

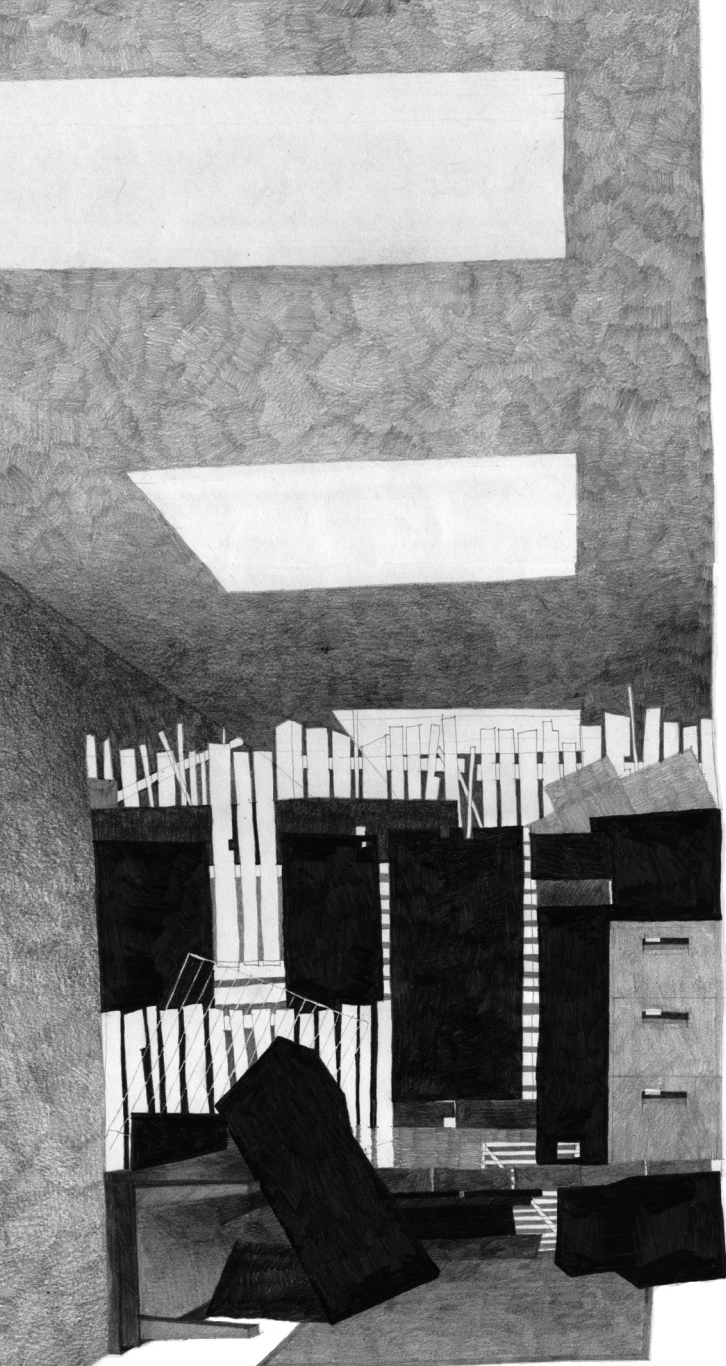
"No man is an *lland*, intire of it selfe; every man is a piece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*; if a *Clod* bee washed away by the *Sea*, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a *Promontorie* were, as well as if any *Mannor* of thy *friends* or of *thine owne* were; any mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*."

What is the matter? Does this upset you? And what is the matter? What is at hand? What is it that matters here? In particular, what does matter matter here? Who matters? And who matters?

One of the matters here is earth: clods of it, islands of it, entire continents of it. But that is not the matter. Although these clumps of matter are certainly at hand, they are not what matters here. According to the practice of metaphor, what is given directly is not the subject matter. As if to confirm this, the very first phrase tells us that no man is an island: there is to be no confusion between men and islands; no mistaking the one for the other. The subject (matter) is subject to the subject matter.

