



Delft University of Technology

## Somaesthetics

### "Bouwkunde reloaded" DSD MSc graduation studio

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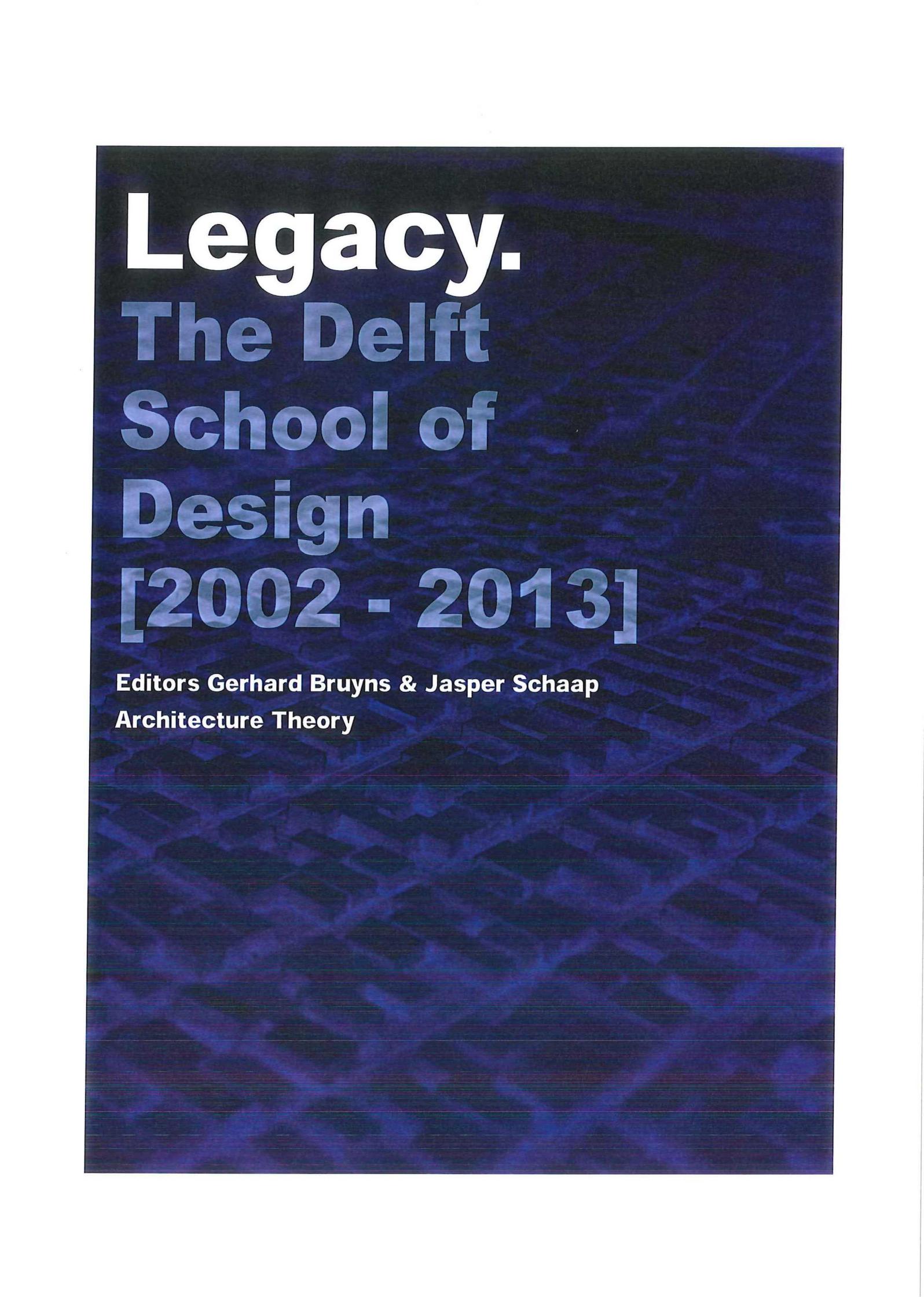
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**Legacy.**  
**The Delft**  
**School of**  
**Design**  
**[2002 - 2013]**

