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mimesis


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Poetry

In the same way that the mindless diamond keeps
one spark of the planet's early fires
trapped forever in its net of ice,
it is not love's later heat that poetry holds,
but the atom of the love that drew it forth
from the silence: so if the bright coal of his voice
suddenly forced, like a bar-room singer's—boastful
with his own huge feeling, or drowned by violins;
but if it yield a steadier light, he knows
the pure verse, when it finally comes, will sound
like a mountain spring, anonymous and serene.
beneath the blue oblivious sky, the water
sings of nothing, not your name, not mine.

Antonio Machado (translated by Don Paterson)

mimesis reveals the mystery of order as a tension between its potential and actual existence

Dalibor Veseley, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production*

The young poet... can attain a perfection without much training and experience—a phenomenon hardly matched in painting, sculpture or architecture... *Mnemosyne*, the mother of the muses, is directly transformed into memory, and the poet's means to achieve the transformation is rhythm... a poem, no matter how long it existed as a living spoken word... will eventually be 'made'... written down and transformed into a tangible thing... because remembrance and the gift of recollection, from which all desire for imperishability springs, need tangible things to remind them, lest they perish themselves.

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

The metaphor with which I have been concerned with is more extended—a double one—in that it involves three terms, a body is like a building and the building in turn is like the world.

Joseph Rykwert, *The Dancing Column: On Order in Architecture*

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Architects

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Contents

Mimesis and Imagination
Patrick Lynch

Design seems to involve as much looking as thinking, and as much remembering as imagining. In this way, it is not dissimilar to a first encounter with a new building or a strange place—where orientation is dependent upon interpretation of experiences of typical situations, and unconscious anticipation of what will happen next. Similarly, reading someone's impressions of a building that you have designed is an odd experience for an architect—both uncanny and strangely familiar. It has more in common with a dream than anything else. If you are an architect who is also a writer—and arguably we all are to some degree—you are used to a certain disjunction between images, metaphors and physical experiences. Yet, encountering architectural criticism is a physical and psychic shock, unnerving: like seeing something unexpected suddenly and fleetingly reflected in a mirror. Despite your own conscious recollection of a catalogue of memories and half remembered images and atmospheres, critics sometimes recognise references to buildings and places that you had forgotten, or weren't even aware that you knew about. In most cases, their references are not yours at all, and if you allow it, an architectural project can have the unexpected effect of beginning conversations about the power of memories, the role of archetypes, and the significance of cultural differences. Writing about our Victoria library project in 2014 Flora Samuel claimed that "Spatial games and historical quotations are clearly present in this highly intellectual composition, evidently an immense investment of care on the part of the architect. This gives the library the necessary authority for this august location. It won't be outdated in a hurry."[1] This is, of course, exactly the sort of critique that any literate architect would wish for, but its also unnerving. She continues, "Kings Gate has a layered facade that fits immaculately well into its surroundings, offering colonnaded urban space at base level. I can actually read the layers of architectural history that have gone into its evolution." What layers can she read in the drawings and images of the buildings? And how can one's memories of buildings and situations communicate themselves so readily?

It is curious that a new building can immediately orient you somewhere. Buildings seem to contain—all at once—recognition, surprise, memory, expectation, premonition and anticipation. In Baroque architecture for example, the tension between 'deformation' and 'reformation' creates rhythmic, geometric and atmospheric richness—vitality and excitement—as you move across and through facades, staircases and courts. This theatricality depends upon a certain amount of recognition of a continuity of references, and disorientation is a vital aspect of the drama of spatial continuity, albeit a sensation that is dependent upon continuity as much as discontinuity.[2]

This essay, and the others in this book, are reflections on the phenomenon of mimesis in architecture, and concern more or less specifically its appearance in the work of my practice. I'm painfully aware of the differences between words and images and the reality of architectural experience—when I hear an architect speak about their work I can't help remembering the words of a critic: "Put your hands on the car, and step away from the metaphor", but I can't help remaining curious about the relationships between words and buildings.

Drawings and models allow you to get quite close to experiencing the qualities of spaces and allow you to adjust the proportions of things, but nonetheless there are things that you cannot understand as a designer as a sequence of images and memories and moods unfurl

1 *Blueprint*, 23 April 2014.
2 Lynch, Patrick, *The Theatricality of the Baroque City*, Dr Müller Verlag, 2011 (this originated in my MPhil dissertation at Cambridge University supervised by Dalibor Vesely, 1996). See also "Practical Poetics: Rhythmic Spatiality and the Communicative Movement between Site, Architecture and Sculpture", unpublished PhD dissertation, Patrick Lynch, The Cass, 2014 (supervised by Peter Carl, Helen Mallinson and Joseph Rykwert).

Opposite
Patrick Lynch, Sketches of the new hall of the ELBWO Centre, London, E7

Above
Model photographs and photograph of the ELBWO Centre

Overleaf
Ground plan, section and street facade

Photograph of the ELBWO Centre,
destroyed by arson, 2004

inside and before you. It is in this latent territory of imagination, neither entirely linguistic or typological, nor purely tectonic or spatial, that mimesis operates within architecture. In order to try to describe this territory, I will refer to some of the philosophical and artistic ideas that structure my work as an architect, and in particular to the tradition of hermeneutics.

