

IDEA LYC

Realms of the Mundane:
Viewpoint of an architectural practice

建築實踐觀

Cuadernos de Estudio



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Process

It is always difficult to begin a project, where the scale of the exercise can seem daunting and the brief, or perhaps the lack of brief can make it a challenge to establish a starting point from which development can occur. Once however the work begins and the thought processes flow, it is equally difficult to stop, the ball has gained momentum so to speak and is moving on its own. It is this view that we take of our growing sequence of newsletters and now that this venture has begun, we look forward to the completion of each subsequent instalment as an established continuity from our previous month's publication and a retrospective of the past month.

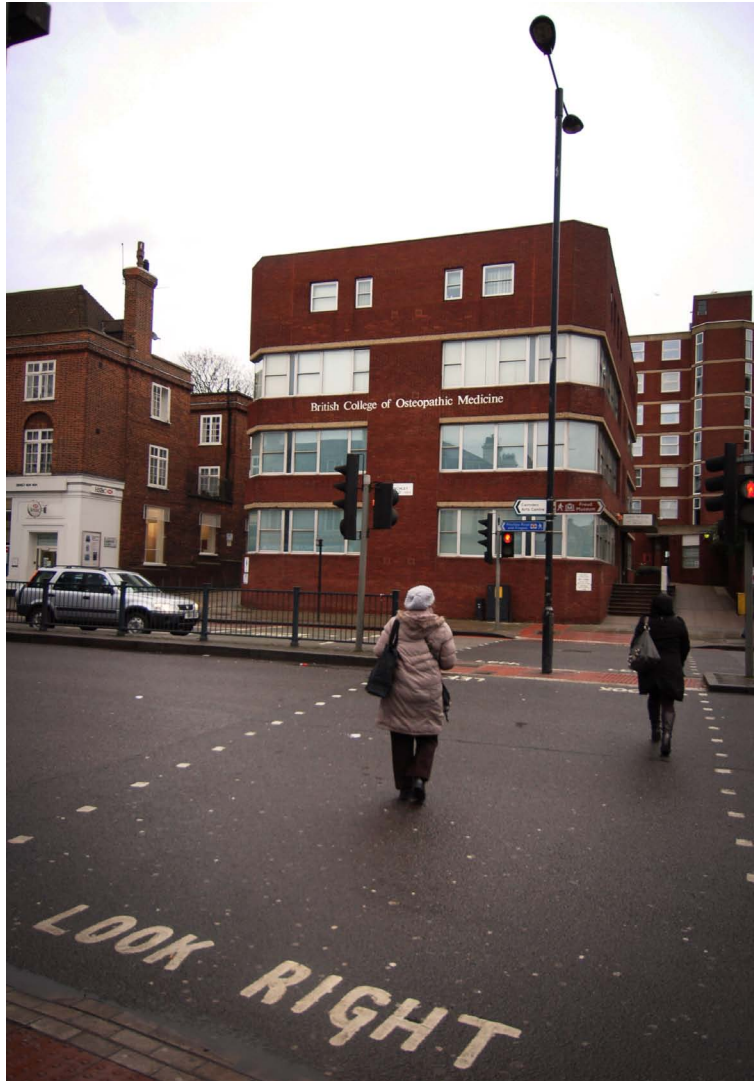
The method considered describes the establishing of an almost autonomous feedback loop, a process of advancing accuracy like the ever more subtle excavation of an archaeological discovery or the fine balance of a universal equation, tending towards the infinite depth of the unattainable solution. Autonomy in design however must be challenged at every stage, preconceived notion interrogated, stripped through enquiry in an attempt to seek the roots of meaning and to orchestrate a humanistic balance or chaos and order.

Our process is laid bare, for your enjoyment.

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- The team at Studio Idealyc



Study of an Educational Institution

To support a recent planning application made by the British College of Osteopathic Medicine we have been commissioned to study the building occupied by the school and complete a comprehensive set of architectural drawings to scale that illustrate the proposal. The local area contains an eclectic mix of heritage architecture from the 19th century and many later additions constructed in a remarkably modern style. Lief House, home of BCOM, belongs in the latter category. Aspects of the more modern buildings along the street declare their allegiance to Le Corbusier and the Five Points of Architecture that he devised and developed throughout his career. Most notable are the strip windows that allow natural daylight to flood uninterrupted into the internal space and the pilotis, concrete supports that liberate the building from the ground level, freeing up space for users to pass beneath.

