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Building Translations: Narratives on Bizarre Preservation

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Statement

In today’s globalized society, we’re confronted with a flood of images and data at a speed that strains our ability to fully process the information. This messy network often gives way to misreadings and poor interpretations. In the architectural discipline, a suspension of critical disbelief is necessary to accommodate the lack of fidelity, clarity or resolution that exists in many of the documents we encounter.

We contend that there’s a productive tension between the object and its mediated representation and that the translations that occur between the two are embedded within the way that architects communicate with one another.

Robin Evans points to how the translation from drawings to buildings is not always exact, that “…things can get bent, broken or lost on the way.” We do not see the process of translation as one of loss, but one that reconfigures elements in different forms of media. They are representations separate from their origin with their own identities and unique attributes.

An early instance of translation in architecture is the use of the Codex Escurialensis as a guide for the creation of the courtyard in La Calahorra. The Codex was taken from Rome by Don Rodrigo, to his home in Granada as a pattern book for the courtyard’s construction, allowing La Calahorra to act as a bridge between the Italian antiquity and Renaissance and the beginning of the Spanish Renaissance. The courtyard is an example of the abstraction that can occur during the transmission of knowledge obtained from a copy of handmade architectural drawings. The fate of the drawing, image or building cannot be anticipated; the translations are subject to the copyist.

We propose three new narratives, loosely based on historical fact, that work to bizarrely preserve and translate the ideas brought to the courtyard from Italy into new bodies.

1. Completing the whole
2. Projection/Mapping
3. Recombination of Scenes

Through the narratives, we position translations as a pivotal instrument to the design process and through the preservation of certain elements, new projects can surface.

Image Caption: Translations of the Salle Door Frame, La Calahorra.
Building Translations
Narratives on Bizarre Preservation

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Undergraduate
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I. Thesis Claim

In today’s globalized society, we’re confronted with a flood of images and data at a speed that strains our ability to fully process the information. This messy network often gives way to misreading’s and poor interpretations. In the architectural discipline, a suspension of critical disbelief is necessary to accommodate the lack of fidelity, clarity or resolution that exists in many of the documents we encounter.

We contend that there’s a productive tension between the object and its mediated representation and that the translations that occur between the two are embedded within the way that architects communicate with one another.

Robin Evans points to how the translation from drawings to buildings is not always exact, that “…things can get bent, broken or lost on the way.”

We do not see the process of translation as one of loss, but one that reconfigures elements in different forms of media. They are representations separate from their origin with their own identities and unique attributes.
**La Calahorra**

An early instance of this is the use of the Codex Escurialensis as a guide for the creation of the courtyard in La Calahorra. The codex was an important souvenir in the early 16th century, taken from Rome by Don Rodrigo, to his home in Granada as a memento of his trip to Italy. Used as a pattern book for the construction of the courtyard, the codex allowed the building to act as a bridge between the Italian antiquity and Renaissance and the beginning of the Spanish Renaissance. La Calahorra is an example of the abstraction that can occur during the transmission of knowledge obtained from a copy of handmade architectural drawings. The fate of the drawing, image or building cannot be anticipated; the translations are subject to the copyist.

*Fig. 1.1: Column Capitals. Codex Escurialensis (fol. 22).*
Narratives
We propose three new narratives, loosely based on historical fact, that work to bizarrely preserve and translate the ideas brought to the courtyard from Italy into new bodies.

1. Completing the whole: In 1505, the walls and ground floor had been built. The new composition represents a greater mixture of stone and motifs, speculating that if the Carrara marble shipped from Italy in the wrong amounts, a different second floor loggia would be imagined.

2. Projection/Mapping: From drawing to stone to new mediums, elements get translated and revealed in new perspectives. As the castle weathers decay, replacement and restoration of elements will be required using new methods of production.

3. Recombination of Scenes: In 1950, a wealthy businessman purchased the castle and relocated one of the doorways to his other residence. Elements are moved around and reconfigured in unintended ways to accommodate the change.

