

What are the roles
of method and technique
in an artistic process?

Can difference be made
in a deliberate act?

What is a problem?

Peter Bertram

PROBLEM INVENTION

The Artistic Process in Architecture



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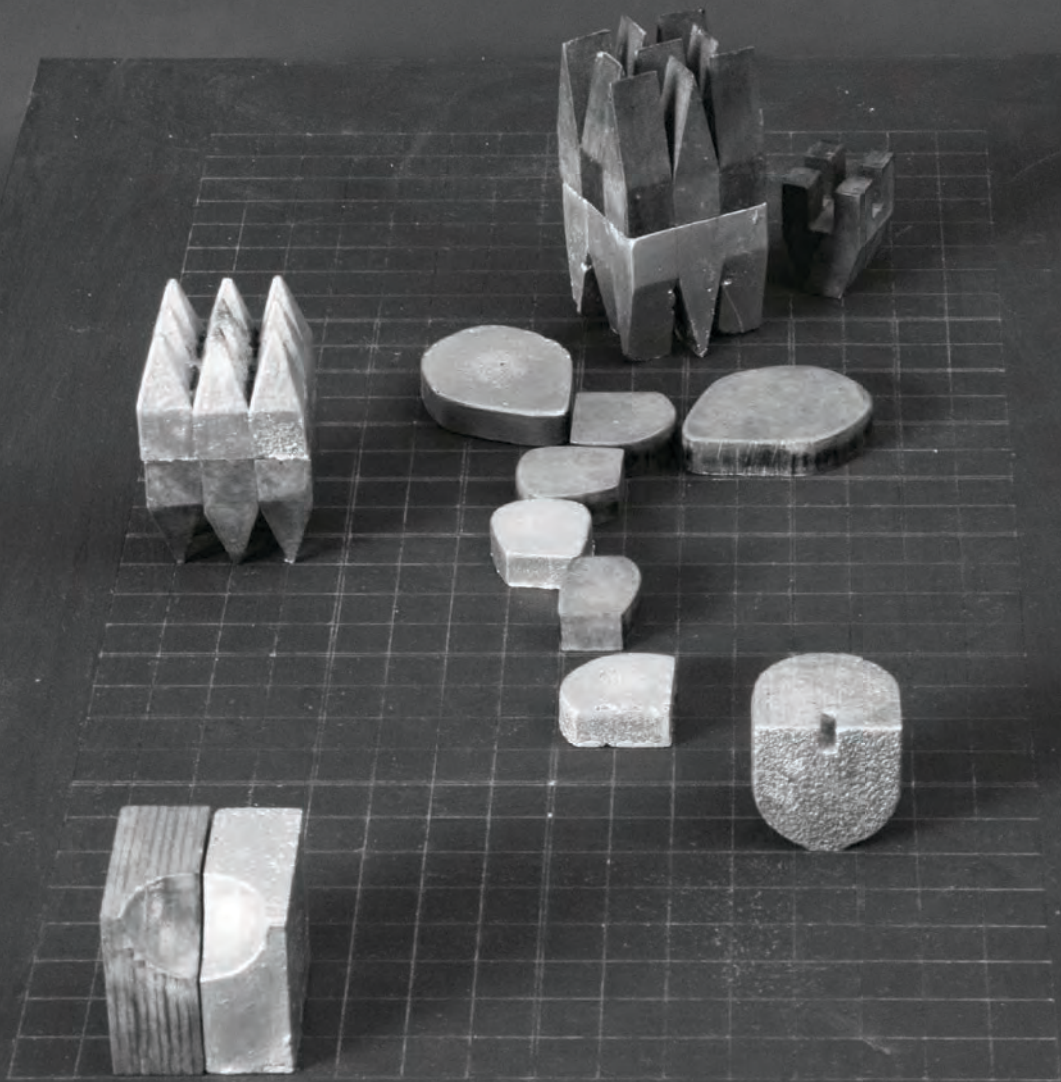
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INTRODUCTION

The book examines the nature of problem invention in an architectural medium and shows my work as an architect and a researcher in the field of artistic research in the School of Architecture at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation (KADK) in Copenhagen. The visual material is an art academy I started to make some years ago, when KADK was in the middle of a structural reform. It gave me the idea to reflect on the role of artistic practice in architecture by making an imaginary art academy.