In *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Frank Auerbach likens his approach to "those modern writers who prefer the exploitation of random everyday events, contained within a few hours and days, to the complete and chronological representation of a total exterior continuum… they hesitate to impose upon life, which is their subject, an order which it does not possess in itself".[3] He describes his method as "letting myself be guided by a few motifs which I have worked out gradually and without a specific purpose", and justifies this, "for there is always going on within us a process of formulation and interpretation whose subject matter is our own self. We are constantly trying to give meaning and order to our lives in the past, the present, and the future, to our surroundings, the world in which we live; with the result that our lives appear in our own conception as total entities—which to be sure are always changing, more or less radically, more or less rapidly, depending on the extent which we are obliged, inclined, and able to assimilate the onrush of new experience."[4] Auerbach defends modern mimesis in terms of its psychological and phenomenal realism: "These are the forms of order and interpretation which the modern writers… attempt to grasp in the random moment—not one order and one interpretation, but many, which may either be those of different persons or the same person at different times; so that overlapping, complementing, and contradiction yield something that we might call a synthesised cosmic view or at least a challenge to the reader's will to interpretative synthesis."[5] He notes the emergence of this view in the early twentieth century in contrast to the "pseudo-scientific, syncretistic and primitive" views of various "sects": "the temptation to entrust oneself to a sect which solved

3 Auerbach, Frank, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Princeton University Press, 1953, 2003, p 548.
4 Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, p 549.
5 Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature.*

Study drawing and model photograph of Lynch Architects' competition winning proposals for Barking Abbey Green

all problems with a single formula, whose power of suggestion imposed solidarity, and which ostracised everything which did not fit in and submit—this temptation was so great that, with many people, fascism hardly had to employ force when the time came for it to spread through the countries of old European culture, absorbing the smaller sects".[6] Mimesis, he suggests, implies a political dimension related to freedom and creativity both in art, and in life generally.

Dalibor Vesely, describes mimesis as "creative imitation in which something with the potential to exist is recognised and reenacted as a significant gesture; it may be sound, as song or music; visible reality, as image or picture; or ideas, as an articulated and structured experience" (ie architecture).[7] He claims that "we do not as a rule think about architecture as being a mimetic art", because 'this disinclination has partly to do with the well-established tradition in which architectural mimesis was reduced to imitation of reified precedents, such as the primitive hut, the Solomonic Temple, exemplary buildings, and so on, or to such generalised notions as 'the imitation of nature'."[8] Vesely believes, however, that architectural representation is closely related to mimesis as *decorum*. Decorum is a term in classical poetics and rhetoric that describes the appropriateness (*prepon*) of dramatic emphasis, and the relationships between content and expression. Crucially, in terms of mimesis, decorum is not in itself representation, but a quality or sensibility and judgement of poetic measure: "Mimesis is not the same as imitation; classical thinkers saw it as a particular form of *poiesis*."[9] Vesely's observation is based not only on Plato's insistence that 'every artist is a poet',[10] but also on Aristotle's description of art as "the imitation of praxis".[11] He defines praxis as "living and acting in

6 Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, p 550.
7 Vesely, Dalibor, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production*, MIT, 2004, p 287.
8 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, p 366.
9 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation.*
10 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, Vesely cites Plato, *Symposium*, 204b-6.
11 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, p 367, Vesely cites Aristotle: "It is mainly because a play is a representation (*mimesis*) of action (*praxis*) that it also for that reason represents people as doing something or experiencing something (*prattontes*)", *Poetics*, 1451b10.

accordance with ethical principles" and also as "people doing or experiencing something but also things that contribute to the fulfilment of human life".[12] One definition of poetics is "making", and as such "(*poiesis*) is the bringing into being in the world something that did not previously exist".[13] If mimesis plays a role in both praxis and poetics, this suggests that they are complimentary in a practical art such as architecture, if, albeit, often in tension. This tension arises from the directed nature of architectural work and from the mysterious character of mimesis, which hints at a deeper ambiguity in imaginative creativity arising from the interplay of intentionality and chance. Arguably, this tension is not only characteristic of our work as architects, which strives towards order of sorts, but also of the nature of order itself. Vesely notes that "mimesis reveals the mystery of order as a tension between its potential and actual existence".[14]

I think that "potential" describes the essential character of design energy, situated somewhere between knowledge and anticipation, direction and imagination. I believe that the mimetic potential of architecture resides in the ambiguity of our commissions and in an architect's creative resolution of practical and artistic problems. The directed nature of this work can be compared to the role that "plot" (*mythos*) plays in drama. On the one hand: "Each project, however small or unimportant, begins with a program—or at least with a vision of anticipated result. Such a program or vision is formed in the space of experience and knowledge available to each of us. The result can be seen as the single actualization of an infinite number of possibilities",[15] and on the other hand, architecture is not merely an example of "the science of poetics, known better as aesthetics",[16] but of the "poetic paradigm" (or "poetic mythos"), because, otherwise "how could architecture, painting, and practical life ever meet?"[17] Their capacity to meet lies in the mimetic potential of each new commission I believe—the potential for a project to become part of a whole. You might say that decorum is the *barometer* of the mimetic potential of architecture to articulate latent order. Which is why it is possible for us, Vesely claims, to "speak about poetic mythos as the soul of all the creative arts, including architecture".

