Theorising the Project

Theorising the Project:
A Thematic Approach to Architectural Design

By

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SHOWING THE WORD

Michael Tawa has written a book about the *teaching* of architectural design. In relation to the material thinking it enjoins, it displays the possibility of ana-materialistic thinking, the recovery from the materials of thinking certain immanent structures or tendencies towards higher levels of self-organisation. These "assemblages" are simultaneously associations of ideas and the "existential infrastructure for life." They are disposed to join together in new ways that are conducive to producing the conditions where life is lived twice, constructively and reconstructively, actively and reflectively. His ana-materialism can be characterised as a marriage of phenomenological principles of analysis to the inherent indeterminism of complex systems whose behaviour is—like the approach he recommends to design—non-linear, that is, both scripturally and ethically, open, unfinished, receptive to innovation. The grounds for bringing out the immanence of dwelling do not reside outside the field of reflection - in some kind of etymological *Ursprache*. They lie—and this is the poetic brio as well as ethical concern of his pedagogy—in the pathways discovered between different semantic and phonological nuances: perfecting the process of pathfinding is the aspiration of his propaedeutic.

To think is to construct possible connections; however, to build is also to *show* that these stand up. The identification of learning procedures with the materials needed to build a house goes back at least to Francis Bacon's suggestion that "prenotions" are needed to make the discovery of forms possible—topics, what Tawa calls "themes," are Bacon said, like angles, doorways and staircases, that already indicate the building. Yet, with the example of Heidegger in mind, Tawa gathers rather than collects; more radically, because of his commitment to holding different meanings together, he does not lay concepts side by side but subjects them to a prior scrutiny to determine their fitness for being joined together—to gather implies what Tawa takes to be the fundamental justification of architecture, the fact that human being is "being-in-common" and it is the design of dwelling together—the bringing out of the potential jointure of things—that permits this to be.

At the heart of this meditation is Tawa's concern to recuperate the Western clearing of thought for a new, more sustainable ecology of dwelling with and alongside. His pathways into the thick of things look for

what is suitable or well-fitted to be gathered; the place of gathering is one of adornment, not stripping bare. The art of arrangement reflects a propensity of ideas themselves when their power of self-reorganisation is admitted: in this case there is no violence in bringing the unrelated together. Discovery is the immanence of matter released through its recollection. As an art of teaching, it is the design of the frames, the delimitations of the matter to be considered and the perspectives in which they are placed. Rarely has the teacher prepared the way so effectively through the staging of his own deliberation. This Hermes owns the shadow cast ahead.

Yet the achievement of this book is not to give a new, contemporary vitality and relevance to an ancient trope—the identification of architecture with the *arche* of truth. It is to use an extraordinarily bold and poetic technique of reading thought to show forth the architecture in ideas. In this, etymology does not descend angel-like to inscribe our confusion with geometrical order: it originates instead in a prior wonderment at the givenness of the world and its inherent capacity to self-organise. If the students who have had the extraordinary good fortune to experience Tawa's tutelage enter professional practice well-equipped to ameliorate living conditions for being together, it is because they understand the design of thinking, possessing a *techne* that fuses the manipulation of the material world to what might be called an ecology of intellectual emergence. Not everything is relevant; nor need it be. To be learned is to be a good carpenter.

It is also to be a good physician for, although Tawa offers the designer (conceived in the broadest creative terms) a program for architectural wellbeing, we cannot fail to read what he writes against a background of dis-ease: the urbanism of the megalopolis, the shelterless purlieux of the political, the environmental and the economic refugee and the distress of the soul-warped provide the background to what is argued, proposed and committed to. A circumambient psychic dishevelment lends his ana-materialism its urgency. The project is to recuperate the word (the idea, *logos*) through a steady showing of its application to the improvement of practice (building design). "If misdirected emotions or ideas can be transformed into illness, why could not illness disappear through a transformation into an idea"[1]—attempted is a *mode* of logophania, the appearance of a coherent "assemblage" of directions for design serving to liberate the collective imagination of its illness.

The method is to expose the poetic scaffolding that informs the built world: to delineate the frames that make good building possible. The frame is something we grow from; it is the tool of the one who leads out,

the educator. But it is also the stencil of the trace of what is already there, the potential future found in retracing the unfinished paths of the past. Hölderlin imagined Freedom as a city dedicated to Mnemosyne: transforming a theory of community and communing into a practice of place-making, Tawa's luminous exegesis translates the poet's double innovation into a program of applied creativity. Architecture also shines forth, mouthing truths, as a cluster of words like fane, *phania* and *phemi* suggest. This is the extraordinary poetic economy of the writing: to house ideas in their rightful places, to build for readers with designs on the world new patterns of inhabitation that are familiar to us because they come as echoes from a primary architecture that is articulate—not defensively self-explanatory but reunited with its logophanic potential, its power to create existential infrastructure, giving shelterless thought a role and voice.

A book of scaffolding, of footholds and handholds, exhibiting a lover's sensitivity to the relationships that make sense of the world, provisional in so many seemly and instructive ways, it is unprovisional in its generosity.