The School of Architecture at KADK has been a member of The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts for more than 250 years and has developed in close relation to the visual and plastic arts. This tradition influences the way I understand artistic practice in architecture and the constitution of an art academy.

Artistic research

I place my work in the category of artistic research, but this is, first and foremost, a pragmatic gesture. I am not concerned with correspondence between abstract definitions and concrete practices. I abstain from defining practices rigidly in terms of identity, and I will not try to distribute creation, making, discourse, thinking, knowledge etc. according to fixed criteria. I am more interested in how concrete practices influence each other in the forming of a particular field of research. I regard artistic research as a relatively open category well suited to examining how artistic practice and research relate to each other. I will return to this matter more thoroughly in 'Research Diagrams' and use the term *poetics* to signify my own position.

It is important to note that I am only concerned with a particular role played by artistic practice in architecture. It is not intended to exhaust the matter and signify all the ways the expression can be used. I regard artistic practice in architecture as a form of problem invention through the use of an architectural medium.

John Hejduk observed that artistic practice in architecture is an intense inquiry into the relation between architecture and life (Canadian Centre for Architecture 1998). I regard the nature of this relation as the primary architectural problem field. It means that although my emphasis is on problem invention, the discussion must eventually address an ethical dimension. I will touch upon political and ethical questions in the last chapter and place the discussion on problem invention in a broader societal perspective.

Art and architecture are conventionally concerned with doing, and science with knowledge (Frayling 1994, p. 2). The distinction is crude, however, and ill suited to deal with

the nature of concrete practices on either side of the distinction. Art and architecture have knowledge on many issues, and science is also conditioned by its practices (Mol 2002, p. 153). I am sceptical of the implication often drawn that artistic research is somehow a middle way between art and science, transcending the inadequacies of the above crude distinction with the single order of a new research identity. It is an assumption that loses important aspects in the process, as I will demonstrate in the chapter 'Research Diagrams'.

I conceive of artistic research as a heterogeneous entity that connects distinct practices across science, philosophy and art. I will therefore not try to define artistic research against a fixed set of criteria. That is, at best, an ontological endeavour that falls outside the scope of this book. At worst, it is a political enterprise that serves the institutional agendas of research bodies. I will try to avoid both a crude opposition and a synthesis into a single research methodology.

Process

I distinguish between two processes. The first is a problem-solving process that realises an intent. The second goes beyond an initial frame and invents a problem. I argue that problem solution merely repeats an existing problem; to create a new problem is real invention (Deleuze 2006a, pp. 15–16).

It is crucial that the distinction is made on a fundamental level, and it must not be confused with concrete processes. It is not meant as a distinction between a professional problem-solving process and an artistic problem-inventing process, nor am I alluding to a positivist understanding of problem solving and opposing it to artistic creation. I am not even concerned with artistic practice as a whole, but only with problem invention in an architectural medium. I do propose that an artistic process in an architectural medium is concerned with problem invention. However, my own work is but a single representation of a fundamental process that may unfold in many other ways. It is not restricted to an art academy, nor does it necessarily have to bear the designation 'artistic'. Conversely, it would be simplistic to suggest that professional practice is merely problem solving. It is fair to assume that any architectural process always incorporates and mixes problem solving and problem invention in a specific way.

Method and technique

Scientific and artistic methods are very different. A scientific method is said to be transparent and rigorous, one that is consistent across individual processes and acknowledged by a collective subject. An artistic method is not equally determined by repeatability and premeditation. Its aim can be to disturb a pre-established mindset, and it is not primarily concerned with consolidation of knowledge across individuals and processes. It is quite

often opaque because the rules are personal and unclear. When artists talk about their methods, it is often to distinguish themselves from other artists. I focus on problem invention in an architectural medium and call it an artistic process. The practitioner who is under consideration is always an architect. I do not leave the domain of architectural media, nor do I discuss artistic practices in general.

I primarily discuss the use of method in a written reflection and the use of technique in an architectural medium. Of course, there are linguistic techniques and methodological regularities in the use of an architectural medium. A written reflection may perform many roles during the course of an artistic process, and it does not need to be concerned with method in a rigorous or prescriptive sense of the word. However, when writing explains, determines or anticipates the nature of a process, it takes on a methodological role. It tries to identify general conditions, and it is not bound to a single process. It is my ambition to distance the written reflection in this book from the job of determining artistic practice. Instead, I will try to present it as a creative practice in its own right. I will discuss a specific method that deals with the creation of new concepts in the chapter 'Intuitive Method'.