While Lief house is not visibly supported by concrete pillars the lower three levels of the building are perforated by long openings that transverse the corners of the façade. The structure involved in achieving this is also expressed on the exterior, displaying the function of the lintels and practically ornamenting the envelope. The light appearance of this arrangement is emphasised by the thin frames of the galvanized steel windows and contrasted against the heavy, monolithic presence of the masonry. Furthermore, the blunted edges of the building reflect an interaction with the circulation at street level while the symmetrical orchestration of the exterior grounds the development in a static assertion of reserve.

03.02.2012

Out of Office Hours



While Friday night is often seen as an evening to celebrate the end of the working week, in some industries such as ours in which the production and delivery of information cannot be measured by time or allocated into slots and opening hours, dedication is a principle that is paramount to the work ethic that surrounds the architectural profession as it is essential that work is not left unfinished prior to our rest.

The establishing of deadlines as a focus for the conclusion of a scheme is a fact of life that is driven into our methodology, from the first time we stepped into an architectural school to the early period of professional development. The deadline is expressed as a landmark in any architects' calendar and the build up

and subsequent passing of the period is tense time, filled with a combination of technical and creative tasks, all managed with a rigorous synthesis while the process is always orientated toward the finding of practical solutions that any project requires.

As a young practice we take solace in the fact that we can demonstrate our passion for the work and the lifestyle that go hand in hand thanks to the satisfaction of finishing a job. In contrast to elation experienced at the end of a deadline, there is always the next step to consider and hence discipline is the most basic distillation of this experience, establishing the backbone of our working life.

07.02.2012

Snow as Nature's Ornament



The recent weather that engulfed the city in a white blanket is renowned for its ability to delay the fast pace of day to day life in the capital but it also gives us the chance to pause and reflect upon the surrounding urban environment, now transformed by the layering of nature's pixel on the constructs of the metropolis.

The presence of snow acts as a temporary ornamentation of the physical environment, decorating trees and rooftops with a delicate, airy residue. The fleeting impermanence of the sight serves to heighten the beauty of the scene, creating an analogy of the passage of time and the fragile fabric of the world.

Observing the setting of Spa Fields and the rear elevation of Exmouth Market, now exposed through the thin profiles of the deciduous trees that bound the park, we note that the articulation of the reverse of the terraces is an essay in the geometrical compositions of Paul Klee. Expressed between the overarching symmetry, the visual orchestration itself creates a portrait of sensible lines. Horizontality contrasts with the verticality as a compendium of different meanings emerge from abstract rules that interact together, developing a stability and static balance between the colour and form of the environment. This interplay of indices is observed and reflected in the opposite building sited within the park, our own development, the Hut.

Once Upon a Time

We have recently taken on the role of consultants, providing our views on the prospective purchase of a property near the historic market town of Reigate in Surrey. The site itself hosts a number of trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders, this will require potential liaison with the council and the input of an arboreal horticulturist to negotiate the development of any potential work within range of the conserved foliage.

Amongst the unbridled growth of the vegetation, a small house is nestled in the envelope of nature. It is this dwelling that is also to be considered in the proposal and it is this which we regard with great interest. The property is a detached Victorian house in an advanced state of dereliction due to its prolonged vacancy after the previous resident had to leave their home following a fire. The clouded sky visible through the decaying roof and the rotting wooden boards that cover the windows give the building an air of foreboding and the shell of the property, engulfed in dark vegetation brings to mind the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the work of Hieronymus Bosch, both of whom depict scenes of tragedy at personal and biblical scales.

These painters frequently drew on literary sources in order to elaborate on a consistent narrative describing the human condition in a chaotic, unforgiving existence, cited by the Romantic poets as the sublime, a description of the irresistible power clearly visible in the portrait of the front elevation taken by us during the visit. The abandoned home resembles the ashes of an earlier architecture, reclaimed by the unrelenting course of the advancing flora, concealing the building in a dense curtain that camouflages the façade.



