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# The Architect's Hand: Making Tropes and Their Afterlife

## Alina Payne

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<sup>1</sup> I refer to Howard Sutcliffe of the Canadian firm of Shim Sutcliffe Architects (Toronto).

An architect friend of mine in Canada includes something made by his own hands in every building he builds. <sup>1</sup> I have always found this a singular desire, habituated as we all are to see the architect distant — above or at least at a remove — from the object being built. And yet I wondered whether we — as architects, as writers about architecture, as users — have not sublimated something that perhaps exists there, deep in the bowels of this paradoxical art — paradoxical because it is an art “in translation,” where each stage (from drawing to model to construction) translates across materials, across ways of making, and across the many players who collectively are involved in this making. In short, what the architect “makes” is never what we see as architecture. Perhaps then to go right back to origins — to the first definitions of architecture — may be a promising way to find out if and when the question of the architect’s manual involvement emerged, was attended to, and (it would seem) disappeared.

<sup>1</sup> Origin myths have always been seen to have a didactic meaning and indeed a didactic intent: those with a negative slant admonishing against (fatal) faults and those with a positive one recommending the appropriate paths to take. There are origin myths for all the arts, but for architecture these have been particularly potent, especially at a didactic rather than poetic or purely philosophical level. For an art with no external referent to be evaluated against (not being mimetic), the mythical origins of architecture acted as the ultimate and necessary means of validation for later shifts in definitions and inventions. As a result, and uniquely perhaps, architecture’s myths and its history are deeply imbricated. And it is this didactic and normative aspect of architectural origin myths that makes them an appropriate starting point for reflection on the changing definition of the architect on the anniversary occasion of a major architectural academic institution.

Of course, myths have many layers, their compactness belying their complexity, and volumes can and have been written about them. Here, however, I would like to concentrate only on one particular aspect to the degree that I can disentangle it from intersecting themes: Who/what is the architect (rather than what is architecture)? And what are his skills? This may seem an obvious way of getting at the issue of architecture as artifact and the architect as potential artisan, yet in fact architecture myths that focus on making are not plentiful, and one must dig deep and read between the lines. Surprisingly, the same is

true of the other visual arts. Given, then, that this issue has been pushed to the margins, across the board it might be useful to examine first how myths about the visual arts in general compare, and how, as a group, they illuminate definitions of practice – both historically and now.

**2** The primary ancient myth for the origin of painting is retold by Pliny the Elder: Kora, a young Greek woman from Corinth, drew the profile of her lover (a shadow against the cave wall) who was about to go away (or to war, depending on the version). <sup>2</sup>/fig.1 As such, this first man-made image was a keepsake, a gesture of love and memory (the remembrance of a loved face). Nature is its principal object, since it is an attempt to copy a real figure, yet by virtue of it being the outline of a shadow, it is an abstraction at the same time. Interestingly, this story is also that of the birth of



sculpture, since the girl's father, Butades of Sicyon (an artisan who made clay roof tiles), eventually models a relief in clay from this outline, which later leads him to ornament the ends of roof tiles with human faces, an invention that thus heralds the birth of figural sculpture. The vexed relationship and competition between relief, painting, and sculpture in the round – causing sometimes acrimonious debates at the very least since the Renaissance if not before – may then also have an origin here. <sup>3</sup> The other, equally powerful, origin myth for painting is the story of Narcissus. Taken up from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* by Leon Battista Alberti in his *Della pittura* (1435), it became a frequent topos and reference point for painters from the Renaissance onward, even though no actual painting takes place in the story. Narcissus (son of a nymph and a river god) falls in love with his own image reflected in a pool and drowns seeking to embrace it. Like the story of Kora, this, too, associates love with the invention of picture-as-imitation, though in this case it is self-love (which leads to death). <sup>4</sup> Reflection on the craft aspect of the art does not figure in either story.

A second group of origin stories for painting that relate to specific artists' biographies come closer to dealing with the physical making of pictures. A leading story is that of the ancient Greek painter Zeuxis, likewise retold by Pliny and many times illustrated

<sup>2</sup> "It was through his daughter that he [Butades of Sicyon] made the discovery; who, being deeply in love with a young man about to depart on a long journey, traced the profile of his face, as thrown upon the wall by the light of the lamp [umbram ex facie eius ad lucernam in pariete lineis circumscriptis]." Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Loeb Classical Library 394, vol. 9 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952), book 35, ch. 15.

fig.1 Jean-Baptiste Regnault, *L'Origine de la peinture*, 1786.

