

Pinstagrammed! Internet as Muse

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The debate of representation in architecture has been going on long before the introduction of the Internet and was especially lively during the first wave of postmodernism. In *Translations from Drawing to Building*, Robin Evans reflected on the “vaunted status of architectural drawings” as “redefining their representational role as similar to [art]... being less concerned with their relation to what they represent than with their own constitution.”

What is the role of drawings in architecture today? Is it to assist in the design process, to convey a vision of speculative environments, to aid in the construction of buildings, or as cultural critique? Can drawings compete between both the “abstract” and the “corporeal?” Or, have architectural drawings finally detached themselves from the design of buildings? ¹

A Conversation

The resulting paper came out of a series of conversations between Gabriel Kaprielian and Andrew Santa Lucia. This dialog began at NCBDS 2017 and continued throughout the year as we discussed individual and shared interests in architecture and our approaches to pedagogy. While we often explored different themes, methods of design, and representation techniques, there was a common interest in understanding and interrogating the process and resulting outcomes as they related to architectural education. Discussing the merits and pitfalls of the Internet as architectural muse provided for rich conversation in which we took stances on why and how to embrace or resist the Internet and the proliferation of the digital image in architecture education. The resulting paper is more a series of questions rather than answers. We invite the reader to answer these questions for themselves and take a stance of their own.

Are buildings a restrictive medium for architecture?

Are images stronger cultural objects than buildings?

What are the benefits and pitfalls of the Internet image in driving architectural discourse?

What does it mean for architecture and beginning design education to focus on the computer screen as the medium for design and representation?

Where does design inspiration come from in architecture?

¹ Evan, Robin. “Translations from Drawing to Building,” in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*, MIT Press (1997): 160.

This is a question that keeps many students up at night. Of course, design inspiration comes from many sources, including professors, building precedents, publications, and studio culture. However, it increasingly comes from Internet image sharing platforms, such as Pinterest and Instagram. This requires taking a stance in architectural pedagogy on how to incorporate or direct the use of the Internet in design education or alternately to resist it.

Students often look to case studies and building precedents to find inspiration. A precedent study of a building involves an in-depth look at information relating to design intent and process, construction documents, and images of a final building. More often students default to an Internet search to do precedent studies. While information about buildings can be found online, frequently on the firm's website, it is typically not as thorough as work in print publications. An Internet search may offer little more than fragmented parts of a building, often focusing on images of the final form.



Figure 1. The miraculous birth of the Villa Savoye

As educators, ultimately we try to teach students to find inspiration through the process of design. We do this through carefully constructed syllabi, assignments, and feedback. The instructor defines the final deliverables, while also curating the design process through the timing and prompts for each assignment or project. Professors differ greatly in pedagogical approach as to what style of representation should be used to convey the design, siding somewhere between very specific or open-ended. With either approach, the question is how much is the student's work being guided by the instructor, the student's design process, or other external influences, which this paper argues are increasingly coming from Internet imaging sharing sources?

Discovering new approaches to design and representation of architecture has often come from studio culture and reviews within a school. Students share knowledge both directly through conversation and indirectly through observation. The Internet, however, has extended the reach of an individual studio or school and made the work accessible to students in schools across the country and around the world. Students of one school might be inspired by the work of a student at a distant school simply by following an Instagram feed. This has the potential to connect students and design movements. Like globalization, however, this often focuses on commodity; in this case, an image of the final architectural product. This leads students to find inspiration more in the design outcome and representation technique, rather than the design process they might observe in their studio from peers.

The Internet as a “Buffet of Images.”

While architecture has been obsessed with the image for quite some time, the evolution of the Internet and web-based technology has certainly enabled a greater proliferation of image sharing. Google Images, first introduced in 2001, has arguably been the most influential web-based platform for changing image searches from print to the Internet. Much of the power of this technology lies in the search engine algorithm that placed similar images together and allowed users to click on one image only to find more similar images, leading down a digital rabbit hole. Google's search engine detaches the images from the original web source, marking a fundamental departure from a library search. Library classification, on the other hand, creates a system of knowledge organization that arranges

resources by subject. This type of cataloging groups similar books together based on overall content, rather than an individual image.

