

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



Martha Abbott – Kevin Alter – Patricia Andrasik – Eduardo Aquino – Paul J. Armstrong – Katy Atherton – David L. Batie – Kurt Tyson Baumgartner – William Benedict – Suzanne Bilbeisi – Jody Blaylock – Charisse Bennett – Charles Brant – Lori A. Brown – David Burns – Hans Butzer – Shannon Chance – Dan Clark – Christain Dagg – Rebecca O’Neal Dagg – Jeffery Day – Elizabeth Danze – Royce M. Earnest – Hersh Farberow – Jeremy Ficca – Laurie Fields – Margaret Fletcher – Urs Peter Flueckiger – Maelee Thomson Foster – Sande Frisen – Bianca George – Abigail Hart Gray – Ann Gribbin – Jeff Hartnett – Richard Hoag – Martin Hogue – Jeanne Homer – Michael Hughes – Howard Itzkowitz – Donna Kacmar – Andre Khoury – Chris Kienke – Ann Kovalchick – Brian Kelly – Linda Klein – Thomas Lambeth – Andy Loewy – Timothy Love – Kenneth Masden – David Matthews – Michael McClure – Kenneth McCown – Robert McKinney – Martha McQuade – Phillip Mead – Michael Mussotter – Duffy O’Conner – Steven O’Hara – Tom Owens – John Phillips – Brian Rex – Clare Robinson – Theodore Sawruk – Joe Self – O. John Selfridge – Korydon Smith – Rusty Smith – Peter Smith – Kim Steele – Jim Sullivan – Maraget Tarampi – Aron Temkin – Stephen Temple – Laura M. Terry – Constantine Vasilios – Cynthia Vranas – Fredrick Zal – Mo Zell

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

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

*Offered through the Research
Office for Novice Design
Education, LSU, College of Art
and Design, School of
Architecture.*

©2003 Oklahoma State University
All rights reserved
Published by Oklahoma State University,
College of Engineering, Architecture and Technology
512 Engineering North
Stillwater, OK 74078
405-744-5714
f: 405-744-5369

ISBN 0-9746642-0-0

Superficial Elements

JEFFREY L. DAY, University of Nebraska

There is a constant dialectic between fact and implication.

-Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky

In the second-semester first year Bounding Space projects, I presented (with Brian Rex) a basic design pedagogy that explores complex notions of space as delimited by various types of boundaries. Borrowing from an area of formal ontology called “mereotopology” (the theory of parts and boundaries,) I argued that one may describe the complex spatial components of life through an additive and incremental sequence of procedures that expose “Everyday Geometries.” These techniques reveal two classes of space defined by two types of surfaces or boundaries, one composed of actual and physical edges and the other of ephemeral and apparent surfaces created by human activity. For the beginning design student, the studio reveals certain fundamental facts about design process and space: that everyday life has complex form, that design can proceed from analytical techniques, and that form is often the resultant or index of an “automatic” process. Bounding Space can best be summed up by the following relation: Form Follows Event, or form = trace.

This paper concerns a follow-up to Bounding Space in which we present students with a sequence of projects that gradually introduces thicker notions of site and program. The predominantly analytical processes and spatial theories of Bounding Space provide the basis for making form in response to limited conditions. Where Bounding Space permitted a very limited horizon of choice (to urge the student to uncover pre-existing complexities of form), each project in Superficial Elements reveals additional layers of choice (more options and more significant decisions).

Although I can express each of the four semesters of the pre-professional studio program with different “equations of form,” (surface + mass = form, form = trace, and form follows form) the fundamental principles remain the same: students are exploring the diverse relations between form and making. In this final semester of the sequence, we introduce them to a more complex understanding of form and program. I refer to the new relationship by stating that Form modified by Use yields an “Event,” or form/use = event. This “event” is the combined notion of form and program that the students explore through a series of progressively denser projects, all of which relate elements of architectural form to use through analyses of boundaries. Each project takes Le Corbusier’s Maison Domino (Form) as its site. Particular activities (Use) provide a programmatic basis for the projects that inhabit the site. The first project or “element” is a wall, followed by a Stair.

Studies of motion in space are the basis for a series of projects that explore the loose fit between form and program, between fact and implication.

While the project sequence explores the operative function of surfaces and boundaries derived from mereotopology, we also introduce students to the context of modernist paradigms such as Plan Libre, Raumplan, and cubist transparency. Here, we discuss the idea of theory directly for the first time. Students begin to understand that choices in design may have a basis in theory and are not simply the result of “dumb” problem-solving algorithms. In this sense, we introduce theory not as a separate discourse, but as a way of working. Where the theoretical content of Bounding Space remained buried in the actual studio, theory in Superficial Elements reveals itself as a description of difference.