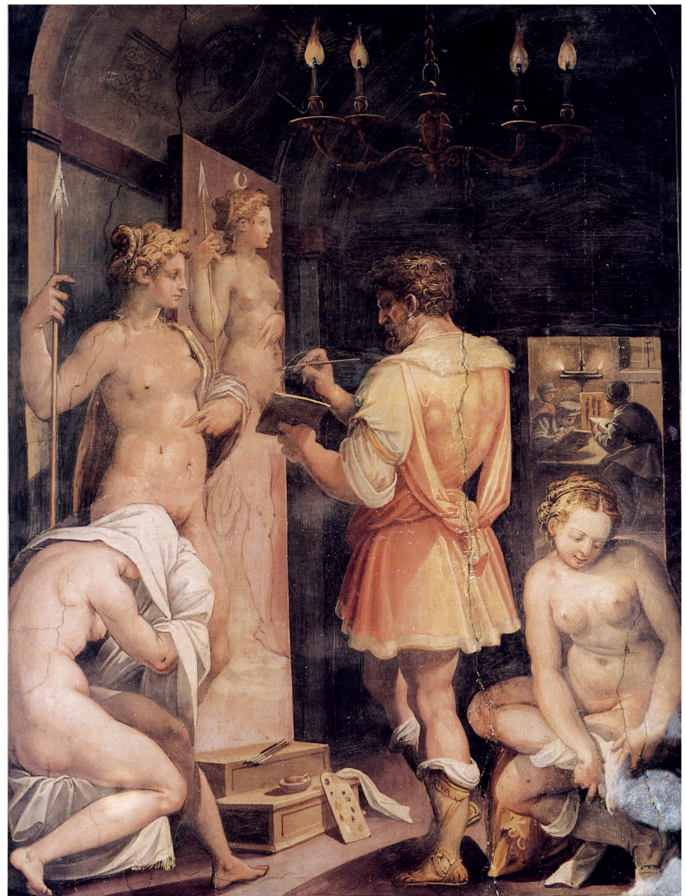
<sup>3</sup> For a history and its modern consequences, see Alina Payne, "On Sculptural Relief: *Malerisch*, the Autonomy of Artistic Media and the Beginnings of Baroque Studies," in *Reframing the Baroque*, ed. Helen Hills (London: Ashgate Press, 2011), 39–64.

<sup>4</sup> For two seminal reflections on the invention of painting and the associations to love, death, and mourning, see Jacques Derrida, "By Force of Mourning," trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 2 (1996): pp. 171–92, in turn responding to Louis Marin, *Des Pouvoirs de l'image: Gloses, L'Ordre philosophique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993).

**fig.2** Giorgio Vasari, *Storie di Zeusi* (detail), Casa Vasari, Florence, ca. 1570.

**5** Pliny, *Natural History* (see note 2), book 35.

by artists (e.g., the rendition Giorgio Vasari painted in his own house in Florence). <sup>5</sup>/fig.2 This is not quite an origin myth, though it was made to fill that role by Pliny's Renaissance readers; instead, it is about artistic behavior, about how painting is done (or practiced). Zeuxis, so the story goes, is invited to paint a Venus by the citizens of Croton and unable to find a perfect model, he asks to behold several young beauties so as to select their best features and thus obtain that elusive perfect body. Only laterally about painting as craft, the story (much commented on from Cicero to Erwin Panofsky) was generally seen as a statement on the fundamental relationship between art and nature: Does it look to



*natura naturata* or to *natura naturans*? <sup>6</sup>

**6** Ibid. For a review of the story and its changes along the centuries, see Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968).

However, not all origin myths are ancient. A more recent origin-of-painting as origin-of-artist story, this time narrated by Giorgio Vasari in his *Vite* of 1550, is also biographical and concerns Cimabue's "discovery" of Giotto. <sup>7</sup>fig.3 This is not an origin myth as such, but like the story of Zeuxis and the Crotonian maidens it became equally potent as an "origin of artists" story or anecdote. As Vasari recounts, Giotto is discovered as a young shepherd tending his flock and scratching images in the sand. Struck by his talent, the older and established painter Cimabue, who accidentally passes by, takes him on as apprentice, and in time, Giotto confirms Cimabue's intuition and becomes the watershed artist for the Renaissance. <sup>7</sup> There are many intersecting themes here, though only one pertains directly to practice. As Marc Gotlieb has shown, what is at stake is not only the discovery and the artist's relationship to nature, but also "the scene of instruction" — the relative roles of the nature-boy (not to say savage artist) and his teacher — that is, where and how art is taught (if at all). Is Giotto a self-taught prodigy of nature who breaks with tradition precisely for this reason, or does he need a teacher (and a workshop) all the same? <sup>8</sup> In fact this anecdote is itself a

**7** Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani: da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri* (Florence: Lorenzo Torrentino, 1550).

