Editing architecture: architect as mediumistic being

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ABSTRACT

The creation of architecture is based on the relationship the designer has with media. Making media requires both a technical proficiency and a capacity to understand how the medium itself informs the architect and the creative work. I will explore through this thesis how the creation of media is not only a metaphor for the process of architecture, but the act of architecture itself. In addition to the making of media, this work will analyze editing media as a provocative interface of design. Finally, this work will focus on digital media – specifically digital video and the opportunities it may have to inform architecture and the education of architects.

Based on the assumption that architecture itself is in fact media, the building itself, is merely a by-product of the process undergone through the manipulation of media. Given this perspective, the product can become different based on the media used in its creation. Architectural media can be created in many formats and for the sake of focus this work will concentrate on video, the manipulation of video, and the conceptual link between video editing and the making of architecture. Of the various forms of media that exist in contemporary culture, video and the manipulation of video stand out as an untapped resource for architecture.

Architecture has an opportunity to benefit from moving images – how these images inform spatial perception, how the series of images may represent time and how relationships between spaces and ideas can be articulated through this medium. While the visual benefits of video may seem obvious, the way video is constructed offers another way to access an understanding of idea generation.
CHAPTER 1

THE ARCHITECT, THE WORK, AND THE AUDIENCE

The Mediumistic Being

Architects are mediators. Architects design through media. These statements appear obvious yet are rarely accepted by both the audience and the architect as major facets of the architectural profession. The "inner design," or idea, is the romantic conceit for how architecture is generated, and the "awestruck" response is what the participant may desire. To accept that much of the design control is relinquished into media, challenges the idea of the single-stroke creative genius that Panofsky romantically depicts. This work displaces the thought of an architect inspired by a single-stroke of creative genius, with an appreciation for the architect as a "mediumistic" being.

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1 Erwin Panofsky, *Idea*, trans. J. Peake. (New York: Harper & Row 1968) 86. "The 'inner design' (or 'idea') which precedes execution and actually is completely independent of it can be engendered by man in his mind only because God has given him the ability to do so, indeed because in the final analysis man's idea is only a spark of the divine mind..."
According to Marcel Duchamp’s compelling essay, *The Creative Act*, “[i]f we give the attributes of the medium to the artist, we must then deny him the state of consciousness on the esthetic plane about what he is doing or why he is doing it. All his decisions in the artistic execution of the work rest with the pure intuition and cannot be translated into a self-analysis, spoken or written, or even thought out.”  

In other words, an architect is a mediator and it is the mediator’s awareness that it is the process itself that lays the foundation for a successful project rather than a single wonderful idea. If the richness of process renders a product which in turn generates a process of discovery in the audience, then a work has achieved the first step toward success. In the postmodern framework this give-and-take relationship during the making of architecture replaces the Modernist reliance on product.

To further elaborate on the idea of being “mediumistic,” it is important to recognize how the media creation itself is one of the processes. The architectural course of action includes many decision-making opportunities along with many critical crossroads. Marcel Duchamp describes in his work, *The Creative Act*, his understanding of process:

> In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plane.  

Here, Duchamp is anticipating the situation that contemporary architects face – that there are an infinite number of conditions and responses to which one must respond. The “self-

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3 Ibid.
conscious” behavior, or the “great idea,” is, in actuality, only a small part of the entire creative act.

The process does not stop when the architect finishes a design. There is a process that takes place through construction as well, and ultimately there exists a process of interpretation by the audience. Duchamp accepts that the artist “plays no role at all in the judgment of his own work” and questions what sparks the audience to critically assess a work. He describes what happens as “osmosis taking place through the inert matter, such as pigment, piano or marble.” The building itself is the mediator in this example, but where lies the “architecture” in this process? Is the creative work in the building or in the media itself? How does the architectural process come into being if one ignores the building?

Jorge Silvetti argues that the architectural product is, in fact, drawings and models. This philosophy is not meant to diminish the importance of buildings as the goal of architecture but to identify the media as a crucial part of the act of architecture. If the media is the architecture, then much more importance is placed on the representation of ideas rather than their final implementation.

General consensus may accept the building as the product of architecture but if one looks at an example like the extensive archives of an architect like Le Corbusier, it is obvious that the media created offers a much more intimate understanding of architecture.

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1 Ibid.
3 Here, the word “architecture” is used as a verb, in the same way that “form” can be used either as a noun or a verb (i.e. “to form”).
than the architecture itself in many cases. This is not to say the building itself is not wonderful or awe-inspiring, however it is merely one of the inroads to understand an architect and an architect’s work. If one returns to Duchamp, the judgment for posterity comes from the user, not the artist, or architect in this case. The architect’s success lies in being a mediator between ideas and execution; between issues and decisions; between user and building. Having an awareness of how the architect functions as a mediator and what tools the architect has for manipulation results in opportunities for richness in architecture.

**The Media Itself**

One of the tools that the architect has for manipulation is the image – images of architectural precedents, images of site, images created from conceptions in the architect’s head. The architect’s fascination with the relationship of image, media, and architecture may indeed come from a passion for the rich imagery rendered by the still camera. The still camera offers a controlled view of a project in its ideal state. In order to capture an architectural moment, the making of the image is, or at least should be, as difficult as capturing an expression on a face or that split-second moment of action. The moments captured by the still camera conjure a perception of architectural space in one’s mind when looking at the printed image. However, this “perfect” image is often chosen from many – cropped, edited and put on display in its most perfect form. Arguably, the

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7 Le Corbusier has an entire archive devoted to the media used in his design process. Looking at this archive can unlock issues about the architect that the building may not according to Dan Naegele, a scholar who has spent time in the archives researching Le Corbusier’s work.
world is largely aware of architecture through the still image in journals or books as they are reproduced, and this image is that frozen “perfection.”

As technology has advanced and tools have been made available to the consumer, video has become a similar mediator to the environment with a very dissimilar product. While selection of video is just as crucial as the selection of still images, video has thousands of images and much control is relinquished in order to present a more dynamic perception of space. The accessibility of digital technology has made available to the consumer such products as Adobe Photoshop, and now equally powerful video editing tools exist that make sophisticated video manipulation tools available to the masses. Contemporary culture is replacing the printed product by embracing video and television, and architecture has the opportunity to connect with contemporary culture through the video medium. Architectural space perceived through motion imagery has very powerful implications and this is changing the general public’s understanding of space. Architects have an opportunity to embrace new forms of media, yet they must also embrace how that media informs their work and changes the understanding of that work.

Like selecting still images and manipulating them, video editing offers a method for categorizing and sequencing moving images. The word “edit” can be understood in its relation to architecture from two perspectives. On one hand, editing is a fundamental working method for defining the specialty of an architect – how one’s decisions are made when designing. In other words, an architect can become specialized by always editing a design idea into a certain material – like Frank Gehry’s current passion for titanium or Richard Meyer’s compulsion to use simple geometry. Alternatively, editing is not only scope related, but has a strong relationship with the architectural process undergone. In
contemporary culture, one is constantly aware of how editing changes perception – the quick cuts of MTV productions give the feel of lightness and energy, while CNN layers many levels of information through the editing process. The tools of contemporary culture engage the culture at large and inspire other fields that engage the public. Many architects are choosing to layer information in the built environment while others may choose to infuse the architecture with energy. To be inspired by the techniques used in editing allows the discourse of popular media to enter the field of architectural discourse.

Architects use tools to mediate their idea with their audience. Some works are two-dimensional such as drawings and photographs. Some works are three-dimensional physical models. The four-dimensional work is the building that exists in space and time. And finally there is motion imagery, another version of three-dimensional work that replaces depth with time. Video and computer renderings give the perception of space by adjusting perception of still images over time. Sometimes these works are confused with being three-dimensional in physical terms, but in fact, depth is perceived largely through time. The dimension of time does not replace the physical reality but does offer a different perspective on the work. An awareness of the many dimensions through which architecture may be communicated increases the arsenal of mediations the architect has at hand.

The Architectural Participant

Spatial awareness of the built environment is not typically a priority for the general public’s sensitivity. However, because of their exposure to film and video, the public is far more passively educated about the perception of space than one may at first
assume. In fact, it is this awareness that may lead the public to be dissatisfied when participating in architectural space – their expectations are heightened through the media to which they are exposed. The controlled cinematic space depicted in mass media is much more compelling than the average architectural space. Space designed by an architect may benefit from a cinematic understanding inspired by attention to contemporary media. It is important that the architect is aware that the participant eventually, according to Duchamp, “becomes the posterity,” and that “…the role of the spectator is to determine the weight of the work on the esthetic scale.” In other words, the spectator becomes the judge, and the architect must be aware of the criteria the public is using to evaluate architecture. This criteria is influenced by the media to which the public is exposed.

