Detail as fragment: the incomplete, the possibility of connection and an excess of multiplicities.

Abstract
‘... and I think that, setting out from there, I will put together, piece by piece, the perfect city, made of fragments mixed with the rest, of instants separated by intervals, of signals one sends out, not knowing who receives them.’

The fragmented detail it is argued, is the incomplete and offers multiple connections, the promise of fragments to be re-united or salvaged. The drawn fragment provides a resource upon which the architect can draw for the invention of new designs, assembling, collecting and recombining the fragments in new ways; the breaking up, distorting, multiplying, and disarranging of oddments and leftovers in the mind after the fragmenting process of perceiving, learning, forgetting and recalling. This paper attends to the drawing archive of the Auckland University for the ‘Government Warehousing, New Premises cnr Nelson and Fanshawe Streets’ (1939).

This paper will discuss the drawn architectural detail through notions of fragmentation and multiplicity. In his book ‘Invisible Cities’, Italo Calvino’s version of fragmentation suggests an endless opportunity of reconstruction, connection and separation. The fragment is seen as an excess of imaginings and a clue to the story that is the unknowable whole. The fragment articulates detachment by drawing attention to the rough edges of a natural break or the clean slice of a surgical cut. A drawn fragment could be a failed work, an unrealized attempt or a partially rendered drawing. In architecture such a cut is articulated by lightening strokes, a residual reference to the broken edge. The fragmented edge is the imagined and the historical. This paper will follow the fragmented line, a small piece of a much larger work.
Detail as fragment: the incomplete, the possibility of connection and an excess of multiplicities.

The fragmented drawing could be seen as partial, incomplete, the worn out, or a missing piece. Jorge Luis Borges has stated that the whole world consists of nothing but details, tiny objects which often mimic the appearance of left over parts that evoke not a missing whole as much as a universe of fragments. This paper will discuss the fragmented drawn detail as a means of connection and detachment offering multiple possibilities.

Complex fragments offer the promise of additional experiences and loss; their incompleteness full of the possibility of imagined connections. A partial image, isolated from its original context, is transformed into a fragment of a lost narrative, a signifier without specific signification. Equally, the drawn fragment offers a sense of nostalgia, a series of irreconcilable pieces that can never be assembled into anything. They become morselated bodies. The drawn fragment hints at the ability of the architectural detail to become a clue, a piece of a puzzle whose origin is imagined. The morselated drawn body may suggest the authors' hand or offer clues to the construction of the lost whole. The drawn fragment may allow for the piecing together of multiple, even contradictory narratives; of things that have been already said and of the regularity of producing fragmentation. Robin Evans suggests that fragmentation assumes the possibility of reconstructing an original that has been broken where the fragment can be considered an accident from which one then reconstructs a whole, ‘…of putting together the busted vase,' he writes,

‘...a delight in smashing things up or sadness in surveying the shattered scene. Yet fragmentation has to be figurative because only things with a constitution can be broken.’

Is the fragmented architectural drawing without assemblage or structure and, therefore indestructible? Are architectural drawings of nothing at all? In one sense architectural drawings can consist only of fragments of potential objects. These fragments come into existence through the process of transformation and projection where the surface condition of the drawn fragment registers the break. This morselated dreamt body is the phantasia, fragmented by scale and lightening strokes, registered by teeth that separate and never connect. Manfredo Tafuri writes that the breaking off of a drawing to show a larger scale detail, is often indicated by lightening bolts, ‘...the isolation of the elements and their sudden breaking off, just when they should confirm the organic connection to the whole.’ In this sense the drawn fragment is not literal; there is nothing to be broken,
no virtual space, no subject matter, no substructure, and no geometry. It is a deliberate miscommunication from the draughts person through the drawing to the observer. Robin Evans suggests ‘...a loss of politeness, the carryover of resemblances from earlier works residua, and the words surrounding the project extraneous.’ The transmitted message is generated not by the individual drawing but by their assembly into a set. The fragmented image becomes a meaningful configuration. The drawn fragment is read not only as an object but also as a structure, a complete and coherent system. vi Here the signifying function of the fragment becomes elusive. If the emphasis is placed on the larger whole it comes from it offers a kind of wholeness by external association or by resembling the whole. If the emphasis is placed on fracturing, it ends up as fragmentation, a breaking up and a loss of meaning. vii