**8** Marc Gotlieb, "The Scene of Instruction," in *The Italian Renaissance in the 19th Century: Revision, Revival, and Return*, eds. Lina Bolzoni and Alina Payne (Florence: Officina Libraria; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018), 189–212.

trope since it rehearses the ancient story of the sculptor Lysippus from Pliny the Elder, which in its turn depends on an even earlier story, also about Lysippus, told by Duris of Samos. At Vasari's hands, however, this becomes "the Giotto story" and thereafter recurs as "biographical padding" (as Kris and Kurz call it) in many other biographies. 9

Clearly there is a core message to these myths and anecdotes: of love that calls forth art-making in imitation of nature (as likeness of the beloved); of the childhood miracle (needing no schooling since the child is already close to nature) and of the accidental discovery of the prodigy; finally, it is also about the relationship to a master, for in many of these stories the ultimate object is to genealogize. So much for painting.

A number of origin myths are also associated with sculpture, in addition to that of Butades of Sicyon. Surprisingly, the craft aspect of the art is marginal here too. As was the case with painting (and architecture, as we will see), accident plays a role here as well: as Leon Battista Alberti recounts in his *De statua* (1462), a rough piece of wood or a clod of clay set off the artistic act/imagination such that the first sculptor only enhances what is already there. 10 In a way this is a pendant to an ancient anecdote about painting: in a Jackson Pollock-like story *avant la lettre*, the Greek painter Protogenes, so Pliny recounts, is inspired by the stain left by a wet sponge he throws against the wall. The story evidently hit a nerve as there is also a later, Renaissance version of this anecdote/myth involving Leonardo and the inspirational effects of cloud formations upon his painting.

To be sure, the most famous sculpture myth remains that of Pygmalion and Galatea (of the sculptor who falls in love with his own creation), which was popularized by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* just like the story of Narcissus. Not strictly an origin myth, this story nevertheless condenses thought about lifelikeness, making art as love, and the liminality between nature and art—a recurring theme in many stories. Finally, a much later though popular vignette that exploits the childhood and body connection between art and artist and hints at the origins of manual practice—perhaps a sculpture pendant to the Giotto story—is included in the life of Michelangelo. As we are

9 Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 30.

10 Leon Battista Alberti, *De statua*, ed. Marco Collareta (Livorno: Sillabe, 1998), 5.



fig. 3 Léon Bonnat, *Giotto gardant les chèvres*, 1850.

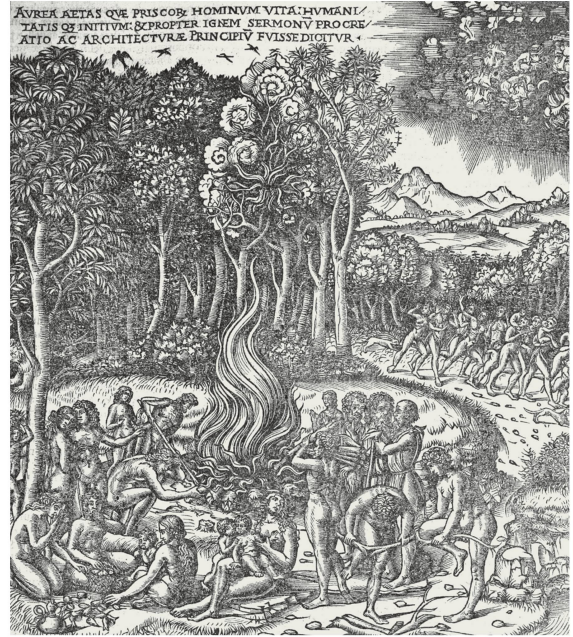
included in the life of Michelangelo. As we are

told by his biographers Ascanio Condivi and Vasari, Michelangelo absorbed the marble-carving talent through the milk of his wet nurse, the wife of a stone carver from Settignano (a major quarrying center on the outskirts of Florence). <sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ascanio Condivi, *Vita di Michelangelo Buonarroti* (Rome: Antonio Blado, 1553).

