

Perspective of Meaning

Drawing “out” the allegorical stories of and in the National Portrait Gallery, London, UK

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Abstract

This discussion focuses on two drawings that were utilised to procure planning permission for alterations to the 1896 Gallery. The construction drawing is a conservation instruction for the preservation of existing windows beneath the new walls while the other employs allegory to present the roofscape of Trafalgar Square as an imagined Tuscan landscape, as a mode of persuasion to planning objections.

These original drawings translated architectural ideas at vastly different stages and were necessary for the new building to be realised. This approach to understanding the architecture of the Gallery continues from a history of narrative techniques underpinned by theoretical understandings concerning the notions of ‘perspective of meaning’, employed to address the meaning of the work. This is applied to critically evaluate the material, spatial, social and cultural aspects of the architecture. Hence these drawings are not isolated pieces of work but embedded within the history of the Gallery and in particular, the layers of meaning that are apparent.

This paper explores critical and reflective drawing practices in design through questioning assumptions of architecture as static and complete entities. Archival research through drawings reveals the design strategies adopted and the consequent response of each shift to specific situations. These notions of sites within sites advocate for the intertwined architectural narratives to be further devised as dialogues with users to enhance the reading, meaning, experiential and unrealised speculative qualities of the Gallery. The drawings serve to confront, place and integrate chronological shifts to initiate the notion of multiple interpretations, furthered as means to mediate and reinterpret research and design processes. Architectural drawings as historical markers and catalysts for transformation are further employed to interpret buildings and spatially reinterpret research material. Consequently, events that would otherwise be consigned to memory or totally forgotten are retold and given new readings, meanings and use through these drawings.

Key words: multiple interpretations, montage, perspective of meaning, archival research, dialectical allegory.

Drawing ‘Out’

The discussions in this instance focuses on two drawings that were utilised to procure planning permission for alterations to Ewan Christian’s 1890 National Portrait Gallery, London and the *NPG 2000* overhaul by Dixon Jones Architects at the turn of this Millennium. The construction drawing was produced to adhere to a conservation instruction for the preservation of existing windows beneath the new walls while the other employs the technique of allegory to present the roofscape of Trafalgar Square as an imagined Tuscan landscape, as a mode of persuasion to planning objections. (Figs. 1 and 2) Addressing the ethos of drawing to build and drawing to create, both were crucial to the building process from inception to completion and in vastly different ways, demonstrated the representation and translation of complex design ideas through material engagement and speculation. While the intention to construct may be seemingly obvious in the first, the latter is drawn with the purpose of pushing existing understandings and enables design opportunities to unfold. Here, this is in relation to assumptions concerning the role of architectural drawings, especially with regards to planning and building regulations. Similarly, while the notion of allegory is purposely employed in the imagined roofscape, the construction drawings can be read as an allusion to a moment in the Gallery’s history that no longer exist. In addition to the building and imagined realities depicted, these two drawings also allow for speculative possibilities of theoretical and material outcomes that are different to the existing architecture. These pieces of work are critical and provocative interactive representations that are open to multiple interpretations, demonstrating tangible and intangible values through practical knowledge and innovative solutions.