This paper will investigate the notion that the fragmented architectural detail can be seen as being made up of elements that can be dislocated, manipulated, cloned and endlessly mutated from one drawing set to another, from one set of plans to a set of details. Is the fragment that repeats from one drawing set to another a trace of the unconscious of the architect? A drawn fragment could be a failed work, an unrealized attempt or a partially rendered drawing. In architecture such a cut is articulated by lightening strokes, a residual reference to the broken edge. The notions of the drawn fragment and the fragmentary offer multiple elaborations, interventions, reworkings and conclusions and will be discussed in relation to a morselated corner, a fragment that fell from a drawing set from the Auckland University Archive. viii

**Fragment: A piece of a jigsaw puzzle and a sign of loss**

The fallen drawn fragment can be seen as part of a larger whole or as a clue to an unknowable whole, as equally it can suggest an endless opportunity for reconstruction, connection and separation. Its torn edges are unrecognizable, the clues to their connection lost in the act of becoming a fragment. The fragment defined in terms of a part whole relationship sees the fragment as being derived from and subordinate to an original whole, either a nostalgia for a lost past or a loss of totality. The fallen piece gives only partial information to the construction of the whole. It implies the incomplete, offering a multiple of connections and the perhaps unfulfilled promise of pieces that are to be re-united or salvaged. Angela Ndalianis in her book ‘Neo-Baroque aesthetics and contemporary entertainment’ writes of fragmented gaps within a narrative,

‘Like ruins, which contain within them the memory of past existence, an understanding of the meaning of the fragment functions as a nostalgic
remnant or emblem of the past, but also reinvents itself as a unique whole that belongs to its own time.\textsuperscript{ix}

The fragmented paper and the drawing set from the archive become a narrative to be explained. The narrative gaps of the drawing set have superficial signs of unity and coherence. Drawing conventions and marks offer clues to their reattachment. These fragments gather as multiple pieces of kind, new fragments maybe introduced to the whole and interact with others, coming together to create multiple, yet unified story formations. The reader entranced by an intricate network of connections that intersect numerous narratives becomes a participant in a game that involves the recognition of prior signs and in the variations introduced to the signs within the narrative. The architects’ signature and the fragment cannot be suppressed in the work.

Joseph Frank in ‘The Idea of Spatial Form’, notes that an inquiry into the relationship between the part and the whole, the fragment and the complete of an object of thought results in the reader being forced to continually fit fragments together. The reader keeps allusions in the mind until, by reflexive reference, they are linked to their complements, the detail and the invisible unity of a dream.\textsuperscript{x} Through the drawing set the reader connects hints and spatial references gradually becoming aware of a pattern of relationships. The jigsaw is slowly pieced together.

Omar Calabrese in ‘Neo-Baroque: a sign of the times’ distinguishes between the detail and the fragment in that the detail assumes and depends on its relationship to the whole whereas the fragment signifies parts of the whole ‘but the whole is in abstentia’.\textsuperscript{xi} The fragment in this sense is read as a form that displays a loss of entirety. He goes on to suggest that the detail or fragment is constituted by the difference between types of divisibility, the cut and the rupture. Calabrese writes,

‘Fragment, fraction and fracture, the diversity of the three terms depends on their temporal relationship to one another in terms of the breakage. The fragment is successive, the fraction is the dividing act, and the fracture is not necessarily definitive potential for breakage.\textsuperscript{xii}

The whole and the part, the fragment and the detail, begin to function simultaneously and notions of their integrity begin to reveal themselves within the archive and the architectural drawing set. The continuous fragment and its infinitesimal edge at one and the same time form an absolute line. Unlike the detail the fragment, despite having
formed part of a previous whole, does not need to take the presence of the whole into account, except as loss in order to be defined. Does the fragment share formal conditions of other fragments like details or are they individual?

The fragment is presented to the viewer as it is, rather than as the product of an act performed by a subject. It is a coloured slip of paper, which is divided both horizontally vertically; the edges are not defined but interrupted. Forces produced the boundary lines and they mark the point of exchange; the boundary condition, the verge, the place where something is about to or has happened. A detailed study of these edges of the fragment may enable a hypothetical re-construction of the part’s relationship to the whole.

Calabrese writes that the fragment becomes transformative according to its context. The fragment does not express a subject, time or space of articulation; its thresholds are measurable. The fragment is not examined as a trace unless it is examined in detail. He goes on to suggest that the fragment can exist in a form of excess, when an apparently fragmentary work is presented as though it were a whole. In this case its reference points are missing. This suggests that there are no drawn connections to other parts of the future work and that the ‘fragment’ offers nothing beyond itself. It is a morsel that refers back to a system that is seemingly absent. The fragmented drawn detail becomes a clue that forms part of the unknowable whole, a whole that can be reconstructed by starting from the fragment represented by the dream itself. The viewer attempts to conduct the fragment back to its imaginary system.

