

STUDIO THEORY IN POETICS AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT:

When we practice, we practice in spaces, most commonly described as "rooms". The rooms we inhabit come to describe our ways of practice. Equally, through their inherent limits, the rooms we work in come to define our ways of working. Large dreams may well be dreamed in small spaces, but, in small spaces, large sculptures can only be modelled, and constructed as fragments. In an effort to describe these limitations and to explore the possibilities of practice, we give special names to rooms. Kitchens are where we cook - from the popular Latin, cucina to cook. This embedded meaning makes sense except that the connection is not immediate and obvious to those untutored in Latin. The lack of obvious reference adds the possibility of radical obscurity. Do all words mean something else, or do some words just mean themselves? And, which ones are which? In its lack of an obvious semantic reference, the word "kitchen" becomes translucent. Through this process of passive disguise, the everyday kitchen acquires a nominal mystique: it is a kitchen not simply a room for cooking. The Bauhaus, mythological in its importance, sounds much less auspicious when renamed "the making house". The same is true when we exchange the semi-magic term "studio" for its companion term "study". A study is a place where intellectual contemplation takes place; a studio is a place where artistic making takes place. One room is for theory and abstract matters, the other is for practice and sensory matters. We enter each space already disposed to construct things or contemplate ideas and yet in each room we are making. By attending to how we name our working spaces we are able to shift attention from expected purposes towards the possibility of new ways and understandings of practising. By colliding studio with study we can arrive at a composite making place: Studio Theory. Here we may see ourselves work as we work.

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INTRODUCTION

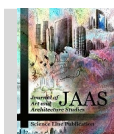
When we practice, we practice in spaces, most commonly described as "rooms". The rooms we inhabit come to describe our ways of practice. Equally, through their inherent limits, the rooms we work in come to define our ways of working. Large dreams may well be dreamed in small spaces, but, in small spaces, large sculptures can only be modeled, and constructed as fragments. In an effort to describe these limitations and to explore the possibilities of practice, we give special names to rooms. Kitchens are where we cook - from the popular Latin, cucina to cook. This embedded meaning makes sense except that the connection is not immediate and obvious to those untutored in Latin. The lack of obvious reference adds the possibility of radical obscurity. Do all words mean something else, or do some words just mean themselves? And, which ones are which? In its lack of an obvious semantic reference, the word "kitchen" becomes translucent. Through this process of passive disguise, the everyday kitchen acquires a nominal mystique: it is a kitchen not simply a room for cooking. The Bauhaus, mythological in its importance, sounds much less auspicious when renamed "the making house". The same is true when we exchange the semi-magic term "studio" for its

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Looking down

Before entering Studio Theory we need to acknowledge how comfortable we have become with our divided worlds. Keeping a studio and/or keeping a study we may feel well kept. According to Leslie Kanes Weisman:

Physical space and social space reflect and rebound upon each other. Both the world "out there" and the world inside ourselves depend upon and conform to our socially learned perceptions and values. Neither is understandable without the other. We keep a "professional distance" from our



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employees, students, patients, and clients. We "look up" to another person as a symbol of respect and "look down" on someone to signify disrespect or disdain [1].

Looking down from a studio seems equally as possible as looking down from a study. The garret and the tower offer to support each other in their own confirming ways. Fine Art and Arts sustain the rhetoric of each other through their recognition of their separateness. In Studio Theory there is no really comfortable place to sit; there is no gentle rhetoric of opposition. The presumption here is that Design has no secure place already made in the world of Fine Art or the world of Arts. Equally, the worlds of Engineering and the Social Sciences, significant as they are to Design, are no more than way stations.

Such way stations and such social roles have their virtues as well as pleasures, even if these virtues and pleasures have acquired defined and differentiated status over time. Poets may initiate the launching of a ship, but engineers believe they build them:

We may trace this division of pleasure [between poet and engineer] to many sources. Florman provides an account about the social status of doing and thinking about doing: "Plutarch, writing about Archimedes, assures the reader that, 'regarding the work of an engineer and every art that ministers to the needs of life as ignoble and vulgar, he devoted his earnest efforts only to those studies the subtlety and charm of which are not affected by the claims of necessity' [2]. Socially, the ability to determine the theoretical constraints of a construction method might seem to have an historic importance greater than any individual example in practice of those constraints. The further towards theory we go, the higher the status: a builder may build a bridge but an engineer can show the way to build many bridges. However, while the Greeks gained power over the concrete through their ability to abstract the design elements, the Egyptians actually built the pyramids. We still admire the pyramids in spite of the lack of theoretical geometric understanding by their makers [3].

For designers this history is cold comfort. The millions of clay artifacts left by the Egyptians talk to notions of mass production rather than to the role of designer. The degree of regularity in the artifacts only underscores the lack of status intrinsic to the task. Like cut out biscuits, the objects taunt their makers. As replicators of replications, these makers are unworthy citizens in the world of Socrates. What then is beyond imitation and the vulgarity of necessity? How is practice theory?

Myths that bind

Before we can re-investigate the pleasures of the designer, we need to de-mystify both the studio and the study. In taking up space, both the studio and the study take up their places in a social register.

Designers, scratching their foreheads in puzzlement at a task, are no different, in their scratching, to the thinkers scratching their foreheads in puzzlement, or the farm helpers, and so on. What we need to disclose is the designed nature of the identity reinforcing myths that surround us in our practices. That is, designers not only inhabit spaces designed for designers but they also design these very spaces. In this sense, designers create the world of objects not only to sustain their practice as the designers of objects, but also to reinforce, through the ideas invested in objects surrounding them, that they are the designers of objects.