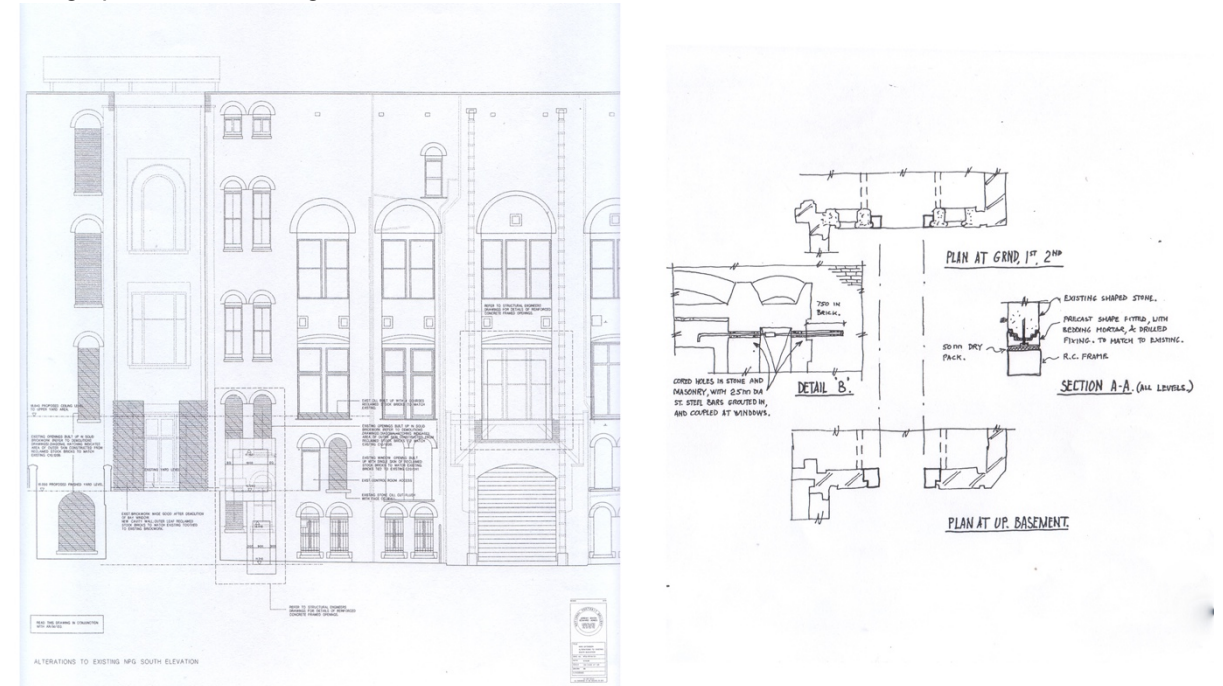


Fig. 1

These original drawings translated architectural ideas at completely different stages and were necessary for the new building to be realised. This approach to understanding the architecture of the Gallery continues from a history of narrative techniques underpinned by theoretical understandings concerning the notions of “perspective of meaning” also referred to as “lost sense of sight” that is used to address the meaning of the work. This contemporary definition is applied to critically evaluate the material, spatial, social and cultural aspects of the architecture. Importantly, the drawings are not read as fixed and finite, privileging material ideas of construction but instead, approached as experimental processes where temporal and subjective qualities are considered alongside empirical attributes. Allegorical techniques are used to subvert architectural logic and exploit the complexities of lived experiences through revealing the multiple interpretations inherent.

The construction details allude to hidden windows while the allegorical roofscape envisions speculative possibilities of how the architecture can be read. The emphasis on this detachment between the actual drawings and construction processes from the realised building uncovers the transitory and ephemeral qualities that are often neglected.¹ Here, these drawings are not simply presented to illustrate measurable spaces but instead, also read as experimental processes where the meanings are fluid and devised to elicit spatial experiences. These drawings simultaneously serve as palimpsests and indicators of absence and, elucidate imaginary potential. Both articulate ways of engaging with the layers of meanings and embodied history of the building. Hence these are not

isolated pieces of work but embedded within the chronicles of the Gallery and in particular, the aspects that are not visually apparent and/or realised.

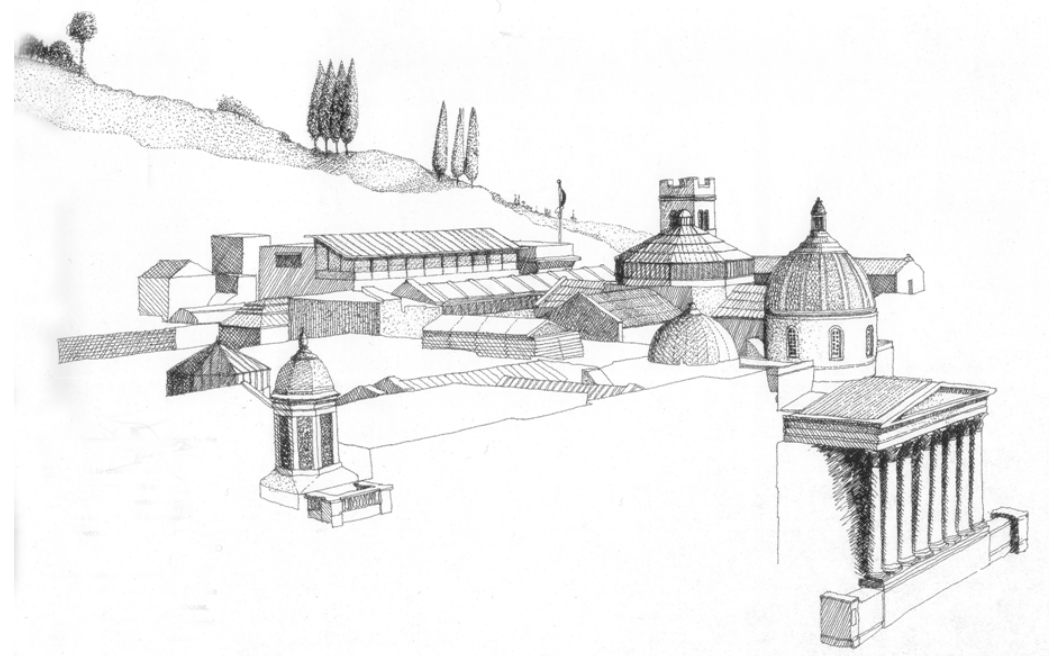


Fig. 2

Perspective of Meaning and 'Lost Sense of Sight'