Just as thoughts are first drafted (often in quite raw form), and then go through the process of editing and re-editing – so too, architecture goes through a similar process (an “editing” of sorts). As initial thoughts are written and then re-written and revised again and again, until the writer’s intentions are fully realized, so the architect’s process of the refinement of his “writing” goes through a similar “editorial” process. An awareness of how a creator may function when crafting ideas is based on a self-consciousness when editing and the more this process is honed and refined “…more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its materials.” This process translates to the participant in the form of his/her own “editorial” choices when encountering the built

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9 This is a process parallel to that of Siah Armajani’s – Raverty, Dennis. “Beyond Deconstructionism.” Art Papers Magazine (March/April 2001) 28-33.
environment. In other words, the observer, or perhaps more precisely, the “participant” in this process, this creative act, has the opportunity to make quick “cuts,” (so to speak) through the building (or to extend the metaphor) to “pan” slowly through the architecture allowing the layers of “text” to be perceived or ignored. The participant has the opportunity to make quick cuts through a building or slow pans, to allow the layers of information to be perceived or to entirely ignore them.

The participant is also impacted at the level of media delivery during architectural presentations. With the changes occurring in presentation techniques from the drawings to the television or computer screen, the mediator between information and audience warrants more attention. A presenter merely uses the screen to deliver information. This work will consider how manipulating the media interface can also play a part in the impact media can have on the user.
CHAPTER 2

THE ARCHITECTURE OF MEDIA

The Still Image

Architects learn about architecture through the photographic image – it may even be argued that architects develop their body of expertise and position themselves in terms of architecture through these images. The understanding of architecture as an experience rather than an image, by actually being within the space, is an impractical goal given the global range of examples and styles – only a fraction of the built architecture actually can be experienced in person. Even when visiting the physical architecture, one’s access is potentially limited by factors such as an inappropriate time of day, a short amount of time or unseasonable weather. Often a visitor must rely on a photograph to show how the architecture should be. One could even go so far as to say that the person is capturing mental still images while participating in the physical experience.
The trade journals, the textbooks and the many collections of “coffee-table book” architectural publications formulate the aggregate understanding and vision of architecture prior to motion imagery. It is this understanding of architecture through photography and its power to persuade, to inform, to inspire – and yet to falsify, mislead and potentially entirely misrepresent – that encourages architects and non-architects alike to be captivated continuously by the photograph. What is it that actually constitutes the foundation for architectural photography while promoting and maintaining it as a valuable aspect of architecture and culture? How has the medium evolved over the course of more than a century of architectural photography? What happens when architects look at photography and does photography, in some almost absurd sense, actually precede architecture conceptually?

It is a common practice for architects to use two-dimensional material to communicate a three-dimensional understanding, and conversely a three-dimensional understanding to produce a two-dimensional work. For example, many architects use sketches or rough drawings to make models and then translate the model back into drawings as a final form of communication with the builder. It is the perception of space as a physical inhabitant rather than viewing the photograph in which Ezra Stoller, a postwar architectural photographer, argues that photography “is as close as you can get” to viewing architecture without viewing architecture yet “there is no way of viewing architecture without viewing architecture.”11 The subtleties of inflection entirely change the meaning of the previous sentence. One might add that the photographer of

architecture is absolutely crucial as a third party to mediate the differences in "viewing." A leap takes place in the dimensional shift where the architectural photographer uses the opposite of the architect's previously described process, in that the three-dimensional space must be understood in order to produce a two-dimensional image, and then two-dimensional work is processed by the viewer in order to visualize three-dimensional space. Essentially, the architect and the photographer complete the same acts with subtle reversals. The understanding and perception of the differences in the complex acts that take place contribute to the reason that the architect of a particular project may make, ultimately, an inadequate photographer of that particular work. The architect is too familiar with the work to photograph it because the images already captured in his/her head may not be the most appropriate nor relate to the perspectival characteristics of the camera. Stoller also criticizes the architect's role in determining the shot, "...I listen, but not seriously since good architects are generally poor photographers." 12 Attentiveness to the differences between the disciplines of architecture and photography while focusing on the attributes that each offer in order to benefit one another helps determine the argument as well as the parameters for architectural photographers, who understand architecture and are able to convey this actuality.

Photographers often open themselves for attack by impacting the understanding of architecture in the mind of the viewer by applying their own opinions to the process. Stoller's reaction to this accusation in terms of the photographic work is, "It is a statement. And if the photographer can subdue his own reaction, his own contribution

12 Ibid 107,115.
enough, then it will be a valid statement." Fine art photography incorporates individualized statements, yet architectural photography must somehow understand the intent of the architect in order to reveal it in the photograph. The mere ability to photograph is oftentimes confused with an ability to photograph architecture (not that it can’t be done in a fine art sense). In this case, it is allowed its own interpretation. The architectural photographer (if he/she claims to be such) must possess a rare combination of architectural understanding and photographic skill. He/she is often educated in architecture or by architects themselves in order to see the work. With this perspective, the statement of the photographer can co-exist with the work and the statement of the architecture. The co-existence in this example parallels the photograph being co-natural with its referent because the statement is not necessarily the architect’s statement, but rather the architecture’s statement; the more parallel the two can be, the more successful the work and the photographs will be.

Another attack on architectural photography comes from the concern that the image does not represent the real – whether it may be the content within the image or the general image itself. Questioning the moral and ethical position of “doctoring” an image presupposes that the image is not “doctored” at its very root. This position also equates the human eye with film and suggests that a perfect image is exactly what the eye may see. Film does not react to light with the same dynamic range as the eye, and while color is ever evolving, it is always subjective to the viewer, printer, or computer screen. From

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13 Ibid 115. (emphasis my own).
14 Ibid 115.
furniture movement to cutting branches and placing them in the physical scene, the photographic image has a challenge to meet the requirements of many user groups, from architect to editor and owner to public, as apparent in the following example:

There were occasions, however, when I was at a loss when, for example, an assured landscape failed to materialize. What to do? For a national magazine, a deadline for the delivery of 8”X10” color transparencies was the requirement. My assistant and I skillfully cut walnut tree branches (on the property) and borrowed a quantity of flowering plants in containers from a nearby nursery. With some careful arrangement, natural-looking compositions were achieved. Months later, on publication, many readers inquired as to the names of the plants on various pages of the story. Suffice to say however, after publication, the happy editor scolded me when I disclosed the true story of my landscaping venture. Even though I provided accurate botanical references for identification, she was not placated. The developer of the house was pleased, although the realistic landscaping puzzled him, after admitting that he failed to adhere to his agreement with the magazine. Perhaps, he offered, ‘I should hire you as a landscape consultant.”

The accusation that architectural photography may be misleading also stems from the use of figures in the photo, or the lack thereof. When people are not used, the image is thought of as empty, barren – a museum perhaps. Yet when used this way, the people are typically staged in order to appear natural. The idea that in order to photograph people in architectural space, they must be posed unnaturally is absurd. Most photographs of architecture use a large-format camera that does not allow the photographer to see through the lens when taking a photograph, and the exposures are usually of a length at which no natural act of a person can be captured with quality. Thus, paradoxically, the person must be artificially positioned and hold very still in order to capture a natural

pose. The arguments and counter arguments constitute an interesting conversation, but
tend to evade the issue, the issue being that photography certifies its very existence and
the props (i.e., people, chairs, branches, etc.), or other modifications of the image,
become the “pose” for architecture. Think about portrait photography and the lengths to
which it goes to capture the true person. Sometimes hundreds of photographs are taken in
order to capture the right one. The same is true in architectural photography, except that
the objects: sky, shadows and etcetera, constitute the animated subjects which “pose.”
Therefore architecture exists in the mind of the viewer as it does in its “pose” within the
photograph and justifies why it is so necessary to have the best, or most revealing, pose
as possible.

Architectural photographers idealize the photo and thus idealize architecture –
that is their job because given the option between being true to concept or being “sexy,”
the public will choose “sexy.” The best photographers can do both. We as a culture, have
become more sophisticated in identifying the idealized body in advertising – are
buildings which are popular and published the architectural version of the “slender
model?” When talking about post WWII modern architecture photography in the United
States, Joseph Rosa offers that, “[m]odeled after American fashion photography, the new
architectural photography created seductive statements about a comfortable lifestyle and
the architecture through which it could be achieved.” Take Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim
museum in Bilbao, Spain, as an example – its graceful form adorns billboards, television

No. 2 Summer 1998) 99.
advertisements and many architectural journals. The museum is made of titanium (rare and expensive) and always photographed with strong reflective light. It is image-making especially for the advertisers who wish to capitalize on its image to sell cars, rollerblades and many other things. The Gehry project is about the sensuous shape and his work is about form making. The photography exhibits both.

**Architectural Photography as Media**

Architectural photography has tended to awkwardly follow its dual root mediums of both photography and architecture. One of the very first photographs “View from his Window at Le Gras” in 1826 by Joseph Nicephore Niepce was of architecture (probably because buildings do not move and the day-long heliograph process needs a stationary subject). Nonetheless, for every period of photography there tend to be architectural representations that parallel it – the pivotal moment is where photography changes from being photographs of architecture to architectural photography, and it coordinates roughly with the acceptance of photography as an art. Le Corbusier as an architect, artist, photographer, writer and theorist incorporated works of photography into his architecture. It is in this act and many other similar performed acts by photographers, artists, and architects when “photography first entered into ‘the arsenal of the painter and the architect.’” In the project *Photomural at the Pavillion Suisse, Paris*, Le Corbusier

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incorporated photographs as a wall covering. The idea that photographic images and architecture could blend together and potentially reinforce one another opened the doors for much more sophisticated use of media as a part of architecture.

