Immateriality in Design and Pedagogy: The Design Studio in an Era of Virtual Spaces of Interaction and Engagement

JAMES F. ECKLER
Marywood University School of Architecture

KEYWORD
studio pedagogy

Instructional models are increasingly online, remote, and accessible whenever convenient, ostensibly leaving the conventional design studio behind. What are the consequences of design education without a place of its own — the studio? What are the consequences if architecture Schools resist the pressures to move to a remote platform?

The Architectural design studio is unique educational setting in which Information doesn't flow in a single direction, from professor to student. Instead, it is exchanged in complex patterns of dialogue and production that form the foundation of a micro-scale community. the quality of the education is predicated on the interaction among members of this community. This presents a challenge to the virtual spaces of education that are increasingly becoming the norm. And, while virtual spaces and places of education have not yet fully assimilated the design studio, this does not mean the studio can't leverage advantages of these emergent grounds of discourse.
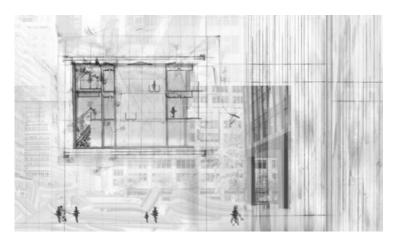
Social media provides a platform that subverts and replaces the social function of public spaces of all kinds — including the classroom. In the city, everywhere becomes plaza as plazas everywhere begin to vanish. In the School, as classrooms become virtual spaces without any substantive physical presence they effectively begin to exist anywhere. As this phenomenon becomes more of a cultural expectation the material counterparts to these immaterial places also disappear. This is seemingly the pinnacle of ex-urban culture.

Recently, however, platforms such as snapchat and Instagram develop new imperatives for social media users; they must be in physical, material places and substantiate their presence with photographic evidence. Perhaps, this is again setting the stage for urban transformation. Suddenly there is renewed interest in material places as the emergence of these new platforms challenge users to travel, snap, selfie, and proclaim that storied places are 'checked-off' some list. Does this present a chance for the design studio format? Can there be educational opportunities that leverage the spectacular nature of social media posting while reintroducing some degree of human interaction? Or, to what extent do these practices exacerbate existing problems of an eroding community of the design studio?

This proposal examines immateriality in two ways. It acknowledges that the architecture design studio has a role in exploring social phenomena, including the impact of virtual spaces of interaction on the material spaces of architecture. Students typically count themselves among the participants of cultural practices that are rarely considered as forces acting on the spaces we design. They are in a unique position to observe, study, and respond to them. Simultaneously, these

forces acting on the format and function of the design studio itself cannot be ignored. Can there be such a thing as a virtual architecture studio? If so, how does it work? If not, how does a conventional design studio take advantage of these evolutions in social exchange to remain relevant?

This proposal speculates upon the potential to resurrect the cultural value of public spaces using social media mechanisms that have so far usurped their roles in our lives by design. It presents student work grounded in immateriality as a driving force behind material decisions. It addresses studio pedagogy that considers the immaterial as well as the material qualities spaces and how architecture might contribute to both. It also presents the studio itself, as an opportunity for examining the intersection of material and immaterial modes of information exchange.

Student Work: A Process that merges the craft of Material and Immaterial media for a design proposal that imagines a material architecture for an immaterial program in a design studio that leverages social media as an instructional tool.

IMMATERIALITY IN DESIGN AND PEDAGOGY