**3** Unlike the origin stories for the figural arts, which tend to revolve around a real or mythical figure, architecture's myths fall into two distinct categories: those with architects and those without (i.e., myths with and without a protagonist). The myths *without architects* are more primordial: they are about the invention of shelter, of building, and only subsequently of a "learned" (intellected), deliberate architecture, in that order. One of the most important such myths — much rehearsed by the reception — is the invention of building as recounted by Vitruvius in *De architectura*. <sup>fig.4</sup> In his account, the invention of man-made shelter (rather than ready-made caves) is occasioned by the accidental discovery of fire, which sets off a chain reaction: as a result of congregating around the fire, man begins to speak; this leads to sociability and, as a consequence, also to the production of things (man's hands and fingers being flexible and able to manipulate materials), and eventually also to ingenuity and invention. "Hence" — Vitruvius concludes — "after thus meeting together, they began, some to make shelters of leaves, some to dig caves under the hills, some to make of mud and wattles places for shelter, imitating the nests of swallows and their methods of building. Then observing the houses of others and adding to their ideas new things from day to day, they produced better kinds of huts." <sup>12</sup>

**fig.4** Cesare Caesariano, illustration for Vitruvius' *De architectura*, 1521.



<sup>12</sup> Marcus Pollio Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, Loeb Classical Library 251, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931), book II, ch. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Marc Antoine Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture* (Paris: Duchesne, 1753). For the popularity and afterlife of the story, see Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (New York: MoMA, 1972).

Of this story of first principles, its best-known avatar and most often repeated version was that of the primitive hut by Marc Antoine Laugier prominently displayed on the frontispiece of his *Essai sur l'architecture* (1753). <sup>13/fig.5</sup> Its tremendous power, however, lay in the sleight of hand that collapsed two myths into one: the origin of building and the origin of architecture. For Vitruvius, these were two separate moments, and even occurred in different parts of the text. In his account, architecture (rather than shelter/building) comes into being when number, order, and form are added to raw matter. Instead, for Laugier, raw matter

already anticipates architecture (the primitive hut anticipates the temple format), somewhat in the manner of the sculpture origin story in which the piece of wood or clod of earth already contained the seeds of the image for the sculptor.

Collective invention also extends to “learned” architecture, not only to basic shelter. There, too, chance plays a determining role. Thus, in Book IV Vitruvius turns to the origin of the columnar orders: “For in Achaëa and over the whole Peloponnese, Dorus, the son of Hellen and the nymph Phthia was king; by *chance* he built a temple in this style [*genera*] at the old city of Argos, in the sanctuary of Juno.”<sup>14</sup> Thereafter, he continues, the people and their “genera” move to Asia Minor, where the original form is developed into the mature Doric by an anonymous “them” and “they,” with no specific person/architect attached to it. The Ionic order is likewise invented by an anonymous and collective “they.” As such, the origin of the orders, the architectural device that *orders* basic building and turns it into architecture (through both number and form), is semi-mythical: the orders come into being through the agency of the offspring of gods and anonymous groups of people, by chance, accidentally—created in “*illo tempore*,” to use Mircea Eliade’s resonant term.<sup>15</sup>

There are few myths with named architects. Perhaps the oldest is that of Daedalus, though his is less a story of the invention of architecture as such (he builds a labyrinth for the Minotaur) than more generally of the dangers of invention if it challenges the order of things (the wings he makes to escape imprisonment by flying collapse and cause his son Icarus’s death).<sup>16</sup> The story of Dinocrates of Rhodes, who becomes Alexander’s architect, appears to be a Lysippus type of myth, an example of an accidental meeting and an artist’s rise out of anonymity. Yet, although

the trope of the accidental encounter and the genius plucked from the crowd seems to be shared with painting and sculpture, in fact Dinocrates is not chosen for being an artist prodigy but for standing out, for his appearance and his boldness. Closer to a bona fide myth of architecture with an archi-

<sup>14</sup> Vitruvius, *On Architecture* (see note 12), book 4, ch. 5. My emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Le Mythe de l'éternel retour: Archétypes et répétition* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).