—Paul Carter

INTRODUCTION

> "To go to the limit is not only to resist but also to let oneself go. I need to sense my self as the sense of what exceeds me. I sometimes need to write things which in part escape me, but which are an exact proof of that which, in me, is beyond me."[1]

What this book is about

This book is about architectural design. That is its subject matter. Yet in its handling, the matter extends beyond architecture and design—into philosophy, etymology, cinema, music, literature, fine art, architectural theory and built environments. Architecture is by nature extended across multiple registers. In the sense that it provides settings for human *being*, which is foundationally *being-in-common*, architecture must engage a wide range of conditions and questions: what is it to provide, what is it to set or situate, what is it to be human, what is it to be, what is it to be-in-common or to be-with-others, what is it to dwell, what is a world, how are worlds set up, why are some worlds disabling and others enabling? Responding to such questions requires at least cross-disciplinary if not trans-disciplinary engagement, eclipsing the confines and capacities of any single discipline or group of disciplines.

The subject matter is also architectural *designing*. Its focus is not artefacts, works and buildings as such, but only in so far as each conveys a *way of making*—a way of conceptualising, resourcing, investigating, assembling, deferring, reflecting, deciding and implementing. There are innumerable ways of designing, numerous ways of proceeding, multiple kinds of design processes. This book promotes a *thematic approach to design*, whereby design is considered to always take place in relation to ideas, concepts and themes. 'Theme'—from the Greek word *thema*, means a proposition, subject or thesis; something that is 'put-down' or 'placed' there before us. Its etymological root is *DHE, to put or place, a *deed*, something *done*, to *do*. The word is cognate with theory, theorem and thesis—words which, through the Greek: *thea*, share a notion of viewing or seeing.

A thematic approach to design is therefore necessarily *theoretical* in the sense that, like theory, it provides a manner of looking at something, a

way of framing and understanding it, an attitude or disposition towards it. In these semantic associations, one can equally hear epistemological, aesthetic and ethical registers. Design is never solely artefactual or merely utilitarian. It invariably engages knowledge, form and ethics. But this sense of 'looking' and 'framing' are not limited to passive seeing of something beyond the seer. *Thea* is not mere looking-at something outside of us. The looking involved in fact produces and creates the thing being looked at. How we frame a way of looking—by way of concepts, ideas, themes and theories—is fundamentally propositional; it proposes a state of affairs, a world, a cosmos. Theorising is therefore a cosmogonic (world-forming) as much as a cosmological (world-structuring) undertaking.

Because of its attending to the production of a world, design must concern itself with solicitude and care. It must take care in setting, then in managing the conditions in which design emerges and takes place. This caring is what *solicits* design 'out-of' a given circumstance. Hence design—or *the* designed—is essentially what, in a situation, is potentially *always already-there* but *not-as-yet* actualised.

This critical condition of the *already-there* is investigated across several registers in this book. Primarily it lies in the semantic, hence linguistic dimension of themes. This is why the book is replete with etymological and metaphorical allusions. I have written at length about the importance of this for design elsewhere.[2] A thematic approach to design requires the construction of an extensive, complex and resonant assemblage of ideas which can drive and resource the undertaking. The possibly excessive lexical fascination and word play evident in the book have two major functions. One is to show how the necessary lexical assemblage can be built and woven. The other is to indicate the necessity of *entrancement*. It is only by a genuine entry into this disorientating world of deferring sense that an indefinite diversionary excess begins to conjugate and coagulate into patterns, which in turn provide thinking and practice with initial footholds and trajectories.

Other registers of the *already-there*, which derive from project specific conditions such as program and site, are dealt with separately in the book—as is the *already-there* of extant works and precedents. But in the final analysis, such conditions are effective only to the extent that they supply thematic material that can be folded back into the design process and further investigated by conceptual/thematic and tectonic/architectural diagramming and modelling.

An important characteristic of this thematic approach is that it is not a one-way process from theme to artefact—as is often the case with design that considers itself to be 'conceptual' or 'theoretical.' Initial themes might

be assembled into thematic frameworks then explored through formal, tectonic, material, technical and representational investigation. But themes arrive for design from multiple directions and sources. They can be produced by free thinking in advance of a design undertaking. They can equally be produced out of a purely technical investigation—the use of a particular graphic medium for example, an impusion to use a specific building material, a certain attitude to the cross sectional profile of a structure, a process of geometric manipulation that produces surprising patterns or an obsession with an infinitely small detail in a room, a text or a film. The main task is to bring thematic material—however infirm, fragmentary or peripheral it might seem—genuinely into the gamut of a broader design undertaking, and to render it productive within the assemblage it will join.

Who this book is for

This book is for designers. Design has come to be a problematic and contested term; and the field it covers has been appropriated by so-called 'non-design' disciplines such as engineering and business. It commonly refers to multiple endeavours—from urban and architectural design to product, industrial, graphic, fashion, digital and gaming design. Various professions claim and reinforce distinctive territorial and procedural boundaries. Yet building designers, organisational or governance network designers, facilties managers, genetic engineers, cybernetic and robotic engineers are all designers and their respective activities all involve an element of speculation and creativity.

