to the Gallery in 1933. This new phase started with Viscount Dillon's bequeath, with records in the Gallery's Heinz archive detailing the transportation of the Portrait from his Ditchley residence in Oxfordshire to London. There is no documentation of the Portrait between Hearne and Vertue's accounts, and Dillon's gift.

The Gallery's current site in the west end, located to the north of the National Gallery was offered in early May 1889, on condition that the unsightly blank wall belonging to the latter on the eastern elevation would be covered. It was to be on this narrow strip of land between the blank wall and St Martin's Place that a portion of the new building would sit. This portion was to be paid for by the government as the additional space promised to the National Portrait Gallery. (Fig.02) The narrative concerning this next site regards Christian's design that enabled the east wing of the Gallery to appear as integral with the National Gallery's short façade.² (Hulme, et al. 2000) This design strategy is elaborated alongside Fig.03. Visual deception was adopted as a design strategy to address the stipulated requirements through continuing the language of the first three corner windows of the National Gallery at the junction of Trafalgar Square and St Martin's Place. (Fig.03)

Hence ideas of allusion and spatial deception can be used to analyse the way the design of the east wing was approached. This is most apparent in the didactic manner in which the east wing visually alludes to being part of the National Gallery despite belonging to the other building spatially. Hence the visual reading of the east wing does not reflect the alleged ownership of the spaces. Similar to the ability that enabled sixteenth-century viewers to comprehend the intention of allegorical symbols in works of art, the term 'lost sense of sight' in this instance can be applied to the situation regarding knowledge of how the architecture of the east wing came to be. This design narrative is not apparent to viewers and the reading of the façade when viewed from the outside remains unrelated to general assumptions concerning the Gallery's spatial organisation. Accordingly, knowledge of this story will certainly facilitate the viewers' participation in the historical and allegorical reading of the building. This dialectical approach will enrich his and/or her level of understanding and appreciation of the façade.

² The National Portrait Gallery was officially declared open to the public on 4 April 1896.

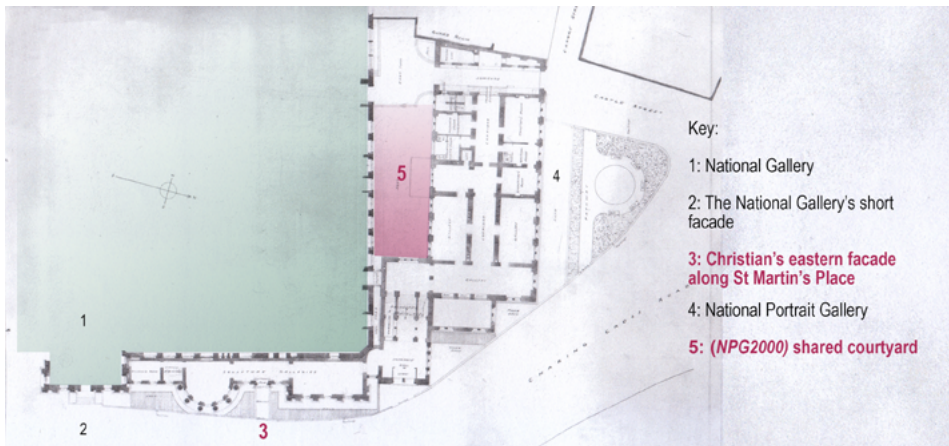


Fig.02. Site Layout Plan, National Portrait Gallery, c. 1900, London, Ewan Christian
 Source: National Portrait Gallery, London, UK. The text and highlights are added by the author.



Fig.03. This image shows the east wing facade of the National Portrait Gallery, London
 Ewan Christian's east wing facade was designed to blend seamlessly into the National Gallery's short facade along St Martin's Place in order that the two Galleries should appear as a single building. The success of Christian's design also meant that this east wing was commonly assumed to be part of the National Gallery. Hence this facade has remained little altered over the years despite the east wing having since been given over to the National Gallery during negotiations for the major overhaul in 2000.