Perspective of meaning is manifested through issues of conveyance and includes the construction of visual symbols embedded with allegorical references as well as allusions to specific narratives.² This sixteenth-century technique of arranging individual objects to create a picture is also referred to as perspective of mind and/or "lost sense of sight". The definition of allegory as the "description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance" also includes "the representation of abstract ideas or principles by characters, figures, or events in narrative, dramatic or pictorial form" that is apparent in pictorial compositions.³ The word "allusion" is less commonly used than "allegory" but nonetheless has a similar meaning and both refer to the idea of hidden meanings being hinted at visually through a diversity of images. This idea of polyfocality is apparent in works that encompass "a great variety of modes of presentation, points of view, media, styles, and levels of reality within one single depiction", with the "tendency to treat single images as part of a larger visual ensemble".⁴ Allegory is employed through the individual symbolic elements and the composition of the figures serve to reinforce specific aspects of the narrative depending on the assembling of different combinations. Akin to medieval art, the allusion to specific narratives through placement is emphasised. These works usually appear as a collection of individual objects placed within the picture plane, hence resulting in images that have "no unity in pictorial design".⁵

This contradicts the notion of empirical accuracy and the mathematical construction of spatially accurate depictions. The approach is evident in "Sir Henry Upton", c. 1596, a painting that commemorates his life and legacy within "a summary of the entire Tudor era".⁶ This allegorical presentation technique is employed to allude to certain points of view and enhance the potency of particular narratives that are apparent in the work. Hence the term "perspective of meaning" is used in the reading of these compositions as a form of articulation that is similar to a manner of expression and comprehension which is mystical and/or abstract as the accurate depiction of scale and optical distance required for a visually unified picture is disregarded. The application of this medieval technique of presenting and reading paintings diminished greatly during the Renaissance during which the belief that vision and truth were inseparable was fostered. This was mainly due to the addition of a mathematical dimension to the development of linear perspective that afforded vision an empirical status during this period. More importantly it enabled the ability to calculate and realistically represent three-dimensional spaces on two-dimensional surfaces. Hence the well placed foreground and background in paintings serve to give a picture depth, and turn the painted surface into a space. This advocated method of constructing and presenting paintings treated the two-dimensional space in the picture plane as an extension of the actual surroundings. In addition, the meaning of the work becomes apparent at a glance and "the eye no longer has to wander across the painting and piece the events together" as in the case of "perspective of meaning".⁷ Hence the demonstration of visual accuracy afforded by the use of linear perspective also ensured that vision was to be regarded as the most important of the five senses. More significantly, this relationship concerning certainty and the

sense of sight is still very much assumed currently and influences the way in which works of art and architecture are appreciated and understood. This idea of visually constructing a picture plane that realistically corresponds to the surrounding space diminishes the possibilities of different readings inherent in processes of completing the work, each of which changes the meaning of the final pieces. Understanding the aesthetic language and implied meanings of key elements embedded in the rhetorical structure was a skill that sixteenth-century viewers were trained in. Hence the term "lost sense of sight" alludes to the fact that the ability to see, understand and appreciate works of art presented in this manner is no longer common practice. Similarly, this understanding extends to the fact that these two important drawings are not considered as part of the public repertoire of exhibits, knowledge of which would enable the public to gain an enhanced understanding and appreciation of the Gallery. Hence these two drawings can be read against each other, alongside all the other pieces of work made during the working process and even juxtaposed onto the existing building. This approach of using drawings as part of a multidisciplinary framework enables innovative readings through combinations of the different mediums of representation apparent in the practice of architecture.

However, the use of sixteenth-century didactic allegory concerns the use of words and/or ideas that may appear to be structured differently, but continuity is nonetheless apparent in the sense of a similar meaning. This also means that despite the different readings and pluralistic compositions afforded to the participant, the intended meanings are comparable. Dialectical allegory in contrast facilitates the creation of new, multiple and individual readings where meanings are solely reliant on the users' interpretations and required to complete the work. Here, the drawing of imaginary places through issues of allegory, narrative and site are used as means to mediate and reinterpret research and design processes. This is similar to notions of polyvocality where the inclusion of many and different voices are used to shift and sustain narrative change. A key feature sees "the narrator renouncing the right to the last word and granting full and equal authority" to the participants.⁸ While this does not condone the total erasure of authorship, this spontaneous transformation of meaning through the active engagement of the user should take precedence over the original intentions and provenance.⁹ In this instance, this refers to the knowledge contributed by many people through the practice of architecture that concerns building and occupancy. More importantly, this idea of proto-practices creates new definitions to further articulate the term layers of meaning and demonstrate that the related architecture and activities are inclusive and constantly shifting as opposed to definitive. These drawings that are part of a much larger ensemble are one of many ways to interpret the stories of and embedded within the Gallery.