There is a tension between the banal aspects of singular commissions and the artistic potential in design problems of course. This tension is implicit in praxis in general, Peter Carl claims, since "One always finds oneself in an agonic movement between particular and universal, between concrete many and symbolic one, between dialogue and dialectic… between earth (conditions) and world (possibilities), which points to the universal nature of 'situation' (all situations involve interpretation)."[18]

In other words, you might say that architecture is an exemplary mode of praxis, and an art, because it reconciles programme (plot, myth) and craft (technique, poetics) with specific situations; and it does so in relation to the broader context of typicality and order. Hans-Georg Gadamer claims in fact that:

> Testifying to order, mimesis seems as valid now as it was in the past, insofar as every work of art, even in our own increasingly standardised world of mass production, still testifies to that deep ordering energy that makes life what it is. The work of art provides a perfect example of that universal characteristic of human existence—the never-ending process of building a world.[19]

Top
Photograph of Barking Abbey ruins in use for an orthodox mass and pilgrimage

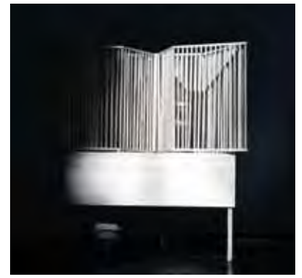
Bottom
Photograph of Barking Abbey Green during consultation with local residents

12 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, p 368.
13 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, pp 12–13.
14 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, p 288.
15 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, p 13.
16 The passage cited is from an unpublished manuscript version of Vesely's *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production.*
17 Unpublished manuscript version of Vesely's *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production.*, p 368.
18 Carl, Peter, "Geometry and Discourse", unpublished essay, 2010.

Why then, did Aristotle talk of art (mimesis) as "mysterious" and "inscrutable to human intelligence"?[20]

The answer lies I believe in the way that "art dwells with the same objects as chance… chance is beloved of art and art of chance".[21]

The role of chance in creative imitation is obvious when we think about the difference between an art work and a forgery of course—the latter is an attempt to produce an exact copy of an 'original', excluding chance. Yet the emphasis placed upon originality in modern culture is deeply problematic. In contrast to traditional "anachronic art" eg icons, etc, the twentieth century avant-garde both worshipped original art works, and sought within mechanical processes methods to overcome the excessive intentionality of individual commissions and the cult of personality.[22] Attempts to artificially simulate the role that chance plays in directed work is one of the lasting legacies of Surrealism and Dada. Games such as *Exquisite Corpse* imitate some of the rhythmic movement of imagination, in an attempt to introduce chance into dialogue. In late twentieth century architectural culture, the directed character of design work—its commissioned nature and civic character—was often abandoned in favour of formalistic method and aesthetics, and thus emancipated from the creative tension between intention and chance. Constant's *New Babylon* project (1959–1974) sought to try to artificially imitate the effects of historical change and chance upon the design of cities based on *freedom from* typical situations.[23] Colin Rowe's picturesque and formalistic use of Lévi-Strauss' term "bricolage" introduced faux-vernacular complexity into architecture[24] as an aesthetics of chance bereft of political *agon*.[25] Both Constant and Rowe worshipped a sort of automatic



Study models of new bell tower for Barking Abbey

19 Bernasconi, Robert, ed, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans Nicholas Warner, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p 104 (cited by Vesely in *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, p 288).
20 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, p 287. Vesely is citing Aristotle, *Physics*, 196b5.
21 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation* Vesely is citing Aristotle, *Niomachean Ethics*, 1140a20.
22 Wood, Christopher, and Alexander Nagel, *Anachronic Renaissance*, Zone Books, 2010.
23 "It is obvious that a person free to use his time for the whole of his life, free to go where he wants, when he wants, cannot make the greatest use of his freedom in a world ruled by the clock and the imperative of a fixed abode. As a way of life Homo Ludens will demand, firstly, that he responds to his need for playing, for adventure, for mobility, as well as all the conditions that facilitate the free creation of his own life. Until then, the principal activity of man had been the exploration of his natural surroundings. Homo Ludens himself will seek to transform, to recreate, those surroundings, that world, according to his new needs. The exploration and creation of the environment will them happen to coincide because, in creating his domain to explore, Homo Ludens will apply himself to exploring his own creation. Thus we will be present at an uninterrupted process of creation and re-creation, sustained by a generalised creativity that is manifested in all domains of activity", *New Babylon—A Nomadic City*, Constant Nieuwenhuys, exhibition catalogue, the Haags Gemeetenmuseum, Hague, 1974.
24 Rowe, Colin and Fred Koetter, *Collage City*, MIT, 1978. The picturesque and formalist character of their adoption of the term is clear in this passage, where Rome is described as "a collision of palaces… an anthology of closed compositions and ad hoc stuff in-between which is simultaneously a dialectic of ideal types plus a dialectic of ideal types with empirical context… something of the bricolage mentality at its most lavish… the physique and politics of Rome provide perhaps the most graphic example of collisive (sic.) fields and interstitial debris, there are the calmer versions of equivalent interests, which are not hard to find", p 106.
25 "A specific situation, by its relative nature, limits us to relative ends", *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture*, PhD Dissertation, Peter Eisenman, Cambridge University, 1963; Facsimile published by Lars Muller, 2006, p 31. Instead, Eisenman claims, what matters is "form", and "total external order is our absolute", p 30. The term "form" is used in an attempt to limit and to control "individual expression", which Eisenman accepts as "legitimate", but which needs to be controlled for the sake of "the comprehensibility of the environment as a whole", p 29. Unsurprisingly, he studied Terragni's work for an absolutist regime in absolute terms.

complexity in design, complexity that imitates the historical, economic and social forces that create richness in cities. But their complexity is formal complexity only; complexity without dialectics, without political agon, without anything being at stake.

