

UNSTAKED TERRITORY: Frontiers of Beginning Design

Proceedings of the 19th National Conference on the Beginning
Design Student, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma
April 3-5, 2003



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Challenging The Boundaries I
Challenging The Boundaries II
Integrating The Boundaries
Obscuring The Boundaries
Various Terrains
Initial Terrain

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Prisoners of Time

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*In their evolving relationship with **time**, should beginning students of architecture be more like **prisoners**?*

Through our teaching, we need to help facilitate this fundamental need for our students to consciously reconsider time, a necessity for our academic-and-professional discipline to survive the contemporary “marketplace”.

Specifically, how can our method of the *teaching* of architecture maintain a needed relevance and usefulness within a socio-economic system that *eschews permanence and physicality* (the touching of a building’s skin, the reading of books, the writing of anything concise and cogent, the direct experience-of-a-place, the Eiffel Tower of Paris) *in favor of temporality and event* (the disengaged gaze at a screen, the scanning of the e-notebook, the PowerPoint presentation, the virtual-visit, the Eiffel Tower of the Paris Casino & Hotel in Las Vegas)? And what is the potential value of teaching in an old-and-slow way, postponing the “rushed professionalism” of much current, on-the-edge, educational practices?

There have recently been heard small warning voices by cultural critics and others against the principle quality that defines our modern, capitalistic, technocratic age – **acceleration** (a *time*-term). This paper hopes to be a mordant reminder of why some things (the design of buildings, the teaching of architecture) should (or must) take as its framework a concentrated and un-rushed period of time. This necessitates the introduction to and the learning of a different sense of time for our students, for a generation raised on “*Sesame Street*” and “*One-Minute Bedtime Stories*”.

The university was once not thought of as part-and-parcel of “the real world”, but mostly as a calm haven, a retreat, a place apart (consider the courtyard of the typical residential college at Cambridge). In contemporary society, we have created one, and perhaps only one, kind of “quarantine ward, with walls the *fever of speed* does not penetrate”: *prisons*. This is the one place where people *do* time, where their most fervent desire is to successfully *deal with* time. Prisoners have a powerlessness to control “exterior” time; because of this, prisoners are plunged into “*uchronia*”, into a world where time does not exist. Some, even many notable figures throughout history, have successfully *used* this time, found new resources, both external and internal, and personal focus by the resultant need for turning inward and reconsider their desired personal-relationship-with-the-(physical)-world. Malcolm X stated that, as a prisoner, “I never had been so truly free in my life”. A student’s psyche can be transformed, even spoiled, by he/she being given the opportunity for an absorption in “*monopursuits*”, freed from the need to be “*worldly*”, the continuously multi-tasking consumerist.

“Light is good, yet, in the dark the stars come out”. Only by taking the “material” of architecture seriously, and at least occasionally *slowly*, will we be able to make a powerful case to our students that architecture, in this world of acceleration, matters at all, and can produce genuine effects that people will notice, appreciate, measure, value, and ultimately demand. This paper will attempt to identify *several key teaching principles* for foundation-level design studio instructors to consider in the creation of their teaching plans. If acceleration is the key quality of our age, we must learn to speak to students about time. How we each value time has a direct effect on the *what-when-where-how-and-why* of the new physical environments we all dream about, using our heads and our hands, and then begin the process of design.