Much in the manner that photography has found its early stages in art, architecture has found its relation to art. It is therefore no surprise that architecture, photography and art have nurtured one another's relationship. Stylistically, architecture, after the formulation of photography and especially starting in the 1920s, had found photography to be a catalyst for change. Most notably, the Bauhaus and International Style tend to invoke a strong dialectical relationship between photography and architecture.

If one returns back to the pre-1920s, the photographs of Louis Sullivan's work represent early attention to architectural photography. The photographs of his work show a mid-level camera setup (when possible, the camera is placed on top of or within a nearby building to reduce perspective from tilting the camera vertically). This viewpoint emphasizes the mass and heavy weight of the building, which was not the intention of the architect. At that time, photography was much more oriented to the sheer ability to represent architecture and the novelty of doing so. Pictorialists critically analyzed their medium to form their manifesto of thought and thus gave a position through which the photograph must communicate – this position allowed photography to be engaged from a

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critical standpoint. Subsequent styles and manifestos mirrored (or at least considered) the parallel movements in art, architecture and other disciplines.  

Beginning with the origins of Modernism, photography has been a constant within the voice of architecture. But, photography has been a vehicle for styles since the 1920s. Perhaps recent movements will change how the photograph is used and may do so by changing the idea of what is beautiful, but the image will still be used, only with a different definition. The separatist groups led by Alfred Steiglitz (among others) against the Pictorialists at the turn of the century serve as an example of movements within photography to reinterpret the very medium itself. The Pictorialists showed how visions of previous styles may enhance the current style. Suffice to say, there are many styles and sub-styles which exist after 1920, and to analyze each individually would be distracting, but a few examples may prove valuable in producing a framework. For example, the Bauhaus exhibits its design fundamentals in many disciplines including architecture and photography – the heavy-seeming light, and the perspective enhanced by pointing the camera upward, allowed the masses of the building to seemingly soar. The research of architecture via the photographic instrument can arguably used as a tool for understanding and as a logic for the creation of a style for both mediums of architecture and photography (among others). “The root of architecture lies in the mastery of the problem of space…” and the mastery of space is also a necessary capability of the

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22 Ibid. 171.
architectural photographer.23 Another quote from Laszlo Moholy-Nagy cited in a forward to Bauhaus Photography by Eugene J. Prakapas states that, “The limits of photography are incalculable. Everything here is so new that the mere act of seeking leads by itself to creative results.”24 Thus it can be convincingly argued that photography allowed creative resolutions to the problem of space, “Through Moholy’s instigation, photography at the Bauhaus developed in a very specific way to become an interpretive medium for the relationship of man with architectural space.”25 The disciplines in the Bauhaus model mutually modify one another, as do their modes of representation.

With Julius Shulman, an architectural photographer during the latter half of the twentieth century, the mode of photography changes from an isolated and naïve art, or an art that is intertwined with its subject, to a photography that has to understand, identify and recapitulate styles as they shift. Shulman flourished during the explosion of post-war architecture and its photography in America, and he exhibits a minor shift in both the training and in his production of architectural photography. Shulman’s training, by associating with and learning from masters of architecture such as Frank Gehry, Richard Neutra, and Frank Lloyd Wright along with many others (and also by growing with these architects), allowed his work to parallel the architect’s evolution. The work by the photographer is no longer perfectly parallel to the specific style; instead the photographer had to grasp one of many styles evident, depending upon the architect, and capture that special essence within each. In order to do so, a photographer of architecture not only has

to be mobile, but must also be alone. There is no opportunity to hire many employees in
terms of a company, according to Shulman, “I was not about to hire additional assistants
as some suggested. When inquiries for assignments were presented, I was to do the work;
my ‘expertise’ was the point of the request.” True to the fashion of many photographers,
Shulman professes to have an innate understanding of light and exposure and also
possesses a unique ability that he may argue can not be taught. Shulman’s manifesto
speaks to the exoticness and difficulty in replicating skills that he possesses.

Currently, architectural photographers have a highly advanced arsenal of
equipment at hand. Architectural photographers perch at the other end of the spectrum of
consumer optics where lenses have evolved to have huge coverage capabilities (for
shifting perspective), and multi-coatings that avoid chromatic aberrations (in order to get
beautiful saturated crisp colors). They even employ digital technology to control
exposure. Digital capabilities with impressive resolution create massive files, and these
files can be used to rapidly edit and modify an image. Yet, some things do not change
because architectural photographers use a camera extremely similar to the view cameras
used by the Pictorialists, they travel the country in their covered wagons of equipment
(the modern version is the S.U.V.) and they still must have an adventurous desire. Farshid
Assassi may serve as a contemporary example of this personality and product type. He is
professionally trained as an architect and as a photographer, and he has grown with many
architects as their firms have evolved. His product exhibits an exceptional capability for
understanding color and composition, and the architect will tell you that he also
understands the story of the architecture in order to represent it. He carries large cases of

equipment across the country and spends months away from home annually. He becomes
the person who visits the architecture ends up acting as the interpreter – the photographer
in this case influences architecture by exposing the assets of architecture and subduing
the liabilities.

**Architectural Photography in the Public Eye**

If the photographic image is a major vehicle through which architects learn, and if
architects are not trained to critically analyze these images – even *before* architectural
criticism takes place – then what is the result? The result is a combination of moments
through which the interpreter constructs a larger framework for understanding, but not
the understanding of a reality – which is what is assumed to be presented. In Susan
Sontag’s book *On Photography*, she argues that images are *of the reality* – not of the
real.\(^{27}\) Society may be more and more trained to recognize the difference (i.e. the Calvin
Klein model may be recognized as a minority in society and as unrealistic) yet people are
captivated because a true representation of reality does not inspire or change society (or
change their bodies). Society has a desire for that which it can not have, for the
unattainable – photographs present these unattainable things like the distant lands,
cultures, planets and even architecture as exhibited in such magazines as *National
Geographic*.

"Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can
speak."\(^{28}\) Do the images speak more clearly than the words to an architect? Architects are

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admittedly guilty of looking at pictures and it is an easy target for criticism of scholarly engagement. If I return to a previously cited author, it may be observed that Barthes comments, “language is, by nature, fictional.” Most writing of architecture is someone’s interpretation of the subject, just as the photograph is, except that the photograph “does not invent; it is authentication itself.”29 Given the choice, it may be argued that the viewer of architectural photography is less prone to be biased by accessing a work of authentication rather than one of fiction. Architects may feel less biased by looking at the image of architecture rather than reading the text, however, just as someone can read without understanding the words, someone can look at a photograph and just see color and shapes – both must be interpreted for comprehension. Viewing photography can be too easy – rarely does one question the camera angle or manipulation of light. On the other hand, reading text requires one to be analytical. If one reads the image like text, one has employed a valuable postmodern technique. The result allows the assessor to question the viewing position of the participant or, for example, how light enters a room.

Criticism comes through the use of the image and is born simultaneously. It does not merely start at the finish of an architectural project. In fact, the image is the first mediator the architect uses with any given project. Camera in hand, the architect walks the site – identifying the vistas, the views, the subtleties of light and shadow, even the blemishes or moments to avoid. This is the eye of the architect. The eye which relies on the objective potential of the photograph while subjectively selecting the view. The views, in turn, manipulate the architect and help form judgments which impact

architecture. These initial photographs are most often destroyed because they are considered unnecessary and an understanding of architecture may be gained only through the alternative approach of looking at the resulting architectural photo documentation of the work. Architectural photography typically gives closure to the work and it is done sometimes before or, perhaps slightly after occupancy. Once the project is finished and the architect moves on to another project, the photos remain as the memory of the previous project to get additional work or to refer to. This approach often leads to the accusation that architects are only trying to get the best photo and are not concerned about the people, the owners, or other needs besides their own. If one returns to the issue of the use of a photograph associated with the understanding of the photograph, it is possible that an architect can merely replicate an image by reproducing what he/she sees in the architecture rather than understanding the work. In this situation, the photograph has been considered at face value and a weakness of photographic interpretation has been revealed.

Architectural rendering versus reality parallel representational painting and reality – photography finds itself in this awkward realm between, on the one hand, wanting to be real and considered as such, or on the other hand, being merely a depiction. The products can never be actually considered real while, in fact, they are real. The line is often blurry between the two and, simply put, the photograph is only a representation of the real not the “real” reality. The axiom that a picture is worth a thousand words along with the idea that it may take thousands of photos to ever capture a single thing, idea or person, illustrates that experience is irreplaceable with a photograph. The difference between Architectural photography and general photography is that architectural photography has
an attachment to its referent that is not only necessary but actually renders the work as not architectural photography if it does not do so. In other words, in order for a photograph to be architectural photography, the photographer must be intimate with the architecture and the photograph is necessarily attached to its referent. The branches of photography tend to overlap and interconnect as the referent is either met or ignored.

