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STAR PLAZA

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The Book: About Concepts

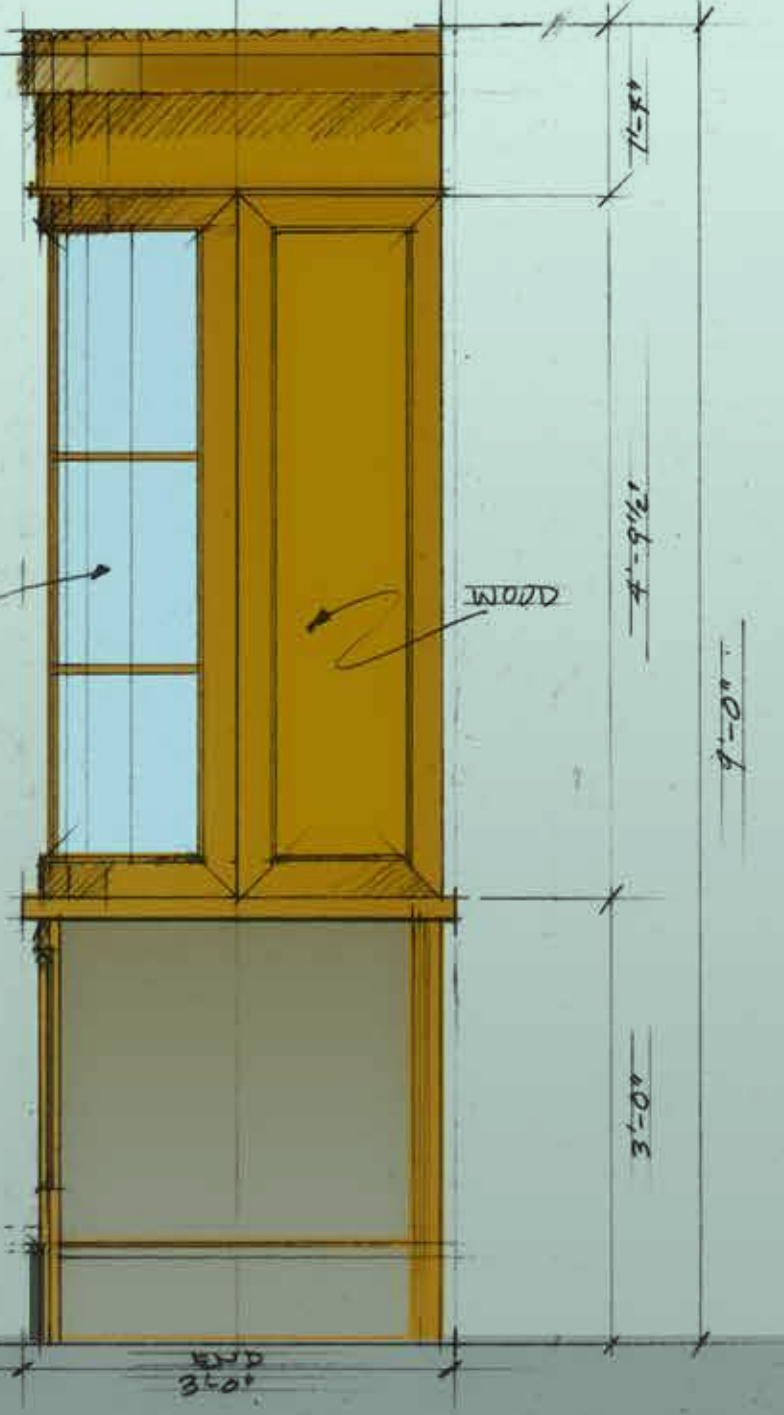
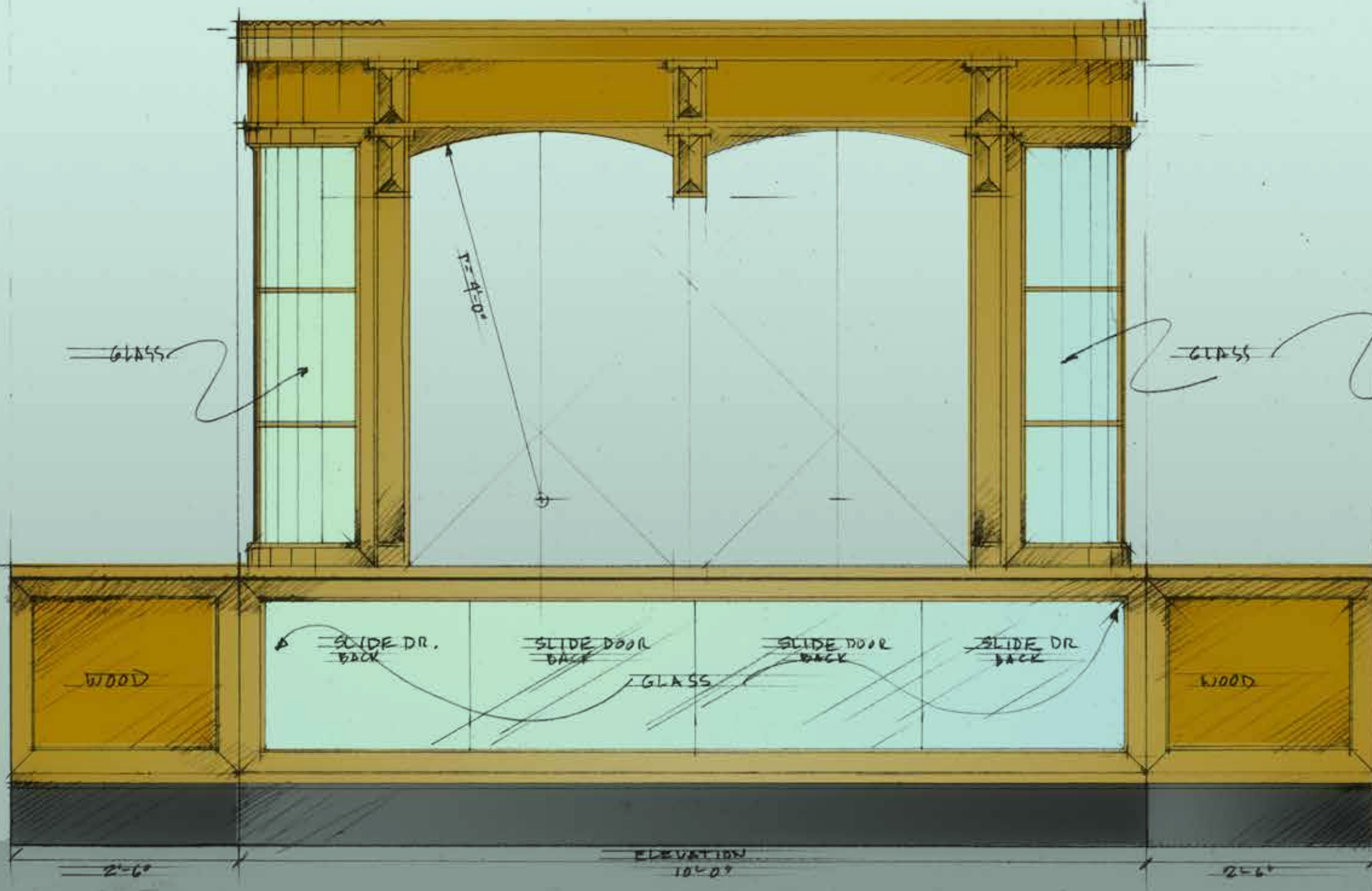
There are certain things that cannot be changed, therefore, one should attack the movable items only. Of the items which can be affected, there are very few which will affect one's work. Where should I start?