NPG 2000: Perspective of Meaning, Different Uses and Users

At the turn of this Millennium, lengthy negotiations resulted in a design solution that accommodated the "right of light" easement in the site of the shared courtyard between the Gallery and the adjacent National Gallery.¹⁰ The ensuing *NPG 2000* project was essentially a triple volume block that was inserted into this shared space in exchange for the building's east wing. (Fig. 3) The insert that serves as the new entrance concourse is anchored by an auditorium in the basement, a mezzanine floor, balcony gallery, the Tudor Gallery hovering within the triple height space and rooftop restaurant. This proposal necessitated the bricking up of the original courtyard windows for protection due to conservation and planning laws, and to ensure that all construction processes related to original features are reversible.¹¹ The blocking of the courtyard windows inadvertently created a physical archive of architectural elements. This hidden body of information lies in contrast to existing manners of archival documentation concerning spatial alterations. The construction work that transformed this external courtyard and the process of blocking off the windows was captured with a Russian panoramic camera by John Goto. The captured images of these fleeting moments would also serve as the last visual record of this former external space.¹² This technique of recording and presenting the transformation process facilitates a manner of visual movement through the spaces shown in each photographic image. (Fig. 4) Significantly, the fluid quality displayed provides various readings and hence different ways for the viewer of the images to engage with the space. This body of work serves as the archive to one aspect concerning the history of the Gallery, and appears completely different to the construction drawings.

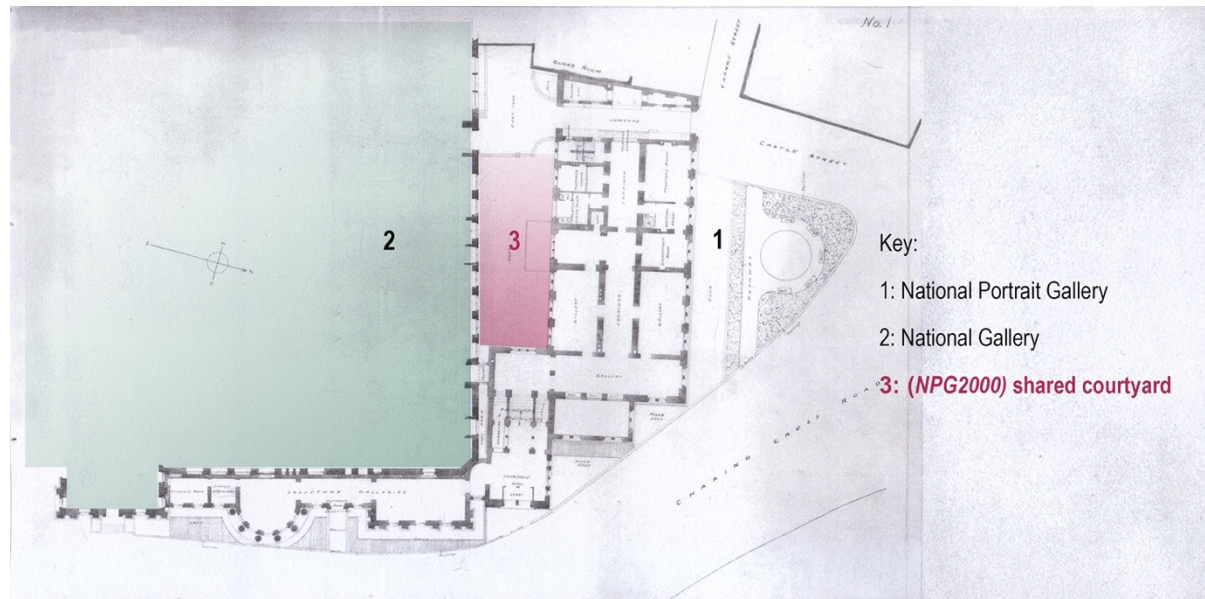


Fig. 3



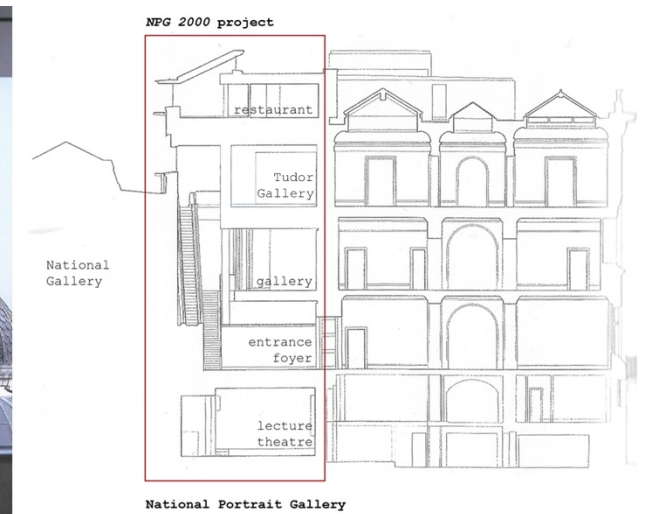
Fig. 4

In archaeological studies, knowledge inferred from interpreting material finds is used to enable an understanding of the past. Architecture is part of this material culture, and through design practice the knowledge and finds can be appropriated to inform and assume some form of contemporary presence. This rigorous translation of research material into works of architecture encourages history to be represented and take on its own relevance in the present-day to further inherent transformational qualities. Hence the courtyard can be read 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 new entrance concourse, and how deeper knowledge of historical events facilitates an enhanced experience for the current users. The reading of excavation and dissemination techniques can be inferred from the construction drawing that may enable innovative manners by which to reveal these hidden features. At present, this material feature of history is completely hidden from the views and knowledge of the current visitors.