**Editors Gerhard Bruyns & Jasper Schaap**  
**Architecture Theory**

SOMÆSTHETICS:  
'Bouwkunde Reloaded'  
DSD MSc Graduation Studio

**Marc Boumeester and Andrej Radman**

**Introduction: Collapse of Verticality** It is no coincidence that both Nietzsche and Deleuze are referred to as radically 'horizontal thinkers' for their anti-idealist stance. Horizontal thought is the thought of difference, not of identity. Nietzsche has been the focal point of departure for those who refuse to accept the necessity of a stable subject-object relation. Throughout his work, the conventional idea of equality figures as exemplary of the order of the *Same*. Any essentialism or teleology as a version of idealism has to deny one or more aspects of life in order to be coherent. This is why idealism is taken to be life-denying to the extent that it eventually produces pathological consequences in modern life. Life is always irreducible. It is a 'totality' of differences and not an identity. An identity can be represented and put on a scale with a common measure. By contrast, horizontality refers to the impossibility of ever finding a scale that is adequate to difference. As inaugurated by Nietzsche, and subsequently taken up by Deleuze and Guattari, horizontal thought paves the way to thought as a creative undertaking. 'Subject', 'actor', and 'cause' remain metaphysical notions characteristic of the vertical axis. The vertical axis thus embodies what is static and relatively unchanging, whereas the horizontal axis is always in movement.

How does horizontality impact architecture? Architects tend to speak in absolutes, ignoring the centrality of socio-cultural change and the condition where "there is no outside." Trained for a profession that has its own inbred oppositions, evaluation criteria and hierarchies, architects are particularly attracted to the vertical axis. It is high time they got their hands dirty for there are no simple rules or methodologies to follow. The only way to proceed is to experiment, while avoiding the Scylla of behaviourism and the Charybdis of determinism. An architect's job is to produce possibilities, that is, to play with the virtual without actualising it. This can be done only through the singular, that is, through material or matter, both corporeal and incorporeal. Only this way can we hope to stumble upon the emancipatory potential. This is the crux of Guattari's *Ethico-Aesthetics*. As Scott Lash suggests, Walter Benjamin's 'double edged' work proves to be insightful in this respect. On the one hand he embraced the age of mechanical reproduction, aware that there was no going back, "but Benjamin's angel of history, while being dragged forward at a tremendous speed was at the same time facing backwards." By contrast to thinkers such as Heidegger, Guattari shares Benjamin's anti-Luddite stance. The machine is not something which turns us away from being. Quite the opposite, the 'machinic phyla' are agents productive of being. They make us enter into what Guattari calls an ontological heterogenesis.

**Research Seminar: Ecologies of Architecture** Building upon the legacy of Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972), the research seminar *Ecologies of Architecture* will reposition the discipline within the transdisciplinary framework. Felix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* (2000), where he postulates the necessity of founding an 'ecosophy' that would link environmental ecology to social ecology (*socius*) and to mental ecology (*psyche*), will provide the basis for surveying the 'speculative' neo-materialist project. Its strong post-humanist and anti-reductionist flavour will offer an 'ethico-aesthetic' alternative to any guise of 'correlationalism' including the latest of PoMo.

With his seminal *After Finitude; An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (2006) Quentin Meillassoux revamped Gilles Deleuze's critique of representationalism. Both Deleuze and Meillassoux consider the enlightenment thinker Kant responsible for the instantiation of 'correlationalism'. Under correlationalism one only ever has access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart. But if the idea of the world independent of our access seems

unintelligible, as Ray Brassier cautions, perhaps the fault lies more with our notion of intelligibility than with the world. Alfred North Whitehead named this tendency the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness'. Meillassoux thus rightly asks whether the self-proclaimed Copernican revolution of the Kantian Critical turn was not in fact a 'Ptolemaic counter revolution'. Throughout his *oeuvre*, Deleuze consistently fought against the parochialism of any anthropocentrism. In her recent book *Deleuze and the Meaning of Life* (2010), Claire Colebrook convincingly argues how this 'bad habit' might even turn out to be suicidal (in the long run). It is essential to start thinking the 'nonorganic' duration where the neologism stands for both the organic and inorganic. This is the watershed of 'flat ontology'.