The next evolution of image sharing came in 2010 when both Pinterest and Instagram were released. Pinterest allowed for a more personalized image search and the ability to catalog images online. Along with image curation came the ability to share and follow other users. However, one of the main differences with Google Image search is that in the case of Pinterest the image is usually detached completely from the original source and the creator of the image is not cited. Furthermore, images that may have been grouped together with textual information are separated and fragmented.

Instagram, while released at the same time as Pinterest, has a technological edge that has made it arguably more culturally relevant. As a mobile application for smartphones, Instagram has become synonymous with immediacy and the present moment. Additionally, postings of images are more often made by the creator or a direct participant and accompanied by textual information. Many firms and schools of architecture have embraced the use of Instagram as the web-based image sharing platform of choice. Their work is able to be instantaneously shared, extending its reach and cultural currency.

From “Paper Architecture” to the “Paperless Studio.”

It is hard to not compare the names of Instagram and Archigram when considering architectural representation. The name Archigram is a hybrid between architecture and telegram; the later being a reference to a new kind of immediacy of information gained through 19th century technology.² Archigram used the power of the image to disseminate its avant-garde views on architecture. Their style of speculative design envisioned future cities, buildings, and lifestyles that was more social critique than proposal. They used the new technology of the day, widespread print media, to create collage composites. Archigram, in turn, referenced past speculative architecture movements such as Futurism, joining the world of “paper architecture.”

In many ways, it may be argued that some paper architecture projects have had larger and longer lasting cultural and architectural impact than many famous built projects. This history goes back to unbuilt work in the renaissance that explored the use of perspective drawing techniques to the atmospheric interiors of Piranesi’s “Prison” series in the 18th century. The concept of “paper architecture” was in many ways canonized by the drawing competitions of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts that encouraged renderings that were not tethered to a built work of architecture, but rather open to the imagination. This work is most epitomized by Étienne-Louis Boullée’s monumental “Cenotaphe a Newton” and Jean Jaques Lequeu’s symbolic and otherworldly drawings.

The “paperless studio,” pioneered in the 1990’s with the integration of digital CAD drafting and 3D modeling, marked a departure from traditional methods of architectural representation on paper.³ While digital architectural has received considerable criticism over the years, it has become an integral part of contemporary architectural education and standard in the professional practice. Hand sketching and drafting, while somewhat marginalized, has not completely disappeared. However, the variety of digital rendering styles that abound on the Internet marks an evolution of the paperless studio that has returned to the same intention of paper architecture, to be culturally relevant and unbound by the constraints of creating a physical building.

What is the role of pedagogy in defining the use of the Internet in architecture education?

2 Darwent, Charles. “When Architecture Went Pop,” Independent, (December 28, 1997) <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/when-architecture-went-pop-1290906.html>

3 Norman, Frederick. “Towards a Paperless Studio,” Proceedings, ACADIA (2001): 336-342.

To answer this question, we discussed our approaches to the use of the Internet in the classroom as it relates to representation and the design process. Between us, these approaches varied from resisting image focused architecture through process oriented assignments to embracing the use of image sharing platforms on the Internet to construct both the design process and representational style.

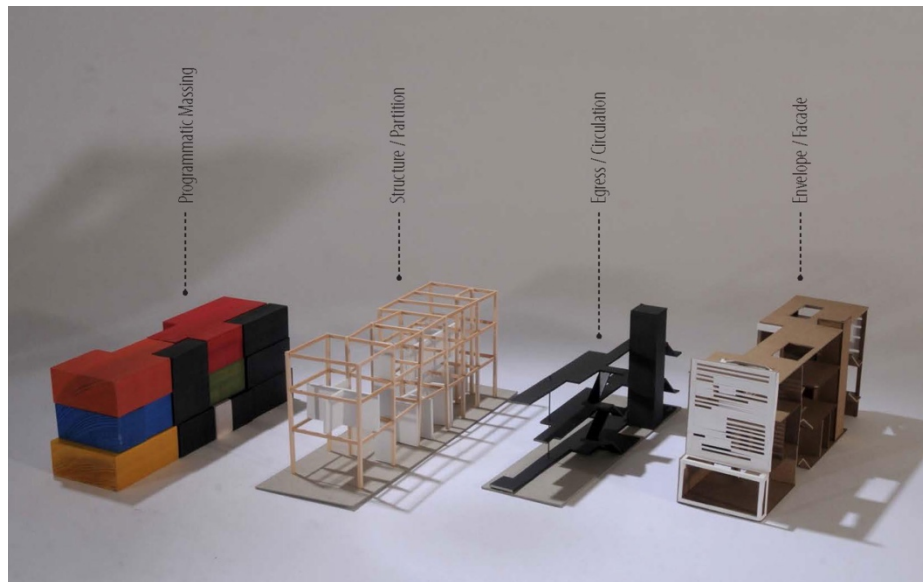


Figure 2. Process Models from the "Inside/Out" Studio, Cal Poly (Student - Stephanie Mason-Hing; Instructor – Gabriel Kaprielian)