Adrian Forty brings out the full force of this irony in the Introduction to his book, *Objects of Desire*:

Unlike the more or less ephemeral media, design has the capacity to cast myths into an enduring, solid and tangible form, so that they seem to be reality itself. We can take as an example the common assumption that modern office work is friendly, more fun, more varied and generally better than office work was in the "old days". The myth serves to reconcile most people's experience of the boredom and monotony of office work with their wish to think that it carries more status than alternatives, such as factory work, where there is no pretense about monotony. Although advertisements for office jobs, magazine stories and television serials have been responsible for implanting in people's minds the myth that office work is fun, sociable and exciting, it is given daily sustenance and credibility by modern equipment in bright colors and slightly humorous shapes, design that help make the office match up to the myth [4].

How to enter Studio Theory?

Exposing the myth is part of the theory task of practice. An initiation strategy for Studio Theory might include making obvious and/or concrete both what is already present and what is already absent in any design space. This can be done through an investigative inventory of objects both physical and mental. Following this, a codex of terms, concepts and models of design and designing can be established to allow for a grammar of occupation and use. Such a grammar, in the case of Studio Theory, would amount to the foundations of a poetic or formal study of making.

Within any grammar is the presumption of the human. Grammar takes its origin in the written form of language (the grapheme); it is a formalizing of a formalization and within this double-distance from the natural, it offers to re-present the human. In the case of a poetic the double distance offers a description of the artificiality of making. Within this account of the artificial, the presumption is that making is human and that therefore any account of making will also be, at the same time, an account of being human. To question the implicit humanity in such an account is to be audacious which is what we



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must be in Studio Theory. We must ask such things as:

Where does death fit in your model of design? Where does joy, love, hope, fear, sorrow, despair, tenderness, fit in your model of design? If these things are not to be found, somewhere, somehow, in your model of design, why should I, as a fellow human, be at all interested in your model of design? [5].

A gentler version of this same challenge can be overheard in the words of Herbert Simon:

The proper study of mankind has been said to be man. But I have argued that people - or at least their intellectual component - may be relatively simple, that most of the complexity of their behavior may be drawn from their environment, from their search for good designs. If I have made my case, then we can conclude that, in large part, the proper study of mankind is the science of design, not only as the professional component of a technical education but as a core discipline for every liberally educated person [6].

To warrant being "a core discipline for every liberally educated person", Design, and its relation with complexity, needs to be established in ways that go beyond Simon's determination. Most of the appeal in Simon's account comes from a wealth of illusion. While he urges the unification of professional cultures, the grounds of this unification would seem to be a kind of everyday exuberance:

Many of us have been unhappy about the fragmentation of our society into two cultures. Some of us even think there are not just two cultures but a large number of cultures. If we regret the fragmentation, then we must look for a common core of knowledge that can be shared by the members of all cultures - a core that includes more significant topics than the weather, sports, automobiles, the care and feeding of children, or perhaps even politics. A common understanding of our relation to the inner and outer environments that define the space in which we live and choose can provide at least part of that significant core [6].

Provided with his own opportunity to extend this core, Simon carries out an excursion into the realm of music, the most mathematical of all arts, to show that while few engineers and artists "can carry on a mutually rewarding conversation about the content of each other's professional work", they can "carry on such a conversation about design, can begin to perceive the common creative activity in which they are both engaged, can begin to share their experiences of the creative, professional design process". By being more explicit about the design processes in each culture, Simon argues we can establish an expanded area of professional culture that we share.

This limited description is fair less appealing than the notion that "the proper study of mankind is the science of design". When we look even closer at Simon's account, we note how rapidly the "science of

design", in terms of the connections between professions, becomes an everyday school book account:

Making complex designs that are implemented over a long period of time and continually modified in the course of implementation has much in common with painting in oil. In oil painting every new spot of pigment laid on the canvas creates some kind of pattern that provides a continuing source of new ideas to the painter. The painting process is a process of cyclical interaction between painter and canvas in which current goals lead to new applications of paint, while the gradually changing pattern suggests new goals.

While this is a woefully inadequate account of painting, it does allow Simon to establish a morality of initial Decisions. That is, like the painter, we must act on the basis that our first decisions "establish initial conditions for the next succeeding stage of action". The initial conditions, for Studio Theory, already exist. We are not able, like Simon, to discount time with the alacrity of a painter fresh to a new canvas. The complexity of our world is not resolved within the seemingly ordinary act of designing. And, while creativity might seem to be an obvious escape from facticity and historicity, creativity, in this account, is a delusion no more profound than the delusion of an empty canvas.

Such delusions exist. What we find in Studio Theory, as an already given, unwrapped and waiting, is Simon's model of free designing. This model sees Design as that kind of uninspected ordinary activity that might, in its intrinsic freedom to discount the past and future, create a practice that is itself free. New objects look like new designs. The biscuit cutters are altered, minutely, in two planes, incrementally, randomly, by color and so on. Daily, and hour by hour, such "new seeming" objects emerge in all their newness. These new objects, as if by magic, find their way into the mind. Here we can window shop like gods as we emerge ourselves in the fancy. This process, which has its counterpart in madness, is seen as benign by Simon:

Closely related to the notion that new goals may emerge from creating designs is the idea that one goal of planning may be the design activity itself. The act of envisioning possibilities and elaborating them is itself a pleasurable and valuable experience. Just as realized plans may be a source of new experiences, so new prospects are opened up at each step in the process of design. Designing is a kind of mental window shopping. Purchases do not have to be made to get pleasure from it.

One of the charges sometimes laid against modern science and technology is that if we know how to do something, we cannot resist doing it. While one can think of counter examples, the claim has some measure of truth. One can envisage a future, however, in which our main interest in both science and design will lie in what they teach us about the world and not in what they allow us to do



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to the world. Design like science is a tool for understanding as well as for acting.