08.02.2012

Specifying for Synergy



Today we held a meeting to discuss the next stage of detailing that we will begin to undertake in the extensive internal renovation of a flat in a Grade 2 Listed Building. As the details become more complex they require greater collaboration to ensure the accurate synthesis of all the composite elements. Working with structural engineers and builders it is important to establish targets, working as a team to create a narrative that will govern construction to ensure that the most desirable outcome is reached.

As we consider the advanced stage of the work it is important to bear in mind that the end product can be greater than the sum of its parts. This is a reference to the need for the individual components to form a dialogue in their final arrangement. This interaction can also be labeled as synergy and in terms of design it refers to the perceived state of the collected pieces.

Black Box Process



The metaphor of a black box is common in modern science and mathematics. It represents a tool of transformation through which something is passed and it is changed. It is not the method of alteration that is examined but the contrast between the two stages of input and output.

In Russian Avant-Garde, Malevich discussed the basis of the cubist principles, transforming them into the foundations of the Suprematist movement, of which he was the pioneer. Many of his compositions were made up of simple, geometric figures, coloured in black against a white background and vice versa. This dualist process was after transformed into a series of compositions in which these elements interact between themselves, following a strict code of architectural principles.

The essence of this visual experience is

translated into the mundane setting of a rear garden in our project in Cricklewood, North London, where we guaranteed the Certificate of Lawful Development for the erection of an outbuilding to be used as a music recording studio. The space can be seen as a bunker against the heavy assault of decibels in a quiet suburban landscape. The walls represent barriers; the contrast of interior and exterior is clearly established. In a similar vein, the presence and absence of light is reinforced by the juxtaposition of the smooth black render against the texture of the vegetation.

Like a bunker, the robust construction we have specified is practical as well as visual. Thick sound insulation envelopes the internal room where the music is recorded, creating an isolated space to be filled by the rich texture of Dionysian music, projecting journeys of tragedy and elation within the enclosed, dark cube.

10.02.2012

Interstitial: The Space In-between



We have recently been appointed to develop an outbuilding in a plot of land owned by our client. This particular region of the property is unconventionally sited as it transverses an edge behind another home at the end of the street to cover the corner of the block. While the site would be very attractive to property developers who could use the space to build an additional house onto the adjacent terraces, it belongs to a homeowner who, using the permitted development rights as his neighbour already has, can build an outbuilding to obtain additional living space for activities.

Like the entrance to Wonderland, the surreal space is composed of a mix of elements, not necessarily speaking in unison but composed together to create a dissonant scene of an unregulated zone. In actuality, it is to the complexities and

contractions of bureaucracy that this development has occurred. The unsightly face of the block work that protrudes over the fence is due to anxiety over the Party Wall etc. Act as the neighbour was aware that he would not have to consult the owner of the adjacent property if he did not built to the boundary.

The silhouette of a Victorian terrace house with a side return looms over the site. The lack of openings in the envelope serves to reinforce the stoic vision of the sheer firewall presented by the abrupt end in the terrace. Variations in the render suggest that once the height of the scaffolding ran short, the top of the wall was left as it is instead of rectifying the mistake. In Berlin, exposed firewalls such as this are a common sight and due to lack of funding, a void is left in the face of the street.

13.02.2012

The Circadian Rhythm of Windows



We held a meeting with a client today to discuss the next stage in her residential project after the pre-planning meeting with the Conservation Area Officer from Islington Council hosted two weeks ago. After initially studying the scheme based on the advice given to us we have begun to consider the exterior appearance of the development. We were advised that the use of glazing would create a lighter feel in the historic building, contrasting with the heavy brick extensions either side of the site. Our idea is to respect the geometry of the grand existing chimney, projecting the line of the articulated brickwork throughout the new addition to unify the appearance of new and old.

When considering the case it is important to bear in mind that exterior and interior are intrinsically linked and the approach to good design requires a holistic view of all the issues involved. Any choice of opening and fenestration will visibly af-

fect the arrangement and geometries of the façade while it will govern the amount and the quality of the daylight that enters the internal spaces. Privacy is also a key issue in densely populated areas such as London and policy dictates that any side facing window must be obscure glazed with limited opportunity for opening.