I believe, in contrast to this, that the civic character of architecture means that complexity cannot be approached in architectural design except in terms of situation and use. Yet on the whole the practical nature of situations remains obscured today by a "contemporary version of poetics often reduced to technical innovation and aesthetics", Vesely states, alerting us to the directed and representational character of design. The task of "restoring the practical nature of situations as a primary vehicle of design enables us", he claims, "to move away from inconclusive play with abstract forms and functions".[26] In other words, the problem facing us

26 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation.*

Top
Study collage of Barking Abbey ruins with proposed new structures

Bottom
Study collage of Barking Abbey Green with proposed new museum tower

in contemporary design can be seen as the restoration of an idea of a poetics of praxis based upon mimesis of praxis.

Mimesis is not simply a matter of the *outward appearance* of something; mimesis, in architecture is the expression also of the decorum of situations housed *within* a facade. This depth cannot be fully grasped by either the introverted nature of functionalism on the one hand, nor the extroverted character of formalism on the other. Rather, decorum is the communication between both the interior and exterior of buildings, people and the world. We see this most clearly illustrated in the role that facades play as communicative spatial thresholds between interior and exterior rooms—indeed, the facade was itself understood as a type of space in Baroque architecture, one with poetic potential to situate activity in terms of decorum. This notion still has currency in modern architecture, I believe.[27]

Yet contemporary architects are still struggling with the idea of the facade as a legitimate aspect of architectural culture. Cino Zucchi describes this struggle in relation to modernist puritanism: "The facade is a phenomena. Architecture has turned it into a theme, only to try to sacrifice it like Abraham's son Isaac on the altar of method. But the modernist axiom of interior-exterior continuity, and the claim that they are a formal unity can only be regarded as an often misunderstood begging of the question. The facade implies arbitrariness." His conclusion is that "the constraints implied by the plan of a building are not capable of fully controlling the residual dimensional and material liberty of the surface of the external wall, in its constant aspiration to achieve the freedom of purely visual existence".[28] Visual discontinuity between interiors and exteriors need not imply a lack of spatial continuity, nor a lack of judgement about the appropriateness of the degree of difference between them. In other words, despite outward appearances, "the original relationship between *prepon* and mimetic representation reveals how close architectural representation is to mimesis".[29] In fact, Zucchi and Vesely both agree that whilst modern buildings might not immediately appear to possess mimetic characteristics, their success often lies in their evocation of an archetype. Vesely describes archetypes in terms of "paradigmatic situations",[30] whilst Zucchi refers to "a common language",[31] suggesting the continuity of decorum as a basis for architectural representation.[32]

27 The facade is the meeting between outside and inside = *Fasaden ar motet mellan ute och inne*, Peter Celsing, Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1992.
28 Zucchi, Cino, "Asnago Vender: Everyday Abstraction", in *Asnago Vender and the Construction of Modern Milan*, ed Adam Caruso and Helen Thomas, Zurich: GTA, 2014, pp 64–65.
29 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, p 366.
30 "The persistence of primary symbols, especially in the field of architecture, contributes decisively to the formation of secondary symbols and finally to the formation of paradigmatic situations. Paradigmatic situations are similar in nature to institutions, deep structures, and archetypes. The role of the paradigmatic structure of a spatial situation is comparable to poetic mythos in a poem or a play. Both have the power to organise individual events and elements of praxis into a synthesis and give them a higher and more universal meaning." Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, p 368.
31 "In their designs, Asnago Vender did not seek a mimetic relationship with existing buildings that had a direct figurative connection. Sometimes the character of a project can be discerned through what looks like a reflection on the archetype." Zucchi, "Asnago Vender: Everyday Abstraction", p 67.
32 "But what is needed, is in my view, not a theory of decorated sheds. Rather, it is a theory which concerns itself at least in part with contemporary variants of the traditional concept of 'decorum'… to establish systems of propriety in the employment of any particular architectural vocabulary. Now, calling for the return of such a classical concept of decorum may seem even more contentious than the claims of Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour have made that I have criticised, but I don't think that it ought to be. To begin, I should state that I can only imagine the contemporary theory of decorum being formulated in the context of the (wary) attitude manifest in a familiar remark of Jean Cocteau: 'Tact in audacity, consists in knowing how too far you can go.' Any modern theory of decorum would have to sustain that degree of ironic resonance." Baird, George, "A Critical Reflection on the Theory and Practice of Architectural Symbolism in the Work of Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown, and their Colleagues", 1976, in *Writings on Architecture and the City*, Artifice books on architecture, 2015.