The freedom proposed by Simon is a positive freedom - it is a freedom from, not a freedom for. It arises from the designer acting in the world as if the world in which the designer acted was a world already constituted as the stage for such an actor. It is the god position. We need wait for no future to inform us of the outcomes of such a position: they are all around us. Such capacity to rush after the richness of possibility no doubt exists. The enlarged understanding of making that Design might provide is also already open for our inspection in Studio Theory. But such understanding requires that we take our history in with us, along with our potential to act and our knowledge in action. That is, we act as we are which is inclusive of our possibilities and not simply the possibility of the objects of our making.

In Studio Simon, no doubt this would be most harmonious and there would be no funny business beyond the pure pleasures of design. Inspecting this studio, with the help Harry Coffin Stafford and Sam Keen, we can disclose much less pleasant features:

As Sam Keen points out, the highly advertised homo ludens ("man the playful one") is often a pathetic and thinly-disguised mask of homo Faber [7]. The widespread popularity of the playboy/playgirl models may be understood in part as the flip-side of the work boy/work girl images of the mechanical universe. Keen identifies "two foci of play: consuming and romantic sexual activity," [7]. Each of which reflects an underlying world view of orthodox consciousness [8].

The view of the playboy/playgirl that Keen presents has obvious connections not only with the world of consumption supplied with designed objects designed by designers to be consumed, but it also has connections with the myth of the designer made evident in the mythological space of the design studio. The irony is not so much that such spaces do not in fact exist, rather the irony is that the reality of such ideas inhabits objects and sustains the identity world of the studio. Here the fiction is more powerful than the fact. According to Keen:

Both the advertisements and the "Playboy Advisor" make it clear that the game of consuming has rules that must be rigidly followed. The playboy must be an expert on the latest styles in clothing, automobiles, wines and all luxury appliances; he must know whether to stir or to shake a martini. Moral concerns do not create any anxiety. but the possibility of being discovered "in bad taste" creates the spectra of shame - how embarrassing to quote the wrong authors, serve the wrong wine, be caught with old-fashioned "repressive" views, or the like [7,8].

So, the mythological pleasures may be opened up by design, and, in practice, they may seem to be the spoils of the designer. Like the blacksmiths of old, as portrayed in the film, *Erik the Viking*, the modern designer gets to play the boy/girl for the mere price

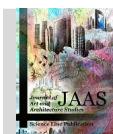
of handing over their energy into the service of the state. Such are the Children in the prophetic works of William Blake. The playing out of these myths is the playing into the hands of an uninspected history. That is, while playing designer in the Studio of Simon, the designer designs for the history they deny or are unaware exists outside the domain of freedom they have taken as their identity. This puzzle is further underwritten by Christian world views. As Stafford points out [8].

A further mythical orientation of both techno bureaucracy and Christian orthodoxy is the focus upon the possible at the expense of the actual, or a denigration of the present (this world) in favor of the future (a world-to-come). Orthodoxy, and more particularly fundamentalism, tends to anticipate a future divine intervention in human affairs to alleviate the demonic influence or power over this present world. Human fulfillment in the present is available only in fragmentary fashion; it must be postponed for the most part to the future life. Furthermore, one must strictly control and restrain present wishes and desires, fears and anxieties, for a life disciplined to future salvation [8].

In the happy practice in Studio Simon, the dominance of the possible over the actual has its support in the uninspected world of work and production that cultivates the designer as the instrument of the possible:

Although techno bureaucracy may engage in limited methodological experiments in the quest for greater efficiency, the only real innovations are new labor-saving devices or machines, not significant renovations of the a priori and arbitrary premises of the institutional structure itself. Technology may continue to create awesome new devices for the mechanizing of culture, but as of yet there is no evidence of any widespread examination of its essential world view [8].

While Stafford, in 1981, looked to historical necessity as one possible source of a significant critique of this world view, his hopes that ecological concerns might disturb the studio have not really eventuated, nor indeed, can they eventuate. Possibility may understand necessity but it does not bother with perhaps. The logic of Studio Simon is not so much incorrect as "wrong". That is, the logic is true to one aspect of making, the aspect that inverts homo faber ("man the maker") to homo fabricates ("man who is made" or "fabricated man") [8]. Having made the studio we now inhabit the studio as the inhabitants of the studio. In this institution we gain identity and security. The "wrongness" of this logic only becomes apparent when we recognize the correctness of the logic, and the inadequacy of this logic to our practice. Which takes us, for a moment, into the realms of pragmatism. Dewey, in surveying the history of American Pragmatism, points to this dilemma in practice:



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Number, space, time, resemblance and other important "categories" could have been brought into existence, he says [William James], as a consequence of some particular cerebral instability, but they could by no means have been registered on the mind by outside influence. Many significant and useless concepts also arise in the same manner. But the fundamental categories have been cumulatively extended and reinforced because of their value when applied to concrete instances and things of experience. It is therefore not the origin of a concept, it is its application which becomes the criterion of its value; and here we have the whole of pragmatism in embryo.

That "many significant and useless concepts also arise" in Studio Simon is something that needs to be acknowledged along with the parallel construction that all value is given to such concepts. Pure thought, in these terms, is no thought at all.

Making things concrete

Because Design has its objects, and because designing would seem to be fundamentally associated with a world of concrete things and physical processes, it can appear that Design is inherently integrative, substantial and indifferent to any other world. That is, it can appear, in Studio Simon, that value is intrinsic. Intrinsic value and material indifference, maintained at a high professional level through the guise of majesty, become their own compensation. Stuck with the concrete, the designer retains the position of a pleased dominance. In the words of Adorno and Horkheimer, talking about the world of the study, we can also see announced a critique of the world of the studio [9].

