

DAVID COHN

*TEN SKETCHES ON
ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING*

1.

The Chinese ideogram for the “sea” and “vastness” is composed of the water radical --three descending “drops” or “splatters”-- and the character for “mother”, in which a cross-shaped “person” appears inside a womb-like square: the sea, mother of waters.

The ideogram is not phonetic of course, but visual and associative, retaining traces of ancient pictograms. It is parallel to and independent of spoken language, and is, in fact, a universal language, understandable in any dialect, even in Korean and Japanese: each dialect applies its own, different vocalizations to the characters. And as a figure composed of brush strokes, of direct registers of the writer’s gestural movement, the character’s meaning is also implicitly, ambiguously associated with human agency.

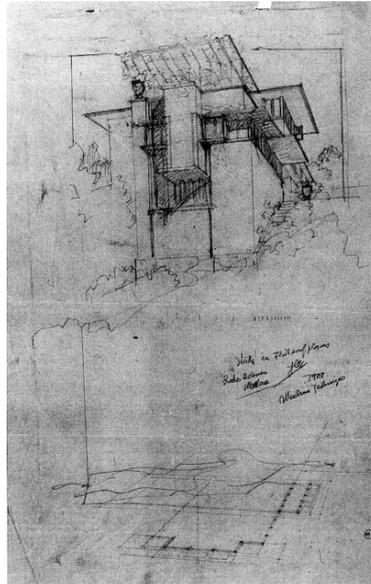
“When I write, I always suspend my wrist, holding my brush with a strength that comes from my heel, travels through my body, and leaves through my fingertips. When the energy of my whole body is concentrated in the fingers, then I move my brush. Not half-finished, I am soaking wet with sweat.”

-Ho Shao-chi, Chinese Calligrapher, 1799 - 1873 ¹

1.- T. C. Lai, Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973, page 190.

ARTESATURNO

1



DAVID COHN

*TEN SKETCHES ON
ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING*

2.

According to his early colleagues in Chicago, Frank Lloyd Wright would draw the plans, sections and elevations of his Prairie Houses simultaneously, moving back and forth like the shuttle of a loom, creating his famous three-dimensional spatial weaves.²

2.- Terence Riley, Editor, Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994, page 99.
Drawing: Lake Delavan Cottage Project, Wisconsin, 1907; Perspective by FLW. The FLW Foundation. FLW: Architect, page 157.

Illustrations.
Lake Delavan Cottage Project, Wisconsin, 1907, perspective sketch by Frank Lloyd Wright.

ARTESATURNO

1



DAVID COHN

*TEN SKETCHES ON
ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING*

3.

Wolf Tegethoff publishes a photograph from the 1920s of Mies van der Rohe working on a row of charcoal renderings that are pinned to the wall. He is standing, dressed in a dark, well-tailored suit, with one hand in his pocket, in a manly pose of casual self-assurance. In another photo, he stands over a table, working on a plan sketch with the same thick stub of charcoal, the drawing almost an arm's length away from him, an icon of elegance, distance and apparently effortless perfection.³

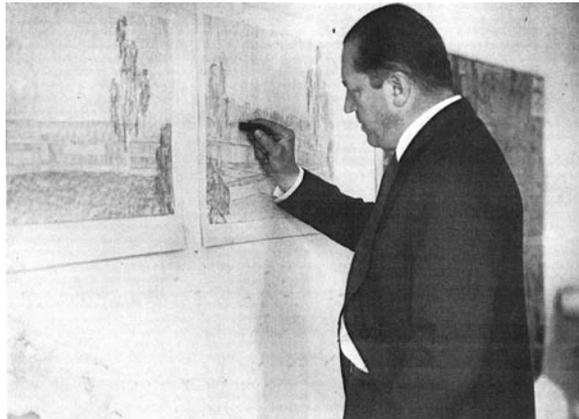
3.- Wolf Tegethoff, Mies van der Rohe: The Villas and Country Houses, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1985, pages 60, 62.