Windows have the unique quality of changing the appearance of a building throughout the day, seen during the hours of daylight the window can be a reflective surface, mirroring the surroundings of the site, as is the case with the large corporate structures of glass and steel that dominate the business districts of cities. In other structures they can take the form of gloomy, impenetrable holes in the envelope of a building. At night their role is reversed and they shine like beacons from the dark façades of the city, stipulating the pixels of the urban fabric and pouring a bright artificial light into the streets.

Project SI_400
Moon Street

24.02.2012

The Architecture of Love



As today is St Valentine's Day we should not have been surprised to find that the most recent installation outside our door symbolises love, one of the most celebrated emotions. The rose has been synonymous with admiration for millennia, perhaps because of the rich, blood red flowers that it produces. Sited in the context of an urban pathway with the drips of red paint projecting from the petals, the work takes on a new meaning, commenting on the relationships between the many inhabitants of our densely populated capital.

Symbols, identifiable throughout the modern city are a reflection of human habitation and the will to project mean-

ing in a chaotic world. In architecture, the inclusion of symbolism is often employed to create details, drawing visual alteration to the user and their context.

Statues and logos are a small sample of the synthesised environment. In Piccadilly Circus, an iconic square in London famous for the multitude of bright advertisements, the central focus point of the thoroughfare is a statue of Anteros. This memorial to love is however often mistaken as Eros, the brother of Anteros. In mythology, this deity resembles the bond of love that binds two individuals, reinforcing the idea that love is not lonely but instead flourishes in companionship.



16.02.2012

Public Service?

Human error is a universal concept; the possibility to deviate from the correct path occasionally is one of the innate traits of life when contrasted with the rigidly structured universe and the concrete laws that govern existence. Mistakes are commonplace in the increasingly complex web of information that holds up the foundations of the modern age. However, when these errors are not brought to light and are instead denied and concealed, the consequences can be dire to the point of causing serious impact on the lifestyle of people.

Following an extremely erroneous application, we have recently been appointed to represent the owners of a property whose neighbour is seeking planning permission to significantly extend the rear of their property. We have advised our clients throughout the course of the application and monitored the conduct of the planning department. Yesterday, due to the number of objections to the scheme, the application was concluded with the scheme being decided in front of a committee of local councillors.

The size and design of the extension

raised poignant issues about significant overshadowing of the neighbouring properties and a pronounced sense of enclosure which will be created by its erection. These issues are just a part of the case against the approval of the extension. Consideration of the drawings submitted to the planning department shows that they are not up to the standard that would be expected, neither in accuracy nor in detail and they should not have been accepted as representative of the scheme in the first place. Further to this initial oversight, we believe that the planning department has been negligent throughout the course of the application, refraining from properly considering the neighbouring properties affected by the application.

We feel that it is disappointing that a public service such as this department, which is appointed to uphold the interests of all the inhabitants of the Borough and seek to enhance the built environment, could let down the local residents. The abuse of the planning process served to misinform and inhibit our clients who felt that consideration has not been given to their objections.

20.02.2012

A Bit of Light Reading



We have recently acquired a pair of oversized lightbulbs, designed by the Swedish Architect Mattias Ståhlborn. The light is intended to be exposed so that the protecting shade that commonly surrounds the bulb is absent. The bulbs themselves are very simple constructions, similar to the everyday screw-in unit that you might acquire from a super-market or DIY store, however, the act of rescaling the standardised lightbulb is an artistic statement in itself. To freely alter the size of such a recognisable object is to challenge our preconceived cognitions, not just about the light itself but the surroundings in which it is located.

The presence of the bulb, hanging in free space, acts like an installation in a gallery. It raises questions for the viewer who perceives it as out of the ordinary, a deviation from the narrow minded, mass-produced commodities of the time. The statement extends to express

the notion that scale is relative, like the endless fractal shapes produced by application of chaos theory. The principles of this view extend to the pixilation that causes deterioration in the information age of today which, in one famous example, allowed faces to appear on the surface of Mars due to the obscuring of detail.

In context, the bulb induces a simulacrum of Alice in Wonderland syndrome, an externally synthesised copy of the neurological condition that causes the distortion of perception in the viewer due to abnormal levels of electrical activity in the brain. The illness is named after the classic novel by Lewis Carroll in which the reader follows the protagonist, Alice, through a seemingly nonsensical fantasy world of illusionary characters that take inspiration from nursery rhymes and English idiosyncrasies.