Abstraction, the tool of enlightenment, treats its objects as it did fate, the notion of which it rejects; it liquidates them. The distance between subject and object, a presupposition of abstraction, is grounded in the distance from the thing itself which the master achieved through the mastered. The universality of ideas as developed by discursive logic, domination in the conceptual sphere, is raised up on the basis of actual domination. The dissolution of the magical heritage, of the old diffuse ideas, by conceptual unity, expresses the hierarchical constitution of life determined by those who are free [9].

Within the magic of production, the designer, as maker, can establish a poetic of domination. The mastery of material processes then becomes a mastery of the non-human. The indifference of making can then become the ground of an artificial freedom. In Studio Theory the grounds for authentic making need to be explored as the grounds for a poetic that equals our expectation of being human.

The Fallacy of Misplaced-Concreteness

Before we approach freedom, we must first look more closely at the issue of the concrete and the issue of products. The brief history offered by John

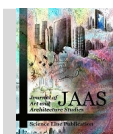
Chris Jones, covers recent forays into the realm of a philosophy of design [10].

And why did the new methods become fixed? Become objects? My guess, my feeling, my impression, my thought about this, is that, though we saw the need to change the processes of designing we did not see the need to change its aims. We retained the concept of "product" as the outcome of designing. We did not see that we were accepting only a part of the challenge which we took up: the challenge to transform the idea of progress, which presumes a specific goal, into the idea of process, which does not. This transformation is I now realize, a main event of the twentieth century, though it may have started earlier. A change which is happening in many areas of life, not only in design.

As a guide on the journey from product to process, Jones points to the views of Heidegger:

I've been reading the books of Martin Heidegger, whose way of doing philosophy can be seen as a change from progress to process. What he does is to refuse to be drawn into making any fixed conclusions, concepts, or theories, which are the accepted aims of Western philosophy. Instead he writes and teaches a mode of what he calls "meditative thinking" that is not intended to reach conclusions but to keep the process of thinking alive. While this kind of philosophy is happening, while the thinker is thinking, then it's happening. As soon as he reaches a conclusion it's over, dead. The aim does not disappear but it changes its nature. For what Heidegger calls "calculative thinking", thinking-as-a-means-to-an-end, the aim is external to the process. The use of thinking to establish truth, certainly; to control something. But for "meditative thinking", or what I am calling process-philosophy, the aim is internal: to maintain the process. Because, says Heidegger, only while we are giving our minds to whatever it is that provokes our thoughts are we being truly human. Calculative thinking being something that diminishes us, to a degree. His books are full of warnings that if, through the technologizing of life, calculative thinking becomes the universal mode of thinking, then the most valuable part of human life will have gone. That which makes us human. He does not say that technology and calculative thinking should be ended but that they must not become the whole of life. He accepts that, in their way, they are realities, parts of ourselves, something we cannot discard but something we should be free to accept or refuse according to the occasion [10].

These views offer a suggestion of a method, and we will return to Heidegger to assist in our explorations. Before undertaking this task, we need to inspect the status of the object, thing, or product from the perspective of presumed concreteness. While it might seem a simple matter to point to the general slide of ideas towards their own reification, the equal tendency on the part of objects to pretend to concreteness needs to be explored.



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It might seem obvious enough that an account of why a person does not have children is not at the same time an account of having children. The obviousness is again a pretending. So much of what we agree not to disclose in our awareness is at the same time the ground or horizon of our awareness. In Studio Theory we must sustain the difficult. Unlike the everyday world, we cannot rest secured in the knowledge of our purposed ignorance of objects. We know where these things come from:

Green plastic things don't normally appear to us at the end of a production run. Mostly we are nowhere near any form of production. Neat as the birth of the designed object may be, this is not how we find objects in the world of experience [11].

We, like non-practitioners, find ourselves in a world already inhabited, already stuffed full of green plastic things that are in denial of their facticity. These objects are fallacious. If simulacra acknowledge no source beyond their own self imaging, then these green plastic things acknowledge no source beyond their presenting. Fully substantial they are void. How to talk into this void?

Fallacies attract attention like saws. The Intentional Fallacy, for example, is frequently used as a whip to hold at bay the tigers of inter subjectivity: authors do intend and, more importantly, intentionally, as a general feature of consciousness, is a particular feature of language. The scribble in the sand is maybe the act of a vagrant but it is not a vagrant act. In terms of Alfred North Whitehead's famous Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness, it too has come to be used as a whip to hold at bay the tigers of an idealist, or process logic and critique. Most commonly, this fallacy is used as quick way to assert simple views of material substance over more complex views of human reality. Here consciousness is diminished as a feature of subjectivity and materiality is elevated as a feature of objectivity. Objects, before the mind, are mental constructs, whereas objects, in the world, are concrete. Love is a concept or affect cluster that remains hidden whereas the rush of blood to the cheek of an embarrassed adolescent is material and evident to the world. Design as practice, in Studio Theory, cannot afford such trivial thinking. Johnson, in his Whitehead's Theory of Reality, makes us aware of how much more is involved in determining the nature of the concrete:

In criticizing the work of previous thinkers, Whitehead points to a persistent tendency on the part of many to perpetrate the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness. This, as the title indicates, consists in mistaking the abstract for the concrete. More specifically it involves setting up distinctions which disregard the genuine interconnections of things. For example, (a) the old-fashioned "faculty psychology" discussed mere awareness, mere private sensation, mere emotion, mere purpose—each a separate and distinct faculty. (b) Another general

illustration of this error is the fallacy of Simple Location. This fallacy occurs when one assumes that in expressing the space and time relations of a bit of matter it is unnecessary to say more than that it is present in a specific position in space at a specific time. It is Whitehead's contention that it is absolutely essential to refer to other regions of space and other durations of time. Whitehead expresses this idea more clearly and briefly by stating that simple location means a mutually exclusive "individual independence." (c) A third general illustration of the fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness is the Substance-Quality concept. This is the notion that each real entity is absolutely separate and distinct from every other real entity, and that the qualities of each have no essential relation to the qualities of others [12].