I regard technique as a way of thinking through the use of an architectural medium. It is not simply a set of tools and a skill in forming matter. An architectural medium follows conventions but it also has a material presence. An architect seldom works directly on buildings, and the actual material in an artistic process is almost always an architectural medium. The medium material is a collection of drawings, models and so on that an architect uses in a given process. My interest in technique calls attention to the role of medium material in an artistic process, and I will examine the relation between technique and material as an important source of problem invention. I will try to liberate technique from a concept of technology, which I find to be more tool oriented and typically married to techno-scientific rationality.

I deal with method and technique in this manner because it is relevant to the relationship between artistic practice and artistic research, and between writing and making. I am fully aware that the terms can be used in other ways.

Text and project

The text and the academy project are sometimes directly associated but are often allowed to develop their own trajectories with no explicit reference to each other. There are always aspects in the text that do not refer directly to the visual material, and the academy project has many layers of meaning not explicated by the text. Text and project are different means whereby I consider related issues. The productive difference between them is an important issue that I often return to.

The primary issue of the main text is the nature of problem invention in an architectural medium. In this way, the text has a discursive object of its own, and it is not intended as a comprehensive account of the content of the works I show. It can be read alongside the visual presentation of the academy project or largely separately if so desired.

Conversely, models and drawings are not meant to validate assumptions in the main text. They are spatial and visual reflections in their own right. They are made in pursuit of specific aspects of problem invention and the nature of the academy institution, and there was no reason to pick concrete sites or specific programmes for the members of the imaginary campus. The academy project was never intended as a concrete project proposal. It would have introduced many additional issues to be considered and distanced the project from the primary concern of the main text.

I thus consider the main text and the academy project as two distinct yet related trajectories. They develop lines of thought without always referring to each other. Trajectories sometimes correspond closely and sometimes develop without direct reference to each other. They often influence each other intensely when they are productive in their own right, and the book's marking of points of exchange is by no means exhaustive

I will, however, mark the most important points of tangency as I go along and summarise them in the final chapter, 'A Map of Thresholds'. In this way, I aim to construct a map of thresholds between writing and making that allows them to unfold in their own right and still point to places where they have influenced each other. I should emphasise that I use the terms *writing* and *making* to distinguish between two practices and their material domains of words and architectural media. The intention is not to imply that writing is theory and making is practice. I use the term *making* because it has connotations pointing to various forms of craft and fabrication.

The texts in association with the images are sometimes traditional captions offering useful information, but they are also used to present short reflections on the way important influences between the main text and the making of the academy project came about. They help construct the map.

The game board on page 6 was made at an early phase in the academy project in order to assemble and compare the most important sub-projects. It served as a methodological device intended to collect, materialise and orchestrate the main issues of the academy project. The pieces transformed into larger models and drawings as the project developed, but on a conceptual level they never left the board. They transformed into more articulate structures, but they were still spatial pieces developed in response to the main text.

The game board points beyond the orchestration of a process to the management of an academy institution. The game board is simultaneously a way of steering the academy project and a way of reflecting on the mechanisms of the academy institution itself. It is both a model of a campus and a model of an institutional practice that stimulates problem invention. I will try to substantiate this claim in the chapter 'An Academic Archipelago'.

Book structure

The book is divided into three parts. The first comprises this introduction and 'Research Diagrams', which presents my understanding of artistic research and positions it in a broader field of research.

The first chapter, 'Difference', marks the beginning of the discussion of my own work. In chapters 1–5, the book develops from a discussion of problem invention in an architectural medium to the issues that more concretely informed the making of the art academy project. The book initially addresses fundamental questions of difference, method and technique. It moves on to examine the nature of an architectural problem and how it is developed in an architectural medium. The last two chapters show more advanced parts of the art academy project and a series of imaginary proposals. In chapter 5, the book addresses ethical implications of problem invention and explains key aspects of the academy project.

Finally, 'A Map of Thresholds' summarises the main issues in the book as they emerge through an encounter between writing and making, and mentions trajectories for further exploration.