<sup>16</sup> On this myth and links between architectural myths and classical philosophy, see Indra Kagis McEwen, *Socrates' Ancestor: An Essay on Architectural Beginnings* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993).

fig. 5 Marc-Antoine Laugier, frontispiece and title page to *Essai sur l'architecture*, 1755.

<sup>17</sup> On this myth, see Alina Payne, “Living Stones, Crying Walls: The Dangers of Enlivenment in Architecture from Renaissance *putti* to Warburg’s *Nachleben*,” in *The Secret Lives of Artworks: Exploring the Boundaries between Art and Life*, eds. Caroline van Eck, Joris van Gastel, and Elsje van Kessel (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2013), 301–39.



tect as its main protagonist is a Romanian legend, versions of which are found throughout the Balkans, the Middle East, and Central Asian regions as far as Inner Mongolia.<sup>17</sup> The richest

and most famous of Romanian monastery churches endowed by the then reigning prince Negru Vodă was built in the first quarter of the sixteenth century (1512–1517) by a Master Manole. <sup>fig.6</sup> As he and his workmen were building the church, so the story goes, it collapsed time and again such they began to despair and pray, and in response to these prayers Manole had a vision: God advised him to immure the first woman to arrive at the site that day, that is, to build her into the church wall. Only thus would the building stand. Knowing that his beautiful and much beloved wife was about to arrive carrying his meal, Manole prayed that she would not reach the building site – but whatever came in her way, she triumphed over it and driven by her love for her husband she overcame all obstacles, thus walking to her death. The sacrifice worked, and the more beautiful the part of her immured body, the more beautiful also that part of the wall.

A similar sacrificial element is embedded in the birth moment of the Corinthian order as recounted by Vitruvius – probably also the survival of a Greek myth like so much else in his work. <sup>fig.7</sup> The maiden dead in the flower of her youth, on whose tomb an acanthus grew entwined around the offering basket that con-

**fig.6** Curtea de Argeș Cathedral, Romania, 1512–1517.

**18** Vitruvius, *On Architecture* (see note 12), book 4, ch. 1.

tained her possessions, is the agent that sparks the imagination of the sculptor Callimachus and allows him to bring a new architectural order into being. <sup>18</sup> This story is not that distant from Manole's, for though there is no actual sacrifice on Callimachus's part, the architecture that emerges is nevertheless conditioned by a death and transformation into stone, and once again a woman is the "ritual" victim. Indeed, in the mid-fifteenth-century the architect Francesco di Giorgio shows an immured maiden animating the column, literally encased in it, enlivening it with her grace and spirit. The myth of the caryatids condemned to remain in their prisoner status for eternity holding up the superstructure of the temple is one other instance of an equally terminal and dangerous cross-over between body and (beautiful) architecture. <sup>19</sup>



**19** *Ibid.*, book 4, ch. 8.

**fig.7** Roland Fréart de Chambray, *Callimachus inventing the Corinthian order*, 1650.

Biographies of real-life rather than mythical architects are present as well, though they are more recent. Neither Pliny-like in style, nor theory commonplaces, as was the case with Giotto's, over time they nevertheless acquired some level of normative power. Condensing evaluations with didactic intent into pithy anecdotes (unlike the biographies of the figural artists), Vasari's



20 Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Howard Crane and Esra Akin, eds., *Sinan's Autobiographies: Five Sixteenth-Century Texts*, Muqarnas, Supplements 11 (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2006).

architect biographies — the lives of Baccio d'Agnolo, Giuliano da Sangallo and Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, Donato Bramante, Baldassare Peruzzi, and so on — thus functioned as reference points if not as bona fide myths. The same is true of some coming from outside of the European corpus of stories, such as the lyrical autobiography of Sinan, the great architect of Suleiman the Magnificent. 20 To be sure, starting in the Renaissance, Vitruvius became something of a myth himself, initiating the modern phenomenon of the “writing architect” that ultimately became that of the *architecte philosophe*. And it is here, in these biographies, that we might expect more answers to the question of architectural craft. Where does the origin of architectural knowledge lie? How is it transmitted?

