

Perspective – monocular and linear – is sometimes denigrated as reductive and authoritarian. From a static viewpoint a system of interconnecting lines defines the limits of an object or a space. We must apprehend the image in a single concentrated gaze. At the Architectural Association I once heard Craig Owens mock Robin Evans; his interest in drawing was outmoded and beyond contempt.

The influence of linear perspective on architectural design is extensive. But the visual experience it describes is unlikely because, for most people, vision is binocular and buildings are experienced over time when they are not the focus of attention. Even a painting constructed according to linear perspective cannot be absorbed all at once. We cannot focus on everything, our attention shifts. Rather than a single gaze, perceptual fragments combine to create a montage of visual experience. Rather than a stable visual cone emanating from the eye, Penelope Haralambidou identifies 'a visual schema best conceptualised as a gas or fluid in motion'.¹

Leonardo da Vinci's fascination for the effects of weather on architecture is wonderfully expressed in the title of his painting *A Town Overwhelmed by a Deluge*, c.1515. Leonardo credits Sandro Botticelli for noticing that 'various inventions are to be seen' in a building stain and identifies similar potential in weather: 'I have in the past seen in clouds and walls stains which have inspired me to beautiful inventions of many things.'² In an early demonstration of linear perspective, made between 1413 and 1425, Filippo Brunelleschi depicted the square around the baptistery in Florence. But rather than draw the sky he silvered part of a wooden panel so that it was seen in reflection and a different sky was always present. Brunelleschi's demonstration seems to confirm the familiar opinion that weather is outside architecture and outside architectural representation. But an alternative interpretation indicates the relevance of weather to architecture. First, because the weather both locates architecture and makes it more open to varied interpretation. Second, because architecture is not just a mirror to the weather but can be like the weather in its subtle variety. Third, because the weather – the cloud – is a model to understand visual perception.³

The title of this exhibition and catalogue – *The Blossoming of Perspective* – indicates Penelope's desire to enrich perspective not dismiss it. And her concern for the figurative and allegorical suggests support for the creative and

1 Penelope Haralambidou, 'The Blossoming of Perspective: An Investigation of Spatial Representation', PhD thesis, University of London, 2003, p. 15.

2 Leonardo Da Vinci, *Leonardo on Painting: An Anthology of Writings by Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. Martin Kemp, trans. Martin Kemp and Margaret Walker, New Haven and London: Yale University, 1989, p. 222.

3 Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a Theory of Painting*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Stanford: Stanford University, 2002.

interpretative potential of ambiguity cited by Leonardo. Allegory formulates meaning through the appropriation of fragments and their transfer to a new context. It is a procedure in which one 'text' is read through another. Medieval religious allegory was didactic but contemporary allegory focuses on the reader's role in the formulation of meaning, which is understood as transitory and cultural.⁴ Penelope recognises the virtues of contemporary allegory but rather than simply submit architectural representation to a swamp of interpretations, she also cites the ability of visual perception to function as a language and investigative tool: 'this gaseous conception of visual space designates not the opposite of rational space but an expanded rational space'.⁵

The command of drawing established the status of the architect. The term 'design' comes from the Italian *disegno*, meaning drawing, suggesting both the drawing of a line on paper and the drawing forth of an idea. Dependent on the assumption that ideas are superior to matter and intellectual labour is superior to manual labour, *disegno* enabled architecture, painting and sculpture – the three visual arts – to be recognised as liberal arts concerned with ideas, a position they had rarely been accorded previously.⁶ *Disegno* assumes that architecture results not from the accumulated knowledge of a team of anonymous craftsmen working together on a construction site but the artistic creation of an individual architect in command of drawing.

In 1563 Giorgio Vasari founded the Accademia del Disegno in Florence. A model for art and architecture schools since, it replaced workshop instruction with education in subjects that emphasise the immaterial and intellectual aspects of the visual arts, such as geometry. For architects since the Renaissance the history of architecture is the history of drawing. In material objects – buildings – architects find and create the qualities they readily discover in drawings. Whether in the studio or on site, the architect will often see line and proportion not mass and matter.