Neo-Kantians have famously given up the metaphysical ambition. They have happily traded the question of *creation* for the (all-too-human) question of *foundation*, i.e. conditions of possible experience. Shying away from the conditions of real experience (becoming) is fatal for the discipline of architecture whose loyalty remains divided between science's Copernicanism and philosophy's Ptolemaism. The choice thus seems to boil down to either the naïveté of techno-utopian positivism or the solipsism of 'poetic' phenomenology. No wonder then that the claimants for the title of the current architectural avant-garde should be split along this exact line: Zahaesque 'topological' Parametricism vs. Sejimaesque 'Euclidean' Minimalism. But what if these two (op)positions are not mutually exclusive? What if you can have a cake and eat it too?

**Design Studio: Somaesthetics** In a desperate attempt to catch up with forms of contemporary image culture, architects tend to forget where their strength lies. To speak of culture as forms of life, as Scott Lash argues, is to break with earlier notions of culture as representation, as reflection. It is to break with positivism for phenomenology, with judgement for experience, with epistemology for ontology, and finally to break with a certain type of cognition for living. While accepting multiple scales of reality, the *Somaesthetics* studio opposes the alleged primacy of the 'physical' world discovered by physics. By contrast, it posits that what we have to perceive and cope with is the world considered as the *environment*. The emphasis is on the *encounter*, where experience is seen as an emergence which returns the body to a process field of exteriority. The ultimate goal of the *Somaesthetics* studio is to debunk *hylomorphism* - where form is imposed upon inert matter from without and where the architect is seen as a god-given, inspired creator and genius - and to promote an alternative morphogenetic approach that is at once more humble and ambitious.

Action and perception are inseparable at the 'mesoscale' which is commensurate with life. In other words, if the objects of knowledge are separated from the objects of existence, we end up with a duality of mental and physical objects that leads to an ontologically indirect perception. By contrast, the premise of the *Somaesthetics* studio is that perceptual systems *resonate* to information. This 'direct

realism' is grounded on the premise that, from the outset, real experience is a relation of potential structure – *distribution of the sensible* - rather than a formless chaotic swirl onto which structure must be imposed by cognitive process. The world is seen as an ongoing open process of *mattering*, where meaning and form are acquired in the actualisation of different agential virtualities. Following Deleuze's argument, it is possible to assert that the genetic principles of sensation are thus at the same time the principles of composition of the work of art(efact).

To account for creation (change), the virtual realm (elbow-room) needs to be introduced. This is by no means a transcendental Platonic realm. It is the *manifold*, a 'phase portrait' of any dynamic system which is real through and through, albeit not as yet actual. Its indeterminacy is the very precondition of novelty. The actualisation of the virtual is thus a morphogenetic (intensive) process, whereas the realisation of the possible is merely a retroactive hypostatisation. Brian Massumi explains the distinction between these implicate and explicate orders as follows:

*Implicit form is a bundling of potential functions, an infolding or contraction of potential interactions (intension). The playing out of those potentials requires an unfolding in three-dimensional space and linear time-extension as actualisation; actualisation as expression. It is in expression that the fade-out occurs. The limits of the field of emergence are in its actual expression. Implicit form may be thought of as the effective presence of the sum total of a thing's interaction minus the thing.*

This two-sidedness, the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in the virtual, as one arises from and returns to the other, is due to the capacity to affect and be affected in return. The *affect* becomes the very interface between implicate and explicate orders. It is the hinge between the virtual and the actual.

**Programme: Bouwkunde Reloaded / 33000 m<sup>2</sup>** (from the original brief <http://www.buildingforbouwkunde.nl>) On 13 May 2008, the Faculty of Architecture of the Delft University of Technology (TU Delft) was unexpectedly reduced to ashes by a devastating fire. [...] the loss of the faculty building also offers new opportunities. Opportunities to take a fresh and critical look at the education of the future, opportunities to realise a modern, innovative and refreshing design for the university building, which can hold its own in terms of power and presence with the well-known Bouwkunde building from the years of Van den Broek and Bakema. Precisely because it intends to realise this specific ambition, the Faculty of Architecture has decided to organise an open international ideas competition, in preparation of a project competition for the new faculty building in 2009.