Cartier-Bresson describes the decisive moment (the clicking of the shutter) as that moment which exists for only a split second.\textsuperscript{30} When the sun comes around and glazes a wall revealing its texture or when the sun is setting and the balance between daylight and artificial light are equal, the opportunity to capture the shot may last only a few seconds. This same type of decisive moment also exists in architecture.

The consequence of the use and appreciation of architectural photography has been twofold: the excitement and stimulation caused when seeing works of architecture that are sometimes attainable, sometimes not; and the securing of an historical representation of the past both in style and mode of particular works for the posterity. In a similar vein, writing only refers to the present in which it is written, it is only understood in terms of the future when it is actually read and linked to the past by virtue of it representing a past reality. Photography will be what it was, what it is, and what it will be. To put this idea, respectively, into the terms of the subject, it is: 1) the state of the architecture; 2) how the photograph of the architecture is (the specifics of the photograph); 3) and how the circumstances of its reading impact its understanding.

The Still Image in Motion

Moving images are, in actuality, still images in motion. What one’s eye perceives as motion in film is a series of images placed in sequence. The refresh rate, or flicker of light, happens so fast that the brain interprets the series of images, or the changes in the relationship of images, as actual motion. While there are many issues of control at stake when producing film or video, it is nearly impossible to fully control every image like an architectural photographer may. Thus, the nature of film allows for chance encounter as well as a more spatial understanding of architecture because the viewer’s perspective can no longer be fixed.

A case of perspectival manipulation is encountered, for example, when photographing a conference room table and the chairs around it. Paradoxically, these often must be placed in a somewhat ridiculous relationship with the table to appear “normal.” The perspective of the camera lens can distort object relationships. This incorrect relationship is imperceptible to the viewer because the still photograph is stationary, but when video is used the spatial relationships change and therefore objects must be placed in the “correct” relationship with one another as the camera pans, zooms or tracks object relationships. Ironically, it is an impure relationship between objects that suggests purity in still images – film must relinquish such control.

The issue of control is always at stake when one is trying to show work in its best light. Control in motion imagery is similar to photography in terms of cleaning the set, choosing correct furniture, waiting for the right light, choosing the optimal angle, and etc. Control is largely lost when realizing that each individual object relationship cannot be
manipulated realistically. It is this lack of control that this essay identifies as a major shift in the mode of operation for architects.

The casual viewer in contemporary culture is potentially more aware of St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome through a panning sweep on television than a centered, perspectively corrected photograph looking down the nave. The visual memory of the dynamic viewing perspective from the video lacks the sophistication of the still photograph but presents a much more complete spatial understanding of the space. This awareness represents a major shift in the spatial acuity of the general public and potentially leads to a more spatially sophisticated audience. The still photograph merely implies space while motion images deliver space to the viewer.

The idea that moving images make the average viewer of space more aware of spatial relationships is only the beginning of the opportunities contained within media. What can be considered even more striking is the idea that architects should embrace that awareness and present their work with an understanding of this sensitivity.

Computer-generated “fly-bys” of architectural models offer one manipulation of motion imagery. However, one must go beyond the computer-generated “fly-bys” of the architectural model and think in terms of motion imagery as a creative device in addition to being a wonderful presentation tool. As a creative device, one can use gathered imagery that is not project-specific to inform the project. Current media in architecture is devoted to presenting the project as it exists as a product rather than the opportunities presented through motion imagery gathering.
The Timeline

Video and film are made up of still images in a series. In order to work with and manipulate this medium, the still images must be put into a relationship of time. The timeline provides a device for video/film editors to work with this relationship. This timeline is a visual graph that shows the relationship of images with time sequences, usually denoted in hours, minutes, seconds, and frames. The timeline represents single frames in relationship to time and therefore gives the manipulator a space/time construction interface. The three-dimensional computer model does not put the architect into a space/time relationship, whereas video editing requires the manipulator to be aware of the space and time relationship with one another.

In order to understand the relationship of video-editing tools and architecture, one must understand how the manipulation of video itself works. The tool of editing is based on the very complicated and expensive editing studios where multiple monitors are connected to a series of input/output mechanisms. This model in turn comes from the linear editing of film where one would literally cut film and tape it together – a very labor-intensive process. Digital non-linear editing is the current interface for the manipulation of video. To be “non-linear,” the still images, all the way down to the single frame, do not necessarily have to be in a time-based relationship with one another. In this manner the editor can manipulate space/time relationships. The original material, called raw video, is “captured” to the hard-drive in the original space/time relationship and the software programs allow for infinite manipulation capabilities.31 The software programs

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31 “Captured” is a term used in video editing that essentially means taking from one medium and saving to another.
are using the clips of video as linked material where the original is not changed, only the rendered output is impacted.

The entire process of editing from beginning to end is an apt metaphor for the architectural creative process. The process begins with defining the problem, what the project is about, who the audience is, and the genre into which it fits? Following this definition is a somewhat serendipitous process used to find materials that engage the aforementioned issues – a gathering process which taps the creative energy of the individual. With concepts, initial ideas and some raw material to work with, the very important storyboarding process occurs in which more finite decisions are possible. Storyboarding is a simplification process that takes the director’s concepts for the production and cartoons the ideas. More elaborate storyboards can become flipbooks that turn the still image into a sense of motion. Storyboarding, when translated into the architecture profession, offers an opportunity for the architect to react to narrative issues that address a project. Every project has some sort of story, whether it may be a story of how one uses a space, a story of how one has developed business, or maybe how a family chooses to live in a single-family residence. Narratives are an opportunity to inform a production and narratives are a way for architects to gain entry into a design process. Storyboarding is therefore the architectural equivalent of programming.

Once the storyboard is in place, a very focused gathering process then occurs and ends with that material being captured digitally – this is similar to the collection of materials, the research of precedents, and early discussions with consultants that architects use at this stage. All of the processes are both editing techniques and architectural process techniques. Once the collection process has occurred, the focused
process of actually editing the material begins, and at this point the process becomes metaphorically similar to a person mixing music – he/she must be familiar with all of the materials and aware of how each part influences another. This is a very personal process because it requires a certain intimacy with the work. As one edits, one is looking for opportunities for overlap, realizing how important timing is, and how the overall mood is being impacted. Architects, too, must be aware of how every decision informs the mood of the work, how one area of structure may contribute to another area’s load.

By being aware of the aforementioned metaphorical relationships between architectural processes and video editing techniques, one can place the architectural process data into the video editing methods. Doing so offers an actual outline for the mediumistic act of architecture to take place. By comparison, the “lightning-strike” idea needs no outline, however mediumistic process benefits from a structure.

If one chooses to use the metaphor of video editing for one’s process, one may find parallels between specific tools and techniques. For instance, remapping time can compress or expand experience. The movement through an atrium may be reduced in speed thereby engaging one in the details of space. Alternatively, increasing speed may be valuable for representing a walk down a hallway where the peripheral vision is less of an issue than the terminus. Transitions are important, while at times one may “cut” from scene to scene in architecture, one may also “cross-dissolve,” meaning that the transition may be softened – an example may be moving from one space to another without going through a door.
One of the most compelling opportunities that video editing offers in the relationship with architecture is that of sound. No other medium can inform the way audio impacts architectural experience like the way a final video production can. Sound may take the form of music that has emotional implications, but it can also take the form of background noise or white noise. It may take the form of footsteps or one’s heartbeat as it anticipates experience. Here architects have the opportunity to experiment and communicate these intentions.
CHAPTER 3
CONTEMPORARY THEORY REGARDING THE USE OF MEDIA

The theoretical underpinnings of architectural media play a major role in the way media is regarded in the process of architecture. Media and the movement with which it is associated, impact both the methodology and the product of the architectural process. A Modernist may draw a certain way, while a Beaux Arts architect may draw another – the way architects use media is relative to the process they engage in. Therefore, the theory, the creative act and the product have a relationship that is reciprical.

Media, both as a product and a process, can be associated with many theories that influence architecture. However, one of the current theories, called neo-pragmatism, offers a unique way to discuss architectural media. Neo-pragmatism, put simply, is a contemporary development that charts a course for moving beyond postmodernism. Its theorists argue that after postmodernism, a grand theoretical schema is inappropriate – since postmodernism deconstructed the metanarrative, there can no longer be an all-
encompassing theory. Instead, neo-pragmatism is basically “fixing up a philosophy for supper,” – that is, to have just enough theory to find a practical solution. This is a very practical way to address using media, thus the term pragmatism has been adopted.

Theory used in such a flexible manner offers a very malleable way for designers to fine-tune the medium for their design purposes. Because media has so many outlets and methods of application, it can offer a starting point for architects to become inspired about their work and to “fix up a philosophy” for the particular application they are addressing. Along with the inspiration that the media offers, the capability of computer equipment to manipulate media gives the designer freedom to exercise many different philosophies, moving between one another, but without allegiance to any particular philosophy as absolute.