Through the narratives, we position translations as a pivotal instrument to the design process and through the preservation of certain elements, new projects can surface.
II. La Calahorra
A Brief History of La Calahorra

Don Rodrigo commissions Lorenzo Vázquez, a Spanish architect and builder, to design the renovation of the castle of La Calahorra in 1491 that he obtained two years prior for his successful conquests. The fortified castle was originally constructed and heavily used by the Moors. Don Rodrigo decides to travel in 1497 after the death of his wife, starting in Valencia and going to Naples, later visiting Rome, Milan and Genoa, from there to return to Spain.

On his travels, he encounters the Italian Renaissance and relishes in the art and architecture that were made in the Italian peninsula at the time. He sends word back to Spain in 1501 to slow construction on La Calahorra, for he had a new inspiration in mind for the residence in the Italian style. Don Rodrigo takes his second visit to Rome between 1506 and 1508 to obtain Papal approval of his second marriage and look for further references.

In Florence, Italy, Giuliano da San Gallo takes the Codex Escurialensis to Rome in 1508, only to be passed along the following year to Don Rodrigo or his cousin, Don Inico, for use at La Calahorra. Between the time that the slow work order was placed, and Michele de Carlone is hired to resume work on the residence, most of the first floor loggia is finished in local stone (grenadine) by Spanish craftsmen. Carlone places a request for Carrara marble to be sent from Italy to finish the doorways, columns, capitals, balusters and cornices for the loggia and staircase. The drawings from the Codex are used heavily as inspiration for architectural elements and motifs.
Model - Section of La Calahorra Courtyard

Model - Detail of Piano Nobile
Ground and First Floor
East Courtyard Elevation

Ground and First Floor
West Courtyard Elevation
Mapping the Codex Escurialensis

Don Rodrigo first Italian tour starts in 1497, leaving the port of Valencia, Spain and going to Naples, later visiting Rome, Milan and Genoa, from there to return to Spain. His second trip takes him to Rome between 1506 and 1508. During the same time period, Giuliano da San Gallo gathers together the Codex Escurialensis, a collection of sketches from Domenico Ghirlandaio’s workshop, and brings it Rome where it’s acquired by Don Rodrigo.

Once the patterns are selected, Italian marble is shipped to the site from Genoa under the instruction of the stone carver, Michele de Carlone.

Sections of the Pattern Book

The drawings from the Codex are used heavily as inspiration for architectural elements and motifs. The codex itself is comprised of three loosely organized sections:

- Section One (Folios 1 - 11): Makes up the smallest book, both in number and in page size (its sheets are uncropped in binding); these are not folded sheets, but separate leaves sewn together, whence the uneven number of folios.
- Section Two (folios 2-68) is cropped at its outer edges but is relatively complete.
- Section Three (folios 69-82): is clearly distinguished by the homogeneous character of its contents; it is made up of outline drawings, mostly plans of buildings.
La Calahorra
Valencia
Granada
Genoa
Milan
Rome
Napels
Spain
France
Italy
Mediterranean Sea
Codex Escurialensis (1509)
Carrara Marble (1509)
Don Rodrigo’s First Trip to Italy (1497)
Savona
Africa

Significant Routes
- Don Rodrigo (Patron)
- Juliano San Galo
- La Calahorra Supplies

- Ghirlandaio’s Workshop
- Juliano San Galo & Sienese Sketchbook
- Don Rodrigo & Castillo

Codex Escurialensis arrives in 1508
- Farnese Hercules visited by Don Rodrigo
- Receives order for stonework.
III. Strategies
Ground and Piano Nobile columns
Primary Piano Nobile Door frames
Secondary Door Frames
Window Variations
Projection/Mapping:
Column Capitals

Fig. 1.1-1.2: Column Capitals (fol. 22)

Fig. 2.4: Abundance (fol. 48v. 0).

Fig. 2.6 Hercules Farnese (fol. 37)

Fig. 2.1: A man on a panther (fol. 39v. 0).