The meaning of the word is simple. Design is designation. Anyone who designates is a designer. Designation literally means to 'mark' or 'sign-out.' It involves a process of signalling and indicating. The Greek work for sign is *semeion*, *seme*. Design is therefore fundamentally semiotic. It constructs sense. A *semeiotikos* was one who interpreted signs, or the significance of signs—what they are the mark of or what they demarcate. This may be too irrelevant or simplistic to be useful. After all, architects, artists, economists, politicians, engineers, marketers, industrial designers and the like all produce designs. They all have designs related to what they imagine and what they produce. They have designs on the world in which these things are imagined and produced. And they all have designs on those who use such things. To design, to designate, to have designs on, to signal, to indicate, to read the signs (of the times)—such various and variable meanings are not so far apart.

The critical etymon in design is *SEG/SEK, which means ‘to cut’—in the sense of setting-apart, cutting-off-from, rendering exceptional (section, segment, sequence, consequence, secateurs, scythe, sword, dissect, segue, secret, sacred, saint...). Cutting marks and sets-apart something out from or over-against its context; or it distinguishes a new work in relation to what it reworks. But *SEK also means to connect, to bind (secure). The ‘sacred,’ for example, simultaneously consecrates and desecrates—hence the constitutive correlation rather than opposition between sacred and profane, sanctification and profanation.[3]

By designating, design *seals*. When we *sign-off* on something we definitively fasten it (close it with wax). We execute it and seal its fate.[4] We effectively put something into train. We name and install it. We activate its consequences. When we *sign-out*, we release ourselves from a given circumstance and free ourselves from its determining conditions. Designation is therefore always a matter of limits, of setting and articulating boundaries, of negotiating and manipulating borderlines.

While this book is evidently focussed on *architectural* design, the concept of design adopted is broad. Design is not simply directed at achieving an outcome. It is as much a matter of designing the conditions of design as it is of designing an object, a building or a place. Design must first of all be framed in a particular way. This framing establishes rules and protocols that will be implemented throughout the design process. Design is therefore projective—it send-forth or consigns a situation, a milieu and an ambience. This procedural aspect of design is generally overlooked in favour of the artefactual product that will satisfy a given brief. But design is always contextualised by intellectual, subjective, situational, epochal, political, financial, technical and material conditions in which it takes place. A major objective of this book is to foreground such conditions and indicate some of the ways that more or less conscious default assumptions might be noted and therefore soberly, genuinely and creatively taken into account.

The focus of the book is specific to architecture. However that specificity has been conceived in terms of its adaptational potential for other creative endeavours. The thematic approach to design assists this objective by referring design thinking, irrespective of its register and domain of implementation, to general concepts which are readily transferable across multiple diciplines. The process of unpacking themes to unfold the conceptual potential of apparently simple ideas is one way of enabling transferability and transactional practice. Recurrent themes such as limit, memory, ambiguity, complexity, assemblage, emergence and representation are not limited to architectural design. They have

implications for other creative endeavours and beyond that to activities not normally associated with art or design.

The invitation of this book is to open thematic possibilities for anyone involved in making. Since everything made by human beings is necessarily multiple, making necessitates joints and articulations. Hence every maker is by definition an artist and everything made is by definition artefactual—that is, made by joining. There is equivalent artfulness in assembling phrases to construct an eloquent expression, composing cinematic scenes to convey a narrative, manipulating the spatiality of a room to evoke the timeless, stressing the acoustic material of music to express the uncanny, organising the combinational rules in a network to maximise its emergent properties or shaping a knife in such a way as to amplify its adaptation to multiple conditions of cutting.

What became of this book

How the book came about is really a matter of what the book became during its writing. It began as a desire to take stock of my architectural teaching—in particular to transcribe lectures given at the Universities of New South Wales, Adelaide, Newcastle upon Tyne and Sydney between 1990 and 2011. In twenty years of teaching some things have shifted significantly and others have remained constant. Recently, my involvement in teaching final year architectural graduation design studios provided one element of constancy which has served as a generic setting in which the book was initially intended to function. This setting is one where students are required to devise their own graduation project, determine a functional program, select a site, undertake research and design a persuasive architectural proposition that satisfies a given set of educational criteria set by the profession and the academy.

After several iterations of that process across three instutions it became clear that the educational setup was problematic for a number of common reasons. It produced recurrent procedural issues that students were regularly obliged to confront. Dealing with these same issues year after year compelled me to imagine a kind of reference and guide for the process. The framework of that guide was determined by those problematic issues and arranged in a roughly chronological manner beginning with project formation, then moving on to the research and propositional phases of design.

Since my teaching approach has always shuttled between thematics and precedents, or between ideas and artefacts, these two feature prominently in the makeup of the book. Devising a design project in

relation to a thematic framework or in relation to a set of consilient ideas, enables a designer to engage theoretical material that amplifies engagement, ultimately enriching the work at every level. Casting the process in relation to a set of precedents enables the work to develop within an extant, shared intellectual and tectonic environment—a kind of designing-with-others or designing-with-the-already-there which removes design from the gamut of an individualised undertaking and recasts the notions of authorship and innovation, if not genius, within a communitarian register. This approach adopts Martin Heidegger's contention, reprising Aristotle, that human being is a *zoon politikon* (political life), a being-with-one-another constitutive of the *polis* and characterised by a *praxis* of concern.[5] Concern is a disposition of being-in-the-world and being-with-others whose *telos* or end is to accomplish such being, to bring it to a genuine end. This ethical *praxis* parallels the practice of design conceived here as fundamentally theoretical or world-forming; and proceeding in relation to the always-already-there of other beings, ideas, places and things.