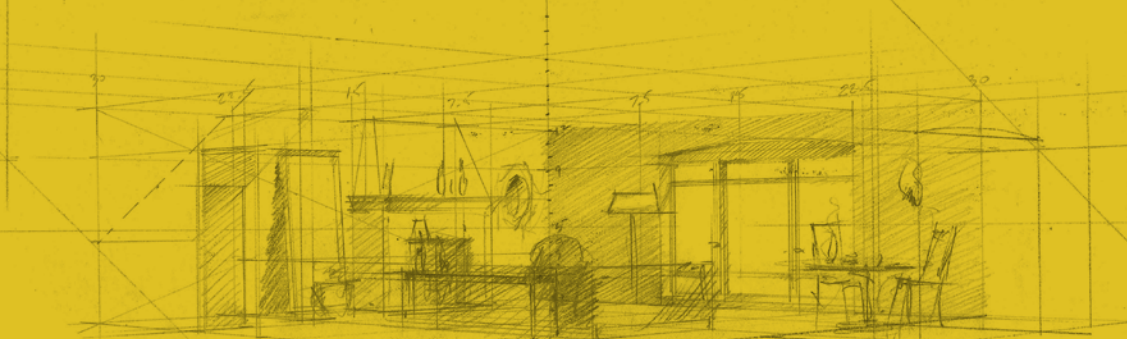
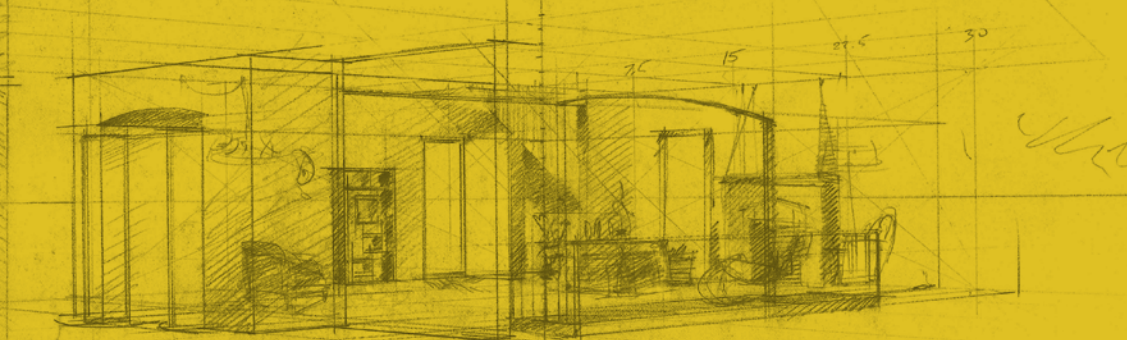
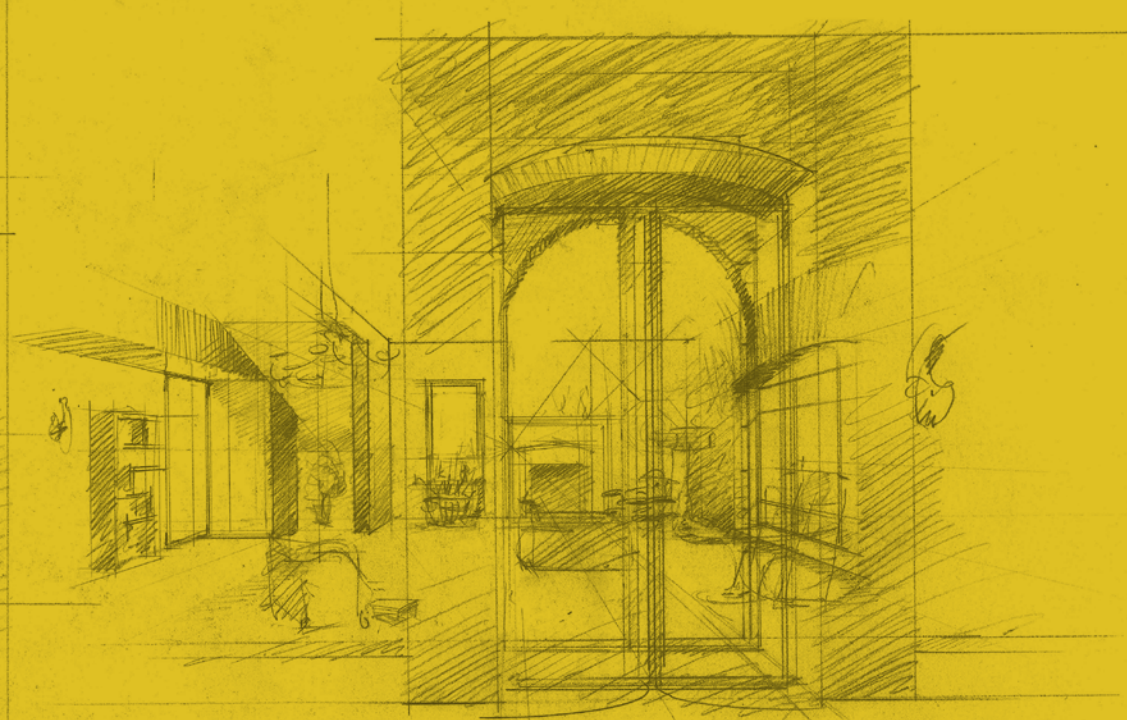
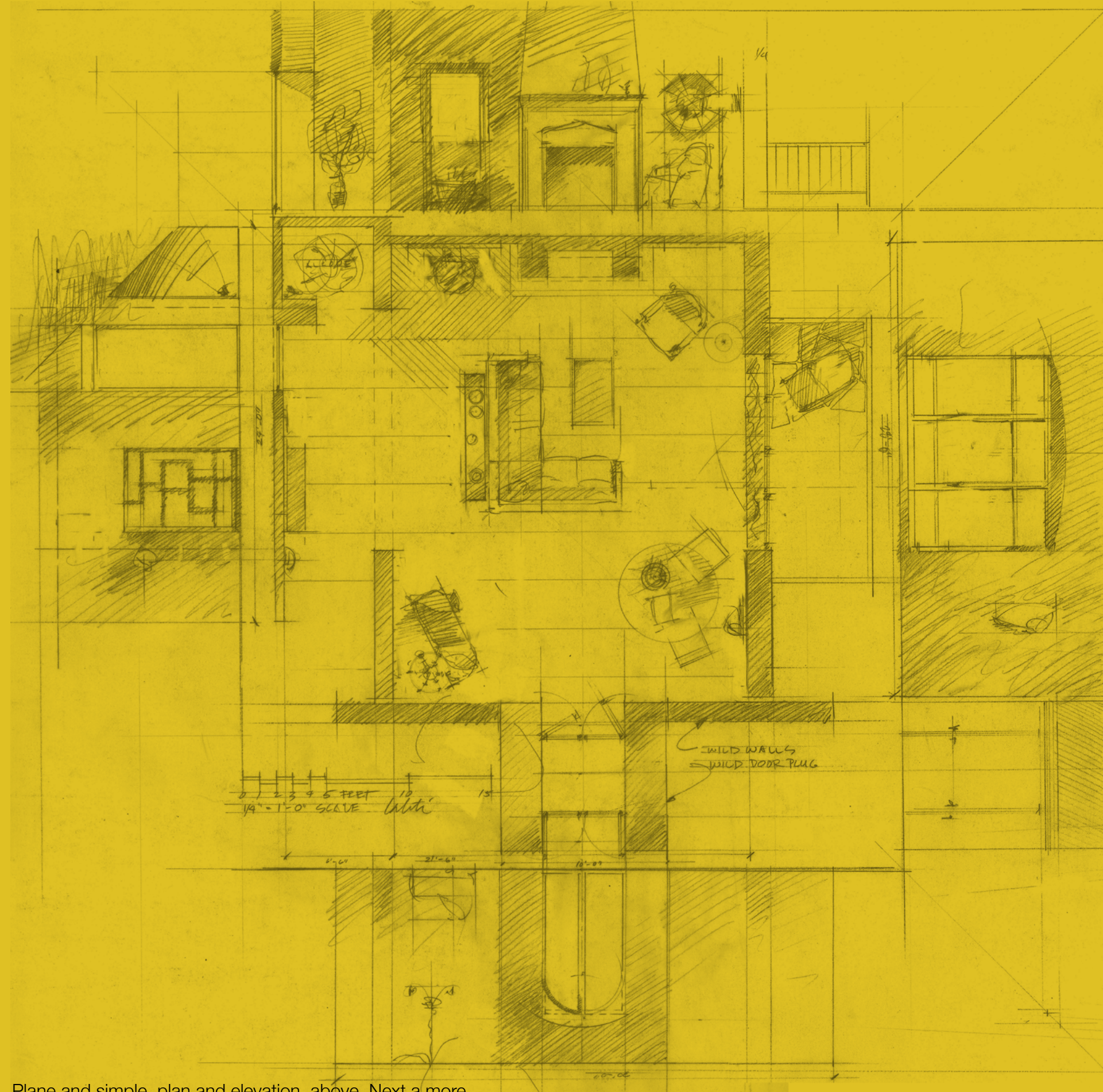
The easiest is to change a physical thing, make it into another. A new item has to have a concept that will resonate and that realization in form will be challenging. Anything can be built, but a concept cannot generate itself, the mind has to enjoy it first. The hardest is to change a concept, because that is how we stay the same, the protection of self. This is a small question, which I noticed in a dream: How can there be a surprise in any dream, the mind is going forward, how can it surprise itself? When I count backward, I pre-think the next number before getting there, therefore, how come the mind doesn't pre-cog the surprise? Is that the same with new concepts, the mind can surprise us? Maybe this is a new idea in itself and should be developed?

