

# THE NECESSITY FOR DRAWING

TANGIBLE SPECULATION

*Michael Graves*

IN A RECENT, RATHER TEDIOUS FACULTY MEETING, I made a number of marks on my pad that resembled the beginnings of a plan organization. After making several passes at my drawing, I found that I had reached an impasse. I handed the pad to a colleague who added a corresponding number of marks and returned it to me. The game was on; the pad was passed back and forth, and soon the drawing took on a life of its own, each mark setting up implications for the next. The conversation through drawing relied on a set of principles or conventions commonly held but never made explicit: suggestions of order, distinctions between passage and rest, completion and incompleteness. We were careful to make each gesture fragmentary in order to keep the game open to further elaboration. The scale of the drawing was ambiguous, allowing it to read as a room, a building, or a town plan.

After each of us had taken several turns, we realized that the drawing had once again faltered. A third colleague was brought in. He casually dropped in a rather large stair on his first move: the ambiguity was lost. It seemed that, either the game had been so well understood that the jump in scale had reversed the rules, or that the third player had missed the point altogether and his set of marks had subverted the preceding ones. In either case, the speculative aspect of the original drawing could not absorb the shift in meaning that the figure of the stair produced. The game was over.

This little episode illustrates for me something that I previously felt only intuitively. For while it is probably not possible to make a drawing without a conscious intention, the drawing does possess a life of its own, an insistence, a meaning, that is fundamental to its existence. That a certain set of marks on a field can play back into one's mind, and consequently bring forth further elaboration, is the nature of this quite marvelous language. Good drawing, by virtue of this intrinsic reciprocity

---

This essay was first published in *Architectural Design*, June 1977.

between mind and act, goes beyond simple information, allowing one to fully participate in its significance, its life.

In exploring a thought through drawing, the aspect that is so intriguing to our minds, I suspect, is what might be regarded as the speculative act. Because the drawing as an artifact is generally thought of as somewhat more tentative than other representational devices, it is perhaps a more fragmentary or open notation. It is this very lack of completion or finality that contributes to its speculative nature.

There are of course several types of architectural drawing. By clarifying the dominant nature of each type according to the intention the architect assumes for his drawing, we find three primary categories: 1 the referential sketch, 2 the preparatory study, and 3 the definitive drawing. This sort of classification can never be pure, as all drawings have aspects of each category. However, it is important to identify the primary themes of each.

**1 THE REFERENTIAL SKETCH.** This kind of drawing may be thought of as the architect's diary or record of discovery. It is a shorthand reference that is generally fragmentary in nature, and yet has the power to develop into a more fully elaborated composition when remembered and combined with other themes. Like the physical artifact collected or admired as a model holding some symbolic importance, the referential sketch is a metaphorical base that may be used, transformed, or otherwise engaged in a later composition, [1].

I presume that most of us are by nature lazy, and when we see something that interests us in the natural



[1]



[2]



[3]