Top
Photograph of the town crest of Barking

Middle and bottom
Model photographs of proposed museum tower 1/50 scale model with carvings by Hilary Koob-Sassen

Johan Celsing recently prefaced an essay on the continuing relevance of decorum citing Alberti—"The greatest glory in the art of building is to know what is appropriate"[33]—claiming: "that what makes a project beautiful or important cannot solely be found in the aesthetic categories is becoming increasingly clear.... Decorum therefore decouples to some extent the question of appearance from what we like personally. What is fitting can obviously take many different forms, provided that it serves the purpose demanded by the task…. Developing one's judgement to enable understanding of what is fitting, just or appropriate in an architectonic commission is the central task for every architect and, in my opinion, every individual. Judgement is trained naturally in the concrete task that we are given to solve."[34]

In architectural terms, decorum determines the dramatic character of situations and of their narrative and spatial continuity, as well as their communicative or civic role.

The pleasure of appropriateness involves patience and enjoyment in looking and thinking: "It implies that order is represented in such a way that it becomes conspicuous and actually present in sensuous abundance."[35]

It is tempting to construe Vesely's phrase "*sensuous abundance*" as inappropriate or hedonistic decoration, but I believe that these aesthetic terms, with their overtones of puritan disgust for the playful nature of reason, disguise the carnal and imaginative character of mimetic order—its superabundance of sense and sensibility.

Poetic abundance isn't an overload of information or an excess of stuff—it is an abundance of pleasure in the haptic qualities of language and the mimetic character of imagination.

For architects, this *mimetic order* resides in the "sensuous abundance" of drawing and model-making and in craft in general—there is a direct relationship between the pleasure and skill of work in the design studio, and the poetic quality of a finished building. This connection is possible because design involves the tensions and "reciprocity of the actual and the

Axonometric and study collage of proposals for Barking Abbey ruins during a summer wedding

33 Alberti, Leon Battista, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans J Rykwert, N Leach and R Tavenor, MIT, 1990.
34 Celsing, Johan, "Decorum, tentative notes on its contemporary relevance and use", unpublished essay, 2013.
35 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, p 366.

possible… the reciprocity of necessity and freedom, where 'necessity' represents a given reality—the inevitable, necessary condition of our freedom and creativity".[36]

I find that *the reciprocity between freedom and necessity* comes to appearance most readily in the role that chance plays in the act of designing. Chance introduces spontaneity, whilst keeping alive the playful and directed character of design thinking, "the rhythm and movement of the processes of making itself".[37] Physical gestures and rhythms abound in model-making and drawing, uniting design with imaginative occupation, enabling the imitation and anticipation of inhabitation. In this way, the poetics of architecture co-exists as a space and time of reflection within the process of design of buildings, and has its shadow, or other, in the lag between surprise, recognition and delight, in your experiences of them. This suggests to me that the mimetic character of imagination has its shadow in the creative action of understanding the world in general—and what is at stake in both of these experiences is participation. Mimesis might be described as a form of imaginative participation.

Hans-Georg Gadamer points out that participation lies at the heart of Plato's demonstration of the beautiful—as that which is visible to all. The beautiful "finds its concrete form in the concept of participation (*methexis*) and concerns both the relation of the appearance to an idea and the relation of ideas to one another".[38] For Gadamer, participation is most evident in festivals, and indeed all art is essentially festive for him.[39]

Whilst it is tempting to see cities made up of historical building types—and the temptation for a literate architect is to want to copy these in the name of tradition or irony—a city might be best understood as a series of settings for dialogue, sites for the festive and everyday rhythms and spontaneity of city life. There is a paradox here of course. "However much beauty might be experienced as the reflection of something supraterrestial, it is still there in the visible world", Gadamer explains, and "beauty has the most important ontological function: that of mediating between idea and appearance". Yet "the beautiful appears not only in what is visibly present to the senses", Gadamer claims, because "it does so in such a way that it really exists only

Model photograph and study collage of Barking Abbey Green showing children's playground, museum tower and cafe

36 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, p 58.
37 Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, p 288.
38 Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1993, p 481.
39 *The Relevance of the Beautiful: Art as Play, Symbol and Festival and other essays.*

through it—ie emerges out of a whole".[40] Whilst "Plato linked the idea of the beautiful to that of the good, he was still aware of the difference between the two and this difference involves the *special advantage of the beautiful*", Gadamer declares.[41] The advantage it has is that: "The beautiful is distinguished from the absolutely intangible good in that it can be grasped. It is part of its own nature to be something visibly manifest. The beautiful reveals itself in the search for the good."[42]

Whilst beauty is manifest in material things, it is better, Gadamer suggests, to describe it "not as simply symmetry but appearance itself… related to the idea of 'shining'.... Beauty has a mode of being of *light*."[43] Because it is "what is 'most radiant' (*to ekphanestaton*)", Gadamer suggests, beauty is something that illuminates and makes beautiful the things that surround it.[44]

This image of beauty, or rather of *the effect of beauty*, as radiant light, evokes a force connecting and illuminating things in time and across "epochs", suggesting also something like Auerbach's sense of "flow" or *influence*. In architectural terms, this phenomenon can be seen in the influence that ideas have across different societies and their presence in buildings of different styles. It is most clearly manifest in the combined effect of buildings that are designed to sit beside each other, and, I believe, lingers in the resulting sensation that we encounter in this situation, of new things that appear both strange and familiar at once.[45]