This argument which encourages different interpretations of the architecture also extends to the new rooftop restaurant. The Gallery’s glass and steel rooftop restaurant was initially rejected by the planners on the grounds of its modern look.¹³ A drawing depicting the National Gallery and the various roofs within its vicinity as an Italian hillside village and the new restaurant sitting comfortably as a “terraced loggia” was subsequently produced to show the numerous visually contrasting elements that are existing.¹⁴ In essence, the restaurant would simply become a part of this context which includes the dome of the National Gallery and Nelson’s Column shown spread across an imaginary hill resembling a Tuscan landscape. (Fig. 5) Presenting the context in this manner pacified the planners and permission was subsequently granted for this restaurant. The allegorical reading of the roofscape demonstrates that there are many ways to evaluate and interpret a situation and, can also be applied to the idea of “lost sense of sight”. In this instance, it refers to the ability to infer and visually interpret one of many different readings inherent in the given situation.



Fig. 5



The layers of meaning revealed here are embedded in the history and fabric of the building and the argument asserts that knowledge of their existence and their roles in the material realisation of the building would contribute to a richer spatial experience for the Gallery users. The discussions reveal the design strategies adopted and the consequent response of each proposal to specific situations. The term “lost” in this instance literally refers to architectural features and aspects of the building that are permanently hidden from view and an imagined reading of the existing context. However, despite user participation there is an inherent linear progression towards a similar outcome. While dialectics are apparent by means of the underlying theoretical implications and initiation of multiplicity, there are also omnipresent traits of didacticism as the plethora of readings are acquired through the trajectory of reverse analysis. Working backwards from the realised architecture raises issues concerning the optimisation of these drawings given the distinct roles they were created for and purposes served. In the first instance, the users share the focused ambition of completing the building and primarily consist of people in the architecture industry like designers, builders and planners. The use of the drawings remains within their roles in the profession and boundaries of assumed knowledge. Extending the users to include academics and researchers would further reveal and exploit the multiple theoretical and material interpretations through the layers of meanings that are inherent. Hence for the intertwined architectural narratives to be further devised as dialogues to enhance the participatory qualities of the drawings, existing stratifications must be negated. Significantly, interpretations of the responses can be further be manifested in design practice as supplementary work to articulate the new narratives construed.¹⁵

Architectural Forensics, Archaeological Fragments and Montage

Critical and reflective drawing practices in design are explored through questioning assumptions of architecture as static and complete entities. This biased imbalance is further embedded in another common idea that regards a work of architecture as a stable built-form and/or an enclosure, an understanding that eclipses most other means of readings. This prioritises the idea of fixed typologies and overlooks immaterial spatial relations and experimental qualities. A work of architecture is significant to discussions concerning these means of representation because it serves as a form of collective memory where historical knowledge is embedded. Archival research reveals the design strategies adopted in the *NPG 2000* project and the consequent response of each shift to specific situations that resulted in an architecture without elevations, and a building that has no external views. Using drawings to negate boundaries and articulate the transitional nature afforded by the work enables the deliberate interpenetration of old and new. Additionally, the removal of all assumed boundaries between the drawing categories and distinct types of users mean that the work can be used interchangeably between theory and practice, and within existing chronologies of the design and construction processes. The complexity of the design and spatial narratives reflected in the drawings will be further exploited by broadening the non-exhaustive list of industry and academic users to include visitors, and those who have only experienced the Gallery through remote sources like images, videos and augmented reality. Erasing distinctions between the people with specialised design knowledge and visitors who understand and appreciate the Gallery primarily through experiential qualities will exponentially increase user-led outcomes. These discussions of dialectical allegory through techniques of montage and new historiographical approaches consider both the tangible and intangible qualities inherent in the work. This enables the Gallery to be read within a spatio-temporal plethora of different physical and experiential configurations that are conceptual,

relational, and the consequences of social, economical, cultural and political forces from inception until now.

Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* (1999) is referenced in discussions concerning architectural dialectics and notions of plurality where new meanings are produced through juxtaposition and adjacency.¹⁶ In this microcosm of Paris where conceptual and material boundaries dematerialise and spaces are absorbed by the city, the notion of dialectics is employed to simultaneously show the opposing "regressive elements" and "utopian potentials" of nineteenth-century Parisian culture.¹⁷ Importantly, a working system that respected the differences of the events juxtaposed within the spaces was invented to effectively capture the basic essence and characteristics of these arcades. Benjamin's interpretation of this task was reflected in his complete disregard for material that has been "accredited as precious and valuable" with his choice of research matter consisting of the "dispersed and frequently arcane sources" in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The notion of multiple interpretations is demonstrated through his technique of researching, constructing and organising the contents of the work allowing perceived "waste material to enter into significant connections".¹⁸ The principles of montage are evident in the arrangement of the six chapters of the book, designed to operate independently and enable "the work to be continuously remade anew" by each reader.¹⁹ Here, the shifting of material form, and the ensuing gaps between design, function and site in *NPG 2000* have created opportunities for differences of opinions that demonstrate resistance to notions of finality. The permutations ensuing from user participation further allow for new meanings and uses to emerge. This generative condition rejects established attitudes, revealing and foregrounding original perspectives on history that are continuously in flux.