Greg Lynn is one such architect who finds value in the flexibility of this way of thinking when designing. Greg Lynn, an architectural theorist focusing on digital technology, offers his argument through the production of media, for how architects evolve their work into what he describes as “beyond” postmodernism. Through his understanding of the design process he addresses methodologies for transcending gaps. Lynn’s work is very powerful in offering a new path for architectural design inquiry both through the methodology and the process. One of Lynn’s “philosophies served up for supper” employs issues of force, motion and time. He uses these terms to inspire his

35 From early 20th century school of American philosophy led by William James, Charles Sanders Pierce, and John Dewey, among others who adopted practicality as the principal means for achieving specific limited ends.
design philosophy with attention toward his use of digital media. The terms he uses represent complex variable equations that are not easily calculated by an individual. And at the root of Lynn’s argument is a suggestion that the availability of complex computing to the masses allows for the contemporary designer to manipulate these complexities in a visual manner. For example, architects and manufacturers can figure out windows on a parabolic cured surface with precision – a nearly impossible task without the computer.

Greg Lynn presents his argument for design as more than just a new set of shapes, rather architecture has issues of force, motion and time. This argument reacts against the form-making agenda of previous generations of high Modern design, where the use of determinate geometry prevails. This argument is based on an advanced use of calculus, that one can compute more than three variables and it is this mode of operation that Lynn describes as necessary for non-linear behavior to occur.

Lynn uses the example of the design of a sailboat to illustrate the complexities one must manage in today’s design. The beautiful form of a contemporary racing sailboat is created through the calculation of forces on surfaces. A sailboat must react differently based on the direction of wind related to its direction of travel – both of these three-hundred sixty degree influences must be calculated into the design of a sailboat. When the boat travels toward the wind it requires the force of the wind to push against the water to propel the boat toward the wind. Along with the need for the boat to push against the water, the boat must simultaneously be streamlined to move efficiently through the water. One can appreciate the complexity necessary to determine how both circumstances...

37 Ibid 16.
combined can make both a more functional shape and a more elegant shape. A boat of this complexity is difficult to design without multiple variable calculation – yet this calculation results in a very striking form. Dennis Dollens describes how Lynn is inspired by the aforementioned example:

Lynn processes visualization and modeling through software, exposing a project’s generation to constraints of time, material, structural tolerances, site, and environmental forces as well as to artistic choices and chance derived from the choices.  

In this way architecture can follow the lead of other disciplines in finding new methods through advanced techniques only made possible through the computer. Lynn describes the arena of architecture and how it functions through contradictions a sort of “deconstructive” mode. He describes how unity may be gained through returning to historical methods or by looking at local consistencies, but he argues that “neither the unity nor dismantling of unity” is the call for in contemporary architecture. He argues for a system that both Hollywood and the military can use – he calls this “smoothness.” Smooth is not to be understood as homogenous in terms of mixture – rather, it is the combination of visual ideas in which both elements retain their uniqueness while at the same time operating together. Here, one can see yet another metaphor of the sailboat – where two seemingly contradictory constraints mutually benefit one another.

He uses the term “pliancy” to describe how he deals with complexity through flexibility. Vicissitude/vacillation is the quality of being changeable in response to all

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38 Dennis Dollens, *D•2•A Digital to Analog* (Santa Fe: SITES Books, 2001) 62.
situations, especially those that are accidental.\textsuperscript{39} All of the terms Lynn appropriates respond to this need for multiple variable calculation and the richness derived through combining complex situations.

The term “multiplicity” is introduced by Lynn in order to modify the understanding of the terms stated above. His concept that “…a multiplicity is neither one nor many, but a continuous assemblage of heterogeneous singularities…” offers an explanation for why some forms cannot be explained in the relatively simple ways that finite geometry can. Multiplicity (for example in Lynn’s work) can be used to describe a spline curve. A “spline curve flows as a stream between a constellation of weighted control vertices…”\textsuperscript{40} In other words, a spline is a straight line that one pushes or pulls to deflect. This pushing and pulling has a weight related to the amount of force put on the line. If one were to remove a “weight” from the line, the line would be destroyed as it exists because all of the weights affect one another. In this way, the line is both a single line and a series of individual forces changing that line.

Terms such as multiplicity, smoothness, vicissitude, etc. are extremely confusing because of their complexity to understand and manipulate. However, for the designer, the computer eliminates the necessity of understanding all of the variables that impact working with these terms. One must only understand their benefits, what variables to consider and when their use may be appropriate (or inappropriate).

If one returns to the spline example for a moment and does not consider its complexities, one may discover that this is a very beautiful line. In Lynn’s work the blob-

\textsuperscript{40} Greg Lynn, \textit{Animate Form}. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999) 22,23.
like form is ubiquitous and that form is a reconstruction of a spline in three dimensions. The medium allows Lynn to add or remove weights based on aesthetic considerations.

Baudrillard offers a way to consider that this type of work by postulating that the design process is more of a *filter* than an *action*. In Baudrillard’s postmodernist essay “The Ecstasy of Communication,” he offers that a human is a “…switching center for all the networks of influence.”

From this reading of Baudrillard one can appreciate Greg Lynn’s vision in terms of letting the medium and its capabilities influence how one works. In other words, Lynn is less of an idea generator and more of a “switching center.” It is the way that the switches are managed (i.e., the choice of software and how the software is manipulated) that manipulates and generates the idea. While Baudrillard may be suggesting that this is internal in the human mind, Lynn is externalizing the “switching center” and perhaps making it more recognizable to someone seeing his process from the outside. The decision-making process, in Baudrillard’s model, is so personal and internal that it is striking to see it on such display in Lynn’s work. Lynn accepts the externalization of the idea generation process and opens himself for attack by allowing it to not be his own specifically. However, he has made the choices for how the software will operate and therefore can only be his own.

In Greg Lynn’s work, the tool *is* the filter and this rather than the initial idea is the ultimate source of the design. The computer functions as a filtering system developed from the criteria determined by the author. In this manner, Lynn exercises a relinquishing

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of control – a relinquishing of the metanarrative by not accepting the historically established mode of operation which starts with a master idea and ends with detail.

If we return to Lynn’s work as an evolution into neo-pragmatism, Lynn’s basic definition of deconstructionism is that architects exploit discontinuities. He claims that:

Both Venturi and Wigley argue for the deployment of discontinuous, fragmented, heterogeneous and diagonal formal strategies based on the incongruities, juxtapositions and oppositions within specific sites and programmes. These disjunctions result from a logic which tends to identify the potential contradictions between dissimilar elements.

He defines his break from postmodernism as considering design through continuous flexible systems – architects may use outside forces as a development of form and therefore move beyond deconstruction. This consideration inspires a reading of Complexity and Contradiction by Denise Scott-Brown and Robert Venturi. Their text sets up contradictions as a tool for design. However, the text written by Scott-Brown and Venturi is a single postmodern interpretation of design methodology by another architect. If one returns to the core argument of postmodernism rather than one interpretation of it, the breaking down of the metanarrative is at stake. In Lynn’s case the metanarrative broken down is the pure geometry, and he successfully offers a method for reinterpreting the methodology of form generation. Instead of complexity and contradiction, Lynn’s work may be interpreted as complexity and smoothness. “Smoothness” is not blending to

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such a degree that two things become one – it accepts both the material qualities of each individual element and their inherent qualities.\textsuperscript{44}

What is the product of Lynn’s complex design process? One can argue that they are beautiful blobs. However rich the process Lynn undergoes may be, Lynn’s process, in the end, can also be considered form-making. When Lynn states that “…designers must understand the patterns of topology as they unfold dynamically with varying performance, rather than understanding them merely as shapes,”\textsuperscript{45} he is really defining how form comes about – that is, the “forming” of form. While Lynn may be arguing against shapes, when the complexity of criteria under which forms are generated is removed, the result is that Lynn’s aesthetic eye chooses the right solution that has been made from a series of options generated by the computer.\textsuperscript{46} It is the shape of the form that is chosen. The computer in this case has become an automatist creation device and Lynn then selects the most pleasing product.

Working with media in Lynn’s case has been an opportunity to unlock opportunities within the medium. The idea that the tools inspired by Hollywood and the military may stimulate architects is, indeed, brilliant. What Lynn suggests seems extremely complex on the surface, but in application it is very palatable to the average architect.

\textsuperscript{44} This is similar to the method employed by the contemporary sculptor, Siah Armajani see “Beyond Deconstructionism: Siah Armajani and the Architectural Text.”
\textsuperscript{45} Greg Lynn, \textit{Animate Form} (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999) 25.
\textsuperscript{46} Greg Lynn, “Embryonic House; Computer Used to Design and Machine Prototype House” \textit{Architecture} (Sept 2000) 99.
The chapters thus far have discussed media’s relationship with architecture from the inside out – in other words how the making of media can influence the product of architecture. This chapter will focus on the influence that media that has been already produced can have on architecture – in other words, how architecture can be influenced by media from an outside position. Within film many opportunities for inspiration exist. Most films take place in architectural space and most films require narratives in one form or another. The spaces depicted and narratives devised become a warehouse of ideas for the designer to reflect upon.