The most explicit example of an attempt to visually represent the continuing influence of iconological themes across time is Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*. Begun in 1924 and incomplete at his death in 1929, it consists of 63 wooden panels 1.5 x 2 metres wrapped in black cloth, arranged thematically in 14 sections, onto which Warburg juxtaposed over 1,000 photographs of images of antique artefacts with examples of their influence upon post-Renaissance Western culture, what he called "antiquity's afterlife".[46] Christopher Johnson claims that the "*Bilderatlas* functions cartographically too, as it explores how meanings are constituted by the movement or translation of themes and styles between east and west, north and south."[47] For him, "Warburg's Atlas explores a middle way between literature and science as it makes visible patterns claiming both imaginative and referential meaning."[48] Warburg believed that the encounter of reason and emotion in artistic influence typified the role that memory (*Mnemosyne)* plays in culture generally, and his Atlas "hoped to create 'metaphoric distance'… *Distanz* that would mediate between unbridled pathos and constricting abstraction", Johnson claims. Warburg saw the perils of unmediated appropriation of the

Photographs of the new playground by Lynch Architects at Barking Abbey Green

40 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p 482.
41 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p 480.
42 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p 481.
43 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.
44 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.
45 Johnson, Christopher D, *Memory, Metaphor, and Aby Warburg's Atlas of Images*, Cornell, 2012: "Memory, Hölderlin intimates, sets us an impossible task in part because we are forever shuttling between the familiar and 'the foreign'", p 2. See also, Michaud, Philippe-Alain, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, Zone Books/MIT, 2007. A similar contemporary project, Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*, Thames and Hudson, 2007, is discussed by Teju Cole along with recent artistic projects that consider the possibilities of Richter's *Atlas Micromega*, 1962–2013, alongside Dina Kelberman's film project *I am Google*, which he describes as "less Warburg than Walmart", Cole, Teju, *The Atlas of Affect*, 7 July 2014: http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/dtake/the-atlas-of-affect/..
46 "Preface", p x. The 63 panels of *Mnemosyne Atlas* and are grouped under these 14 thematic or "iconological" headings: 1 Coordinates of memory; 2 Astrology and mythology; 3 Archaeological models; 4 Migrations of the ancient gods; 5 Vehicles of tradition; 6 Irruption of antiquity; 7 Dionysiac formulae of emotions; 8 Nike and Fortuna; 9 From the Muses to Manet; 10 Dürer: the gods go North; 11 The age of Neptune; 12 "Art officiel" and the baroque; 13 Re-emergence of antiquity; 14 The classical tradition today. Images of Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* can be seen here: http://www.engramma.it/eOS2/atlante/#
47 "Preface", p 10.
48 "Preface", p 11.

imagery of antiquity in his own lifetime "in the rise of fascism", Johnson declares, "whose imagery Warburg described as dangerously without any 'metaphoric distance' or mediation".[49] He suggests that *Mnemosyne Atlas*, was "audacious" and "perilous". Audacious because it represents "intellectual, spiritual thirst for syncretic solutions… never yields to the strictures (or rigours) of a single system of thought, never embraces the comforts of teleology, and yet continuously tries to expand the compass, the discipline of boundaries, of its questions. Perilous because his historical enquiries are fuelled by a precarious ideal affirming that the polar forces of reason and unreason can be balanced in ways redemptive not only for an individual thinker beset by personal demons, or *monstra*, as Warburg came to call them, but also the culture in which one labours and whose origins, history and future compel contemplation."[50] Warburg attempted to reunite the ethical and the aesthetic aspects of culture in a "*Denkraum*" or "thought-space", made up of his selection of wordless images—"ghost stories for all adults"[51]—that illustrate the power of metaphor across cultures, "anchored in the contingencies of language, personality, and ethics".[52] Johnson states that "for Warburg, metaphor is both the means (vehicle) and the aim (tenor) of his 'dialectic of the monster', the name he gives to the cognitive and historical process by which the artist, cosmographer, and critical spectator mediate between numerous polarities—world and self, fear and serenity, past and present, religion and science, magic and reason, the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, ecstasy and melancholy, and above all word and image—that they may yield phenomenological knowledge, psychological balance, and however tenuously, historical understanding. In brief, *Mnemosyne*'s panels show when and how metaphor (or 'pathos formula' or 'dynamoram') wins and loses a connection with what Edmund Husserl and Hans Blumenberg term the 'lifeworld'."[53] Warburg's emphasis upon the role of metaphor in imagination and memory suggests the inherently mimetic character of both. The tacit role that mimesis plays in daily life, and in the imagination, reveals its profound and continuing modest potency and relevance today.

Top
Collage study of Lynch Architects' proposals for Barking Abbey Ruins showing the synchronicity of seasons and its everyday and festive use as part of the town

Above
Site sections through Barking Abbey Ruins showing our proposals for "mimetic" structures

49 "Preface", p 12.
50 "Preface", p 13.
51 Warburg, Aby, *Mnemosyne: Grundbegriffe I*, fol 3, WIA, III.102.3.3.
52 "Preface", p 13.
53 "Preface", p x.

Addendum:
Notes on Mimesis and Type at Barking Abbey Green and The ELBWO Centre

ELBWO is an impure archetype. A collage of a typical West Indian yard house type based on a long veranda, and also something contextual: contextual not only to the client but also to the site typology. The setting was a courtyard defined by a line of south-facing mature trees in front of a Victorian, brick, Methodist chapel. This at least was our reading of the situation, of something occluded and lacking a cloister or any mediation between an obdurate windowless form and the courtyard and the world beyond.
Our design response was at once a high cultural archetype, ie a loggia, and also something typical and highly culturally specific, ie a verandah.