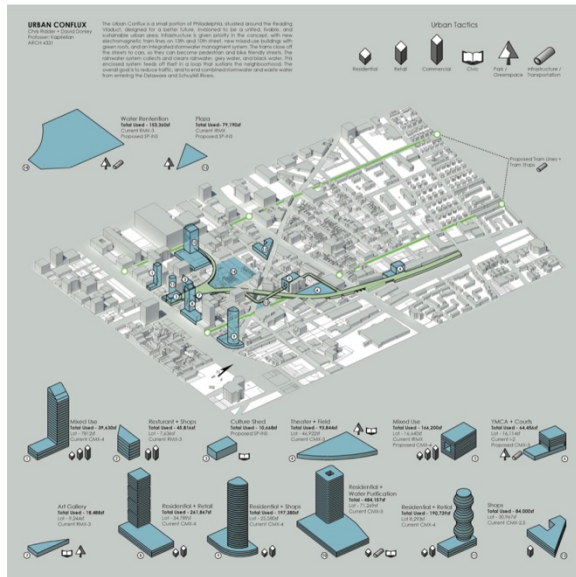
Resisting the Image

I developed curriculum for a second year architecture studio at Cal Poly called "Inside/Out" that, as the name suggests, attempts to direct the architectural design process to begin with the interior of a building. The rationale for this pedagogical approach touched on a number of learning objectives that I felt were appropriate for beginning design students. This included the incorporation of a haptic design process through model making, connecting the studio project to the concurrent course in Architectural Practice by conceptualizing a building as a system of interrelated parts, and in general to focus on designing architectural space inside of a building rather than what is experienced on the outside.

I chose a particularly confining urban infill site for the studio project that was a deep lot with a very small street façade and buildings on each side. The studio approach was in response to what seems to be an over amplified focus on exterior architectural form rather than the design of spaces that people actually inhabit inside of a building. Too often architecture is similar to the design of a sports car, it looks good from outside, but it is rather uncomfortable to be a passenger in the back seat.

During the course of the semester, students began the design of their building exclusively through physical hand models. This included creating models for Programmatic Massing, Structure and Partition, Egress and Circulation, and lastly Envelope and Façade. Throughout this process, there was no computer work. Image production was confined to hand sketching and drafting of designs on trace paper and experiential watercolor vignettes relating the lighting inside of the building to the exterior envelope. After the mid-review, students worked to combine their building components into a composite design through the use of section drawings, a single unfolded drawing of plans, elevations, and sections, and a final physical model.

What's up with all the Axons?



This past fall, I taught an Urban Design course at Temple University. This was only the third architecture studio in the sequence and jumped from the scale of designing a three-story building in the previous semester to tackling the design and planning of an entire neighborhood and a large scale building. To enable students to approach the increase in scale, I worked to devise a pedagogical approach that simplified urban complexity and its representation. This was especially important for the neighborhood urban design component of the studio that was only a three-week long project.

Figure 3. Viaduct neighborhood urban design 3-week project, Temple University (Students Chris Ridder and David Donley; Instructor – Gabriel Kaprielian)

As a class, we began by attempting to simplify the urban site, relating it to city planning games both digital and physical. This included playing and discussing SimCity, Minecraft, Settlers of Catan, Suburbia, and Machi Koro. Each of these games abstracts components of city building and the interactions between the stakeholders or players. For the Urban Design project, students focused their attention on developing vacant land by conceptualizing their site as a game board, considering places of opportunity, constraints, zoning, infrastructure, and local stakeholders.

To develop an appropriate representation technique for the Urban Design phase, I had the students use the axonometric drawing. In addition to referencing digital video games, students were asked to use online image sharing platforms to create a precedent study of axonometric drawings, which conveyed clarity and simplicity. From this study, student teams created a graphic standard and palette for their final posters.

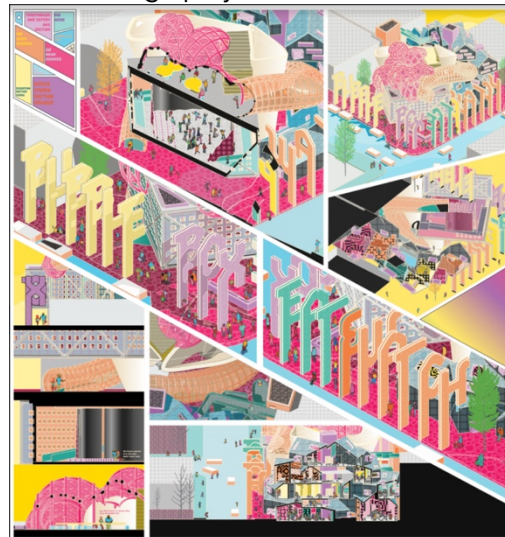


Figure 4. Bubble Box Eat & Watch, Portland State University (Student - Jonathan Brearly; Instructor – Andrew Santa Lucia)

Some Questions and Answers

What is the role of the Internet in architecture and beginning design education?

Andrew: Of course, the internet as an environment is more important than any one thing on it, so it's difficult to overstate or understate its role, since it simply is the ground from which all humans, not just architects, exist, operate, etc. That being said, the shift from web 2.0 (traditional websites, social media site like Facebook and Myspace) towards the Mobile Era (Instagram, Twitter, etc.) has created a text-light image-heavy system of consumption, which is a nice shift for architecture. As a medium, the image

(but also even the image of a drawing) dictates a type of accessible engagement with architecture that extends past the disciplinary boundaries set forth in the production of drawings - discreet, specific, technical documentation. Of course, these images are not just about one point of view (perspective), but about a new ground from which to produce architecture from, in square tiles, mood boards, and endless scrolls.

When do you think the last time your students went to the library and checked out a book?

Andrew: From a pedagogical standpoint, I think half of in-class suggestions come in the form of architectural literature and accepted canons, which are located in libraries or Amazon. The other half, come in the form of Instagram posts that connect students to young practices who take the medium very seriously and not like a new version of the old internet - many of the practices I have them search on their mobile devices do not have monographs, let alone many accessible features outside of journals or magazines. So there is always the in-and-out of pedagogical approaches, whether you use traditional precedent studies as a driver of architecture or use Mobile mediums as an accessible space. Perhaps, one major difference between the library visits and the online scrolls is that the latter information is almost always very recently put out into the world, so it is free from canonization and is much more incremental, forcing students to develop value judgments outside of popular positions on the work.

How is the Internet changing the way students learn architecture and how we teach it?

Andrew: Students become interested in style and appearance much more early than usual, but I also think it's a more honest version of the precedent study after modernism, which largely was 'look, but don't copy.' Instagram allows students to see a collective body of work emerge in real-time, not necessarily mandated by a CIAM or a RIBA, but by the producers of said work. More broadly, the turn towards the philosophies of Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology were largely spawned online, essentially horizontalizing the access to new ideas that are generally relegated to a journal or book. That being said, this by no means make the information itself any easier to understand, so the learning portion comes from both suggesting access, but also working through content. There seems to be a general anxiety over the proliferation of using images on Instagram as a legitimate form of precedent studies because many times appearance is thought of something that is less honest or useful, definitely a residue of phenomenological and modernist ideologies.

Conclusion

Responding to the conference theme "Past, Present, Future," it's important to consider how representation and the design process have changed in architecture over time and will continue to do so with evolving technology. Currently, students appear to be more focused on the way a project should look much earlier in the design process. In many ways, this is positive, as architectural representation is getting stronger. However, there also seems to be an impatience with the design process. Students seem less interested in the tough part of design that doesn't immediately result in a strong visual outcome. What then is the role of architectural educators to direct or resist the influence of the Internet in the classroom? In our discussion and the resulting paper, we ultimately came up with more questions than answers. It has therefore been more about the process of the conversation, rather than a final product. The dialog will continue and we hope that it prompts others to join in and further define a stance on the use of web-based image sharing platforms in architecture.