As has been said, Whitehead objects to these three variations of the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness because they involve a "break up" of the real continuity of experience. He admits the practical usefulness of these fallacies. His objection is to the use of these patterns of thought without recognizing their serious deficiencies. Whitehead suggests that this approach is useful in metaphysical speculation only with reference to the "subjective form." If the notion of simple location is taken seriously (in general) the reality of temporal duration is denied. Memory and induction become hopeless mysteries. If the subject (substance) - predicate (quality) notion is accepted uncritically the subject is confined to a private world of experience. Solipsism is inescapable. Whitehead also notes that frequently the substance-quality form of thought involves the notion of "vacuous actuality"; that is, there is a denial of subjective experience to the ultimate realities [13].

"Vacuous actuality" is the condition of the speculative object born in the studio of window shopping. In the private world of experience, the designer is the object of self-irony. Here the objects of the imagination pretend to self-mediation: it is just magic. In pointing to the "reality of temporal duration" we need to avoid an equal danger which is the denial of the genuinely originary. That is, in questing for a non-vacuous actuality we may end with a reality that is filled to the point of spilling with the simple on goingness of things. There is an emptiness at the heart of knowing that needs to be approached. Just going on and on, with designing, makes for a spurious continuity in full disregard for "the genuine interconnections of things". The "and then-ness" of time makes all things their own origins; such trivial origins are really just denials of connection. That is, origin, as a logic feature, is a feature of any and all instances of thought or perception. In this sense, Whitehead's view of creativity can help us untangle the doubleness of being human in a world of things. William A. Christian offers this insightful account of Whitehead on creativity:



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Creativity is Whitehead's term for the most fundamental character of actuality. Creativity is not an individual thing and has no status apart from actual entities. By saying that creativity is "ultimate," Whitehead seems to mean at least two things:

(a) He means that any actual entity, whether God or an actual occasion, is not altogether derived from something else. There is an underived element in every actual entity. Every actual entity, not only God, is in some degree self-creative.

(b) He means that every actual entity is in some degree novel. The novelty of an actual entity is the uniqueness which results from its self-creativity. It is an essentially new unity of experience. Having in mind both of these meanings, it seems fair to say that an alternative expression for creativity might be "originality," in the fullest and most radical sense of the word [14].

The "underived element in every actual entity" would seem sufficient at the level of logic to permit a reviewing of reality as a process, especially if, as with Whitehead, we are aiming to shift attention in the subject-object debate, towards the materiality, or concreteness, of that relationship. The disjunctive diversity of reality, its and/or-ness seems to know no bounds beyond the logic of its being bound. That is, the disclosure of reality-in-process neither makes rivers run nor does it dry them up. Rather it makes available a critique of relations that reanimates the debate of permanence and change. Importantly, in this current context, it reanimates the debate on the origins of the human as subject and the position of the human as subject in the world. According to Whitehead, the outcome of his views, including those on creativity as radical, is the view that his "philosophy of organism is the inversion of Kant's philosophy. For Kant, the world emerges from the subject; for the philosophy of organism, the subject emerges from the world" [15].

Such views may be happy in the world of philosophy. In the case of Whitehead, they have their outcome in a religious view that is beyond the scope of this discussion. For the purposes of the argument here, the endless novelty of endless origin needs to be reviewed from a pragmatist perspective. Emerging from the world, as subject, the human is to be defined in tension with its own awareness of the endless novelty of awareness, experience and thought. There is no end to things to be dreamed about, constructed and replicated. Adam eats the apple, in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, after realizing the implications: it is an action based on lengthy debate. Adam choose Eve which is to say, he chooses to be human. There is a very obvious end to being human. In Studio Simon, this urgency of human valuation seems to be absent. In Studio Simon it as if we are in the Garden of Eden where the fruits of the mind are simply pleasures for the taking so long as none of them are taken from the tree of knowledge. As innocents, we can simply process through the garden adorned with the gorgeous tools of design. In Studio

Simon we might dare to take the clock apart to re-build it in a novel way. In contrast, in Studio Theory we would take the clock:

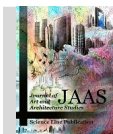
Daring to ask "what is a clock" (and subsequently, "what is time") would take us away from the infinite series of modifications that suit environments, styles that suit users, and types that suit functions; it would take us back to the questions of designing where the revisions are open to being total: daring to ask would take us back to the originary [16].

The originary, as an aspect of human valuation, opens up the possibility of an awareness of "the genuine interconnections of things". It opens up the possibility for another kind of existential freedom; one in which the mockery of novelty and the idiocy of disjunctive variation are balanced by the choice to defer the infinite possible for the sake of the temporal actual. Such a deferral would seem to be the ground of Dewey's assertion of the practical character of reality:

Common sense regards intelligence as having a purpose, and knowledge as amounting to something. I once heard a physicist, quite innocent of the pragmatic controversy, remark that the knowledge of a mechanic or farmer was what the Yankee calls gumption - acknowledgment of things in their belongings and uses, and that to his mind natural science was gumption on a larger scale: the convenient cataloguing and arranging of a whole lot of things with reference to their most efficacious services. Popularly, good judgment is judgment as to the relative values of things: good sense is horse sense, ability to take hold of things right end up, to fit an instrument to an obstacle, to select resources apt for a task. To be reasonable is to recognize things in their office as obstacles and as resources.

