



If the present flyer-series prompts a critique of “foundation theory”, it is because **1)** its basic assumption that theory somehow *precedes* practice [like theology precedes faith]; **2)** by accepting this contract with practice, theory fails to comprehend and act on the foundations of the design-discipline.

By contrast, experimental theory development will operate directly on these foundations, and *contribute* to move the perception of what design *does*, in the professional field (and thereby what designers do). In this capacity theory operates alongside practice, in an autonomous but coordinated way.

The experimental back-drop for this flyer-series—on devices—comes from archaeology. A distinction drawn and questioned by [Erik Born \(2016\)](#) between the notion of ‘cultural technologies’ and *media*-archaeology. If the latter is the archaeology of *electronics*, the former is the *designed* context.



This flyer-series is prompted by the need to locate theory in the larger field of design-practices. *One* take on this would be to view design-theory as feeding the multiplicity of specialisations in design with information and depth. Relating to the arenas, the business, its actors, history and society.

Such an approach fits a *foundation-course* idea of theory in the design-field. But it may not be as appropriate to inquire into the foundations of the discipline/s because it is tethered to already existing practices, and may not be equipped to define directions for design relating to “wicked problems”.

It requires an experimental approach to theory development, when working with problems of this kind—environmental issues, human conflict and security—since they are such that the problem grows the more we attempt to solve it, because it is wired to secondary causes beyond our control.

Any success at working with “wicked problems” is likely to affect design as its foundations: what design *does*. It is puzzling, however, as I have heard in stray comments that should be addressed before they become viral, that experimental directions in design theory readily become categorised as *art*.

Or, perhaps only a bit “arty”. It is rather interesting that queries with relevance to the discipline’s foundation should be categorised in this way. Since it is likely to be based on a received notion that the design locates its foundations in art; not taking into consideration that it has been otherwise.

Indeed, Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) a renaissance architect and artist, defined design as “the animating principle of all artistic processes”. Clearly, Vasari located design—or, Italian *disegno*—in the *edgeland* between architecture and art, underscoring its foundational role in artistic processes.

Which means that in course of the centuries the foundation-course concept of design theory has turned tables *topsy turvy*; perhaps owing to a contractual notion of what theory should do in a field predominantly managed by the practitioners—and also by set notions of theory and practice.

In sum, there may currently be a kind of modernist conservatism—an *oxymoron*—inherent in how theory and practice are working together, that persists in placing design at the *margins* of the art-field, seeking its foundations there, while posing a bit “cheaply” from its commercial outskirts.

The danger of this position is that design-practices evolve that are structurally free of obligation, while taking pride in being the odd member of the art community. I say danger, because it becomes strangely exempt of taking responsibility for its foundational legacy, *and* working on wicked problems.

In contrast, experimental theory-development asks *two* basic assertions: **1)** experimental ground-breaking can transpose wicked problems so that it is possible to work on them; **2)** the success at this—when it occurs—will constitute a foundational re/search into what design *does*, of core relevance.