The framework for the book was established in relation to specific stages of the design process, shadowing the problematic stages in students' pathways through that process. *What is Theory for?* engages a series of recurrent and tacit questions: Why theorise? Is theory necessary? Why obfurscate what could be a straightforward undertaking? Why seek ideas outside of architecture? Does not architecture produce its own theoretical agendas and trajectories? *Framing the Project* outlines a way of setting up a theoretical, thematic or conceptual agenda for the design project. *(Re)sourcing Themes* shows how to determine ideas relevant to a project, how to productively unpack them and how to map out their implications for architectural design and tectonic manipulation. *Theorising the Project* follows the entire thematic design sequence—from establishing a line of inquiry and framing themes to determining a functional program, selecting and mapping a site, chosing and analysing precedents and drawing implications from technological and representational dimensions of the project. Theorising each of these stages enables design to draw thematic material and opportunities from apparently prosaic conditions of a project. *Reading Precedents* outlines a manner of analysing extant works so as to unpack their thematic and adaptational potential for design. *Devising the Project* shifts the emphasis away from procedural concerns into broader thematic and philosophical registers around the ideas of assemblage and emergence—ideas that made themselves known only as the book was being written but that were in fact present from the outset.

The process of transcription was revealing. I began with a full set of recorded lectures for each semester of teaching—normally eight lectures of 90 minutes each. These were delivered over approximately seven academic semesters, so that there were at least seven iterations of each lecture needing transcription. The lectures were sufficiently different to warrant at least comparison, if only to capture the most effective wording of key ideas. I began with word-for-word transcription, expecting a text to emerge directly from the lectures. With certain passages this did eventuate. But on the whole, as I began transcribing words and phrases, they led away from recorded speech into speculation, elaboration and ornamentation of themes implied in what I was saying. I was not so much transcribing a text as writing into and excribing it; undoing at the same time as remaking. In this way the text developed as an unpredictable, emergent entity within the interstices of what was already announced. This process produced the substantive material of the book, which was then subjected to a long process of editing and refinement in structure and expression. I found that the book's mode of production began to parallel what I was advocating as a thematic approach to design. Earlier structures and tables of content became entirely provisional and mutable, serving merely as armature and foothold for an undetermined and undeterminable process that in time began to yield new structures, content, figures of thought, themes and words.

Beyond the book, the process was implying something substantive for architecture itself. Two main lines of inquiry imposed themselves. The first was the notion of *assemblage*—a heterogenous context of extant conditions that enables multiple possibilities of combination and conjugation, none of which can be explicitly designated in advance. This led to the allied concepts of the *network*—the relational field of conjugational potential that Manuel De Landa calls a 'possibility space'; and *emergence*—that is, the unexercised capacities that consequentially arrive in the network by networking its relational potential. In this context, design becomes a matter of constructing productive possibility spaces that unclench and enable emergence.

The second line of inquiry impelled me to contrast two different perspectives on architecture: what it is, how it is produced, how it works and what it does. The first is *formal* and *representational*. It encompasses anything from sacred and symbolic architecture that claims to represent transcendent realities in built form, to the biomorphic and orthogonal geometric predilections of nascent modernity, which persist in the recent obsession with parametric modelling and digital fabrication in architectural speculation and production. In one way or another all of these practices

seek architectural identity and validation through tectonic means. The second perspective on architecture is *infrastructural* and *non-representational*. This too has its early technophilic formulation in modernity—for example through the speculative work of Archigram and Cedric Price. But rather than focus on formal conditions, this perspective adopts a notion of architecture as 'enabling apparatus' or 'adaptational framework' for emergent systems and patterns of socio-spatial appropriation, inhabitation and use. The objective is not to produce more or less fantastical or restrained, static or turbulent compositional arrangements, but to make possible relational systems and transactional opportunities in which the formal can only ever be a precarious and provisional condition that is always yet-to-come.

Implied in the second perspective—tentatively valorised in this book—is the strange notion that architecture only comes into its own when it effectively withdraws; and only when its formal conditions no longer impose but instead depose themselves in favour of the undesignated, the unprogrammed and the makeshift.

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I have learned from many people but did not wish to produce an interminable account. Yet on reflection these people—how they thought, how they worked and what they taught me—constitute a kind of assemblage or region in which I have existed and out of which I continue to produce my own thinking and practice. I include the list here to acknowledge their importance to me and to faintly trace the contours of a formative landscape or map of emergence. Their names are collected into constellations, each of which constitutes a separate but related assemblage of people and influences. Omitting the anecdotal, the personal and the specific might render the list dry and abstract. But a full enunciation of significance and influence may well have proved unsurveyable, if not unreadable to the outsider. I have therefore left names hanging in these loose communities of individuals, in roughly chronological order of affect, assuming that the various collectives might prompt their own stories:

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CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS THEORY FOR?

