The key issue and its many facets

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The Key Issue and Its Many Facets

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Being an architect, an educator, and a researcher, I find myself constantly thinking and reasoning out of various angles, intertwining at the same time several perspectives and playing different roles simultaneously. If somebody would ask me why I experience what I do in this way, my first answer would be: because I'm trained as a designer. Reflecting on this first thought brings me to a second one: reasoning as a designer feels almost like a built-in feature to me, and it is most probably also the linking thread between many things that I do. However, I don't sense this to be happening in a linear way. As conditions, inputs, impulses, triggers, and many more matters change all the time, one of the recurring challenges is for me grasping the key issue, the most important aspect, the raisons d'être, and, depending on the specific case or situation, try to make it visible, evident, and steer it towards the desired result. Both the key issue and the specific case or situation are related to one another, though reliant on a variety of intentions, implications, moments in time, deriving choices, etcetera. Another commonly recurring fact is that the key issue has many facets, some of them more apparent than other ones. Also, the punch line I see may differ from the one somebody else can get to see, making the way towards the desired result quite bumpy. Therefore, I have to admit that the question of writing a contribution explicitly on 'one' specific method for 'reflection' looks somehow slippery to me. It depends on the matter at stake, the specific case, the people involved, their intentions, agendas, acts, etc. Sometimes it is about something that I wish the interlocutors to comprehend the same way I do. Some other times can be different, wishing the counterparts to interpret it in another way. But a good way to proceed is to keep chasing the key issue and reach out to its various facets, making use of images, drawings, diagrams, other visuals and leveraging on a sensible verbal explanation.

A reflection in design-driven research should start with the consideration of the key issue, the project proposition, the design 'drivenness', and how it relates to research. The design-driven components may also be personal, moved by intuition or tacit knowledge, whereas the relation with research should be ultimately leading to uncovering the knowledge and making it suitable for transferability. In doing this, objective and subjective matters play both their roles and should be conveyed to the interlocutors by the design itself, by means of drawings as well as through a thoughtful verbal account. In his book 'I racconti del progetto', published by Skira in 2018, Vittorio Gregotti talks about the materials for the project being very important for the process of narration. Materials for the project are intended not only as the ones actually utilized for its realization but in particular meant as the inventory of

relationships and findings fueling the creative process of the project. The relation between the project and the context, history, uses, interior / exterior relationships, the normative, the rules, but also the representation tools, the critical reflections, the exceptions and their interpretations, and the link to some artistic practices, are all considered choices like in the case of actual materials. According to the author, we shouldn't interpret creativity as pure and delusively free subjective expression, because whatever we do as designers is susceptible to external forces. Throughout the book, Gregotti's main intention is narrating the possible phenomenology that every time is behind the construction of a specific project, also as an expression of artistic practice.

Following his line of reasoning, in a design inquiry, drawings play a fundamental role. Drawings are both tangible signs of the creative process and mode of communication, just like writing, functioning as indispensable connections between the thoughts, their interpretations and direct translations. I find the ideas shared in the above-mentioned book quite interesting, even if considering that are related to projects which took place in the past. One clear warning is coming forward as well from the book. Nowadays there is a serious risk, namely that artistic practices and architectural project pathways are being identified merely with the search towards spectacle and success in communication, keeping out of sight the unmissable link to the real matters, like the existing place, context, its history and memory. Taking into account the key issue, and understanding its many facets using, in Gregotti's words, the 'materials' of the project, it can not only be very useful, but it will help to reflect upon the design research process. To do so, each 'material' needs to be unraveled, charting cross-connections as well between 'materials'. This can be done systematically along with the development of the project, or only in (pre)determined moments. Last and not least, although perhaps not always very convenient, trying to reflect in the first place as a designer while deploying design-driven research, may be the best way to go.
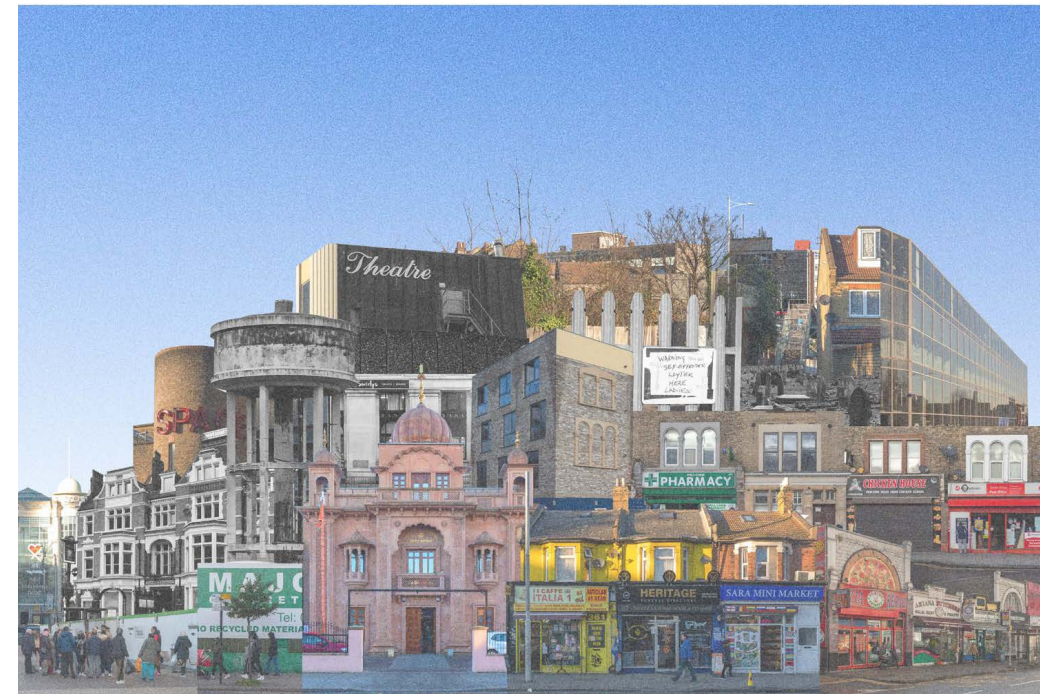
Collage photographs - author William Guild