Like the biographies of painters, these questions, too, bear on the education of the architect: with or without a master? Even if the relationship between Giotto and Cimabue elicits interpretation, the former is nevertheless an apprentice in the master's workshop. With the architects — and I emphasize that this applies even to the “pure” architects, those few who did not practice other visual arts — there was no passing of a baton, no master/student relationship. Each one was an autodidact of sorts, starting with the inimitable Filippo Brunelleschi, whose career began as a goldsmith. If anything, in Vasari's biographies most architects start with knowledge of other crafts (carpentry, woodcarving, metalworking, perspective construction, sometimes sculpture, sometimes painting), and it is only by absorbing what each has to offer that they finally synthesize the knowledge and become architects. Indeed, it would seem that much of becoming an architect has to do with learning manual crafts, the operation of instruments, and the nature of materials. The same is true of Sinan's rise to the top of his profession — from carpenter to ship builder and janissary (hence acquiring military knowledge), and finally to architect. 21 But most important, what becomes clear is that, unlike the other arts, architecture is not about spontaneous prodigy or genius. Architecture is the *archae*, the coming together of all the arts. And this is the origin and myth of architecture to which all biographies ultimately refer.

We have been following two types of architecture myths: of the art and of its practice through the artist (whether real or mythical). Some (the oldest) are about the relationship between architecture and nature, which is much more problematic than in the case of painting: architecture displaces (or interferes with) nature, so it must make its peace with it. One way of achieving this reconciliation is by following nature's laws, building “with” nature — and this the community does (the Dorians and Ionians),

21 Crane and Akin, *Sinan's Autobiographies* (see note 20).

rather than any single architect; the other way is expiatory (for having interfered with nature), hence the sacrificial component of some myths (e.g., of Manole).

Ultimately what all these myths are about is *agency*. Where does it lie? With the architect or with external circumstances? It would seem that in all instances the human (artist's) body comes into play and is the site of agency: either it must mitigate for the interruption of nature (with loss of life and redemption, as per the myths), or (as in the biographies of real architects) it is a knowing body that has accumulated and assimilated — metabolized — physical experience, knowledge of craft, of making. In Vitruvius's words, "When, however, by daily work men had rendered their hands more hardened for building, and by practicing their clever talents they had *by habit* acquired craftsmanship ... *then from the construction of buildings they progressed by degrees to other crafts and disciplines, and they led the way from a savage and rustic life to a peaceful civilization.*" <sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Vitruvius, *On Architecture* (see note 12), book 2, ch. 1. My emphasis.

**4** In the face of these thin references to making in myths and other stories, it seems legitimate to ask: Having metabolized knowledge of various types and contemplated if not actually experienced the deep tie between building and body through bodily sacrifice, is the architect a maker, is s/he a craftsman as well as an intellectual? Does s/he need to be both in order to be a good architect? In *De architectura*, Vitruvius seems to separate (or



**fig. 8** Office for Metropolitan Architecture, China Central Television Headquarters, 2002–2012.

connect) the two activities when he distinguishes between *fabrica* and *ratiocinatio*: "Opera ea nascitur et fabrica et ratiocinatione." <sup>23</sup> But this is not so much an origin myth as an Aristotelian moment in Vitruvius's effort to systematize architectural knowledge. More

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, book 1, ch. 1.

in keeping with a transmitted myth is his origin of shelter story, where building is the ur-instinct, and from there come all the crafts. Elsewhere, in the other myths, the architect is in fact a craftsman (witness Manole and Callimachus) as is Daedalus, the paradigmatic Bronze Age architect after whom Manole's figure is certainly modeled: credited with the Cretan labyrinth and a temple to Apollo in Sicily, his name actually means "finely crafted objects" (*daidala*) in Homer's Greek, thus suggesting an artisan working in bronze, on armor, vessels, buckles, and so on.

Yet, despite these occasional appearances, crafting as such is not generally foregrounded in architecture's origin stories. And the biographies of Renaissance architects, for all their references to deep knowledge, contribute to this erasure of making. Despite the fact that most architects were also artisans and artists, and that quite often architecture and sculpture merged to the point of being indistinguishable, little is said about the architect's physical agency – the architect's hand – even by Vasari, who records the many crafts architects must master. <sup>24</sup> Was the architect's hand, and therefore his body, not seen to be implicated at some level at least? Danger certainly threatened it: falling, breaking bones, heavy equipment or stones collapsing and crushing him... <sup>25</sup> But what about the body's positive contribution? On the whole, the corpus of stories – and the historiography – have avoided these and all episodes of making. And since architectural history started in earnest in the later nineteenth century, it inevitably told it with a modern bias. Despite a brief moment of concentration on crafting in the second half of the nineteenth century – a direct result of anxieties about manufacturing occasioned by the Industrial Revolution, and which included participants like Gottfried Semper, who claimed textile weaving was the ur-craft of architecture – the theoretical thinking on this topic has been marginal if present at all. <sup>26</sup>