> "The ninth book of Paracelsus' treatise *On the Nature of Things* is entitled *De Signatura rerum naturalium* (*Of the signature of natural things*). The idea that all things carry a sign which manifests and reveals their invisible qualities is the core of Paracelsian epistemology. 'Nothing is without sign (*nichts ist on ein Zeichen*)' he writes in *Von den naturlichen Dingen* 'because nature lets nothing of itself go, which it does not sign' (Paracelcus, III, 7, 131). 'There is no outside which does not announce an inside,' affirms the *Liber de podagricis*, and it is by way of signs that human beings can know the mark of every thing (*ibid*., II, 4, 259). And if, in this sense, 'all things, plants, seeds, stones and roots reveal in their qualities, their forms and their figures (*Gestalt*) what is in them,' 'if they are all known by their *signatum*,' then, 'signature is the science by which we find all that is hidden and, without this art, nothing profound can be made' (ibid., III, 7, 133). However, this science, like all knowledge, is a consequence of sin, because, in the Garden of Eden, Adam was absolutely 'unmarked' (*unbezeichnet*); and he would have remained so had he not 'fallen into nature,' 'which leaves nothing 'unmarked.'"[1]

Default theory

By default, theory operates as a source, resource or foundation from which architectural design draws its meaning. A designer will claim allegiance to a theory which will be said to make sense of a spatial or siting strategy. A building will be made to embody or incorporate a theory which will be said to justify an architectural assembly or a choice of materials. In every case, reference is made to something outside or something other than the designer, space, site, building, assembly or material.

This is what is thought: something comes to be *embedded* in the architecture—to enter, possess, invade, convict or in equally loaded terms, to *inform* it. Architecture manifests theory and the process of design consists in the incorporation of incorporeal ideas—a somewhat magical sleigh of hand at work in the mysterious alchemy of design. Architecture

actualises the virtual and realises its potential. It brings it across to the here and now. In doing so, architectural design establishes or installs a world—it is fundamentally a world forming, cosmogonic act. Theory gives meaning to architecture and architecture receives meaning from theory. Architecture needs theory to be meaningful; and it needs meaningful theory since it does not in itself possess the means or the resources to be so.

What follows from this is the need for mediation between theory on the one hand and practice or architecture, on the other. The lexicon is familiar: convergence, transition, connection, translation, relationship, correspondence, integration—*between* theory and practice, *between* ideas and buildings. In a curious reverse magic this *between* haunts and burdens design practice. It haunts and burdens representation. It sets up design and the designer for irremediable failure. The first characteristic of this setup is *dichotomy*. The dichotomy is between two opposed domains—the transcendent and the contingent, the ideal and the real, potentiality and actuality. The second characteristic is the *singularity of the concept*, since the idea's role is to unify the parts, make them whole, harmonise or heal their fractured state. The third characteristic is *intentionality*. One starts with an intention. One intends a meaning, which meaning the job of architecture will be to enunciate and represent. In fact one always starts and ends with tautology.

In this setup, the bridge demanded of design practice—the motif which will bridge this gap, resolve the dichotomy, harmonise the parts and install meaning—is the concept, the idea, the *parti*, the diagram, the organizational blueprint. We know the phrases: 'what lies *behind* your design,' 'what *underpins* your scheme,' 'what is the *concept* of your proposal,' 'do you have a *rationale* for this plan,' and so forth.

Theorein

In Western epistemology, visuality—associated with a metaphor of light—is the privileged mode of apprehending and understanding truth.[2] The word 'theory' is from the Greek *theorea*, 'speculation,' and *theomai*, 'I see.' *Theorein* is 'to look at,' 'behold,' 'view.' *Theoros* is a 'spectator,' *theorema* a 'spectacle' and *theatron* a 'theatre.' Martin Heidegger read 'theory' as *thean-horan*, from *thea*—'the outward look or aspect in which something shows itself,' and *horao*—'to look attentively at something, look it over, view it closely.' Hence theory would mean "to look attentively on the outward appearance wherein what presences becomes visible and, through such sight—seeing—to linger with it." In short, theory is a "beholding that watches over truth."[3] Likewise, the word 'idea,' from the

Greek *eidos*, derives from the etymological root *id-*, 'to see.' Consequently, the act of knowledge, *eidenai*, is the act of an eyewitness—'one who has seen.'

Theorising a project is not intellectualising it into pure abstraction and rarefied, radical inaccessibility. Neither obfurscation nor pretense, theorising a project simply means 'seeing a project.' To see the project we must assume a position, orientation or perspective towards it. We must stand in some relationship to it. This also means that what we see of it is necessarily limited and partial. We do not see the whole of it and never can. What is more important is the character of that standing-towards. Seeing it we also regard it, we must have some regard for it, for what it is and what it can become. This is the ethical dimension of seeing as *theorein*, as theorising. The project that we see is not a fixed entity but one in the process of becoming. The regard we have for it is not only a regard for its appearance but more so for its emergence. That design is a *praxis* of observing and serving the project in its own coming to presence as a project and eventually as an artefact—as something made and therefore as something technological—is a foundational premise in this book. Regarding the project we project a seeing. What does that projected seeing see? Precisely the *look* of the project, its aspect, its own looking and projecting in return. Theorising the project we are not only throwing a kind of seeing, we are also attending to a seeing projected back towards us. We are eye witnesses in the midst of an exchange. As Jean-Luc Nancy has it, in relation to the idea of landscape:

> "The landscape contains no presence: it is itself presence itself. But this is also why it is not a view of nature opposed to culture, and forming with it some kind of relationship (of work or rest, of opposition or transformation, etc.). It is a representation of the country as possibility of a taking place of sense, of a localisation or a locality of sense which only makes sense by paying attention to itself, making itself 'itself' as this corner, this angle that does not open upon a territory or upon a prearranged spectacle: but an angle open upon itself, making an overture and thus making a seeing not as the perspective of a look upon an object (or as vision) but as surging, opening and presentation of a sense that sends to nothing but this presentation... That is why the landscape is not a view which 'looks out on' some perspective. It is on the contrary a perspective which comes to us."[4]

Theory, or the manner in which a project is envisaged, becomes a device for seeing, an apparatus for registering the appearance of a world. If I have a 'theory' about the world, I am simply saying that I have a way of framing that world to make it understandable and comprehensible. I have a way of seeing that world, a way of looking at it, of looking out into it, of

envisaging it so that I might be able to exist in it, and of regarding it so that I might have a way of being with it. When we claim to be theorising a project what might we mean? Simply that we are aiming to develop a way of seeing the project, a way of envisaging or considering it, a manner in which that seeing or that sighting comprise a way of looking out at the world, an attitude towards it, a way of engaging with, beholding and facing out towards it, a countenance, world view or cosmology. A way, therefore, of speculating or contemplating; a manner of framing and preparing for a looking. Hence theorising the project also means framing a way of being in the project, a way of behaving, proceeding and operating as a designer in the midst of design.

Clearly this must apply in reverse. Since the conception and design of buildings is inseparable from a world view and an ethical disposition that produce them as figures of thought and configurations of space, time and materiality, buildings in turn frame ways of seeing and speculating on the world. They promote certain ways of regarding and behaving in relationship to the world. They make certain kinds of looking possible and disable others. They are world-forming in the sense that they not only frame a seeing but produce the conditions of that seeing, and in so doing produce the seen. Seeing is never merely aesthetic. Every manner of seeing implies a manner of being. Seeing, and with it theorising, are fundamentally ethical, and in addition creative and productive—that is, *poietic*.

Significantly, the Greek: *the-*, cognate with the Indogermanic root *D(H)E = bind, put in place, set up, establish. *Theo*—'god' or 'deity'—is allied to the root *DEIW = what is brilliant, what shines and by extension what is divine, heavenly.[5] In this register knowledge is not simply associated with seeing but with seeing *clearly*. In Classical poetics and aesthetics, clarity is a function of representational or mimetic accuracy. Clear figures of speech or thought, clear configurations or shapes are those in which the essence or idea (*eidos*) shines-through or radiates. 'One who knows' (Greek: *gnomon*) is also 'one who articulates' (*gonu*), 'one who joins and connects.' A more significant alliance, through *GEN = generation, production, is that between knowledge (*gnosis*) and existence —coming to be, arising, becoming assembled (*ginomai*).[6] Hence 'to know' is 'to see clearly.' To see clearly is to know. With clarity we understand what shines-through and shows itself articulated and conjoined. This clarity of articulation then becomes a measure of truthful and unconcealed existence.

As Giorgio Agamben has put it, this supremacy of vision in epistemology conditions authenticity as what is "present before the look."[7]

In the very word *theorein* is played-out a problematics of the idea, the look and the image; as well as the destiny of the image in Western thought—which is to present the silence of this impossibility, of this irreconcilable gap between language and idea, the sensible and the intelligible, multiple and the one. Agamben and Nancy make of the landscape a scene in which this irreconcilability plays itself out:

> "the landscape becomes the setting wherein is represented what, in man, cannot be said, his ineffable... the mystery of landscape is to preserve intact this dimension in which man is always in the midst of losing himself outside of himself in this too luminous sphere of the divine or, within himself, in the obscure dramaturgy of sentiments and pulsions."[8]

The question must therefore hinge around *who* sees, *how* they see, *what* they see and what evades that seeing. It is a question of veracity, verisimilitude and truth applying in particular to the regime of the image.

Eidos-Poesis-Techne

The Platonic concept of art (Greek: *techne*), still widespread in mainstream ideas about design and design education, has to do with installation and representation. A design re-presents a paradigmatic concept or archetype—the idea (Greek: *eidos*, Latin*: forma*)—which it installs here and now. It represents it by translation or imitation (Greek: *mimesis*). The closer an art work imitates the idea the more it participates (*methexis*) in that idea; the more it discloses it the more perfect, beautiful, true or unconcealed (*aletheia*) it is, since "to admire a representation is to admire the original upon which it was made."[9]

Good art—or efficacious *techne*—depends on mimetic correctness. It is a technology of similitude geared to identity between original and copy. Similitude is conceived not as reproduction or visual resemblance (*homoiotes*) to the *eidos*—which is in any case invisible—but as adequacy (*isotes*) and correctness (*katorthosis*), which are a matter of accuracy (Greek: *orthotes*; Latin: *integritas*).[10] Similitude depends on the successful reproduction of the characteristics and proportions (Greek: *analogia*) of the *eidos. Techne* becomes a practice of proportional transposition which harmonises and integrates part and whole. Success is measured not by the aesthetic pleasure given by configurative organization but by the accuracy of mimetic representation.[11]

> "A really skilled craftsman or guardian in any field must be able not merely to see the many individual instances... (but) the single central

> concept... (and) put the various details in their proper place in the overall picture."[12]