Fig. 2.7 Apollo (fol. 64)

Fig. 2.0 Arch of Medinaceli, Spain.

Fig 2.2: Tritons and Nereids (fol. 15v. 0).

Fig 2.3: Warriors pillaging (fol. 15v. 0).

Fig. 3.1: Victoria of Trajan’s Column (fol. 31)

Fig. 3.3: Apollo of Belvedere (fol. 53)

Fig. 3.2: Aphrodite (fol. 54v. 0)

Fig. 3.4: Abundance (fol. 48v. 0)

Fig. 2.5 Unknown or Page Missing
Similar to a child circling their favorite toys in a toy catalogue for Christmas, in the Codex Escurialensis, a plus sign notated next to the drawing indicates an interest in using the motif in La Calahorra. These marks could of come from the client, Don Rodrigo, or the stone carver, Michele de Carlone.

Some, but not all, of the marked drawings exist in the present courtyard. This could indicate that a later decision was made to exclude them, or that they play a role in the inner doorways that are not currently documented.
Recombination of Scenes:
Honor Hall Door Frame
Fig. 2.1-2.8: Honor Hall Door Frame. La Calahorra, Spain. 1512.

The significant honor hall entry, located on the second floor of La Calahorra, is loosely based on the Roman triumphal arch of Medinaceli. The ABA proportions and three level design are used to compose selected sculptures. The niches, decorative frieze, and bas reliefs are filled with various motifs contained within the Codex Escurialensis.
Fig 2.1: A man on a panther. Codex Escurialensis (fol. 39v.).

Fig 2.2: Tritons and Nereids. Codex Escurialensis (fol. 15v.).

Fig 2.3: Warriors pillaging. Codex Escurialensis (fol. 55).

Fig. 2.1-2.8: Honor Hall Door Frame. La Calahorra, Spain.
Completing the Whole:
Honor Hall Door Frame

Fig. 1.1-1.2: Column Capitals (fol. 22)

Fig. 2.4: Abundance (fol. 48v. 0)

Fig. 2.6 Hercules Farnese (fol. 37v. 0)

Fig. 2.0 Arch of Medinaceli, Spain.

Fig. 2.2: Tritons and Nereids (fol. 15v. 0)

Fig. 2.3: Warriors pillaging (fol. 15v. 0)

Fig. 2.7 Apollo (fol. 64v. 0)

Fig. 2.1: A man on a panther (fol. 39v. 0)

Fig. 3.1: Victoria of Trajan's Column (fol. 31v. 0)

Fig. 3.3: Apollo of Belvedere (fol. 53v. 0)

Fig. 3.2: Aphrodite (fol. 54v. 0)

Fig. 3.4: Abundance (fol. 48v. 0)

Fig. 2.5 Unknown or Page Missing
Fig 2.4: Fortuna. Codex Escurialensis (fol. 48v).  

Fig 2.5: Unidentified / Lost  

Fig 2.6: Hercules Farnese Codex Escurialensis (fol. 37).  

Fig 2.7: Apollo Codex Escurialensis (fol. 64).  

Fig. 2.1-2.7: Honor Hall Door Frame. La Calahorra, Spain.
Fig. 2.4: Statue of Fortuna. Honor Hall Doorframe. La Calahorra, Spain.

Fig. 2.4: Fortuna. Codex Escurialensis (fol. 48v.).

Fig. 2.4: Fortuna. Rome, Italy. 1st or 2nd Century CE.
Fig. 2.6: Hercules Farnese.
La Calahorra, Spain.

Fig. 2.6: Hercules Farnese.
Codex Escurialensis (fol. 37).