Given that a new art project develops, how is it distributed. Maybe that is premature, one shouldn't design for production and distribution, only for self. I'll try that! What do I do? Do best? What do I want? To Do? Where is my mind? How can I access it? Is that the route? Under which synapse is it hiding? An easier way: write something, then illustrate or sculpt the process and the product. Create words to develop the physical.

The problem is now started: where to go next? Perhaps I should consider a riddle, and enigma, something which has the potential of a solution, but has no one answer. Not a treasure hunt, but one that exists in the viewer's mind alone. The next step is through the art itself, like a self referential drawing by Vignola:

SCALE: 3/4" = 1'-0" @ 300 DPI LAHTI DESIGN.COM 310.749.0031 09.10.09 PLAN-ELEVATION 15 FEET

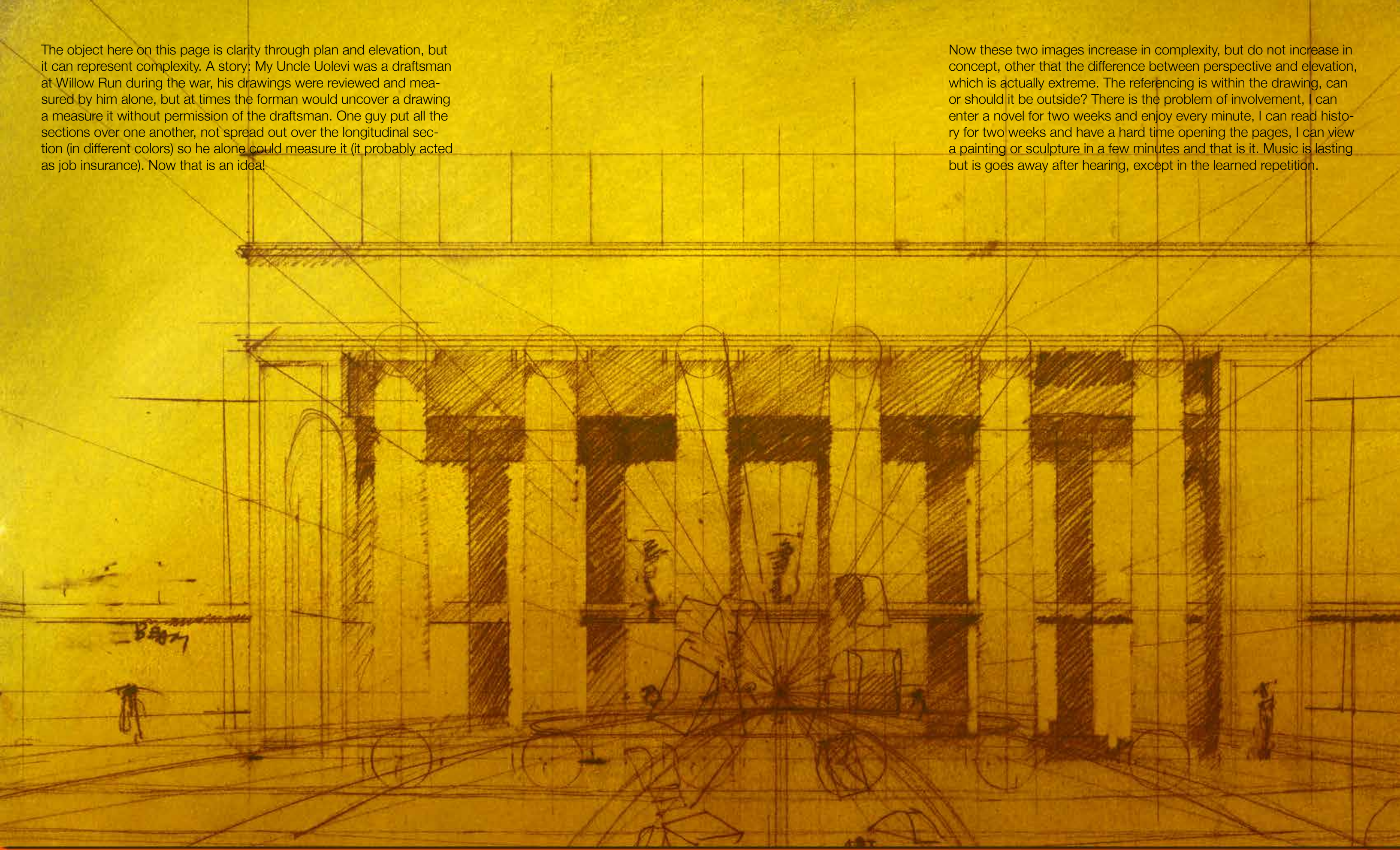




Plane and simple, plan and elevation, above. Next a more complex perspective:

The object here on this page is clarity through plan and elevation, but it can represent complexity. A story: My Uncle Uolevi was a draftsman at Willow Run during the war, his drawings were reviewed and measured by him alone, but at times the forman would uncover a drawing a measure it without permission of the draftsman. One guy put all the sections over one another, not spread out over the longitudinal section (in different colors) so he alone could measure it (it probably acted as job insurance). Now that is an idea!

Now these two images increase in complexity, but do not increase in concept, other than the difference between perspective and elevation, which is actually extreme. The referencing is within the drawing, can or should it be outside? There is the problem of involvement, I can enter a novel for two weeks and enjoy every minute, I can read history for two weeks and have a hard time opening the pages, I can view a painting or sculpture in a few minutes and that is it. Music is lasting but it goes away after hearing, except in the learned repetition.