Disegno transformed the traditional practice of building and established new means to practice architecture: drawing and writing. To affirm their status as exponents of intellectual and artistic labour, architects began increasingly to theorise architecture in drawings and books. Sebastiano Serlio and Andrea Palladio are notable early exponents of this tradition, Le Corbusier and Rem Koolhaas are more recent ones.⁷

The Blossoming of Perspective is both outside and inside this architectural tradition. In the drawings and texts of other architects the building remains the point of reference even if no physical construction results. But the building is largely absent from Penelope's investigations:

Consequently, this research strengthened my view of architectural design as a practice not strictly confined within the boundaries of building but maybe closer to visual literature or philosophy, a method for analysing spatial concepts and their relationship to behaviour, perception, observation and imagination.⁸

4 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne, London: New Left Books, 1977, pp. 159-161.

5 Haralambidou, 'Blossoming', p. 15.

6 Plato, *Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles*, trans. R. G. Bury, Cambridge: Harvard University, 1929, p. 121.

7 See Sebastiano Serlio, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture*, vol. 1, books I-V of *Tutte l'opere d'architettura et prospettiva*, 1537-51, trans. Vaughan Hart and Peter Hicks, New Haven and London: Yale University, 1996; Andrea Palladio, *The Four Books on Architecture*, trans. Robert Tavernor and Richard Schofield, Cambridge: MIT, 1997. First published as *Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* in 1570; Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells, London: Rodker, 1927. First published as *Vers une Architecture* in 1923; Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, Rotterdam: O10, 1994. First published in 1978.

8 Haralambidou, 'Blossoming', p. 239.

9 Haralambidou, 'Blossoming', p. 17.

While the translation from drawing to building lingers in architectural discourse even if it is ignored, the processes and products of artistic endeavour need no further validation. Exploring the spaces of drawing and writing, Penelope proposes a means of investigation and discovery in which process and product combine: 'Constellations of clues, information, details, unrelated facts and personal thoughts appear and disappear like gas particles or stars in the Milky Way.'⁹ Applying architectural drawing beyond the architectural discipline, she encounters issues, ideas and techniques relevant to architecture. Within her investigation of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, c. 1503-1507, and Marcel Duchamp's final assemblage *Given*, a story of perspective and an allegory of architecture blossom.

10 Penelope Haralambidou, '3 John Street, 1:50: Mise en abyme' in Jane Rendell and Peg Rawes, eds, *Spatial Imagination*, London: Bartlett School of Architecture, 2005, p. 14.

Housing the Domo Baal Gallery and a rococo ceiling, John Blagrove began 3 John Street in 1756. *The Blossoming of Perspective* occupies the first-floor room in which Penelope exhibited a year ago. Her contribution to the *Spatial Imagination* exhibition was a paper working 'model' that, reflecting her role as curator, represented the themes and locations of the other exhibits.¹⁰ Exhibiting the model of the exhibition within the exhibition, as part of the exhibition, allowed one to be understood as a model of the other, and is firmly within the tradition in which architects blur the object and the representation. Elegantly proportioned and delicately delineated, the rococo ceiling that occupies the centre of the room and the centre of the catalogue is a notable example of this tradition. The focus of Penelope's exhibition this year is a 1:1 analytical reconstruction of Duchamp's *Given* described in delicate lines of steel and waxed thread. Penelope does not draw buildings. But she builds drawings.

11 Haralambidou, 'Blossoming', p. 237.

The three original visual arts share a common heritage. Painters and sculptors stopped discussing design once it became associated with collective authorship and industrial production in the eighteenth century. However, *The Blossoming of Perspective* indicates design's continuing importance to the three original visual arts. Penelope describes Duchamp's practice as spatial drawing, which also describes the practice of the architect since the Renaissance.¹¹ Without mentioning or designing buildings she refers to the architect's five-hundred year history of building drawings. Reading one 'text' through another *The Blossoming of Perspective* emphasises the importance of allegory to design. In a drawing we see an allegory of a building. And in a building we see an allegory of a drawing.