The "ability to take hold of things right end up" would seem simple enough, except, in the case of novelty where "end" and "up" and "right" and "take hold" and even "thing" would all be open to origin as features of our knowing. Such an openness leaves us with "to" and "of" and "up", perhaps, as uncontested systemic features of language rather than reality. Most likely, on closer inspection, these tiny wheels of knowing would themselves open up features of causality that demand reflection. In Studio Theory, such difficulties need to be addressed. Novelty, arising from knowing, after all, is something that must be accounted for in Design's practice. Dewey offers this introduction to what is a vast subject:

If things undergo change without thereby ceasing to be real, there can be no formal bar to knowing being one specific kind of change in things, nor to its test being found in the successful carrying into effect of the kind of change intended. If knowing be a change in a reality, then the more knowing reveals this change, the more transparent, the more adequate, it is. And, if all existences are in transition, then the knowledge which treats them as if they were something of which knowledge is a Kodak fixation is



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just the kind of knowledge which refracts and perverts them. And by the same token a knowing which actively participates in a change in the way to effect it in the needed fashion would be the type of knowing which is valid.

Valid knowing is the form of knowing required in Studio Theory. Other questions to ask - What is here; what is not here?

Freedom in Studio Theory is neither underwritten by a magical heritage nor by the dissolution of a magical heritage. We may talk about the weather and politics and the many aspects of the artificiality of making. We may talk about anything and everything and conclude that we are talking about something because of our need for phatic communication. In the silence of Studio Theory, existential questions forever remain to be answered. Being in a room appears to answer itself. That is, we are here and not somewhere else and this is enough. However, in being here, in a room, what does this being mean? How is this being structured in this room?

Looking at presence we become aware that most of what is here, in the sense of our being here, is in fact not here. As a collection of memories we are mostly absent; as a complex of suspended desires we are mostly absent; as beings directed towards a future, we are mostly not here. When we try to bring our presence into the present, in this room, now, we mostly have to structure our account of our presence through an account of things that are not here. The classic example of this awareness is seen in Sartre's story of a person arriving late for a dinner appointment to discover that his expected companion, Pierre, has not yet arrived.

It is certain that the café by itself with its patrons, its tables, its booths, its mirrors, its lights, its smoky atmosphere, and the sounds of voices, rattling saucers, and footsteps which fill it - the café is a fullness of being. And all the intuitions of detail which I can have are filled by these odors, these sounds, these colors, all phenomena which have a Tran's phenomenal being. Similarly Pierre's actual presence in a place which I do not know is also a plenitude of being. We seem to have found fullness everywhere. But we must observe that in perception there is always the construction of a figure on a ground. No one object, no group or figure; all depends on the direction of my attention [17].

While Sartre's original account is relatively transparent, further examples help in our comprehension of this somewhat absurd idea. Gaarder, developing Sartre's idea in *Sophie's World*, points to the destructive nature of attention when what is looked for is absent:

If you were in love, and were waiting for your loved one to call you, you might "hear" him not calling you all evening. You arrange to meet him at the train; crowds of people are milling about on the platform and you can't see him anywhere. They are all in the way, they are unimportant to you. You

might find them aggravating, unpleasant even. They are taking up far too much room. The only thing you register is that he is not there [18].

This awareness of the destructive nature of attention, it needs to be pointed out, is the basis for existential freedom. Palmer, in his very approachable introduction to Sartre, *Sartre for Beginners*, reinforces the positive benefits of this nothingness:

These absences are the empty spaces where free action is possible. (If the world were a "plenum", if it were jam-packed with being containing no holes, if we were like insects trapped in a drop of amber, then freedom and action would be impossible) [18].

Bringing attention to what is existentially absent in Studio Theory, can then draw attention to how perception, in the present, is formed around our attention. While we wait for something to happen, the things going on around us are perceived through our attention which is directed towards what is not happening. The child waiting for the school bell to ring is attending to something that is not there. This absence is potentially a freedom in that it points out we might be, here and now, doing something else. In this sense, where we are now is not serious; there is a gap in our world between our attention to absence and our required attention in the room. Simply filling up the room with objects and activities does not fix attention to the immediate present. Rather, like the drop of amber, it fixes us in a plenitude that is already satisfied. Somewhere the absent needs to be accommodate in the present. Studio Theory needs its empty chair, its vacant space, its void, its silence, its machinery of nothingness. Freedom needs to be acknowledged within the room as something beyond the mere potential to act.

It might seem easier, in the first instance, when confronted with this absurdity, to shift the focus towards a redefinition of the object such that what was once a chair now becomes something like a chair. This shift, towards a lack of reference, or of a confused intention, is a shift towards the fine art object. Such a shift, while perhaps being appealing and pleasurable, is insufficient for the questions being asked. This response is simply another kind of acting. It is a kind of endless daubing, poking paint at the canvas, over painting, re-working the already over-worked. The compulsive aspects of this shifting of attention from attention are rightly described as distraction. Photography, along with oil painting, have reiterative dangers, from the vantage of the artists. For the designer, this danger is recognized and cultivated as style: the current fashionable object selected for this compulsion is the toothbrush though the toaster might serve on a long weekend.

Allowing that a philosophical account of what it is to be in a room is potentially as complex as we bother to make it, we can start to attend differently to everything that is in the room that might take our attention. The question of what else might be in the room, but is not in the room, and the question of



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what is in the room but should not be in room, can be suspended as being inherently political and therefore already available as a discourse. The same logic applies to the concrete description of the things that are in the room simply as things. What needs to be attended to first is attention itself. According to Dewey:

Awareness means attention, and attention means a crisis of some sort in an existent situation; a forking of the roads of some material, a tendency to go this way and that. It represents something the matter, something out of gear, or in some way menaced, insecure, problematical and strained. This state of tension, of ambiguous indications, projects and tendencies, is not merely in the "mind," it is nothing merely emotional. It is in the facts of the situation as transitive facts; the emotional or "subjective" disturbance is just a part of the larger disturbance.