21.02.2012

Realms of the Mundane



As a continuation of the dialogues established in our news section, we have compiled a monthly newsletter as an experiment in graphic design and communication. This compendium of commentaries has been established to give a voice to the day to day concerns of the practice, to bring about investigations into the nature of the often seemingly mundane procedures we undertake.

Opening a discourse with this aspect of our routine allows us to examine our tasks from a variety of viewpoints; a plethora of narratives that intertwine, sometimes clashing in discord and at other times speaking in harmony. Throughout the monthly installments we hope to give rise to an expression of our

methodology, not as a linear sequence of texts but as a holistic tome of inter-related references, originating from tangible experience to bring about a manifesto rooted in knowledge of the real as well as the philosophical.

Like the Futurist Manifesto of 1909, the poetry of an emergent society is described through the appropriation and reinterpretation of sources, establishing an abstract language that documents the concrete constructs of the growing information age. Developed in the corporeal matrixes of an empirical universe, the information is processed and distorted through the looking glass of human perception, transposed into the cultural language and signifiers of cognition.

22.02.2012

Composing Vistas



One of the principles of experimenting with planes is that the creator is not aware of how consistent a line can be. The forms developed through this can be relative elements of a composition perceived by the observer, always from a different angle. This process defines new arrangements, occurring during each subsequent event that can vary in itself due to external factors such as natural light. While angles can often make us anxious when compared to the static calm of the right angles, we have been working with the undulations of the exposed roof structure to bring a level of dynamism to the space.

The artist's work in all fields is imbued with his personality, and art is not always conscious or premeditated, it can arise from the unconscious hand like auto-

matic writing to express the subconscious. Part of our process contemplating the achievable geometries and forms involves our dissection of the work of other designers. Two such sculptors whose work we have looked at recently that work are Henry Moore and Alberto Giacometti. While both of them can create objects with a vast level of aesthetic attention, the processes each uses are at odds to one another. The work of Giacometti are born from an adherence to an austere simplicity, his figures are unnervingly chipped away at until the impression left is a distorted shadow of the essence depicted. In comparison, the balance of mass and rhythm in the richly curved forms of Moore allow the viewer some sense of solace in the calm contemplation of the abstract figure.

22.02.2012

From the Workshop to the Site



While we spend many hours in the studio developing 3 dimensional strategies in the 2 dimensional environment of the computer there is no more effective method of design than visiting the site to conduct practical investigations. It is for this reason that we allocate a great deal of our working week to spending time on site, working with the builders on the specification and implementation of accurate systems. This approach to construction allows us to return to the office with vital new ideas and information which can be integrated into the working drawings and overall scheme.

The site therefore is established as a workshop, a hub for creation and collaboration between disciplines interacting in a space that facilitates creation and progress, emerging in unison towards the final result, always limited by different constraints such as budget, regulations and timescales. Through this vigorous path that moulds our initial studies into realities, the studio develops a central role with regard to the aims of the clients, guided by our services.