As designers are looking for inspiration and are looking for that theory to serve up for supper the places to mine are endless. It can be argued that contemporary culture

\[47\text{ See footnote number 33.}\]
and the decisions that are made by people in that culture are manipulated by the “big screen.” The decisions people make are impacted by the choices their hero/heroines make. I see this as an opportunity for architects to find ways to address contemporary culture and deal with issues that the populous are immediately aware of. This is not to say that an architect must “dumb-down” his/her process or simplify it in some manner to make it palatable to the masses – rather, the architect can use the process to question or deal with the issues that movies often glaze over. Furthermore, by using material potentially recognizable to the general public, the architect has an opportunity to make valuable links with the end user.

Among the plethora of films produced, one of the movies that I have had to opportunity to analyze is the movie *The Grifters* (see Appendix B). This movie is unique in the fact that it is a Neo-film noir produced in 1990. Film noir, as a genre, is loaded with theoretical and aesthetic opportunities for analysis. The 1990 version employs the theoretical and aesthetic issues along with contemporary subject matter. In addition to film noir having interesting content, it also has very strong architectural relationships such as the figure-ground relationship identified in this film. What is important to note is that this move was most likely never intended to provoke an architectural response. The opportunity for the movie to address architecture comes from my own interpretation and response to the movie.

The figure-ground relationship in this movie provides an architectural inlet into the movie. Once that inlet has been defined, the applications of that theoretical approach allow for many derivations. Again, this is offering an outside-in methodology for

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inspiring architectural design. Rather than one making media and responding to it, one can address already created material.

Many architects search for the perfect object or issue to pursue in order to generate the “big idea” however, to do so is akin to the “lightning strike” idea discussed at the beginning of this thesis. Everyone trying to find that one perfect object is like searching for the Holy Grail. I will return to the Baudrillard “switching center” example for a moment to think of idea generation as more of a series of choices as one navigates his/her own interests. When a designer looks for outside influences, those influences are relative somehow to their own experiences. Everyone has been exposed to a different collection of media in his/her lifetime and in some manner that collection makes up who that person may become. I am merely suggesting that the designer tap into that resource to discover what points of inspiration may derive from such experience. As the designer chooses which switches to “turn on,” the designer is making connections to his/her own previous experiences.

In chapter 5, I describe an architectural sculpture that I have created. This architectural project has been inspired by the movie the Moulin Rouge. I found the movie to expose many issues of contemporary culture. One such issue is the way creative material, such as songs, can be collected and reconstructed into new pieces. In the Moulin Rouge, Baz Luhrman, assimilates songs by Elton John, Madonna among others to collage altogether new songs that refer to older pieces and benefit from the nostalgic properties of those songs. This conceptual inspiration drove the use of existing equipment (i.e., the use

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49 See footnote 41.
of existing computers, motion detectors, and tractor parts) in an almost humorous manner. These parts, while still recognizable, are taken out of their typical context. By removing the parts of the media pod from their context, I was then able to reconnect them in a new manner much like the way Luhrmann used contemporary songs.

Another contemporary culture issue dealt with in the Moulin Rouge is the way the presence of the movie as film is put into question. Luhrmann plays with the idea that the movie can coexist as theater, musical, film and finally theater within theater. The audience within the film may not be sure if they are seeing the story or the live performance as well as the audience outside the film experiences the same phenomenon. In the media pod, I worked with the idea that an individual can engage the device while simultaneously engaging a larger audience. Therefore, while the individual is aware of his/her experience, he/she is also aware of the audience. This inspired a broader approach to the device than merely dealing with the body in the machine – I also dealt with the audience and their impact on the machine and the experience.

When I applied the ideas that came from the movie, I used the particular inspirations to drive the idea when I came to an impasse. This method provides a different use of idea generation than “the big idea” because it could then be used as an idea generator. This technique provides a facile way to thwart a creative block.

Using contemporary media to inform an architectural design is daunting. On one hand the ideas can be extracted too literally and risk superficiality. On the other hand using the film itself can become a trap because not all films are applicable nor are they absolutely necessary. This is why it is necessary to address the film from the position of navigator rather than implementer. In other words, one must choose the areas that inspire,
the areas that are applicable and then act upon them. Therefore, the designer does not implement ideas that come from a film, but rather, they navigate inspirations which come from the film.
CHAPTER 5

STUDIO PROJECT: COMPU-KINETIC MEDIA POD

Digital media exploration typically lacks a physical presence – the work is on a computer screen and its space is the flat plane of that screen. One of the architectural intentions within this thesis is to explore the physicality of media. The physical work produced as a companion to the more theoretical aspects of this written thesis (figures 1-10) acts as a prototype or a testing area to investigate the physical relationship of media and the space the body inhabits.

This compu-kinetic media pod was produced as a parallel studio with my thesis. The work is essentially a temporal place for one to engage media. Its location varies within the College of Design at Iowa State University because it is built to expand within the space and fit any location desired. The frame of the piece is built out of steel while the intricate moving parts are built from stainless steel.
Upon this frame rests the digital and mechanical devices that move in response to the inhabitant and the audience. As the participant changes from audience member to inhabitant his/her impact becomes more physical. The inhabitant must lower the chair and doing so triggers many events (fig. 4). One event is the lowering of the computer display from standing audience height to the seated inhabitant height. Another event is the Flash animation taking place in front of the inhabitant (fig. 6). The Flash animation is manipulated by mechanical switches wired into a keyboard and these keystrokes trigger events within Flash. Along with the mechanical devices, motion detectors maintain constant awareness of the individual as he/she engages the piece and the audience as they move. The media pod responds to the movement and the more active the movement is, the more active the Flash animation will be.

Filmstrips are also attached to the media pod (fig. 5). These medium format film sequences depict the theoretical underpinnings of the project. The first filmstrip contains images of the can-can dancer in motion – a very early inspiration for the form of the media pod. A second filmstrip shows the elegance and ergonomics of current computer devices – the media pod is the opposite of the confinement of the “box” that computers are placed in. Finally, a third filmstrip responds to a later discovery that there are many agricultural/Midwestern influences in the sculpture. This image sequence shows rusty farm equipment and the “solve as you go” nature of farm equipment repair.

Surrounding the media pod (also called the “D26” because of the tractor seat attached to the seating armature) is a curtain wall similar to feed sacks. The main purpose of the curtains is to define a space for the “D26.” I intended with the curtains to separate
the device from its environment, they also function as theatrical curtains, and finally they make a final conceptual link with the agricultural equipment as a parallel to feed sacks.

Artifact as Spectacle

The working title for this architectural sculpture was “Spectacular Spectacular.” The D26 began with the desire to deal with media physically. How one interacts with media, is in the end, a physical relationship – one must touch the keyboard and mouse and a person’s head position relative to the viewing screen is important. The television show must be presented on a television set, a web page must be delivered on a monitor, a newspaper must be physically turned in order to read it. With the idea that one’s engagement with media is a body/space relationship (an architectural relationship), the structure for the D26 began.

The desire to make this piece a spectacle required the program for the Media Pod to go beyond a glorified Central Processing Unit (CPU) holding device. In other words, it had to do more than hold a computer and monitor in place, it had to address the physical relationship a body and an audience has with an object such as this.

There is a rich history of interactive and kinetic sculptures by such artists as Rube Goldberg and Nam June Paik, and even Laszlo Moholy-Nagy from the Bauhaus period experimented in movement and light. The work intrigues the participant by engaging him/her with the spectacle of its performance.

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51 Inspired by the movie Moulin Rouge. See footnote 50.
Theoretically, this project is a metaphor of the “Spectacular Spectacular.” As in the movie, *Moulin Rouge*, the title preceded the product with only the event of making and the process undergone in its evolution left to determine what the “Spectacular Spectacular” really is. In other words, this project began without knowing what it will become, with no prescriptive needs (a very difficult way to work because no limits are placed upon the project). Prior to its current program, its only initial purpose was to be a spectacle, its purpose was to be physical and engaging. With the benefit of hindsight it is much more than a spectacle while it maintains the power of being a performance in process. By being in process it suggests an indeterminate end – in other words the story continues to develop, the ways in which the *D26* may engage the participant may evolve and become more advanced and potentially more personal.

**Artifact as Object**

The making of the *D26* had to relate with much more than merely something to hold a computer screen or manage cables that connect computer devices. Without knowing what the final form would be, nor with the full knowledge of what peripherals or equipment would be needed, the construction needed a framework in which to respond. Much like a building, a structural framework needed to be determined with necessary flexibility and strength. The system chosen was inspired by a simple telephone pole – a conduit for media. Furthermore, knowing its final location required finding a means to rigidly connect the media pod without penetrating or disrupting the university facility, I had to determine a way to install the device. A compression-expansion mechanism was employed to take advantage of the honeycomb grid of the College of
Design ceiling. Essentially the D26, when put into place, expands, therefore compressing the structure between the floor and the ceiling. This method responds to the temporality and portability of media.