That is, having our attention drawn, we are in a condition of tension. Our awareness is in tension with that which draws our attention. Recognizing this tension allows that things brought to our attention are themselves held, as aspect of awareness, in tension.

What is a thing?

For most of us, most of the time, things simply are there. Drawing attention to their being there is as unusual as drawing attention to our being there. In Studio Theory, such attention is required. This questioning may seem, at first sight, to be a waste of time. Instead of questioning such basic aspects of our everyday world, we might better spend our time solving the urgent problems of possibility. And yet, these things in our world require our inspection as features of actuality. They constitute our immediate problematic. According to Heidegger:

The most difficult learning is to come to know all the way what we already know. Such learning, with which we are here solely concerned, demands sticking rather closely to what appears to be nearest at hand; for instance, to the question of what a thing is. We steadfastly ask, considering its usefulness, the same obviously useless question of what a thing is, what tools are, what man is, what a work of art is, what the state and what the world are [19].

The seeming uselessness of these questions is part of the initiation strategy of Studio Theory. The irritable forgoing of fundamental questioning is a feature that separates the world of the studio from the world of the study. The eager shift from ideas to actions is typical of the practice/theory divide that was so clearly announced by Socrates in his persistent confrontation of the Sophists that they rested happy with practical accounts. To illustrate the purpose of Socrates' method of inquiry, Heidegger offers the following story:

There was, in ancient times, a famous Greek scholar who travelled everywhere lecturing. Such people were called Sophists. Once this famous

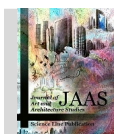
Sophist, returning to Athens from a lecture tour in Asia Minor, met Socrates on the street. It was Socrates' habit to hang around on the street and to talk with people, with a cobbler, for instance, over what a shoe is. Socrates had no other topic than what the things are. "Are you still standing there," condescendingly asked the much travelled Sophist of Socrates, "and still saying the same thing about the same thing?" "Yes," answered Socrates, "that I am. But you who are so extremely smart, you never say the same thing about the same thing".

For the cobbler, each new shoe is a new instance of a shoe, it has its own particularity, and it is a realm of novelty and disjunctive variations. For Socrates the determination of the existence of things is not ended by the object at hand. The object at hand is simply the beginning of the series of questions. The variations peculiar to each object offer no solution. What they offer is the grounds for the perception of perception.

How is being?

Within this plenitude of objects and surfeit of sensory information, we can become lost. The focus of attention can shift from object to object in a way that is essentially a distraction. Not only are we surrounded by the splendid and trivial fruits of mass production, but, we are also absorbed by the wealth of nonsense displayed in our mass and popular culture. The redundancy and excess of available meaning typical of languages are now also found everywhere and in everything in our super-saturated culture. The intertextuality that was once the province of reading (and originally the interconnections made in reading one text) is now the province of all cultural experience. Start anywhere and everything will be implicated. The pleasures of this approach are their own kind of music as is made obvious in the work of John Cage:

What do images do? Do they illustrate? (It was a New Year's Eve party in the country and one of them had written a philosophical book and was searching for a picture that would illustrate a particular point but was having difficulty. Another was knitting, following the rules from a book she had in front of her. The rest were talking, trying to be helpful. The suggestion was made that the picture in the knitting book would illustrate the point. On examination it was found that everything on the page was relevant, including the number.) But do we not already have too much to look at? (Generosity.) Left to myself, I would be perfectly contented with black pictures, providing Rauschenberg had painted them. (I had one, but unfortunately the new room has a slanting ceiling and besides the wall isn't long enough for it. These are the problems that have no solution, such as the suit wearing out.) But going along, I see I'm changing: color's not so bad after all. (I must have been annoyed by the games of balance and what-not they played with it.) One of the simplest ideas we get is the one we get when someone is weeping.



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Duchamp was in a rocking chair. I was weeping. Years later but in the same part of town and for more or less the same reason, Rauschenberg was weeping [20].

Here the human is recovered in the excess. Cage, a master of the incidental, manages to create something out of the more than nothing of the New Year's Eve party. Much as the millennium attracted significance, so the object of the artist's attention attracts a significance that is reminiscent of a still life; by photographing the room we fix that which was not fixed in an effort to stay the question of perception. Here perception becomes the game and our pathway through the detritus becomes the journey of the mind. Objects have been danced, but have they been accounted? The emptiness rapidly fills.

When is there?

Cage's New Year's Eve party is a drama that is mostly about space as the organizing dimension of experience. In this world of space there "are the problems that have no solution, such as the suit wearing out". The unavoidable consequences of wear and tear appear as an index of existence: we age which confirms our being. This might appear comforting except that it offers no real account of the other major human constraint: time. In Studio Theory there are such moments of clarity; equally there are moments where clarity is the enemy of perception. Cage can trust his aesthetic judgment to re-determine the human. For most of us, following the method of Cage leads to an intellectual mess. In a world of practice and theory, it is easy to hand this problem over to artists and philosophers and allow that for most of us the everyday world is not to be confronted in its complexity. We take things as we find them. In Studio Theory this point of exhaustion is the turning point. Either we persist in playing the game of perception, or we withdraw from the lists and fiddle, with pleasure, in Studio Simon.