(The description of the facade from left to right) The first three windows form part of William Wilkin's 1838 short facade design for the corner of the National Gallery. Christian's design for this east facade of the National Portrait Gallery almost half a century later, follows the same two-storey height with a continuous parapet and balustrade line. This horizontal line visually continues through to the design of the delineation and string courses. The issue of scale is further addressed by the use of similarly proportioned and spaced Corinthian columns, and rectilinear windows with similar frame details to that of the National Gallery. The facade concludes with Christian's design for the entrance block of the National Portrait Gallery.

Source: Author's own

NPG 2000: Perspective of meaning and use

A century later, lengthy negotiations with the National Gallery resulted in another design solution that also concerned windows. This time to accommodate the ‘right of light’ easement in the site of the shared courtyard between both Galleries. The ensuing NPG 2000 project was essentially a triple volume block that was inserted into this shared space in exchange for the aforementioned east wing being returned to the National Gallery. The proposal necessitated the bricking up of the original courtyard windows for protection due to conservation and planning laws.³ (Figs.02 and 04) Consequently, this material feature of history is completely hidden from the views and knowledge of the current visitors.

In archaeological studies, knowledge inferred from interpreting material finds enable a study of the human past. Architecture is part of this material culture, and through design practice the knowledge and finds can be appropriated to assume some form of contemporary presence. This rigorous translation of research material into works of architecture encourages history to be (re) presented and take on its own relevance in the present-day to further inherent transformational qualities. Hence the courtyard is understood by archaeologists as a quantifiable material space to delve into as well as a conduit to the past with an existing narrative that occurs within. In this instance, the notion of ‘lost sense of sight’ extends to the physical context of the entrance concourse, and how deeper knowledge of historical events facilitates an enhanced experience for the current users. The application of excavation and dissemination techniques from considered archaeological traditions will enable innovative manners by which to reveal these features. The response to these changes can be manifested in design practice as new finds are discovered and new narratives constructed. (Lau, 2020)

The site of the NPG2000 courtyard insert which also serves as the new entrance concourse is anchored by an auditorium in the basement, a mezzanine floor, balcony gallery, rooftop restaurant and significantly, the Tudor Gallery hovering within the triple height space where the Ditchley Portrait is currently exhibited. (Figs.05 and 06)

Multi-faceted Narratives and Design Practice

The discussions reveal the design strategies adopted and the consequent response of each proposal to specific situations. These notions of sites within sites advocate for the intertwined architectural narratives to be further devised

³The project was so termed as the negotiations started at the turn of this millennium. The windows were bricked up for protection in accordance with English Heritage regulations. In general a listed building, the National Gallery in this instance, may not be demolished or altered without special permission from the local planning authority and the appropriate central government agencies. Available at:

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/> (accessed 19.03.2021).



Fig.04. This image is titled 'High View, Construction of the Floor Slab for the Lecture Theatre'

This image forms part of a series of photographs that recorded the transformation of the courtyard during the construction process of the NPG2000 project. The picture was taken by John Goto in January 2000.

Source: National Portrait Gallery, London, UK



Fig.05. (Left) The new triple height entrance concourse

Fig.06. (Right) The new Tudor Gallery exhibiting the Ditchley Portrait

The blocked up windows are currently hidden behind the internal elevations of the entrance concourse. This new Tudor Gallery that houses the Ditchley Portrait is on the top level.

Sources: Fig.05. Author's own. Fig.06. National Portrait Gallery, London, UK

as dialogues with the users to enhance the reading and experiential qualities of the works. The narratives serve to confront, place and integrate chronological shifts to initiate the notion of multiple interpretations in the meaning, reading and experience of these sites. This supports the underlying argument that ‘there is always a history of drawings, objects and buildings within and against which an architectural work can be seen’. (Manoloupoulou, 2013, p. 124) Through issues of transience and permanence, a work of architecture can function both as a historical marker and a catalyst for transformation. In *The Architecture of the City* Aldo Rossi discusses the manner in which history preserved as built form enables aspects of the past to be experienced in the present, and that architecture is essentially a collection of ‘other architectures’ located within a historical lineage. (Szacka, n.d.) This also implies that every site has its own narrative that can be woven into a work of architecture, and the story can be simultaneously composed of material remains as well as related historical events. Buildings have their own inherent narratives and user participation is generally inevitable through issues of use and habitation. To avoid the argument of multiple interpretations being an accidental and existing by-product, design authorship can ensure that the occurrence of different readings and experiences shift from an assumption to a working focus. (Lau, 2016)