This competition creates firstly an opportunity to stimulate research by design. After all, combining design and research makes it possible to use a design to test a conceptual vision, and consequently strike a good balance between abstraction and reality. Secondly, the ideas competition makes it possible to also encourage creativity among the important younger generation of designers. The Faculty sees it as its task to explicitly offer this group a chance to enthusiastically think along regarding the scope of the educational building of the future. Finally, the competition is aimed to stimulate scientific development in the field by means of critical reflection and debate. Sustainability, as an integral aspect of both the future educational programme and the faculty premises, forms a theme of considerable urgency in this context.



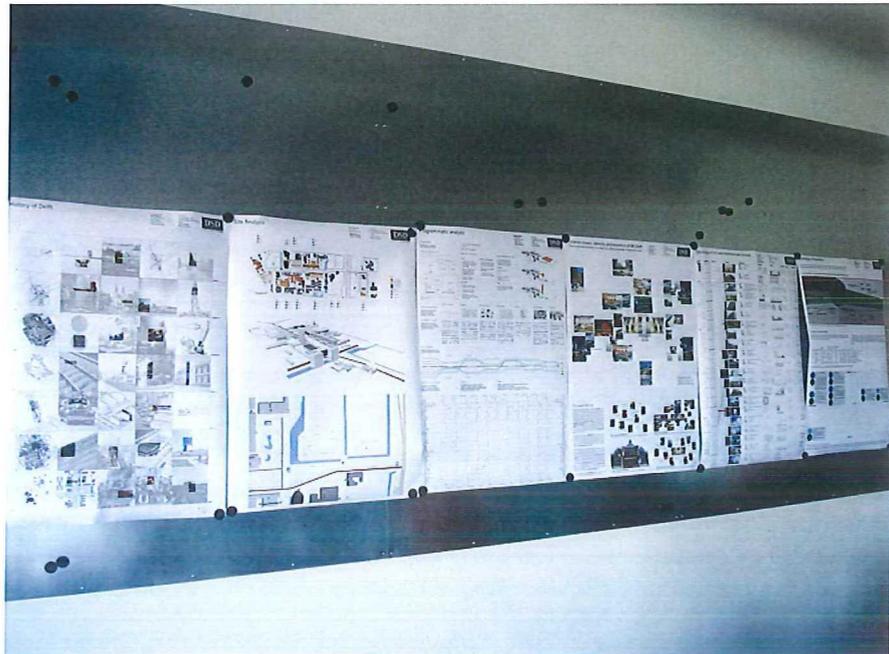
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- 1 Six Minutes Workshop, Delft.
- 2 Field Trip, EYE Film Institute Amsterdam.
- 3, 4 Seminar, Faculty of Architecture, TU Delft.

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### **The Delft School of Design**

**(DSD)** was formally instituted in 2002 as a laboratory for emerging research and experimentation concerning doctoral research within the faculty's departments of architecture and urbanism and building technology.

Since 2013 the DSD has been continued in the chair of Architecture Theory at the Faculty of Architecture, Delft University of Technology.

Since its founding, the DSD has provided both an academic and public platform for events such as lectures and debates, conferences, colloquia, seminars and workshops. The DSD platform brought together architects, historians, theoreticians, urbanists, and structural designers; additionally, we also brought together economists, geographers, social and political scientists, neuroscientists and philosophers, comparative literature scholars, filmmakers and artists. Whilst each has detailed and extensive

specialized knowledge in their chosen field, the goal is to organize seminars, meetings and debates around various mutually relevant themes.

These encounters, while respecting the diverse disciplines coming to the table, are productive and generative of fresh approaches to the complex sets of problems engaging professionals, academics, and emerging doctoral researchers and scholars today. The DSD thus provides for the exploration of interconnected frameworks of knowledge, detailed problem analysis, and technical methodologies.

This book provides an overview of the activities undertaken by the DSD and the student work which has been produced by students of the DSD in the period between 2009 and 2013.

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