METHODS AND MADNESS

Persisting with the game can lead to a self-indulgent fascination with the unending nature of questioning, and it can lead to an urgent need to act. Both of these positions are described by Taylor and Saarinen:

We have no intellectually secure foundation for anything. And yet, we must act. This is the starting point of media philosophy: secure-in-insecurity, we cannot avoid acting in the world with priorities, a sense of relevance, and values. The kind of action in the world that we need is possible only with the category of positive choice. Under the urge to act, the media philosopher breaks with a tradition that has been strong since at least Descartes - the intellectual tradition that centers on the question of secure footing. Instead of looking for secure footing, a foundation of knowledge or a universal framework for rational discourse, the media philosopher,

surrounded by insecurity, stumbles and opts for action. He opts for action also instead of elaborating, in joyful cynical terms, the deconstruction of any secure footing [21].

Insecurity of means, insecurity of goals

Insecurity of means, in opposition to the security of means of the traditional scholar, conventional rationalist, institutionalized reason. When Derrida starts up his engine of neologisms, sophistications, literary and conceptual elaborations, his staggeringly wide reading, inside the monument of French letters, inscribing his visions through writing and through the culture of books, is he not, in his own way, secure in means, as he rolls out volume after volume of commentary, heavy argumentation and histories of thought, all of which lead to his own thought, rich in abstract developments and theories? [22].

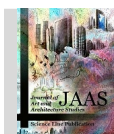
Stumbling hardly appears appealing, especially in contrast with the sophistication of Derrida. Are these the only alternatives?

Where is then?

There's a strange concept in the philosophy of science called an "entelechy." An entelechy is something complex that emerges when you put a large number of simple objects together. Examine one molecule of water in a vacuum, and you'll be utterly bored by the lack of activity in your vacuum tube. Pour a bunch of molecules into a glass, and a new phenomenon crops up: a ring of ripples on the water's surface. Combine enough glasses of water in a big enough basin, and you'll end up with something entirely different: an ocean. Take the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet, lay those out in front of you, and you'll have a set of small squiggles, each of which evokes just one or two specific sounds. String a few million together in precisely the proper order, and you'll have the collected works of Shakespeare.

These are entelechies. A city, a town, a culture, a religion, a body of mythology, a hit record, a dirty joke - these, too, are the results of entelechies. Take one human being, isolate him in a room from the time he's born until the time he dies, and you'll end up with a creature incapable of using language, with little in the way of imagination - an emotional and physical wreck. But put that baby together with fifty other people, and you'll end up with something entirely new - a culture [23].

Bloom seems to be arguing here for the self-evidence of self. That is, cultures emerge and therefore they exist. Put Hitler with 50 other people and the Holocaust exists. Novelty will get us every possible variation because, logically, every possible variation is a variation. This is not a problem of theory, rather it is a problem made available by inspection of practice. According to the Australian scientist, Tim Flannery (conversation 1997, University of Newcastle), three very different views



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and practices were held by three tribes, each within 50 miles of each other, in New Guinea. Each different view and practice aimed to account for the seeming anomaly that boys were born without being able to produce semen. In all tribes, the view was held that boys got semen from their older male relatives. Semen was transmitted from man to man and then to women. About this logic of generation there was no dispute. However, views on the process of transmission varied: one tribe used oral transmission; one anal transmission; and one used smearing on the skin. All saw their own method as the only true method and laughed when told of the other methods. The fact that all three alternatives seemed to work was not a problem, perhaps because all three actions took place in each tribe. The dispute was simply about the lack of true methodological knowledge on the part of the other tribes.

One needs more than the comfort of logic that goodness can emerge, that knowledge can be found and that one might just happen to be born amongst people with whom one can achieve civility. In Studio Theory, the urgency arises from a common need to attend and apprehend. In other words, to take hold of awareness and to be taken hold of in this taking hold. Responding then amounts to the ground for responsibility. I may glory in the wonder of water, but it is no consolation that the world has no need of the particular difference that amounts to my ability to be different. I must design and be designed in my designing. My mortality is my concern.

Who are you?

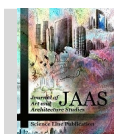
The beehive beneath my office window quietly exhales legions of busybodies and then inhales them. On summer afternoons, when the sun seeps under the trees to backlight the hive, the approaching sunlit bees zoom into their tiny dark opening like curving tracer bullets. I watch them now as they haul in the last gleaming of nectar from the final manzanita blooms of the year. Soon the rains will come and the bees will hide. I will still gaze out the window as I write; they will still toil, but now in their dark home. Only on the balmiest day will I be blessed by the sight of their thousands in the sun.

Over years of beekeeping, I've tried my hand at relocating bee colonies out of buildings and trees as a quick and cheap way of starting new hives at home. One fall I gutted a bee tree that a neighbor felled. I took a chain saw and ripped into this toppled old tupelo. The poor tree was cancerous with bee comb. The further I cut into the belly of the tree, the more bees I found. The insects filled a cavity as large as I was. It was a grey, cool autumn day and all the bees were home, now agitated by the surgery. I finally plunged my hand into the mess of comb. Hot! Ninety-five degrees at least. Overcrowded with 100,000 cold-blooded bees, the hive had become a warm-blooded organism. The heated honey ran like thin, warm blood. My gut felt like I had reached my hand into a dying animal [22].

Determining self, in action, amounts to a loss of self. This kenotic process (loss of self and recovery of self in a transformed identity) offers the ground for a designer to inhabit Studio Theory. In this process, the object, as mediating co-relative, serves to make concrete the relations and locate value. In its use, the object of use, is used up leaving no remainder. Novelty and disjunction are then known as features of the self in its own designing, as this kenotic process, becomes its own study: here study and studio collide.

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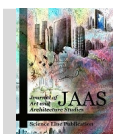
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