But without this matter (clods of dirt, earth raised up into mounds and promontories, islands and continents) the matter (whatever it is that really matters here) remains unspoken, unwritten, unthought. What is the relationship between matter and thinking? Between clods, promontories, islands, continents, and the matter to which our attention is being drawn? A thought is written thing, a recorded thing, a thing heard and repeated, a thing constructed. Mere thoughts, entirely private ideas, may exist, but they certainly don't matter, except possibly to God.

The word 'matter' has several senses, some of which we have already tested here. There is physical matter (something *is* matter). There is the significance or importance of something (something *matters*). There is a state of affairs (something is a *matter* which concerns us); and this state of affairs can be a problem (we might ask what *the matter* is). If we were to hazard a definition for architecture (which is the underlying matter of these brief thoughts), we could do worse than to suggest it is a practice of *mattering*, in all these senses.



Let us set this matter aside temporarily and turn to another matter, specifically the subject matter of the statement with which we began.

Immediately it will be seen that it is not a matter of what, but of who. Who is it that matters, and who is it that matters to me? A corpse: a person-become-matter, who-become-what. John Donne (although his name probably doesn't matter) is listening to the sound of a bell announcing another plague death in London. For whom does the bell toll? Who does the bell concern? Who is the subject matter of the bell?

Donne himself is ill at the time, but it is not the matter of the individual that concerns him or the bell. Rather it is the matter of the collective, the matter which is collectively given the name '*Mankind*'. Collectivity is the subject. It is what matters here (although, as we have noted, it is the earthy matter that enables collectivity to matter in this piece of Donne's writing). The point to which these matters (the subject matter and the earthy matter) are brought is that a collective is not a grouping but a massing which can occur at any scale.

According to some structure of our psyches, or some process of learning in our childhood, we come to identify how much of the matter of the world is us. We identify ourselves as individuals. But there are identities, selves, that are not circumscribed within individual psyches. If thoughts have mat-

ter (and they only *matter* if they do); and if thinking is the relating of thoughts; and if a self is something that thinks (*cogito ergo sum*); then not all selves are necessarily people, and one person might be a participant in many concentric and overlapping selves.

How does a collective think? Not as a sum of the mental activity of its participants. Consider the situation of working collectively in a design studio. The design studio is premised on the value of working in close proximity to others. The collective is thinking, and each individual production (each statement, model, drawing, reference) is a collective thought. No one person *has* all these thoughts; they are thought by the group. A model constructed by one of the participants, for example, is not a representation of the 'real thought' which occurs in that individual's mind. It is itself a real thought, a thought which matters. It can be encountered by the other individuals in the group in the same terms as any of their productions. The relationships between the various thoughts of the collective can be varied, and new thoughts can be had by the collective. Able to think in this way, a collective such as a studio group can be spoken of as a self with its own identity.

This publication has, for six years now, operated on the premise that each graduating year-group of students can have some kind of common identity. At the very least it acts to provide such an identity. By gathering on more-or-less equal terms the visual statements of each student it tries to make explicit the loose collectivity of the studio.

Architecture, this practice of mattering, concerns things which exist in the experience of more than one person, that matter to more than one person. This may seem an unambitious definition, but it is the heart of the matter. Architectural matter (whether it be concrete, graphite or data) is not mere matter that is to be elided or seen through in favour of some real subject matter. The subject matter exists only insofar as it matters, insofar as it exists in the experience of more than one person, insofar as it is a collective thought.

Collectivity is not defined by the separating off of a group. Nationalism, for example, is a negative collectivity, defined by exclusion. Collectivity is defined by an act of identification, an act of involvement, incorporation. You are not a single person. You are an operating element within many selves, only one of which is coextant with your individual psyche.

Architectural production is an act of collectivity.  
Identify widely.  
Matter.

Carl Douglas

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Quote: Donne, 1634, 'Devotion XVII', *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*

Image: Barricade 2 (Untitled), 2006, pencil on paper, 841x594mm