Man as measure: human figure in modern architectural drawings

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Abstract– Human figures are conventionally used in architectural drawings to visually express the scale of represented building. Someone might generally affirm that their presence is a symptom of a particular sensibility toward human scale and needs. But human figures have played a number of roles during centuries not only according to the kinds of representations but to the different idea of man. They have been accosted to architectural orders and overlaid to churches plan and facades by Renaissance architects to demonstrate the proportional relationship between human and architectural body. They have been inserted (sometimes reduced to a floating eye) to represent perspectival foreshortening and specific points of vision. They have been used to visually measure archeological reconstructions as well as to maliciously oversize urban squares or metropolitan churches by Piranesi and Boullee. They have been ordered and multiplied to mark an important route through the building. Finally, their latent designing and communicative potential has been understood by XX century architects. Some of them tried to combine Ergonomics, diagrams and numeric proportions to achieve a general spatial defining system and used human figures to project themselves into the designing space. Some others inspired to painting, popular press and first comics to put in scene little stories describing urban scenes or modern men's activities. Since Le Corbusier's sketches this fictive component has been increasing thanks to cinema's influence and photomontage practice, but few architects have expressed it better than James Stirling and his loyal Leon Krier. While Stirling's famous isometric drawings are abstract schemes to express ideas more than spaces, his perspective drawings are invested by the task of telling stories through characters, extras, actors and Stirling himself, of course.