This is problematic for a number of reasons. The philosophy installs in every art or design process, and in every representation, a practice of deception. The *eidos* is original, the representation is a copy—an inferior and inauthentic simulation of the superior, perfect model. The metaphysical discontinuity between these two states, and the counterfeit status of the product, haunts and consigns *mimesis* simultaneously to craftiness and imperfection.[13]

It follows that the more pure a reflection is the more perfect an image of the *eidos* it will be. In order to produce the purest reflection a work must efface itself so that it totally withdraws from the equation. The most perfect mirror is one so materially homogenous and polished that it bears no blemish that would obscure or distort the reflection. It must bear no trace of its material reality or its making. To attain genuine semblance a work must be seamless. Likewise, the perfect maker is one who interferes least in the process of making. The maker must be extinguished or effaced so as not to jeopardise the reflective capacity of the work. Imperfection is therefore endemic to the process since identity between work and *eidos* is structurally and logically impossible. The process is therefore always subject to inadequation and the maker always-already destined to fail. Evidently this inadequacy becomes grounds for an entire politics of judgement, criticism and control—intellectual, professional and pedagogical —nowhere more palpable than in the undergraduate design jury and the backroom deliberations of appointed design panels.

Techne is then the artfulness or craftiness of art—its mode of operation; that through which an immaterial *eidos* is transmitted, worked and incorporated in sensible matter. *Techne* is instrumental. It is a mimetic apparatus. But Heidegger's reading of *techne* contests this instrumental function. For him *techne* is not a tool for achieving representation, representational accuracy, or mimetic correctness. *Techne* is about production—*poiesis*. It is about presentation (*Vorstellung*), not representation (*Darstellung*). *Techne* is a way of presencing, coextensive with what presents itself. It is the coming to be and the taking place of a being—its advent and event (*Ereignis*) of arrival. As a 'mode of presencing,' *techne* is not the installation of a being as an object. Rather, it is the way a being appears, looks, demonstrates and shows itself showing. An art work, as a product, is not other than or after its production. It does not arrive to be after its presentation. Rather, it is the presentation of what presents itself *in* and *as* its presentation.

In the mimetic representation of the *eidos*, art presents the idea *again*. The idea is cast as a copy and reiteration of itself, as *other than itself*. It comes to stand there in the work in its own stead, instead of itself. In a curious way, then, in standing in for the idea, the work declares that the idea is *not* there—that the idea is absent, that it has been replaced and therefore displaced into the lost or forgotten. The real sense of *mimesis* is that at the moment of representation and installation, the idea withdraws. Representation is the presentation of absence in which and as which the *eidos* withdraws and conceals itself. Or else representation is this double gesture—the forwarding-retreat of the *eidos* in its simultaneously both presenting and absenting itself.[14]

One of my objectives here is to question the persistence of *mimesis* in an architectural design practice whose significance is drawn primarily through modes of signification. Is design—as insignificant, or as non- or anti-significational—viable? Can design be thought aside from *mimesis* and from all its attendant motifs of translation, imitation, resemblance, illustration, exposition, reproduction, representation, incorporation, and so forth? Can design do without the thought of constructing predictive ideas and concepts? Can it do without participation and adequation. Can design survive its own deception and displacement?

Thinking aside from *mimesis* I would like to sketch the outline of what might be termed a presentational rather than representational practice. That is, an essentially anti-mimetic, productive or *poietic* practice that is simultaneously fictioning and fabricating. Here, production—that is, thinking, reading, writing, designing—circulates in the interstices and at the limits of *mimesis* itself, interminably displacing and dis-installing familiar, normative processes of signification.

Reading, writing theory

By default, theory is read for content. A text is considered to contain meaning, which reading intends to uncover and make explicit. Textuality occludes and conceals meaning, which normative practices of reading are geared up to clarify and reveal. Meaning is secreted away and hidden in thought and language. It is the function of reading and of art generally to reveal, expose and secrete that meaning. This kind of reading assumes that the primary function of language is representational. Words represent and communicate meanings. The more explicit the representation, the clearer the expression, the more effective the communication and the better the text. *Mimesis* again. The representational function of language thereby assumes a pre-suppositional character. That is, language, speaking, writing

and reading are all made possible by pre-supposed and pre-existing ideas, concepts and motifs which may be spoken of, to which they refer and which they seek to communicate.[15] This communication operates by imitative mediation. A word imitates its presupposed idea and in so doing mediates between two domains—incorporeal and corporeal, unarticulated and articulated, silent and spoken, inner and outer. Writing is the cipher of representation. I write so as to communicate meaning. I describe, or I summarise, or I interpret what an author has thought or written. I mediate between an author and a reader. I translate an author's intention and explain the contents of their thought. These representational practices are passive in relation to their object and promote a passive reception by a subject.

To contest this approach to theory and design in various design courses I have taught, I ask students to develop their thinking and work in relation to a selection of texts. The selection primarily enables engagement with processes, practices and techniques of writing, thinking and reading—rather than with specific theoretical content. It provides a range of themes with numerous possibilities for resonance in terms of the projects and practices of the design studio—themes such as limit, representation, place and mapping. The texts are a disparate set of excerpts from a wide range of literary and philosophical sources. The collection resists any cohesive reading across individual excerpts,[16] which together present no consistent or homogenous 'theory.' They are intentionally incoherent and constitute a fragmented, de-contextualised framework. Yet the collection is a region of sorts—contextualising and situating a displacement of thinking, ideas and sense.

