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*

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 Veselý, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production*
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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.” This is, of course, exactly the sort of critique that any literate architect would wish for, but it is also unnerving. She continues, “Kings Gate has a layered facade that fits immaculately well into its surroundings, offering codes and codes 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—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.” This is, of course, exactly the sort of critique that any literate architect would wish for, but it is also unnerving. She continues, “Kings Gate has a layered facade that fits immaculately well into its surroundings, offering codes and codes 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?

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

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 iconoclastic 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". 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
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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
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acquaintance with ethical principles” and also as “people doing or experiencing something but also things that contribute to the fulfillment 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.” 11 If mimesis plays a role in both praxis and poetics, this suggests that they are complementary in a practical art such as architecture, if, albeit, 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.” 12

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 at least with a vision of anticipated result. Such a program or vision is formed in the process of 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 something, but also things that contribute to the fulfillment of human life”. 12 One definition of poetics is “the science of poetics, known better as the single actualization of an infinite number of possibilities”, 13 and on the other hand, architecture is not merely an example of “the science of poetics, known better as aesthetics”, 14 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 productive and inscrutable creative interaction to become apparent in the mimetic potential of architecture as an aesthetic of the potential of human existence—the never-ending process of building a world. 19

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. 20

Why then, did Aristotle talk of art (mimesis) as “mysterious” and “inscrutable to human intelligence”? 21

The role of order 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 something, but also things that contribute to the fulfillment of human life”. 12 One definition of poetics is “the science of poetics, known better as the single actualization of an infinite number of possibilities”, 13 and on the other hand, architecture is not merely an example of “the science of poetics, known better as aesthetics”, 14 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 productive and inscrutable creative interaction to become apparent in the mimetic potential of architecture as an aesthetic of the potential of human existence—the never-ending process of building a world. 19

12 Vesely, Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation, p. 368.
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. 369.
21 Vesely, Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation Vesely is citing Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 11a40a20.
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 Horst Ludemann will demand, firstly, that he responds to his need for playfulness, for adventure, for mobility as all the conditions that facilitate the free creation of his own life. Until then, the principal activity of man has been the exploration of his natural surroundings. Horst Ludemann will seek to transform these, these surroundings, that work, according to his own needs. The exploration and creation of the environment will happen because in creating his domain to explore, Horst Ludemann will apply himself to exploring his own creation. Thus we will witness at an uninterrupted process of creation and re-creation, saturated by a generalized creativity that is manifested in all domains of activity”, Rave Babyloni, A Nomadic City: Constant Nomadicity, exhibition catalogue, the Thagg Gamarde Museum, Cape Town, 1974.
24 Rowe, Colin and Fred Koziol, Dolce City, MIT, 1978. The pictureque and formalist character of the adoption of the term “is clear in this passage, where Rome is described as “acollation of palaces...an anthology of closed compositions and ad hoc stuff in between which is simultaneously a dialectic of different types plus a dialectic of ideal types with empirical content...something of the bicameral mentality at its most levied...the physics and politics of Rome...pictorial marshes, like Colette’s ice, held and intolerant dezees, there are the calmer manifestations of equivalent intentions, which are not hard to find”, p. 109. 25 A specific situation, by its relative nature, limits us to relate event.”, Nelson Goodman, The Structure of Appearance, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973.
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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. Cizo 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.” 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 peepen and mimetic representation reveals how close architectural representation is to mimesis.”28 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”,29 whilst Zucchi refers to “a common language,”30 suggesting the continuity of decorum as a basis for architectural representation.31

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 decorative play with abstract forms and functions.”32 In other words, the problem facing us

26 Vesely, Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation.
29 Vesely, Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation, p.365.
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 parasitic situations. Parasitic situations are similar in nature to institutions, deep structures, and archetypes. The role of the parasitic structure of a spatial situation is comparable to poetic myths in a poem or a play. Both have the function to organize individual events and elements of praxis into a synthesis and give them a richer and more universal meaning.” Vesely, Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation, p.366.
31 “In their designs, Aarne-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, “Aarne-Vender: Everyday Abstraction”, p.67.
32 “But what is needed, in my view, is not a theory of decorum itself, or 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 Scharoun. I have been influenced by their work, but I don’t think that it ought to be”. In: “To be begin. I should state that I cannot imagine the contemporary theory of decorum being formulated in the context of the (very) attitudes manifest in a familiar remark of Jean Cocteau: ‘Tact in audacity consists in knowing how far too far you can go. Any modern theory of decorum would have to sustain that degree of ironic resonance.” Band, 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, Anthology books on architecture, 2015.

2015 Mimesis and Imagination: Patrick Lynch
Johan Celsing recently preplaced an essay on the continuing relevance of decorum citing Alberti—"The greatest glory in the art of building is to know what is appropriate"—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 mimetic order—its superabundance of sense and sensibility.

For architects, this mimetic order resides in the “sensuous abundance” of drawing and model-making and in craft in general—that 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 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 literal 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 supramundane, 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 as inappropriate or 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 mimetic order—its superabundance of sense and sensibility.

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Whilst it is tempting to see cities made up of historical building types—and the temptation for a literal 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 supramundane, 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 as inappropriate or 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 mimetic order—its superabundance of sense and sensibility.

For architects, this mimetic order resides in the “sensuous abundance” of drawing and model-making and in craft in general—that 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 possible... the reciprocity of necessity and freedom, where ‘necessity’ represents a given reality—the inevitable, necessary condition of our freedom and creativity.”

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through it—is emerges out of a whole”.44 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.45 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.”46

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”.47 Because it is “what is most radiant” (to elephanestatikos), Gadamer suggests, beauty is something that illuminates and makes beautiful the things that surround it.48

This image of beauty, or rather of the effect of beauty, as radiant light, evokes a force controlling and illuminating things in space and time, according to the “iconological” techniques, the generally accepted “iconological” grammar of 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.49

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”.50 Christopher Johnson describes 1,000 photographs of images of antique artefacts with examples of their influence upon post-Renaissance Western culture, what he called “antiquity’s afterlife”.50 Christopher Johnson describes Warburg's emphasis upon the role of metaphor in imagination and memory suggests the artistic 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 tensions, historical understanding. In brief, Mnemosyne's panels show when and how metaphor (or 'pathos formula' or 'dynamein') wins and loses a connection with what Edmund Husserl and Hans Blumenberg term the "new inquiry".53 Warburg's emphasis upon the role of metaphor in imagination and memory suggests the inherently mimesis character of both. The tacit role that mimesis plays in daily life, and in the imagination, reveals its profound and continuing modified potency and relevance today.

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, Mnemosyne, and Aby Warburg’s Atlas of Images, Cornell, 2012; “Memory, Hölderlin intemates, sets us an impossible task in part because we are forever shifting between the familiar and the foreign”, p.2. See also, michaël, philippe-alain, Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion, Zone Books/MIT, 2007. A similar contemporary project, gerard riché’s Atlas, thames and Hudson, 2007, is discussed by teju cole along with recent artistic projects that consider the possibilities of riché’s Atlas, Mimesis in 1926-1923, 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://thenewrepublic.com/blogs/takeoff/2014/07/07/warburg-implosion.
47 “Preface”, p. 10.
48 “Preface”, p. 11.
49 “Preface”, p. 12.
51 Warburg, Aby, Mnemosyne: Grundbegriffe I, vol 3, WIA, III.102.3.3.
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 Conclusus 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.

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.”