The only place where the participant must engage the device by touch is the chair. One will notice that the chair is a vintage tractor seat rather than a sleek Aeron Chair® for example. The use of this has many double meanings – one is the anti-technology that it represents, another is the materiality of steel and the color of its rust as an acceptance of the agricultural presence, while yet another may be the surprising comfort level for a rigid material, and finally it is a beautiful sensuous form as a throwback to the revealing of flesh by the dress of the can-can dancer.

The mechanism that holds the seat and allows it to raise and lower also holds a relationship to the can-can dancer depicted in the Moulin Rouge. It is as if the machine is doing a high leg kick with one foot firmly planted on the floor – a technique used by the dancer to purposefully invade one’s personal space. This mechanism also refers to the complexity of landing gear and the mechanisms involved to make it both expand and contract in a compact manner.

The construction is primarily made of steel and stainless steel. These materials have a certain relationship with one another where the stainless is the round rod stock and the square tubes are made of mild steel. The mild steel has been treated with a patina to maintain a dark black texture and the stainless has been left with a milled finish.
Artifact as Media

In this work contemporary media has to play a role in the discovery of how to address a physical relationship with media. Contemporary film work is addressing the rich work of media that supports itself – in other words contemporary film work can be critical of itself. One such work is the movie Moulin Rouge, a high profile, large budget movie with a self-criticism of the emptiness of mass media. Out of respect for its self-criticism and the fact that it may be considered anti-intellectual because it appeals to a mass audience, the movie was chosen as a stimulus for design ideas.

Throughout the movie, the cast was to develop the “Spectacular Spectacular” musical. However, the audience never sees the musical “Spectacular Spectacular” because they are watching the real “Spectacular Spectacular” unfold. This ambiguity between reality and perception criticizes pop culture and its inability to differentiate the movie life from real life. Of course, movie life and real life are twice removed in this movie. In other words, one is seeing a movie about a musical about a musical and unsure of how many times one is removed as the audience member. The Media Pod responds to this by acting as itself, with a single user and with an audience simultaneously. One is also aware that its performance is for the sake of its action not as a further means to an end.

The tawdry, controversial nature of the Moulin Rouge inspires this work to be controversial in terms of not being a building. To talk about media and the importance of media in the process of making architecture and then to design a building as an entertainment club would defeat its own purpose. The fact that it offers many inroads into
the design of a club proves the possibilities of the use of media which is the goal of this work.

Direct gathering can come from the media. The can-can dance, for instance, can provide movement inspiration. The revealing details of clothing from that era can provide detail inspiration. Even the issue of balance can inspire formal responses in the work. The point is that any piece of media can provide these inspirations and give limitless opportunities for designers while the familiarity with this material in pop culture allows the participant to have some foundation for its understanding.

The Media Pod purposefully denies the presentation of video editing used in its construction. A second screen could be potentially used to do so. The primary monitor is used to display the interactivity of single user and audience with media.
CHAPTER 6
CLASSROOM PEDAGOGY IN ARCHITECTURAL MEDIA STUDIES

Media Teaching Philosophy

The following objectives of the Bachelor of Architecture program are taken from the Iowa State University Catalog. The underlined section highlights the learning objectives of media education in the discipline of architecture:

The Department is committed to the study of architecture as a cultural discipline in which issues of practice, of the multiplicity of social formations in which buildings exist, and of environmental effect are enfolded with the subject matter of building design - construction, space, material, form and use. Architecture arises from the aspirations that diverse individuals and groups have for their physical environment, and from the social enterprise of designing and fabricating the landscape we inhabit. It involves individual and multiple buildings, the spaces within them, and the exterior landscape.

It is our intent: that our students develop the skills with which to critically assess and research architectural questions and to invent architectural designs through which those questions are addressed; that they develop a working method for designing and that they have the communication, graphic, modeling and computational skills to support design exploration
and to represent their design ideas to others; that they gain knowledge of architectural technologies through which buildings are given form, of which they are constructed and by which they are environmentally tempered; that they understand architectural history, that they understand the theoretical and diverse cultural underpinnings of the discipline of architecture, that they are able to reference architectural precedents and know how to utilize all of these in the development of their ideas; and that they have grounding in the ethical and practical aspects of the architectural profession in society.53

To What End?54

Teaching media in architecture can be distilled into two objectives; first, it must disseminate a technical know-how which is not typically covered in studio or other survey courses offered within the curriculum. The other objective is to lead students to question the use of media and thereby inform their design process. Each student must be engaged in the act of investigating his/her work from within his/her work. Allowing students to work with a previous architectural project results in work that is entirely based on representing the final product. Students who use media merely for presentation still develop a technical understanding, but this interface does not allow one to question the capabilities of the tools or the potential for the tools to evoke creativity within the design process. A course of study that works with their current studio project and challenges the student to go beyond merely presenting the work forces them to look at their work from an introspective position. The students must consider how they are using the media to communicate ideas and allow techniques to inspire process and in turn inform their work.

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53 Iowa State University, Undergraduate and Graduate Courses and Programs 2001-2003. (2001).
54 The format and headings were inspired by Lee Haugen “Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement.”
Parallel within this process is the issue of technical fluency. This nut-and-bolts approach is an integral step in engaging the mind of the student. By knowing the tools, the opportunities, and the limitations of the tools, the student is better prepared to engage the media. Because the hardware and software is ever evolving, it is an impossible task to try to present the information and technical know-how with any degree of finality or totality – in fact, one must address technical understanding from a general point of view rather than a specific button of single piece of software. This leads to creating inquisitive operations for students where they have to seek out answers and techniques from their peers, instructors, books and/or the Internet.

By What Means?

The computer is the interface for this aspect of the education. Through the teaching technique of reviewing work, redoing work, reviewing work, changing format/mode of investigation, and reviewing/redoing work again. All modes have presentation within the creation of a product, but it is not presentation for presentation’s sake, rather it is mini presentations exhibiting the student’s particular method of production.

Class time, in this model, is spent examining contemporary examples, student work examples, technique examples, and encouraging students to supply their own examples to the class (through direct presentation or through links within the class web site). Much of the work is completed outside of class where one can focus on the task at hand and practice the techniques discussed in class.
To What Degree?

Elective courses, such as a media class like this, offer a vertical studio scenario—that is, second through fifth-year architecture students, graduate students, landscape architecture students, interior design, graphic design, and industrial design as well as art students participate in courses that address architectural media. While the quality and level of development may vary with each student’s background, the style and type of project may differ between varying levels and types of studios, the students often benefit through sharing their individual expertise and explaining their work to one another. What is interesting is that in many cases younger students come to class at a more advanced level in terms of background and basic computer literacy than some of the more advanced students, while the advanced and graduate students tend to make stronger theoretical connections to the design process. By no means are any examples the rule and there are many variations within this system—including motivational issues, studio culture, and project load.

Why?

Media classes operate as a supplement to the core studio pedagogical goals. These classes are designed to engage students from another perspective and to prepare the student for various new design techniques, to enhance their capacity to integrate digital technology in their design process, and to allow the student to question their process through this medium. Finally, media classes address legitimate student concerns about the lack of technical know-how they possess upon graduation.
Modes of Work and Methods of Collection

In order to go through the process, the student goes through three phases. Gathering and collection represent the first phase, replication is the second phase, and finally internalization is the third. When one gathers and collects, one is really collecting things that inspire him/her or have representational parallels to his/her own work. The student is conscious that they are collecting for their work and that they are to look for examples of contemporary culture to stimulate their work. The second phase plays off of the first. In the second phase, students attempt to re-create the things they have seen. With the number of examples available in contemporary culture and the tools at hand, the students must follow their instinct in order to determine the techniques they wish to cultivate. Upon finding the material they choose to work with, the students also have the opportunity to do the research to find out how to complete it.

The final step of internalization is not only the step that solidifies the student’s technique, but it is also the step where the technique oftentimes, becomes his/her own. In this step the student takes the material he/she has collected and the methodologies he/she has developed and applies this knowledge and capabilities to his/her work. This step helps to make the understanding of the use of media stick with the student and gives a practical application to the work created.
Media Pedagogy

The Creative Leap

The creative leap will hopefully happen many times over the course of the semester. This is a purposeful act in order to foster an environment that encourages transforming ideas into representation and analysis of that act. It is an integral act in the creative process and invaluable in terms of importance in media.

Students need the opportunity to engage their studio development from an outside source and this outside source offers an opportunity to question their process. Media, and the study of media offers one such point of view.

Students need to be encouraged to look at contemporary culture. An awareness of how the public is being exposed to space and how it impacts their judgment of architecture will benefit their understanding of their own work.

Students need to be aware of how both the still and the motion image impact their perception of architecture. The Reconfigured Eye\textsuperscript{55} is one such source that exposes the student to the potential fallacies of the still image and is suggested as a basic text. An awareness through making media is also of value in that their efforts to make an image or to edit video is a method of controlling their ideas as they are communicated visually to an audience.

A course syllabus for an architecture media course is attached in Appendix B. In it one will find the practical application of the philosophy stated above.

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

The intent of this thesis is to underscore the necessity of researching and understanding media to stimulate the architectural design process. The reality is that architects are often reluctant to use alternative media, in particular the medium of video. Architects are even more reluctant to capitalize on the conceptual benefits of questioning how media is made in order to think about how they make architecture. The reason for this may stem from the lack of intimacy with the medium.