The drawn fragment, seen as a shard, a ruin or a trace of a past of future plenitude, may also become ideas, a world and wholeness to which it may no longer have any relation. Is it possible to restore the fragment as an imagined assembly of matter within a shifting complexity? Is architectural drawing dominated by a type of asymmetrical assemblage of elements from which connective transitions are missing, where logical sequences have been replaced by abruptness, interference and indeterminacy?

The detail and the fragment each involve notions of proximity and division. The detail suggests an ideal form of knowledge and totality, the knowledge that comes from exhaustive description. The fragment relates back to a whole only to question its status, offering absence, an enigma, and an effaced memory. The drawn fragment, where part of the detail is missing through becoming a fragment, offers ambiguity, multiplicity and boundlessness. Complexity and chaos are concepts that become disordered, unstable, random and irreducible.
Is the wearing away of a drawn sheet a sign of its reconstitution, or a worn out mode of drawing.

The fractured corner partially describes a section through a future building. The titled sectional scrap reveals two broken floors and hints at a third. The edge of the torn sheet, where it might be reattached to the body of the original work, is frayed and irregular. The sectional detail is fragmented and broken away. It becomes an examination of a fragmented edge. The fragment invokes the absence of the whole providing the hint or clue by which the archival hunt continues.

As the archived fallen morsel becomes isolated from its original context it is transformed into the fragment of a lost narrative, a signifier without specific signification. The potential for breaking up, distorting, multiplying, and disarranging could become a systematic criticism of place carried out by using the instruments of visual communication. The drawn fragment offers detachment, a broken edge that equally refers to a nostalgic fragmentation or a trace. The fragmented detail becomes a clue with which to reconstruct an absented body.


The fragmented scrap shows a section of part of a future building. The section is cut through columns 4-13. Vertical columns are numbered 23, 33 and 43. A lemon grading and case making room are shown on the second floor. To the right an insulated butter patting room and store has tiled walls rendered in a soft pink. For a complete recipe to the insulated butter-patting store refer sheets No.s 2 and 13. To the right ice blue glazing opens the view into an office for testing. A small note orders, ‘omit tiles and finish in plaster’ lies beneath the dining room for men on the third floor. A single line cuts diagonally across the fragment showing the slope of the Nelson Street footpath. Is this a method for grading the lemons, a partial recipe for lemon butter? The torn sheet reveals a
glimpse of a series of thresholds between inside and outside. The representation suggests the edges of rooms, the beginnings and endings not quite clear. The drawing surface not only appears fragmented but it also describes the ability of the thresholds to cut spaces, to be at one and at the same time of entrance and exit, a cleaving place of adherence and separation.

The drawn fragment then becomes contained and focused on under a specific set of circumstances. The reader organises them by referring to an implied situation. Do readers suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unit? Is fragmentation a side effect and therefore incidental? Or is it because the explanations are always a side effect? Does the graphic energy of dissociated and disrupted form become more visible than the buildings represented? Is that which is diminished by time augmented by pencil? Does fragmentation become a destructive urge that has been filtered into representation and thus kept manageable? In this light the appearance of fragmentation in a drawn detail could be a signal of a wider obstruction.

The morselated drawn sheet appears to be broken up into fragments, each fragment may not be read as a ‘type’ of thing, even if in its original unified state it could have been called typical. Is the building designed as a large recipe; grade and colour the lemons, pat the butter, filter the honey? Can this recipe be repeated endlessly? Is this order? The edge of the fragment offers two conditions, one is compared to the original unified thing and the other belongs to the surface or edge formed by the break or tear. The break or tear can be smooth with the cut of a knife, rough but regular with the saw, coarse and brittle with broken stone, feathery as when a cloth is torn. This missing totality suggests a certain habituality of things that have been ruptured, where parts are lifted off and connected in an incongruous manner.