Similarly, archiving and extending the history of the Gallery to accommodate the chronological gaps and different approaches to alterations require a system that is non-hierarchical and enable knowledge of the ongoing material and experiential changes to enhance occupancy. The qualities of montage are exaggerated as the presence of these gaps allow the architectural dialogue to remain unfinished and "available for endless revisions and appropriations" by the different types of creative users.²⁰ This is also when the notion of the architectural fragment comes into play as a spatial interpretation of a precise source and/or reference, which enables particular meanings to be expressed through its articulation within the architecture. These allusions can be spatially considered in their entirety or occur as segments. The occurrences imbue the spaces with alternative readings and connotations, which are subject to individual interpretations. This layering of meaning over function also allows for the possibility of new dialogue to be created between the site, building and the user to enrich the experience of the work.²¹ In *The Architecture of the City* (1966) 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.²² This is furthered through notions of "pathological" and "propelling permanence" where the first is considered inert and isolated whereas the latter is operative and functions as a record of time. Importantly, "propelling permanence" exist in a "dialectical position" and provides a past that can still be experienced within existing developments.²³ The techniques of montage reflect that history is not linear or binary and further allow the spatial and intellectual qualities of the work to be appreciated in different orders. These processes can be used to highlight alternative meanings that the visual qualities allude to and/or have been overlooked.

Montage enables the examination of the connections between past and present through the multiple ways in which spaces can undergo change and still be considered valuable. Buildings have their own inherent narratives and user participation is generally inevitable through issues of use and habitation. Accepting the gaps and ambiguities as positives allow the users to claim authorship and become part of history. 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.²⁴ This includes exploratory and experimental pieces of work that are attempted as inquisitive acts. Hence more flexible approaches that extend ideas of architectural representation to include the changes accommodated during construction will emphasise the importance of working processes. This asserts that techniques and representations within the scope of drawing are not passive tools but active mediators, guiding thought, shaping design possibilities, and transforming spatial experience.²⁵ This understanding allows for more responsive definitions, demonstrating the value of a non-hierarchical and radial structure that allows more permeable and inclusive understandings of what the practice of architecture entails. The two drawings can be read independently or as fragments of all the work produced for this project. These are not endpoints but generative tools in defining and mediating the gaps to formulate experiences that critique existing conditions and importantly, speculate and create new possibilities of production.

Dialectical Allegory and Proto-Practices

The depth of these drawings contains a world of nuances and inferred meanings, celebrating the gaps between reality and imagination. They also serve to confront, place and integrate chronological shifts,

furthered as means to mediate and reinterpret research and design processes. Architectural drawings functioning as historical markers and catalysts for transformation are further employed to interpret buildings and spatially reinterpret research material. 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".²⁶ Consequently, events that would otherwise be consigned to memory or totally forgotten are retold and given new readings and meanings through these drawings. The occurrences imbue the spaces with alternative readings and connotations, which are further subject to interpretation as participatory-led dialectics allow for the possibility of new meanings to be continuously created. Through issues of transience and permanence these discussions reveal the design strategies adopted in the multifaceted narratives, the consequent response of each drawing to specific situations and the celebration of new architectural propositions that are deliberately incomplete and open-ended. This analysis further provides an additional way of looking at techniques of montage and especially Benjamin's stance that history is understood from the vantage point of the user and historical transformation is not progressive. Hence montage is approached as a "philosophy of history" that focuses on the "discontinuities separating past and present".²⁷ The rejection of accepted narratives advocates for seemingly random fragments to be read alongside established accounts. When the drawings are used interchangeably between theory, practice, use and/or when accommodating the knowledge proffered by all the different types of creative users, the opportunities within the layers of meanings shift. The dialectical outcomes at each stage can be reread against the processes of inception, design and construction. This also includes the contradicting and diverging readings apparent in the drawings when the assigned purposes of construction and planning are no longer requirements. Disregarding ideas that the completed building serve as the main criteria against which to measure the drawings encourage speculative new outcomes of what and how the architecture could be differently determined. This purposeful misalignment creates possibilities for the final building to be different. For instance, if the construction drawing had not been strictly categorised as a measured survey and used as a catalyst for design interventions, then perhaps material evidence of the courtyard and relics consisting of these windows would be apparent and visible to current visitors. Likewise, if the allegorical drawing or drawings of a similar nature were produced at the start, the readings offered might have altered the design direction and eventual architecture. The initial roles of the drawings that were created for specific users within designated categories are dissolved to enable new purposes like suggesting additional and different outcomes to existing works of architecture. These shifts allow for the recombining of different types of users and sources of material and, simultaneously serves to criticise and reject assumptions in design processes. Consequently, these new ways of thinking and approaching the notions of drawing and drawings through reconstructing and erasing history serve to inform design practice.²⁸