A “product” is or should be a living organism, which at its core behaves like an “interactive” game. I will begin by redefining product [traditionally defined as a noun or thing] as a participatory event not an object. It should not be considered as a noun, but a verb. The organism’s [product = organism = game] interface should be transparent, in that the person is not encumbered by the accessing of the program. Here I have to bring in a newspaper article to make the context in which the “product” and “organism” begin to be alive. There was an article, L A Times, 3.23.95, “Innovation” by M. Schrage, which compares “content” to “network” when looking at interactive media. In his observation he notes that: “Every day there are millions of telephone conversations. If you think about it, what are these people really doing? They’re creating their own content! The telephone network is a medium that that enables people to do that. Fax machines and answering machines add value to the network because they give people more options about how to create content. Same thing with talk shows: the people literally become the programming.” The organism must be the network and the user the content, if the organism is to sustain interest and grow. I will take a moment to define one notion of “game,” which is important to this discussion. Games are not the sole ownership of an organized system. They are ad hoc, and often random. A game is often played by accident, as with this computer keyboard. If I try to type by turning off the monitor, the game becomes a finger and mind challenge which uses memory and sequencing and let’s say training or repetition. There are games where the training is important, others where the training is a handicap. Take for instance sports activities, where the training is essential, but the goal has to be unattainable. One requisite of a game is that the goal can never be attained or it is a shifting, moving target, the better one gets the further the goal moves. The opposite of course is the game where training would spoil it, such as hid and seek, where the surprise and suspense is the fun, or interactive part.

“If anything at all, perfection is finally attained not when there is no longer anything to add, but when there is no longer anything to take away, when a body has been stripped down to its nakedness.”

I thought that I would follow the quote by Exupery, with a little history which might be of interest to you. Before I was legally permitted to drive, my brother and I built a car. It weighed 900 lbs., steel frame with a fiberglass body, of our own design. It went from a 900 cc engine to a 1200 cc engine over a period of six years. After eleven years I moved away from it. I mention it not because it was earth shaking, but because I have lost some of the naive awe of objects that designers often possess. It ran, it broke down, it needed changes and it was tested in an ad hoc way. It was in fact a large interactive game. I will not dwell on my past, but look at all design as it pertains to objects now.

I will now use this new idea “car” to define what should be invested in each and every “product”, because they are equal in the sense that they have to create interactivity. That car, any car, can be viewed as a metaphor or example of “good” being a moving target. The target varies from field to field. It is never stationary. One might look at Santayana to see that the codes for “good” are not within the object but within us. “If we say that other men should see the beauties we see, it is because we think those beauties are in the object, like its colour, proportion, or size. Our judgment appears to us merely the perception and discovery of an external existence, of the real excellence that is without. But this notion is radically absurd and contradictory. Beauty, as we have seen, is a value; it cannot be conceived as an independent existence which affects our senses and which we consequently perceive. It exists in perception, and cannot exist otherwise.” I used this quote because it begins to tell us that there is another dimension to design, that is the viewer, not just the object. “We desire nothing because it is good, but it is good only because we desire it.” I mentioned that “good” is a moving target, well Santayana states that we can’t even think of good as being a thing in a target, it is a value within ourselves. And as that value has pressures on it, it changes. Spinoza now shows that the target adjusts, moves as our desire shifts.

A simple example would be to take the “concept” car from any design firm and “judge it,” not in the usual way but in a specific environment. Let’s say Antarctica. One would try to start it, of course the gasoline wouldn’t vaporize. The car, if warmed, wouldn’t run on a no-road condition. The person in the seat at the moment wouldn’t say that this is a “good” car. The value depends on the person, the environment and the object. What am I telling you? Design is an anti-entropic force, and as such it is unstable and varies as to the de-stability placed on it. I would like to say I have the answers, I don’t. I have experience and drive. One may not need to know “good” but know where it is!

The hardest thing in the future will be for designers to commit to one design. The problem being that, as with this word processor, ideas aren’t fixed any longer. I don’t have to type it out once and get right. I can look at it tomorrow or some time later and change it, as if it were an original. So? How does it effect designers? There was an interesting article in the L. A. Times, business section 10.12.94, by Anne Gregor, “From PC to Factory.” The processes now available to the designer allow the design to become 3-D immediately. That’s good. [The article described the process of solidifying liquids to make finished objects, without machining, directly from the computer drawings.] But the problem will now be the analysis of the project. There is a quality of time which mitigates mistakes, but this quality is lacking in quick decisions. Time has a stabilizing effect. I find that now with the computer and its peripherals, I can produce a design, a back-