24.02.2012

Green Roof Details

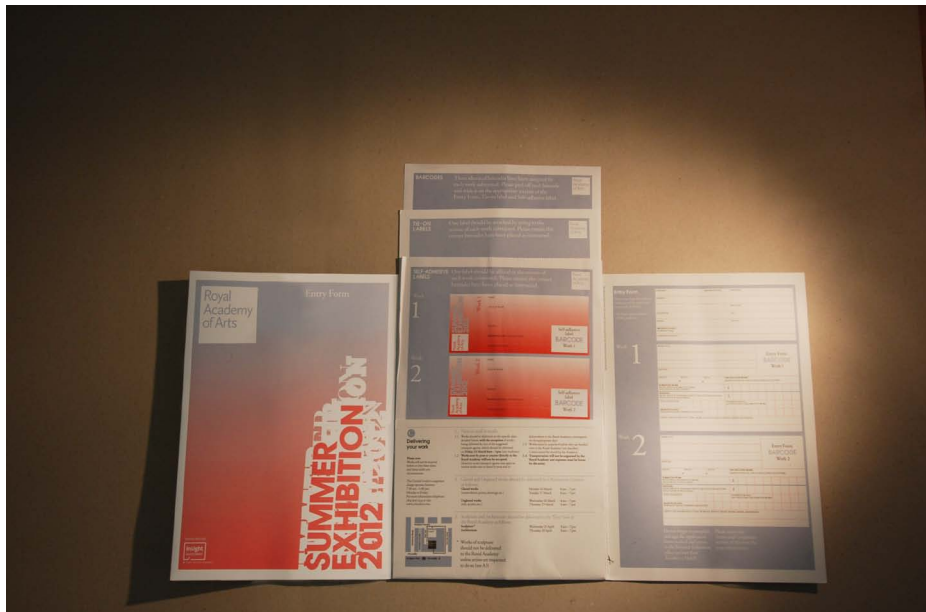


As our skills cover a range of services, from technical detailing to graphic communication, we are sometimes commissioned to put our abilities into other roles. Due the economic downturn it is crucial to take advantage of opportunities to branch out and therefore one of our most recent projects has required us to employ our drafting skills. We have been working with the international Guaranteed Asphalt Ltd to complete a set of technical drawings, working their new design into an existing scheme. This required a high level of accuracy and interaction, understanding every single component of their construction and facilitating the correct implementation of the product's specification.

Detailing requires understanding of scale and composition, orchestrating connections with respect to material properties. In cases like this where the drawings will be read by a builder or project architect, accuracy is essential for a comprehensive result. While we have worked in many similar schemes, this opportunity offered us the possibility of expanding our outlook, considering new solutions to problems posed by other professionals. The design in question incorporates a sedum roof which brings an extra layer to the envelope. This is a popular environmental choice for specification as it can reduce ground water run off in the urban environment while offering additional insulation and an attractive natural covering to the roof scape of Clerkenwell in central London.

28.02.2012

On Art and the Monarchy



While the succession of monarchies to the throne in England is sporadic and the number of years each king and queen has served vary extensively, the league of longest appointments is currently topped by Queen Victoria, who was inaugurated on the 28th of June, 1837 when she was just 18 years old. Throughout her reign she achieved a great deal, establishing the British Empire, on which the sun never set and championing the arts and the growing field of engineering thanks to the wide scope of discoveries sought across the world. On behalf of the people, during the first year of her reign the Royal College of Art was set up, although it was initially called the Government School of Design, the ethos remains the same. Some confuse this establishment with the Royal Academy of Arts, an older institution founded in 1768, almost 70 years before, by King George III. The period between the opening of the two bodies saw the passing reigns of 2 kings, showing the relativity of the times each served.

One of the Royal Academy of Art's most recognisable events is the Summer Exhibition. This notorious show has been organised every year since 1769 and it

has been the cause of much controversy ever since. The show marks an important event in the annual calendar of artists, both professional and amateur as it offers the opportunity for all to apply to have their work shown. The fact that this show has been held every year, through two world wars and cultural upheaval, is testimony to the sense of tradition and preservation held highly in the British mentality. The Summer Exhibition is often known to cause a sensation and hence it can be seen as the litmus test for changing opinions in the art world.

At Studio Idealyc we have decided to enter our work to this event for the first time. The architecture room of the show has recently been seen to express not just the final product but the scope of design now reflects the process that architects engage with on a daily basis. Architecture is not only represented through finely detailed presentation models and line drawings but also through more abstract works that question the site and relationships of the established and imaginary geometries. We hope to describe in our work our experiences of materiality and history, important pillars in the practice's design approach.