Illustrations.

Mies van der Rohe working on two renderings in the 1920's.

ARTESATURNO

1



DAVID COHN

*TEN SKETCHES ON
ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING*

4.

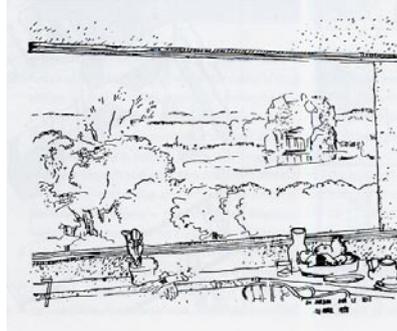
In his drawings, Le Corbusier integrates opposing mental forces that in the work of his followers were seldom again united. He found in Picasso's cubism both an analytic method and an earthy hedonistic sensuality. His drawings render with a Cartesian clarity a vision of Mediterranean sunlight, cool gardens, full bodies at ease in space. His pen both diagrams and caresses.

Illustrations.

Mies van der Rohe working on two renderings in the 1920's.

ARTESATURNO

1



DAVID COHN

*TEN SKETCHES ON
ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING*

5.

Erich Mendelsohn did his first imaginary sketches on the Russian front during the First World War, where they came to him in explosive hallucinatory illuminations. Later he would draw during musical concerts. His designs were also developed from improvised impressions.

Mendelsohn: "My sketches are only notes, outlines of sudden visions, although they are all in the nature of buildings. It is very important to record these views on paper as they flash through the mind, because every new creation carries within it the seed of potential growth, and, following a process of evolution, becomes a spiritual being."⁴

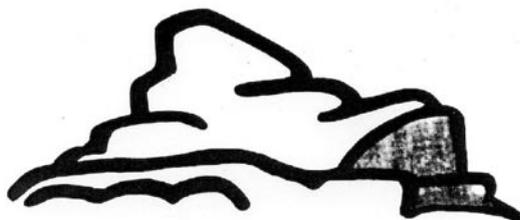
Here Mendelsohn echoes Cabalistic beliefs, which hold that a man's spilled seed propagates incomplete, evil spirits, which may only be countered through incessant prayer, as if the thought of God were another form of creation. Mendelsohn gathers the ejaculations of his mind and nurtures them into full artistic creations.

4. - Quoted in Bruno Zevi, Erich Mendelsohn, American edition: New York: Rizzoli International, 1985, page 24.

Illustrations.
Sketch by Le Corbusier for Villa Meyer, Paris, 1926

ARTESATURNO

1



DAVID COHN

*TEN SKETCHES ON
ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING*

6.

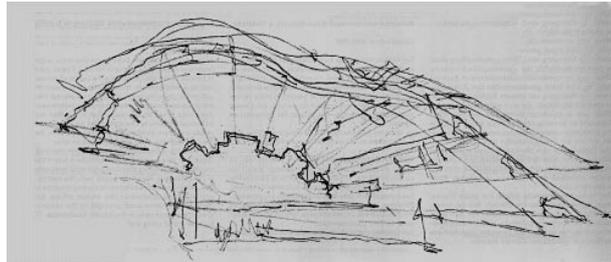
Alvar Aalto's first small pencil sketches of a project usually had an uncanny resemblance to the final design, as if the building had been born whole in the architect's mind before he set pencil to paper. But at the same time, we seem to see the movement of the architect's hand in the compound curves and fan shapes of his buildings: the jerky movement of his forearm over a small area of paper, like a writer, the wrist and forefinger adding detail, the shoulder and body immobile – although Aalto could justify his forms for reasons of acoustics, exterior views and interior organization. The plan of the Vuoksenniska Church in Imatra is like a diagram of bunched fingers holding a pen.

Illustrations.

Eric Mendelsohn, sketch for a theater.