Fig. 2.6: Hercules Farnese.
Rome, Italy.
Projection/Mapping:
Ground Floor Windows

Fig. 1.1-1.2: Column Capitals (fol. 22)
Fig. 2.0 Arch of Medinaceli, Spain.
Fig. 2.1: A man on a panther (fol. 39v. 0).
Fig. 2.2: Tritons and Nereids (fol. 15v. 0).
Fig. 2.3: Warriors pillaging (fol. 15v. 0).
Fig. 2.4: Abundance (fol. 48v. 0).
Fig. 2.5 Unknown or Page Missing
Fig. 2.6 Hercules Farnese (fol. 37)
Fig. 2.7 Apollo (fol. 64)
Fig. 3.1: Victoria of Trajan’s Column (fol. 31)
Fig. 3.2: Aphrodite (fol. 54v. 0)
Fig. 3.3: Apollo of Belvedere (fol. 55)
Fig. 3.4: Abundance (fol. 48v. 0)
These two significant windows flank the staircase on the first floor. Their balustrades echoes the larger one on the second floor that enircles the courtyard. On the left window, facing the staircase are carvings of Victoria of Trajan’s Column (fol. 31) and Aphrodite (fol. 54v.⁹). On the right window, facing the staircase are carvings of Apollo of Belvedere (fol. 53) and Abundance (fol. 48v.⁰).
Fig. 3.2: Aphrodite.
Codex Escurialensis (fol. 54v. 9).
Projection/Mapping:
Second Floor Doorways
Fig. 4.1: Candelieri. Codex Escurialensis (Fol. 19v.)

Fig. 4.1-4.2: Second Floor West Facade Doorway

Fig. 4.1-4.2: Second Floor South Facade Doorway
Fig. 4.2: Entablature (fol. 21.V.3)

Fig. 4.2: West Facade Doorway.

Fig. 4.2: South Facade Doorway.

Fig. 4.2: West Facade Doorway.
IV. Production: Techniques
1. Misreading the Courtyard
The set of renderings and models here explore the perception of depth, and the remapping of an image onto surfaces. They speak to some of the various misreadings of the project that can occur by only looking at images and elevations, such as imagining elements as much thicker than they actually are, or seeing first floor columns as projected forward while on the second floor, the columns are on the same plane as the back wall.
2. Translating the Salle Door Frame

In a similar light to how drawings were continuously traced, retraced, and updated with current artistic trends in the 14th and 15th century, this series focuses on how the door frame element might continued to be retranslated and understood through digital process. The original door frame, photographic in perspective, was warped and redrawn with lines. From there, 3d and 2d images and drawings were generated as an experiment to test how different elements fair in the relaxation of forms, loss of resolution, and translation into new physical forms.
3. Postcards from Places that Never Were
These postcards illustrate a fictional map of the use of La Calahorra’s courtyard elements across the world. It is an exercise that tells the story of a history that never was, but also a story of translation and copies, a phenomenon as common to the architectural discipline as the use doors, columns and windows.
door 1 postcard.psd

door 2 postcard.psd
4. Pattern Rearrangement

These renderings take the courtyard as base material that can be divided and intentionally recombined in a number of ways. This is in relationship to how pattern books were used at the time to create and recreate various building elements. Entablatures and motif could be applied to important domestic homes as well as religious and civic buildings.
V. Reference Material
Site Visit

Due to geographical constraints, our site visits consist of the following 90 photos found on amateur travel blogs, Google maps, Youtube video stills, and stock photo websites. References for plans and sections were found in 15 images taken from a variety of research journals and historical books.

These documents comprise all our visual knowledge of the project that we’ve never actually visited.
The Evolution of Souvenirs
Souvenirs play an important role in the ability to transmitting knowledge from one site, person, or point in time to another. Evans points to how the translation from drawings to buildings is not always exact - this is also true for souvenirs. The transition from project to souvenir does not always assume a one to one relationship; often the souvenir translates certain qualities while ignoring others. They are manufactured representations separate from their origin with their own identities and unique attributes. The first time the word souvenir was used was in the 18th century when Grand Tourists began to explore Europe. At that point, souvenirs were mainly for the aristocracy and took the form of artists’ models and paintings, but today they possess much less valuable forms, as symbols of a tourist culture that is “unable to engage with a moment or place.”
Original Souvenir

Collection of Individual objects Designed collectible series

Seeing the Original Debate Selection Return (Distancing) Displaying in the domestic home

Original Souvenir

Context Home

Plan Elevation Section Axon Perspective

Subject Reproduction

Scale Models 1:1 Mock-ups + Drawings Built Project Souvenirs

Product Source

Photographs Renovation Reconstruction
Flatness

Architecture is compressed into a single surface. The back is no longer relevant. Evaluational relationships take priority as one can only guess at the original plan. They offer a single angle, faking depth by painting shadows and employing visual projection tricks.