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 establishes how proto-practices can include diverse disciplines and range of tools to enrich architectural design practices. The research processes established through the introduction of multiple authors that are receptive to new ideas, techniques and operating systems facilitate open-ended narratives.²⁹ In this instance, the emergent multidisciplinary proto-practices look to experimental modes that prioritise the testing of ideas furthered through focused approaches that embrace different skillsets, and importantly, occur prior to the formalisation of methods. These collaborative efforts acknowledge the inherent complexity in new inchoate working methods and perspectives to ensure innovative ways of encouraging ongoing dialogues with variegated users. This also implies that in order for the users' impact to be a conscious consequence, the construction of new frameworks to accommodate design strategies need 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 and further the possibilities and outcomes of multiple interpretations in different and differing capacities.

The methodology is structured to facilitate dialectical interpretations through the development of practices that express a range of readings and responses pertaining to different sources. This includes precise decisions that stage the works differently and question known conventions. Dialectical allegory advances multiple user-centric and multi-faceted interpretations through facilitating active user participation. Hence, the operative potency of these two drawings encompasses and shifts between addressing the programs, appropriating the site conditions and importantly, enabling the use and meaning of the work to be completed by the recipient.³⁰ This also alternates between responses to the different allegorical, material and immaterial narratives of constructing and appropriating archival sources, manifested by means of associated memories and explored through "perspective of meaning". This sixteenth-century storytelling methodology apparent in historical works is revisited to communicate theoretical, cultural, social, ephemeral, experiential and material narratives within existing and reclaimed knowledge in the drawings. While "lost sense of sight" initially refers to the fact that the information in these drawings is not visually evident, it also suggests a lack of imagination,

curiosity, inference and the ability to use works and knowledge from archival research and other disciplines to reference design practices and vice versa. Here, the notions of dialectics and multiple interpretations extend to definitions of “lost sense of sight” that include revisiting working processes and positing on different building possibilities. This alludes to the fact that these alternative versions have no material and tactile accompaniment to fully articulate the spatial qualities, hence requiring the use of augmented reality to insinuate experiences for the user. “Lost sense of sight” also encompasses added manners of using the drawings to progress beyond their roles concerning inception, process and completion to address and inform future issues concerning change of use and material alterations through the speculation and simulation of different scenarios. Most importantly, these manners of drawing “out” the allegorical stories would authorise the drawings to be considered as portraits of the Gallery.