It is important to recognise that the design was in a very particular place and for an unusually cohesive range of uses and users, eg a black women's group operating as a crèche and an informal cultural centre as well as a local community hall.

The whole thing came to life as soon as it opened in summer 2004, people sitting on the verandah steps in the midday shade of the trees, seemingly naturally, etc.

Barking extends the logic of this empathetic and mimetic approach to site, use and history, recreating ghosts of the destroyed cloisters and religious structures around the ruined abbey, marking out spaces by traces of architectonic presence. For example, the *Hortus Conclusis* would be defined by shadows of colonnades around its edge, the metal columns framing modern versions of ambulatory routes, describing what is missing rather than replacing or directly reproducing what is lost.

These new structures house ramps and provide artificial lighting, making the site accessible physically; whilst also acting as interpretative structures for heuristic educational purposes. The phantom colonnades accommodate everyday uses and amplify the civic significance of the site, providing facilities for school visits and creating shelter for permanent exhibits of artefacts and historical information.

The various archetypes form something like a memory atlas. They also describe something that is hardly there, and are an attempt to demarcate and bring to the surface ancient spatial relationships that defined the site as sacred and semi-sacred territories. Our aim in trying to do this is educational and cultural—making visible the reasons why the ruin is an important historical artefact itself as a piece of semi-visible architecture territory.

We are also trying to find ways to support the continuing religious use of the site for summer weddings and for an orthodox pilgrimage each spring (there are lots of immigrants in Essex and the abbey is pre-schism so acts as a pilgrimage site for all Christians to worship the same saints, acknowledging its role as a popular centre of national reconciliation and universal identity).

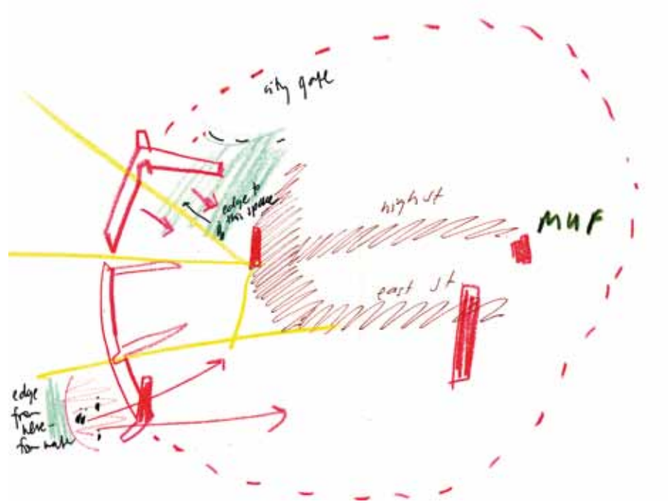
Our new structures enable the site to be used in a mundane sense everyday, as we provide safe access across the ruins connecting the riverside to the town centre.

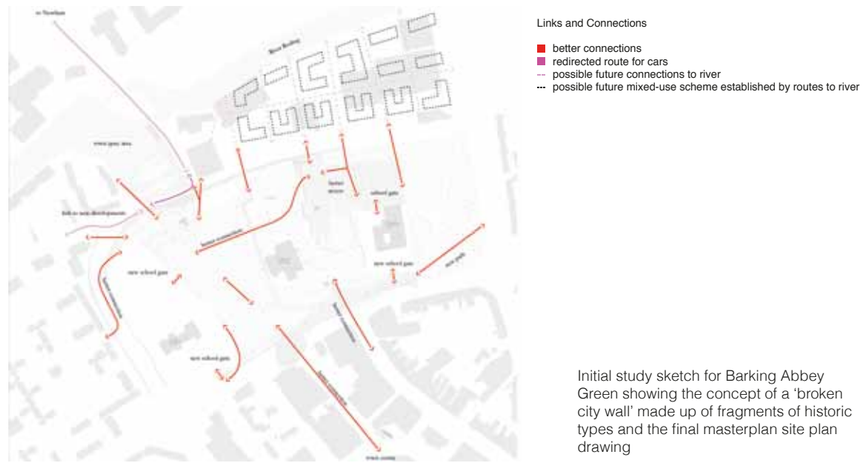
Our strategy for Barking Abbey Green was to have had the status of a master plan delineating and limiting a development strategy for the river edge, limiting future development of yet more "out of town" shopping sheds further cutting the town off from nature.

Studies and model photographs of proposals for Barking Abbey Green and the ruins of the Abbey