Flatness works to reduce the project to an icon that can be displayed on a variety of surfaces, losing its site to the background of whatever its “on”.
Fragmentation

The referential building is not viewed as a sacred composition, it's dissected and split up to the will of the souvenir. Concept is kicked to the curb as entablatures are broken to make the rim and base of the coffee mug. The building is hollowed out and windows plugged to act as a container for fluids deemed much more important than the original content. The number of floors are forgotten in the repetition.

If the viewer is unfamiliar of the built project, the fragment misguides and presents itself as absolute.
Definition

Architecture usually demands a one-to-one correspondence between the represented idea and the final building. Precision and control are king when it comes to assemblage and images.

Souvenirs oppose this notion by embracing the low definition, partly due to the tourist’s lack of interests in these matters and attributing the rest to the tools and materials that define the souvenir. Crisp edges, accurate proportions, and materiality are the first things to go. It’s only important that they are somewhat close...ish to what they are being compared to.
Utility

The image trumps its use. Souvenirs often subvert the functional qualities of an item. Plates, golf balls, and spoons are elevated as display. Their sentimental value makes them too prized to use in any traditional setting. Those that do encourage interaction do so as a representation not of the lived experience but the secondhand experience.

They articulate a tension between the exotic and ordinary... Between local culture and homogenized globalization.
(Faux) Materiality
Souvenirs transmit original materiality into textures and color. No longer made of the same “stuff”, the focus turns to the surface. They exaggerate seams, apertures, and primary elements over the flat wall, aiming for visual complexity or stark contrasts rather than accuracy. Visibility dominates precision. Bricks and rustication are forced into larger than life scales in order to be rendered in new materiality.

Souvenirs work to distill the most relevant qualities into visible artifacts.
Key Readings:

Carpo begins by introducing an important moment in the early 1500s - a shift from verbal descriptions to printed images which changed the whole process of architectural design. The spread of printed images generated a new visual environment and encouraged higher standards in the transmission of visual information. The sign of the print, rather than an artist’s signature, soon became the trademark of documentary trustworthiness. Handmade architectural drawings and drawings from the antique, as a result, were still valuable but not the best method for making a factual copy.


Eco works to define and provide examples for fakes and forgeries, noting how they were understood in the Middle Ages as well as contemporary society. The reading is split into the following topics: pseudo-doubles, false identifications and its categories, historical forgeries, the difficulties of authentication procedures, pseudo identifications, as well as historical truths and traditions.


Evans states that the translation of drawings to buildings is much like the translation of languages - it is meant to convey something without altering its original meaning, but it is often impossible to maintain this continuity, with things becoming bent, broken and lost along the way. Architects must suspend critical disbelief in order to preform their task, as it is impossible to avoid elements getting lost in translation.
There are two possibilities for translation, according to Evans: the redefinition of architecture in favor of creating consumable art that stands separate from the original, or the use of the transitive, communicative qualities of the drawing to better it or emphasize certain aspects.


Jacob writes about his encounter with Madelon Vriesendorp, who’s better known for cover of Delirious New York, and her collection of familiar objects. While belittling souvenirs as “the pathetic symbols of tourist culture, exposing a total inability to engage with a moment or place,” he also admires their ability to be much more than representations of the past. Coming from a history of the Grand Tour, They are both document and proposal, for they do not always have to be faithful to the thing they represent and can propose alternative futures.

Additional Readings:


Projects: