

Editing Pedagogy

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The text does not gloss the images, which do not illustrate the text...

—Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*

When Roland Barthes wrote *Empire of Signs*,¹ his ambition to distill an entire country into a series of vignettes or signs was not just ambitious but unprecedented. The act of publishing selective fragments to represent the whole of Japanese culture was not without criticism, but in its totality the book offered an engagingly aggregated exploration: signs, symbols, excerpts, and artifacts. It was a form of portraiture, one that was highly literary in style and fundamentally spatial or place-based in ambition. For Barthes, it was not only critical to leave out the obvious but to explore the nuances, the connections, and the materials that amalgamate across scales.

Editing a book that concerns itself with a year of intellectual production is akin to composing a similar kind of portrait. The sites are equally multifarious and varied although the rendezvous is certainly less exotic and definitely more repetitive. The act of compiling matter in itself draws out suppressed emotion from its subjects, creating compositions that are difficult to control, while endorsing a perspective that is seemingly limited but actually expansive. From the outside, the result is a highly synthetic, staged review, but it is the subject's perspective that can change dramatically, as depiction creates new frames of reference, offers altered perceptions. *Platform 6* is a portrayal of our present knowledge, shorn of elaborations and complications, as the work it contains is inherently varied and complex—embedded with its own particular brand of signs and artifacts.

You will be characterized by your content and liable for the trends from the year of production; your content will be composed of (1) projects that are not formatted or conceptualized as linear or sequential, (2) a selection of existing publications that are wholly complete unto themselves, (3) events that are valued through direct experience, and therefore resist print media.

Platform 6 is a book about how education is shared and knowledge gained. The process begins with an archetypal ritual: the dissemination of the brief, the confrontation of the task, and finally, the tested response. This ritual is our pedagogical commons, an established form of investigation, akin to a contract. By accepting the brief, the student agrees to make a determined attempt to either answer its query or reveal its deficiencies. Lessons are learned along the way, ground is won or lost, and effort is exerted in supporting or dismantling the brief. *Platform 6* opens a theoretical discussion regarding this exacting kind of education, as students experience it. Their collective experience of learning deserves particular attention because it may differ from the one that is designed and campaigned for by the faculty, or even from the one that is experienced by the instructor in the same context. These pages are an archive of those efforts, deciphered by revealing the questions asked and answers given. Metacognition—how information is administered and processed—in some ways is the true subject of *Platform 6*.

You will be responsible for establishing perspective across programs, using annotation and hyperlinkage to establish connections that map layers of stimulus onto pedagogic experiences.

The editorial concept of *Platform 6* relies on presenting the range of outcomes that manifest through this exchange at the GSD. As with most design education, knowledge is acquired and tested in a studio environment. Studio-based learning is essential to each design discipline, acting as a laboratory for experiential scholarship. Working in studio offers solitary designers a chance to interact; it is a hands-on model, organized around the investigation and attempted resolution of the suggested variables. This approach to learning embraces problems as possibilities and challenges as opportunities, placing emphasis on iteration and experimentation with risk. Correspondingly, no such environment is without conflict and no ecology can endure without disturbance—a characterization that reflects Gund Hall's place as an ecosystem, a community of living organisms. According to Frederick E. Clements, who first initiated the study of vegetative succession, ecology can never be represented as a permanent condition.² The notion that a community might go through dynamic yet orderly stages is aptly applied to the feeling of studio life in “the trays,” which unifies each year of production—continually expiring and renewing in front of us. The trays are our habitat, our workplace and our classroom—a space of close cooperation and friendly competition.

Platform 6 is structured around studio, as experienced through the sequence of core pedagogy and options, embraced or supported by seminars, lectures, and events. Outside

of graphic devices, and beyond discriminations of style, the reader will find perhaps surprising correlations between disparate projects and a deliberate undoing of any perceived segregation between studio-based learning and significant peripheral influences. Studio offers a model of non-prescriptive teaching and strategic thinking, supporting the student's ability to adapt to changing conditions.³ If metacognition is the subject of this volume, the design of instruction is its substructure.

You will be remembered for what you leave out or neglect.

This system of transformation is taken seriously on these pages, each image offering a sampling of a larger endeavor. The work in this compendium is far from complete, just as most projects work with models that must be continually adapted to changing environments or as statistics are transformed by new inputs. Advanced projects are refined and iterated over extended periods of time and in ways that don't often fit neatly into an annual investigation. Our work is in a constant state of modification, as feedback and criticism are offered to make the outcomes more robust. The majority of projects are tested and iterated through this critical exchange.

Within this sometimes chaotic domain, knowledge spills over, flowing into the classrooms, spreading ideas and dispersing expertise while fostering incidental conversations.⁴ Frequently these encounters yield collaboration, absorbing diverse characters and their particularities into complex explorations. The contributors to this knowledge environment are a combination of faculty, students, staff, and guests, each adding successive layers of disturbance and regeneration. The Graduate School of Design becomes a matrix of chance meetings, accidental intersections, and competitive tensions; the feeling of being new mingles with the competent airs of being established. The sequence of pages borrows from this exchange, where the reader will find that opinions and people overlap and associate freely, in surprising ways.

You might be analyzed for structure, but you will be read for content.

Some of the most interesting relationships are reflected in material presented alongside studio-based work, found at the intersection of disciplines and pedagogies. The purpose of this editorial treatment is not to reaffirm our multi-scalar, multidisciplinary approaches but rather to develop a more profound understanding of the genealogies that underpin our present. Witness the compelling current that can be felt as Toyo Ito discusses the future of the village by referencing Kiyonori Kikutake's *Metabolism*, as the page turns to reveal an architecture thesis that questions the autonomy of the urban dwelling (offering an aggregated alternative), while the next page uncovers an urban planning studio in Burkina Faso that studies innovative typologies for constructing modular housing in Ouagadougou. These associations are not made lightly but offer a powerful tool for revealing emergent patterns that operate across public event, individual thesis, and global narrative.

In 1993, *Studio Works 1* included a series of conversations between students and faculty in an effort to document the issues being discussed at the Graduate School of

Design.⁵ One of those questions was: “What is the GSD’s particular pedagogy and what will it be like in five to ten years?” If we consider that most of the varied replies could easily be reprinted with today’s date, then the question becomes: “Where have we seen significant change in the pedagogy of the GSD?” One of the clearest signifiers lies in the space between disciplines. As Alex Krieger replied at that time, “I believe we are heading into a period when rethinking is a kind of collective rather than a discipline-by-discipline thinking. I think we will see more interactive attempts to teach, to think through how we need to re-tool or re-direct, not so much within the three traditional disciplines but in-between them, or in relationships with one another. *Platform 6* confirms this projection, as these aspirations have been realized and are taking shape daily in Gund Hall. The appeal to categorization, classification, or theme that organized past presentations of research and production is withdrawn, the need for common terms obsolete. The emphasis on connections and exchange has been transformed by our own pedagogical evolution. Nowhere is this more articulated than in the faculty essays that punctuate this book. Each text is significant in its intention to explore methodology over pedagogy, and creativity over obligation—ambitions made manifest in the passion of their words. When research reaches the cultural or structural level, methodologies must engage with ideas and relationships over disciplines.

You are a printed book. You will be handled, manipulated, and flipped through.

Which brings this discussion back to the material artifact in design, the scope of which is now so diverse that it becomes difficult to define (observe the predominance of concept over form, process over site, and simulation over experience). The physical artifact has taken an extreme form: either as a display of pure craftsmanship, tactility, and dedication to uncorrupted materials, or completely dematerialized as a computational consequence, moving image, big data, or parametric projection. Contemporary conditions in the academy reinforce this output, as pedagogy enables these disparate conditions and their evolution. As the multi-scalar, territorial, and global become our grounds, the devices used to describe it must also be tested. If student production can be projective of future practices, then there is no doubt that videos are replacing the static model and that narrative is still the most compelling framework for sharing ideas. It would seem that the typical but disparate deliverables of iteration (sketch) or rendering (polish) are diminishing, to be replaced by approaches that evoke future conditions, scales, and issues, critiquing current paradigms of production. This volume is a testament to the students who are testing, trying, and the bearing responsibility for their motivations and risks.

1 Roland Barthes *The Empire of Signs* New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.

2 Clements, Frederick E. *Research Methods in Ecology* New York: Arno Press, 1977. [c.1905]

3 Cassidy Schmidt, Maribeth and Timothy Newby “Metacognition: Relevance to Instructional Design” *Journal of Instructional Development*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (1986) p.29-33

4 see Jacobs, Jane. *The Economy of Cities*. New York: Vintage Books, 1961.

5 *Studio Works 1*, ed. Linda Pollak (Cambridge: Harvard Graduate School of Design, 1993). P.37