up variation or an infinite series of back-ups. They are all beautiful spin-offs of the original. Indeed they are now technically all originals. When I do silk screen prints or lithographs, the process of making the art work in the printing medium is so time consuming, that the design grows as it progresses. It is in constant evolution. Today the ink jets spray down the color or the binder [in the case of 3-D] or an ultraviolet laser head solidifies a photopolymer to create: the original, the mold or the prototype. The machine begins to take raw material and dump it directly into the product line. That is fast, efficient and satisfying, but it doesn’t have the cross-checks that there used to be. I may sound like a cynic, I’m not. In my teaching experience I have found that students tend to talk through problems, never getting to the final design, they don’t make a commitment. “Any single germinal form is pregnant with many different possibilities, but the greatest of painters will never be able to actualize more than one of them at a time.” This comment by Gilson states in one sense, that we need the computer, but in a more basic sense it states that the designer needs commitment. Stated in another way, Focillion says that a work of art must be made tangible. “Art is made up, not of the artist’s intentions, but of works of art.... In order to exist at all, a work of art must be tangible. It must renounce thought, must become dimensional, must both measure and qualify space.”

The designer today needs also to be the master of the new technology, meaning that there will be a shortage of designers who are able to use the new tools which make decisions on the fast track. Already there is a “data clog” in most firms, the technology may have arrived, but no one can run, use or maintain it. I visited the University of Michigan Property Control [the sales outlet for all hardware which is no longer useful]. It was frightening to see cloth laundry hampers full of computer keyboards, computers and printers. There were mainframes still in their original wrappers, never installed. It is the same in all firms. I have computer programs that have come with other hardware that will never be used or opened. There isn’t the time to learn it or use it [if it doesn’t have all the features needed as one program]. It just slows down the work.

There were five points made:

- “Product” can be an organism.
- “Product” is a verb.
- “Good” is a moving target.
- Designers have to make commitments.
- Firms have to use the human resource and technology in a new developing environment.

Therefore the designer of today has to have a dichotomy of virtues. The designer must make decisions as to how long to let a project evolve [even within a production deadline]. And the designer must also limit the technological input to a controlled chaos. Unless, of

course, the project is “the process of development” and it is a “test bench” for a new technology. It is then possible that many projects are only an intermediate destination not a final goal, when viewed in a larger picture.

I taught a design course where the material was generated from myth. [Many “products” derive their “form” from myth also]. The writing/history professors, who were part of the class seemed to have a difficult time conceiving of space as metaphor when it was directly related to myth. “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus” by Brueghel, is about symbol done in an icon form, which related to human values or hubris in this case. The myth itself is one thing, the space another and the interpretation quite another.

Myth is on going, it is ever growing, one needn't go back in time to find it or even study it. All advertising can be considered as the making of myth (as can be seen in a brochure that I have collected.)

“[ixi:z]: future traditions... ixi:z celebrates the rituals of man with old forms and new rhythms... Among these pages lie fragments of future traditions; a collection of clothing and accessories with an eye on your visions of the modern world. Pieced together they create possibilities that are unmistakably [ixi:z]. Ideas traditional in inspiration - subversive in application.”



There is the matter of understanding myth and its origins. If you looked at a recent book, *The Celestine Prophecy*, by James Redfield, it is the creation of a myth in present time. Its strength comes from the fact that it like other classics, shows the everyday struggles of the common person and takes them to the next level, which he/we could not see. He even goes so far as to market the myth as an ongoing saga, a news letter.

In a well running system, there are components which co-produce the measure of performance and it grows and or changes with the designer's built-in instructions. I have introduced the next page as a guide to design. A development, is a system, and it has to be a living system, that is responsive. The designer cannot work in a void, but must be responsible to all the variations in the client, user and environment.

I'd like the opportunity to demonstrate these principles. I hope to hear from you soon.