On the basis of these texts I promote a reading practice that involves scanning texts and shuttling between them—rather than following a consistent narrative sequence or remaining with a single text from beginning to end. The practice follows a framework sketched by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their *What is Philosophy*, through what they call the 'Plane of Immanence'—a region of thought made up of disparate concepts which are worked for mutual efficacy and productivity.[17] According to this transactional practice, the purpose of reading would be to put into play a scanning rhythm—a relay which permits relational and associative networks to emerge between disparate elements. It is to read for assonance, dissonance and resonance, rather than for meaning. In this kind of reading, attunement is not destined for concord but for discrepancy. Its purpose is to promote and open, not close a thinking; not to fix meanings but to produce an environment in which sense wanders and wavers. Discrepancy ruptures the fabric of meaning. It spaces

meanings apart. It opens charged intervals between them and prompts a practice of deferring meaning out of which sense interminably undulates and concatenates. This eruption of meaning—this spacing-out and partitioning of signification—is communication: communication as the *commutation of sense*.

In this kind of reading sense does not build to an end. Rather, reading is always beginning to make sense. It is the each-time-new relay and linkage of sense. Reading is always "the beginning of a reading, of an *incipit* always recommenced."[18] It is not about plurivocality of sense, opposed to univocality or equivocality. Instead, it tends towards the several, one-at-a-time (Latin: *singuli*), singularities of coextensive meanings. In this way, reading disequilibrates meaning—which means that it works against meaning; that it weighs on meaning. This weighing is the bearing and disposition of sense—at the same time *what* it carries and *how* it carries it. Sense unsettles meaning "so as to annoy or oppress the communication of this meaning"[19]—which is to say that it keep meaning in transit and keeps the process of signification moving. It intends to be a playful and light practice, where levity is a mark of the interminable fluxion between the lineaments of thought. This levity measures and weaves thought. It weighs on sense while making sense and carrying the gesture of this making. Such a reading is:

> "weighty, annoyed, and endlessly engaged in deciphering, although always beyond deciphering. This reading remains trapped in the strange materiality of language, and accords with this singular communication that would not be achieved though meaning, but through language itself, or rather, which would be nothing but the communication of language to itself, without a release of meaning, in a suspension of meaning, fragile and repeated. True reading advances without knowing, it always opens a book as an unjustifiable section through the supposed continuum of meaning. It must lose itself on this breach."[20]

By shuttling between meanings, reading produces thought. Thinking is not destined to resolve discrepancies or close intervals, but to keep meaning in a state of perpetual wandering. Such 'keeping' has the sense of attending to and keeping watch over its production—being with it as it wanders, being awake to the circuits it describes, being attentive and listening-out for resonances as they arise and begin to waiver. Sense is this state of wandering. It is thought itself—both what makes sense, how it does so and the sense that it makes.

Writing then becomes the trace of thought—not the trace of 'an' originary or transcendant meaning, but the trace of this distraction of sense

which writing interminably tracks, maps and registers. Writing thereby loses its descriptive function to acquire a performative, presentational agency. That is, writing exposes sense. It shows the process by which sense produces itself, shows itself showing and signifies itself signifying. According to Giorgio Agamben, language is not presuppositional (pre-supposing things that may be spoken about) but expositional—that is, thinking and writing constitute the exposition and taking place of language that is immanent in every utterance.

Thus writing no longer depends on a content which it would represent, signify, reveal and secrete; or dissimulate, encrypt, hide and keep secret. Writing is not cryptic. It hides nothing. There is no inside to writing—nothing opposed to a transcendent reality; no pre-existing meaning or concept; no abstract, metaphorical or symbolic meaning sought elsewhere: outside, above, below, beside or wherever. Writing is the each-time-new reformulation of several one-at-a-time singularities of sense in a constant and interminable state of transformation. Writing thereby ceases to be a matter of similitude or adequacy. It converts similitude and adequacy in relation to another into similitude and adequacy in relation to the in-itself—to the thing itself that it is. Abandoning its mimetic function and oblivious to it, writing no longer stands for anything. It no longer stands-in for anything or instead of anything. Neither is it nonsense.[21] Rather, it carries its standing as productive disposition. Its bearing bears sense and carries it to an unbearable exposure of meaning—an "overturning of meaning to the obscurity of its source of writing."[22] This writing is writing at the limit—that is, a limit-writing, a writing of the limit writing itself (writing):

> "writing *excribes* meaning at the same time as it inscribes significations. It excribes meaning... (since *the thing itself*, everything of which there is question in the text) is outside the text, takes place outside of writing… this 'outside' is not that of a referent towards which signification would point…this 'outside'—entirely *excribed* in the text—is the infinite retreat of meaning by which every existence exists. Not a gross, material or concrete given, supposed outside of meaning and which meaning represents, but the 'empty liberty' by which the existent comes to presence—and to absence… In inscribing significations, we excribe the presence of that which retreats from every signification… The being of existence is not unpresentable: it presents itself excribed…"[23]

What these practices evidently do *not* imply for architecture is a 'theory of representation' that would produce architecture whose goal would be to communicate one or several simultaneous meanings. Neither do they imply, for the tectonics and fabric of architecture, a restless