The incomplete.
In one reading the torn fragment presents a sense of the work lacking wholeness a vague sense of lost completeness, a vestige of something. Equally the appearances of leftover parts evoke not a missing whole so much as a universe of fragments. These fractional drawings hint at the architectural detail’s ability to function as a clue, as the piece of the puzzle that tells us about a larger whole. The torn fragment is made up of recognizable fragments, of machines, instruments, structure, occupation, food, furniture, limbs and diagrams; a composition of figurative elements in space.
The fragment and the detail have a mutual dependence, where both are distinct parts referring to the same totality. Naomi Schor writes in ‘Reading in Detail: aesthetics and the feminine’ that the detail and the fragment are in an hierarchical relationship, because it is the equal distribution and high density of purposeful details that ensures the integrity of the fragment. The search for connections may lead to the operations of the imagined building, the recipe for construction? Stores, labelled entrances and a large warehouse in the middle of the city, streets for rolling lemons and sectional cuts rendered in soft pink yellow and green.

Schor goes on to add that it is in the virtuality of the fragment that the detail finds its finality ‘in an aesthetic of an essentially archaeological order, where any totality is but a temporary assemblage of potential fragments the detail is the guarantor of certainty.’

Raoul Bunschoten in ‘Collage City: A Masquerade of Fragmented Utopias notes,

‘The fragmented detail begins to reveal hidden worlds and uncover buried structures. The fragments gather together roadside leftovers and oddments left over in the mind after the fragmenting process of perceiving, learning, forgetting and recalling.’

Fragment: the morselated body, the wasted, used for another purpose.

The torn fragment appears to belong to the proposed Sheet No. 7, ‘New Premises - Internal Marketing Division, New Zealand Government’ at the corner of Nelson and Fanshawe streets, Auckland City. The sheet describes three elevations to the proposed building, three sections and, to the left, one partial section where a piece has been torn from the drawing. The street elevations have a strong horizontal emphasis, broad horizontal bands of column-less fenestration. The Sections show openings, cart docks and numbered columns of the warehouse while the entrance and offices are detailed elsewhere.

John Stacpoole and Peter Bevan write that the 1920–40’s were considered as a transitional period in New Zealand architecture. Heavy investments in primary industries, new roads and new land development were reflected in designs of progressiveness appropriate to the new government agenda. Architects developed pronounced horizontal windows and plaster bands, contrasted with verticals such as stairs and towers in response to these new government initiatives.
Hilde Heynen writes in ‘Architecture and Modernity: a critique’, that a view of modernity is characterised by irreconcilable fissures and insoluble contradictions, by divisions and fragmentation and by the collapse of an integrated experience of life. The fragmented nature of the drawn set and the building could be a sign of a fragmented agricultural country reconstituting itself as a modern nation state or as a fragment, a ‘waste-product’ of this historical process. Here the torn slip lies somewhere between the simultaneous speech of fragmentation and contemporary life, it may have incomplete content or it maybe an idle idea that repeats itself. The fallen fragment offers a moment between the history of the fragment in its own right and the discourse on the morselated piece; the interpretation of the fragment using its own language.

The collected sheets reveal rooms of tasty delights including a butter patting room and a lemon colouring room on the first floor, a lemon grading room on the second floor and honey melting cabinets, a continuation of the recipe? Deliveries of honey and butter marked in raised relief, 2 inches from the wall surface are signalled on Nelson and Fanshawe Street. The title, ‘Internal Marketing’ and Stores are also marked on the elevations of the building. The plans shift from a terraced entrance detail in sweeping arcs to a large warehouse. The plans are colour coded in blue and red, the rendering of the warehouse and front entrance shift in code and scale. The sectional detail of the stairwell reveals a honeyed entrance to the offices of the building.
The drawing set consists of twenty hand coloured sheets. The faded fragile paper shows details picked out in faded greens and reds. The set also contains 31 blueprints of reinforcing details to the building. Within the archived set are also several unnumbered sheets and fragmented slips of paper torn from the whole in the process of archiving, investigating and age. The building no longer exists.

The drawing set of the ‘New Premises Internal Marketing Division’ can be viewed not as whole picture or as an artefact but as an incomplete representation of thought, showing changes in the structure of thought. The viewer begins to notice narrative gaps and perhaps a sense of fragmentation. Are there superficial signs of unity and coherence that are shared across the drawing set? Can the audience, although initially disorientated when confronted with the fragmented corner and its narrative gaps present in its disconnection, come to an understanding within the context of the whole and rediscover a kind of order? The portrayal of an object in its totality requires the destruction of its picture’s unity; conversely, the destruction of a picture’s unity may, by inference, or shared intuition create the sense of a probable totality beyond the picture. Its rendered objects are transparent and give suggestive instances of notation and discontinuity.