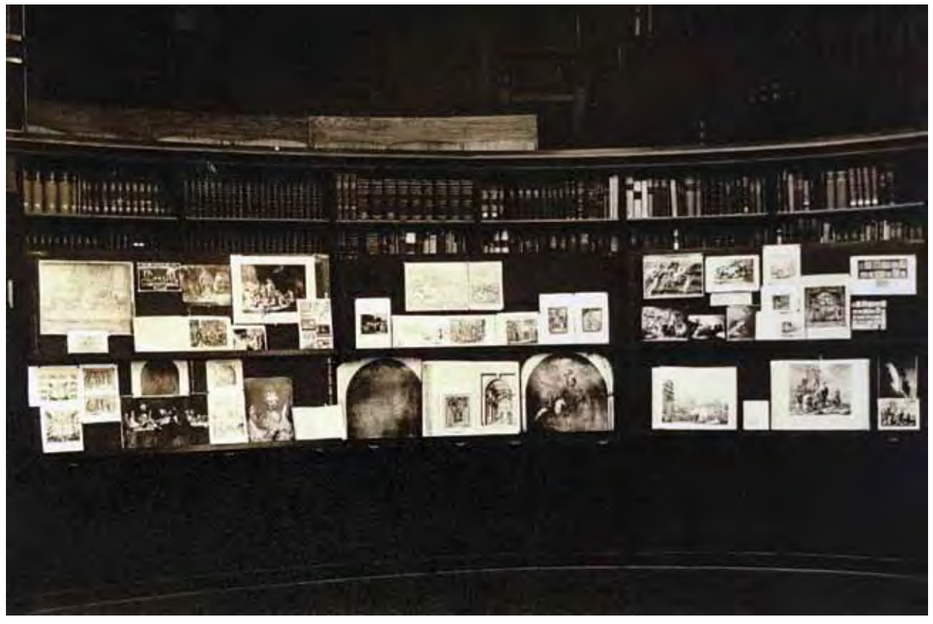
In these restorative projects architectural types are bound up with memory, creative mimesis, practical circumstances and cultural continuity—suggesting that they are exemplary generally of the ways in which we encounter communicative elements in our work as architects.

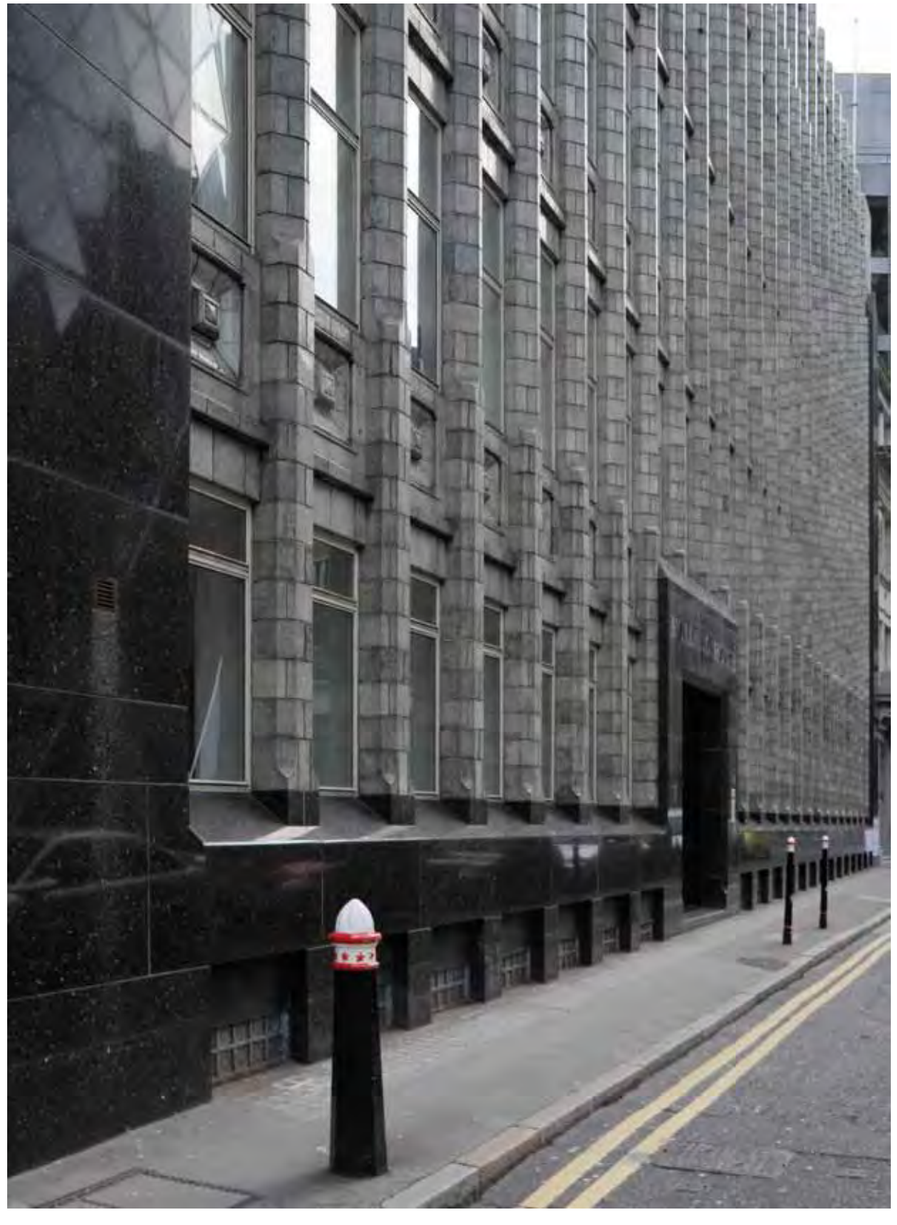
William Blake seemed to understand very well the difficult task of communicating in imaginative work, suggesting that the artistic problem of knowing when to stop is also a question of energy and risk: "You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough".





Initial study sketch for Barking Abbey Green showing the concept of a 'broken city wall' made up of fragments of historic types and the final masterplan site plan drawing






Controlled
ZONE