Today, making may seem the last trope to consider. And if Rem Koolhaas is right and contemporary architecture – the post-architecture, post-theory condition – is about “bigness,” the gigantic, and the overscale, rhetorically exaggerated to make the point, then craft and the hand have nothing to do with it anymore. **fig.8** Koolhaas's architectural models might suggest otherwise, but this apparent miniaturizing has the same effect: it suggests a gigantic (planetary?) perspective from which these enormous elements of the city actually look tiny. **fig.9** Exaggerated smallness suggests exaggerated bigness. Likewise, in drawing, since AutoCAD has taken over and the keyboard has eliminated the pencil, the gesture and the choreography of the hand on paper have also disappeared. Is drawing also obsolete? Not only the body's agency in tracing lines but also the sketch itself, with its unfinished and highly suggestive quality, is a thing of the past: the computer can model everything and anything in space and gives it a deceptively finished and complete look. The hand has disappeared, so has the body, and what belonged to the body – love and sacrifice. Where is the prodigy,

**24** For a discussion of this trope and its absence, see Alina Payne, *L'Architecture parmi les arts: Matérialité, transferts et travail artistique dans l'Italie de la Renaissance* (Paris: Hazan/Louvre Éditions, 2016), ch. 3.

**25** There are many stories of architects – Antonio Gaudi, Carlo Scarpa, and others – dying in the exercise of their work, just as there are many stories of workmen dying during construction from the days of Brunelleschi's dome to the 1960s Autostrada del Sole, for whose “fallen” the church of San Giovanni Battista “Chiesa dell'Autostrada” was built by architect Giovanni Michelucci (1960–1964).

**26** On this as it pertains to architecture and the rise of modernism, see Alina Payne, *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

**fig.9** Office for Metropolitan Architecture, model of Les Halles project, 2003.



and where lies the talent? What happened with the myths? Are they still informing architecture and architects as they did for millennia, or are we “post-myth” as well?

And yet. Renzo Piano, for example, still holds that things need to be understood through making before they are exploded in scale. In his office all details are made of wood, studied, turned, made physically available before they are translated into final destinations of scale and materials. His studio is a model-maker's shop. <sup>fig.10</sup> Clearly, this approach connects to his deep history with boat making, the personal history of a genuine Genoese. And he



**fig.10** Model-making workshop, office of Renzo Piano Architects, Genoa, 2017.

is certainly not alone. Over the *longue durée* many architects produced full-scale details of buildings to assess their assemblage and appearance. But in the context of bigness as contemporary paradigm and commentary on where architecture is headed, is Piano's approach now an anachronism? Or is nevertheless something left between bigness and the human hand? Might there still be a space where one can think about this? The hand develops the thought as *embodied* knowledge, as *techne*, and the knowledge of the draftsman, like that of the

craftsman, is mediated by the hand. Instead, with computer-aided design and in industry, the *techne* is not that of the creator; it comes out of calculations and other intellected operations and is no longer a function of the body performing movements at the intersection with thought.

Are we then facing a loss? And, if so, what are its consequences? Does my architect friend's deep visceral desire to make something by his own hand in every building he designs manifest this loss and some deep condition of architecture that neither old nor new myths voice? Is there a place left for the architect's hand today? Modernism is said to have embraced and proselytized the chasm between the artisan and the machine that the Industrial Revolution permitted. Perhaps looking at the Bauhaus — a classic, by now almost mythical site where this parting of the ways was consecrated — is a way to think again about education on this occasion of the gta's anniversary. <sup>fig.11</sup> The well-known recruitment brochure with the hand calling young people

**fig. 11** Hannes Meyer,  
*junge menschen kommt  
ans bauhaus!*, 1929.



to the Bauhaus recalls many things, among them Adam's hand by Michelangelo on the Sistine ceiling and even Lord Kitchener's hand calling young men to join the army in the First World War. But, more important, to me it recalls the examples of Giotto's "site of instruction," for the Bauhaus was also a "site of instruction." Perhaps even at the very heart of modernism, with its claims to have effected a *tabula rasa* and embraced industry, the hand was nevertheless central and meant to be involved — a hand that was led, and taught, but was present.