28.02.2012

Edwardian Suburban



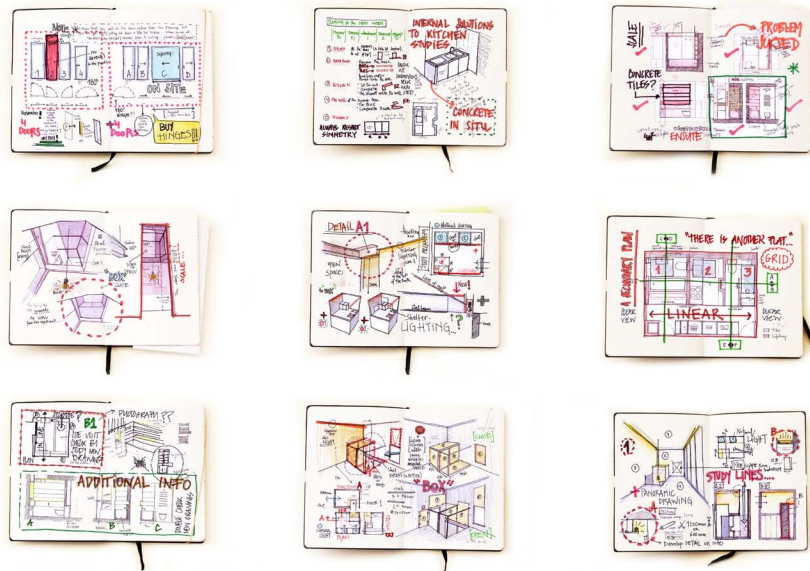
We have recently been appointed to propose a roof extension for a flat in the Muswell Hill Conservation Area. The apartment is situated in an attractive Edwardian suburb which has been remarkably well preserved. There is an abundance of foliage in the area, from the tall trees that line the street to the densely planted gardens of the houses. The variety of vegetation compliments the multiplicity of volumes, especially at the rear of the terraces along which a number of prominent chimneys and tall bay windows protrude from the red brick apartments.

Part of the charm of the streetscape is the consistency in the use of authentic materials, for example the timber porches and window frames, some of which include quaint decorative aspects. This adherence to the natural properties of the construction materials exposes an Arts and Crafts influence on the designs. The streetlamps along the pavement also exhibit similar ornamental elements,

drawing on the thin profiles that could be achieved with cast iron the heights of the details articulate the varying levels of function, with a thick, supportive base and a maintenance panel specified to avoid interrupting the vista at eye level but also to provide ease of access to workmen. The decorative elements bring to mind the pioneering work of Viollet-le-Duc who established the theoretic roots of Art Nouveau.

The suburban Edwardian architecture of the area reflects the rural qualities of the site which were present before the rapid expansion of London. It is often noted that the design of Edwardian houses reflects a less idealised attitude in comparison to the previously highly considered Victorian properties. This in turn was an expression of the more relaxed attitude of King Edward which was disseminated among the people and the changing attitudes of the middle class who sought more convenient and affordable housing typologies.

Real Time Thinking



Compiling a sketchbook is an intuitive process; it is the means to an end and the expression of a journey, where one can retrace their steps, informing future ventures through acknowledgment of the past and its achievements and mistakes. Identifying and recording the thinking process is crucial in the conscious improvement of a project constantly under development.

Before the technical stages of plotting and calculation a more general view has to be taken. The process of honing a design is like a sculptor clarifying form by removing stone from a rough rock, with the adjustments made becoming increasingly more sensitive until the final piece of work is achieved. Every subsequent stage is a continuation of the next, a visual and diagrammatic trace of a developing hypothesis, born though ambiguous inception and matured in thought.

29.02.2012

The Council Complex



Dealing with the council on a daily basis, we often find ourselves liaising through the electronic environments of the internet and the phone network, hence our psychological constructs of the entity are free to develop, almost completely unrestricted by the intrusion of reality into our semi-conscious modes of thought. It is for this reason that a visit to the council's office to hold a pre-planning meeting holds a great level of significance for us, a ritualistic landmark in a journey towards an approval which equally holds a status of paramount importance in the contemporary culture of information.

Our trip to the offices of Barnet Council did not serve to disappoint, the post-modern citadel of the borough's authority seemed a labyrinth of corridors and desks, a rabbit warren of bureaucracy. The initially problematic parking facilities of the council reinforced the notion of challenge we had come to expect.

However, once we had overcome the early barriers the meeting proved very beneficial to the scheme we had come to discuss. As the meeting centred on a long-standing project we were glad to move positively towards a sense of closure, the final balance to be achieved with resolution in sight.

In a sense the planning department are the gatekeepers, regulating the ceaseless flow by quality and consistency. With schemes of a larger nature, dialogue must ensue for a project to reach a level at which outcomes and consequences are exhaustively covered. This notion of a debate reflects the psychoanalytic principles of the psyche, initially developed by Freud when he lay down the foundations of modern psychology. In this model, the council acts as the super-ego, a moral and cultural conscience controlling the output of a vast society.