ARTESATURNO

1



DAVID COHN

*TEN SKETCHES ON
ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING*

7.

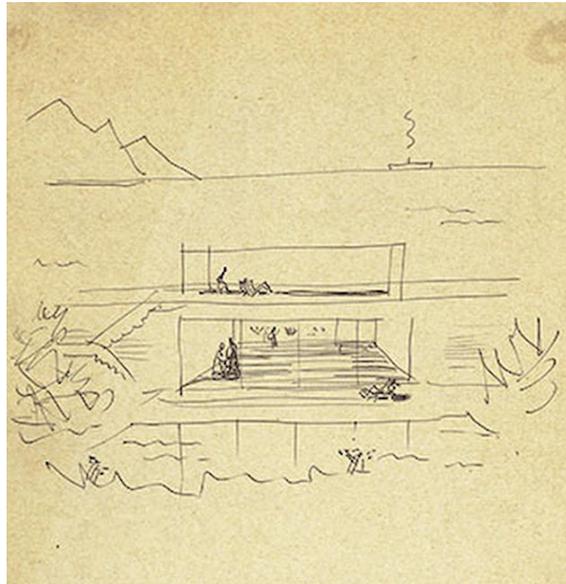
The most calligraphic of architects is Alejandro de la Sota, for whom drawing, building and idea are inseparable. In his 1989 monograph, he echoes the Aalto legend: "I maintain that one should never sketch a single line until the work is completely defined in one's mind".

Illustrations.

Plan sketch by Alvar Aalto, Bremen Apartment Tower.

ARTESATURNO

1



DAVID COHN

*TEN SKETCHES ON
ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING*

8.

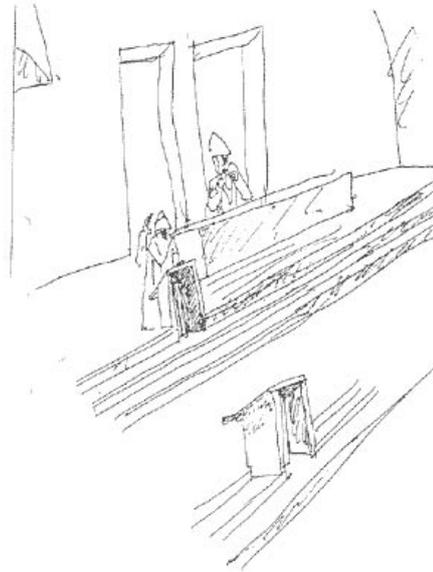
“Lan T’ing Shu, the Orchard Pavilion Preface, by Wang Hsi-chih (307-365), a sublimely beautiful specimen of the running script, was allegedly written in a state of in-sobriety. It was highly treasured by the calligrapher himself, for although he tried many times to re-write that piece, he never succeeded in improving on it.”⁵

5.- T. C. Lai, op. cit., page 57.

Illustrations.
Alejandro de la Sota, Perspective for Aludia Development, Mallorca, 1984.

ARTESATURNO

1



DAVID COHN

*TEN SKETCHES ON
ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING*

10.

In *Mechanization Takes Command*, Siegfried Giedion demonstrates that one of the crucial stages in the development of a mechanical process occurs when inventors begin to develop functions according to the logic of the machine rather than seeking to reproduce in the machine the logic of human movement and work – in the 19th century this machine logic had to do with the rotary motion of the steam turbine and the repetitive linear order of the assembly line.

Due to the mutable and impermanent nature of digital data, the computer as a medium of design has little in common with conventional drawing. One of the consequences of this is to eliminate the distance between the conception and the material realization of the building. Already implicit in the architect's first drawing is the number of bricks required, the structural loads, the heat loss of the windows, the hard and soft and long-term maintenance costs.... Through the computer, idea and building are fused, and cast into a state of impermanence, potential and change, a process which, though played through time, is essentially timeless.

Illustrations.
Alvaro Siza, sketch of Marco de Canavezes Church