The fragment takes the form of a crumbling parchment, a corner of a larger work. It gestures toward a whole that is absent, and in isolation, it resists notions of unity or resolution. It also suggests a new entity, the story of a different work that can lay claim to its own completeness through the combination of a number of individual narrative fragments. The torn fragment becomes linked to a sectional cut of the warehouse; shifts in scale, colour and detail are made in the drawing set to accommodate the warehouse, the terraced entrance and the office suites.

The knowledge of the whole is essential to an understanding of any part as equally the parts can describe the whole. But is the knowledge only obtained after the book has been read and the recipes learnt? When are all the references fitted into their proper places and grasped as a unity? Is the lengthy and often fragmented search through the archive continued on the assumption that a unified spatial apprehension of a dreamt work is ultimately possible? The fragmentation of a drawn surface, through a multitude of reflections, offers the idea of space and its detailing as a realm of all possible combinations, between broken and reaching completion, visual interconnections and the arrangement of objects generating the potential for multiple meanings.
The drawn fragment provides a resource upon which the architect can draw for the invention of new designs, assembling, collecting and recombining the fragments in new ways. The detailed drawing becomes the materialization of a continually changing process, the movements, rhythms, and partially comprehended ruminations of the mind: the operations of thought. Catherine De Zegher writes,

‘…drawing, tracing and following the hand of the drawer, is forever caught in the space of action and event. Where one thing leads to another, whether as the registration of fragmented moments played out in a finely articulated game of delineation.’

The drawn fragment can be read as a means of endless multiplicity, as the manipulation of words or details and all the variables with their connotations and tones. Does a fragmented drawing mean the inability of ever find an ending? Calvino writes of his novels in a sense that they are unfinished or left as fragments, like the ruins of ambitious projects that nevertheless retain traces of the splendor and meticulous care with which they were conceived.

‘…a network of relationships that the writer cannot restrain himself from following, multiplying the details so that his descriptions and digressions become infinite.’

Endnotes


iii Robin Evans. ‘In front of lines that leave nothing behind’. AA Files 6, May, (1984), 89-96. 92


v Evans, ‘In front of lines that leave nothing behind’, 92.


viii The set of drawings of interest are those to the ‘New Government Warehousing at the corner of Nelson and Fanshawe streets, Auckland City.’ The building no longer exists and was designed by the partnership Benjamin Charles Chilwell and Cecil Trevithick. The title of the drawing set is ‘New Premises Cnr Nelson and Fanshawe Streets, Internal Marketing Division New Zealand Government, November 20th 1939.’ Chilwell was a practising architect in Auckland for 40 years and in 1914 he entered into the partnership with Trevithick. The partnership undertook a wide variety of domestic, commercial and industrial buildings within the Auckland City central business district, including Myers Park Kindergarten (1916), Edeans Building (1914), Whitcombe + Tombs
Limited Building (1916), Rutland Building (1929), Nestle Factory (1925-7), Royal Exchange Assurance Building (1920) and the Prudential Building (1939).

Angela Ndalianis, Neo-Baroque aesthetics and contemporary entertainment (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 60.


Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque: a sign of the times; translated by Charles Lambert; with a foreword by Umberto Eco*, 73.

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The ‘New Premises - Internal Marketing Division’ was one of a number of major government office buildings built in New Zealand during the 1930–40’s and showed a development of public works and government administration, particularly during the first labour government from 1939-49 under the leadership of Michael Joseph Savage. The onset of the economic depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s and the deprivation and suffering that many people, especially the unemployed and the elderly, experienced put tremendous pressures on members of Parliament. Savage was distressed by the hardship he encountered, and in 1931 was admitted to Auckland Hospital with mysterious abdominal pains; they were to recur throughout the 1930’s. From 1933 he traversed New Zealand repeatedly with an intensity and evangelical fervour previously unknown in New Zealand politics. In the months leading up to the 1935 election Savage came to personify the Labour Party’s commonsense humanitarian approach. He spoke with sincerity, eloquence and power, convincing many voters that he and his colleagues not only understood their problems but also could be trusted to solve them. Savage refused to indulge in recrimination and divisive politics but sought to unite as many people as possible behind a common dream of a better and fairer society. With the addition of two Ratana MPs elected in Maori seats, Labour came to power at the 1935 election with 55 of the 80 seats in Parliament.”

http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/dnzb


Conversation: Avis Newman and Catherin de Zegher. Sited in: Catherine De Zegher (Ed), *The stage of drawing--gesture and act: selected from the Tate collection by Avis Newman; curated by Catherine de Zegher; organized by The Drawing Center, Tate* (London: Tate Pub.; New York: Drawing Center, 2003), 67.