Each of the sites discussed has its own tale concerning allusion, inception and construction. The recording and recounting of history are not linear processes and all views expressed are interpretations of selected research material. Hence in design practice the process of (re)constructing and ‘erasing’ history is dependent on how a work of architecture responds to a particular site at a given moment, and how spaces are used and experienced by the inhabitants. (Lau, 2020) Particular meanings from precise sources can be used to construct new narratives that are articulated through the architecture, and these allusions can be spatially considered in their entirety or occur as architectural fragments. The occurrences imbue the spaces with alternative readings and connotations, which are further subject to interpretation. This dialectical layering of meaning over function allows for the possibility of new dialogue to be created between design conversations, the site and the user to enrich the experience of the work. Time enables buildings and people to tell stories of themselves and through interactions with each other. Hence the term ‘lost sense of sight’ can be simultaneously applied to the analysis and reading of all these sites that are visible and/or alluded to, and suitably demonstrates the idea ‘layers of meaning’.

The reconstruction of different research fragments through analysis and complex networks encompassing historical, archaeological and theoretical research, conceptual and spatial design strategies as well as construction knowledge establish how narratives can include different disciplines and range of tools to enrich architectural design practice. The research processes established through the introduction of multiple authorships that are receptive to new ideas, techniques and operating systems facilitate open-ended narratives. This is important as the assumption of a singular claim to authorship in the practice of

architecture is misleading. The notion of authorship has always been ambiguous and the meaning of the project changes at different stages. Buildings are made by many people and inherently used and appropriated by different people in numerous ways. This inherent dialectical quality contests the straightforward argument that buildings are conceived, constructed and attributed to a single architect and/or a singular source and makes the idea of a single claim to authorship questionable. (Lau, 2016) In this instance, the multidisciplinary proto-practice that includes the creation of new meanings and different readings of the work is furthered through focused approaches that embrace different skillsets. Collaborative efforts resulting in new working methods and perspectives ensure the provision of innovative ways to encourage an ongoing dialogue with the user. The different aspects in terms of historical events, site features, and the allusion of these events and features to other narratives provide a landscape of different readings that not only contribute to their presence and historical significance, but also reflect the different disciplines involved. This also implies that in order for the users' impact to be a conscious consequence, the construction of the design strategy needs to be deliberate and integrated from the outset. Hence the additional consideration of ideas and conversations outside the immediate field of architecture is implemented to knowingly generate narratives and further the possibilities and outcomes of multiple interpretations.

Here, the methodology is structured to facilitate dialectical individual interpretations through the development of narratives that express a range of readings and responses pertaining to different sources. Hence the notion of multiple interpretations is explored through the architectural narrative and used to construct a dialogue with the user. Precise decisions that stage the works differently, question known conventions and encourage user involvement, result in the creation of new meanings and different readings of the material. These further reveal different manners of envisioning multiple user-centric multi-faceted architectural narratives.