Notes

1. Federica Goffi, “Architecture’s Twinned Body,” in *From Models to Drawings, Imagination and Representation in Architecture*, ed. Marco Frascari, Jonathan Hale and Bradley Starkey (UK: Routledge, 2007), 88.
2. Constance Lau, “A Contemporary Reading of the Accession Day Tilts in Relation to Festival and the Elizabethan Notion of ‘Lost Sense of Sight,’” in *Architecture, Festival and the City*, ed. Jemma Brown, Christian Frost and Ray Lucas (London: Routledge, 2019), 40. Additional reference, Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987).
3. The English word “allegory” is derived from the Middle English and French word “allegorie” with the first recorded instance in 1382. Oxford English Dictionary online, accessed 9 August 2025. <http://dictionary.oed.com>. The original source is noted as “Wyclif Gal. iv. 24”. Dictionary Reference online, accessed 9 August 2025. <http://dictionary.reference.com>. The original source is noted as “The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, fourth edition, copyright Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006”.
4. Martino Stierli, *Montage and the Metropolis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), 11.
5. Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 43, citing John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space* (London, 1957), 35.
6. Breeze Barrington, “A Full House of Tudors,” *Apollo Magazine*, accessed August 9, 2025, <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/tudors-holburne-museum-national-portrait-gallery-review/>. The painting “Sir Henry Upton” measures 740 x 1632 mm, unknown artist and is currently displayed in the Tudor Gallery at the National Portrait Gallery, London, UK.
7. Anna Krausse, *The Story of Painting: From the Renaissance to the Present* (Cologne: Konemann Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1995), 7.
8. Simon Dentith, *Bakhtin Thought, An Introductory Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 36–40. This awareness of the creativity of the user and explorations of multiple contributions in author-audience relationships include writings by Mikhail Bakhtin. In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin describes the polyphonic novel as having a multi-character approach where active dialogue and multiple perspectives enables meaning to first be derived from the interactions amongst the characters, and consequently between the author, the work and the reader. This idea was developed in relation to Fyodor Dostoevsky’s writings and the concept of polyphony is borrowed from music and literally means multiple voices.
9. Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” 1967, in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 143. The shifts that occur in the meaning of the text during the process of reading are acknowledged.
10. The project was so termed as developments started in 2000 even though negotiations began in autumn 1994 when Dixon Jones Architects won the open competition for the project. Christian’s Gallery was listed Grade I on 9 January, 1970. The two-storey National Gallery overlooking Trafalgar Square was designed by William Wilkins in 1838, and awarded Grade I listed status on 5 February, 1970.
11. This is in accordance with English Heritage regulations. In general a Grade I listed building like the Gallery may not be demolished or altered without special permission. “Historic England,” accessed August 9, 2025, <https://historicengland.org.uk/>.
12. John Goto, “Construction Photography,” in *The National Portrait Gallery*, Graham Hulme, Brian Buchanan, John Goto and Kenneth Powell (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2000), 158. This device was so chosen because “the swing lens gives a field of vision rather as if swivelling one’s head through 120 degrees”, and the fluid results of this technique record a vision that cannot be had from the usual singular static viewpoint.
13. This design was not in line with the surrounding buildings which are more traditional in appearance and the comment was in specific reference to the view from the top of a double-decker bus travelling north up Whitehall.
14. Ian Latham and Mark Swenarton, *Dixon Jones: Buildings and Projects 1959–2002* (Melbourne: Right Angle Publishing, 2002), 133.
15. Constance Lau, “On-site as an Interdisciplinary Practice,” *Il Quaderno, no. Onsite*, The International Studies Institute (ISI) Florence Architectural Series (2020): 50.
16. Walter Benjamin, “The Flâneur,” in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: New Left Books, 1973), 37. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), viii. This position was articulated through Benjamin’s representation and critique of nineteenth-century Parisian bourgeois society through his fascination with life beneath these arcades. Benjamin not only considered these arcades described, as a “cross between a street and an interior” to be “the most important architectural form of the nineteenth-century”, but also where the most interesting and relevant depictions of the century’s preoccupations occurred.
17. Margaret Cohen, “Benjamin’s Phantasmagoria: The Arcades Project”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. David S. Ferris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 215.
18. Michael Schwarz, “Rag Picking,” in *Walter Benjamin’s Archives*, ed. Ursula Marx, Gundrun Schwarz, Michael Schwarz and Erdmut Wizisla, trans. Esther Leslie (London and New York: Verso, 2007), 252–3.
19. Jonathan Hill, *Actions of Architecture: Architects and Creative Users* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 108.
20. Jonathan Hill, *Actions of Architecture*, 200.
21. Constance Lau, “Montage and Multiple Interpretations,” 284.
22. “Aldo Rossi, Bruno Reichlin, Fabio Reinhart, Eraldo Consolascio, 1976,” Léa-Catherine Szacka, accessed 9 August 2025, <http://radical-pedagogies.com/search-cases/e08-eth-zurich/>. This is in reference to Analogous City, an artwork produced by Aldo Rossi, Eraldo Consolascio, Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart for the 1976 Venice Architecture Biennale. The working process and outcome was used to illustrate the “ever-changing nature of the city, where the form of the city is determined by the historical imagination—collective memories, places, and buildings”.
23. Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 6, 22, 59 and 92.
24. Constance Lau, “Montage and Multiple Interpretations,” 288.
25. Robin Evans, “Translations from Drawings to Buildings,” in *Translations from Drawings to Buildings and Other Essays*, (London: Architectural Association Publications, 1997), 157.
26. Yeoryia Manoloupoulou, *Architectures of Chance* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2013), 124.
27. Margaret Cohen, “Benjamin’s Phantasmagoria: The Arcades Project,” 200-1.
28. Constance Lau, “On-site as an Interdisciplinary Practice,” 56.
29. Constance Lau, “Montage and Multiple Interpretations,” 289. This is important as the assumption of a singular claim to authorship in the practice of architecture is misleading, and the notion has always been ambiguous given that 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.
30. Constance Lau, “Montage and Multiple Interpretations,” 285.

Image Captions

Fig. 1. Construction drawing of the courtyard, and blockwork construction details for the blocking of the windows. This formed part of the building survey that studied the existing windows in the shared courtyard which were scheduled to be blocked up.

Fig. 2. This drawing by David Naessens illustrates the roofscape of the site and the National Portrait Gallery's rooftop restaurant located in the middle of the imagined Tuscan landscape.

Fig. 3. Site plan showing the National Portrait Gallery and National Gallery.

Fig. 4. This image forms part of a series of photographs taken by John Goto in January 2000 that recorded the transformation of the courtyard during the construction process of the *NPG 2000* project.

Fig. 5. View from the rooftop restaurant and section showing the *NPG 2000* insert.

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Biography

Constance Lau is an architect and member of the Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, UK. She leads and teaches architecture from undergraduate to doctorate levels in London and Singapore. Research interests in multiple interpretations and narratives are explored through the techniques of montage and different notions of allegory from medieval to contemporary discussions of user-led dialectical participatory interpretations, to create multiple readings in design work. These theoretical frameworks are dually examined through design driven methods of writing practice. The idea of a "questioning and incomplete" approach is fundamental. These are applied through studio work, PhDs, REF standard publishing, peer reviews, and international conferences and workshops. Central to the methodology is the role of design practice as an ongoing dialogue that challenges assumptions and emphasises authorship. This is further articulated through publications and especially projects in the book *Dialogical Designs* (2016).



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