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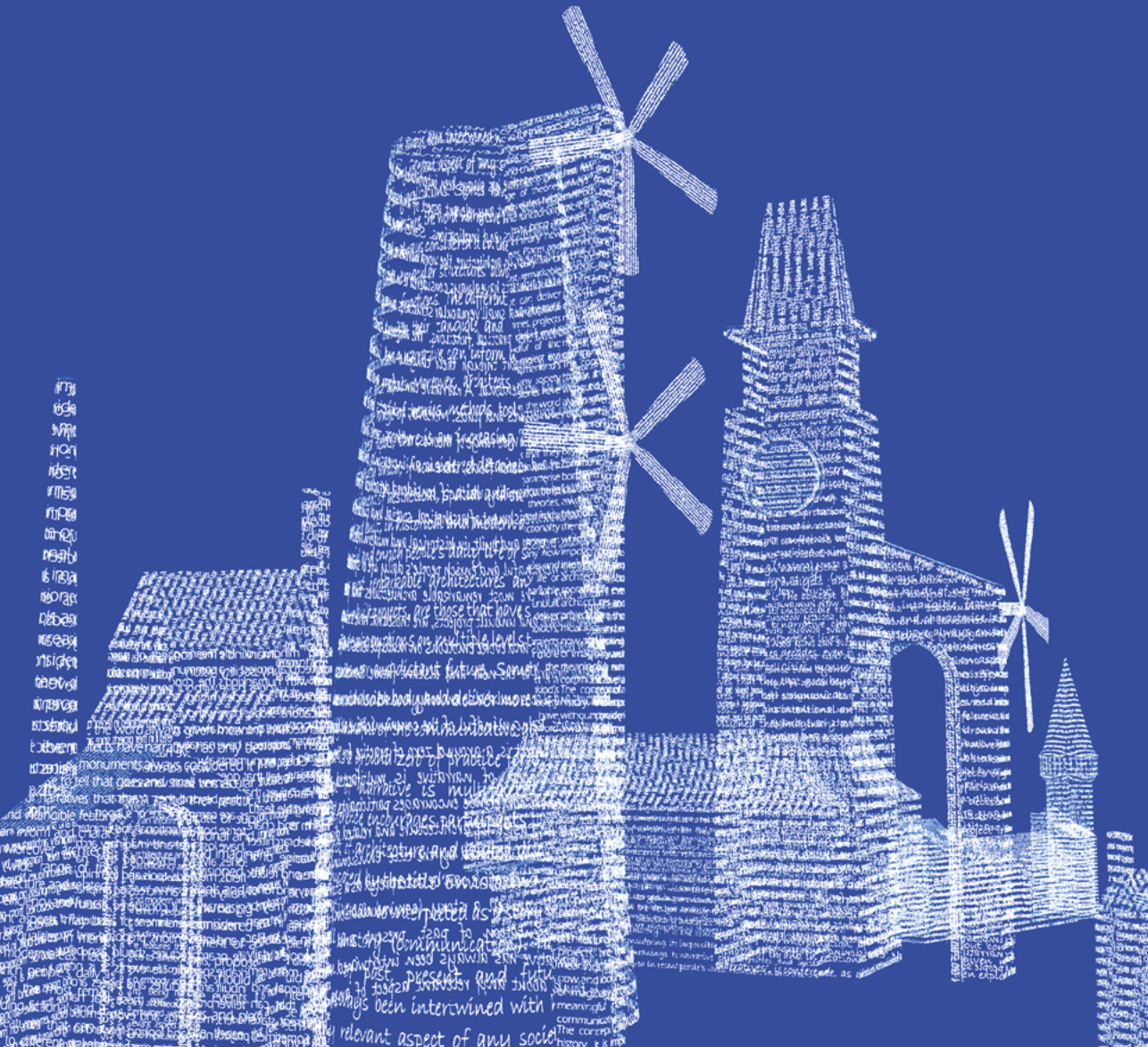
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ENVISIONING ARCHITECTURAL NARRATIVES

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Envisioning Architectural Narratives

This monograph documents the 15th European Architectural Envisioning Association Conference, entitled 'Envisioning Architectural Narratives', hosted (virtually) by the Department of Architecture and 3D Design, School of Art Design and Architecture, The University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom, from the 1st to the 3rd of September 2021. The event has continued the mission of the European Architectural Envisioning Association, namely, to create a valuable opportunity for communication and exchange of ideas and experiences in teaching, research and practice, with a particular focus, for this 15th edition, on envisioning the multiple and multifaceted relationships and applications between architecture and narrative. By considering the importance of narrative in humankind's history, the theme has invited participants to reflect upon three main topics: narrative and analysis, narrative and design, and narrative and representation.

This publication presents the papers accepted after two double-blind peer review processes. Each submission was assessed by three reviewers from the EAEA15 International Scientific Review committee, which is constituted by scholars from 12 countries. The authors of the accepted papers are from 20 different countries worldwide.

Dr Danilo Di Mascio is a Senior Lecturer in Architecture at the University of Huddersfield, and is a researcher, registered architect (ARB) and Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA). As author and speaker, he participated at various international conferences in Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East.

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