One cannot deny the enormous impact video has had on contemporary culture. It is in the best interest of the architect to embrace media in order to capitalize on its benefits and to forge new ways to relate with both the participant and the client. One must also be aware of the fact that what is suggested here can have mediagenic results. To be mediagenic means that the simple fact that media presents something favorably encourages the public to accept it in a favorable manner. This sparks a different kind of
responsibility for the architect that s/he may not be used to. The architect must on one hand accept the participant as the jury\textsuperscript{56} and on the other hand avoid tainting the jury with the seductive medium they have access to. All too often I have witnessed unsuccessful projects be received well because of the polished medium that presents it.

Film and architecture find a common bond as mutually modifying entities. Film typically depicts the ideal state of space while architecture attempts to replicate the ideal. By grasping the conceptual link between film and architecture, architectural practice has the opportunity to not only replicate the ideal, but to drive the ideal. The hope is that an understanding of this medium can help elevate the architect to a new plateau.

Media must expand beyond the bounds of the computer. Media is manipulated within the computer, but the experience of media is physical and architects have the opportunity to embrace the benefits of manipulating this player in the process. To an architect, this process is his/her practice. Much like a doctor, the architect impacts the building just as a doctor treats a patient, but the practice of medicine, like the practice of architecture, is methodology through which the patient is affected and therefore architecture is the methodology through which the building is manipulated. Understanding media and the manipulation of media allows the architect to have a more effective relationship with his/her patient, the building.

\textsuperscript{56} See notes 2, 3, and 4.
Figure 1

Overall photograph of the D26 installed in the College of Design, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.
Figure 2

Overall Elevation of the D26.
Figure 3

Overall of the D26.
Figure 4

Series of photos showing the chair operation of the D26.
Figure 5

Detail of the electronics and filmstrip on the D26.
In static state

When seat is lowered

When motion detectors are triggered

Other state of motion

Other state of lowering

Lowering and motion

When seat is raised

Raising and motion

Figure 6

“Screen shots” of the flash animation presented on the D26.
Figure 7

Detail of monitor mechanism.
Figure 8
Side elevation of monitor mechanism.
Figure 9

Detail of electronics.
Figure 10

Overall photo of the $D26$. 
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APPENDIX A

FIGURE-GROUND, ARCHITECTURE, AND THE GRIFTERS

The figure-ground drawing is a drawing type used by architects as a tool for analysis and for presentation. This type of drawing is not new, instead it has been a common communication device for two-dimensional presentation since drawing became a major part of the architecture discipline. The figure-ground drawing is essentially a high contrast drawing where the subject (figure) is placed in its context (ground). It is often used to place a building on a site so that the viewer can easily understand the relationships between new and existing - between form and context. The drawing style of figure-ground was used extensively during the Bauhaus period and during Modernism which roughly coincides with the work of film noir of the 1940s and 1950s yet it is still a popular method of representation for architects today.

The drawing style of figure-ground has persisted while canonical Modernism has faded away. Its longevity can be attributed to the usefulness of the style and potentially to the clarity of the product. Because of its ability to transcend design styles the figure-ground relationship can be used to gain some insight into film noir, which has also managed to be timeless in terms of its message and aesthetic. *The Grifters*, a neo film noir, offers an interesting subject to analyze because it is a 1990 film with a timeless socio-cultural situation. The movie has been adapted from an earlier novel by Jim Thompson in the 1950s yet feels very contemporary. People have been cheating and have been cheated by one

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another since bartering was established. In this paper I will exercise the architectural analytical technique inspired by the figure-ground drawing to analyze the timeless content of *The Grifters* and offer a presentation of how the movie informs architecture. Architecturally, the movie communicates beyond its content. The compelling message, story and plot benefit from the figure-ground relationship. It is the format of the content which has evolved to have a postmodern richness that makes neo film noir truly something special and also makes film analysis an architecturally revealing process.

The inspiration to use the figure-ground as a framework to analyze the movie came from the beginning sequence of *The Grifters*. The sequence is a series of high contrast black and white photos of high-rise buildings. At face value this can be assumed to set up an urban theme for the audience because the social situation of grifting is more likely to occur in a densely populated city. However, this bold series of lonely cityscapes also suggests a character out of context – incidentally, this whole beginning sequence is out of context in terms of the movie because it has no obvious bearing on the story. The figure-ground in this case represents the sharp contradiction of being an individual within a mass population and being an outsider in terms of occupation.

The movie itself is full of contradictions. Roy Dillon’s (John Cusack) desire for an honest lifestyle contradicts his actions as he cheats others in small-time scams. Lily Dillon’s (Anjelica Huston) love for Roy as a son contradicts her love for him sexually. Myra Langtry (Annette Bening), Roy’s girlfriend, is in a relationship with Roy that contradicts her desire to scam him. They all internally experience the contradictions of the honest route, the typical route – versus the route of the cheat, the route of the outsider. For each of the, love contradicts their mistrust. The figure-ground drawing, with its high contrast, presents
contradictions clearly and the contradictions of the characters in this film offer a likely parallel.

The audience is addressed after the title sequence with the characters in a creative three-shot series. The figures/characters are establishing their given situation on the site – who they are, how they function, and their individual success rate. Here, the three individual stories unfold – Roy is swindling in a bar while Lily is trying to cut Bobo's losses at the track and the cute, sweet Myra is trying to unload some fake jewelry to an all-too-savvy dealer. What is interesting to note is that Myra fails in her first and second attempt – the second being her attempt to recover her failure with the jewelry dealer by offering sex which the dealer refuses. Roy, on the other hand, has a more sophisticated cheat where he sets up a sure-loss bet but the wording of the bet makes his losing more profitable. Lily is immediately established as the most sophisticated because she is calmly handling large amounts of money with accuracy and confidence at the racetrack. In Lily's simultaneous scam she is also successful by collecting unused tickets at the track and passing them off as her own expenditure to her employer. In effect she is veiling a small-time grift within the large scam associated with the mob. Roy, alternatively, only scores a few dollars in his multiple complex schemes, when the stakes raise at his third scam he gets nearly fatally punched in the belly.

According to Francis Ching in his book Design Drawing, "The visual environment is in reality a continuous array of figure-ground relationships. No part of a visual field is truly inert. A thing becomes a figure when we pay attention to it." The triple scene where the three main characters of the movie are all shown together, yet individually, suggests the individual motives within the complex triad of the three characters. Three people making

binary choices result in six potential schemes. The path a movie typically takes, along with architecture, is to move through the many figure-ground relationships to result in a final, most fitting scheme. The fitting scheme for film noir typically includes tragedy but it first must frame the visual field for the tragedy.

The series of scenes that develop in response to Roy’s hospital visit establishes the relationship of figures to one another – a second act of making a figure-ground drawing is to define how things relate. Lily, without doubt, looms large on the dominance scale as the mother, caregiver, and decision maker. Roy is the child who wants to break free of being controlled so he flaunts his relationship with Myra in defiance yet desires the love from his mother he never had. Myra is the outsider; a threat to Lily’s incestuous relationship with her son, and Lily shrugs her off as a meaningless woman with no merit. Yet Myra gives pause because she is a youthful attractive woman who is threatening because she knows how to use her attractiveness much like her nemesis Lily.

Lily is thrown out of her normal routine by reuniting with her son and therein lies her demise. She is deep in her own scam within a scam and has no time to call attention to herself with Bobo. Lily is drawn deeper into her son’s life because she is threatened by her adversary, Myra, and genuinely concerned about her son. This guilt-driven reaction is a weakness and proves to be very painful for Lily in the end. Having baggage and caring for someone is a weakness as a femme fatale especially when she is connected to the mafia. It is significant to throw Lily’s character out of context because she is so strong. Lily would never make a mistake with Bobo unless she is confronted with circumstances more powerful than her daily business – that of her son’s well being. Myra offers the venerable adversary because she shows similar tendencies as Lily but lacks a family connection. This method for
questioning the givens to take the object out of environment and see if it fails is the checks and balance system of the figure-ground drawing.

Once the figure has been established and some of the initial problems have been revealed, the next step in the design process is to make some very broad assumptions and act upon them. After Roy leaves the hospital, he and Myra decide to take a vacation to La Jolla—ironically the same town where Lily is staying. This action represents a fresh start and an opportunity to live, if only for a moment, outside of the normal routine. At the same time, however, it is a return to the past by going back to see his mother and rekindling some old ghosts. While away, Myra works two design fronts; the first is the story of the swindle with her prior counterpart Cole (J.T. Walsh) and offering this position to Roy, the other is to size up her adversary in Lily and in so doing uncover Lily’s scam. Meanwhile, Roy is struggling to design his life choices with his contradiction between going the straight and narrow path and leaping deep into a more complex swindling scheme with Myra. Another design choice is his relationship with his mother—he knows that there is something wrong with his relationship with his mother yet feels that it still has more substance than the sex-driven relationship with Myra. Lily shows her special position in this case because she has no choice—either the route she is going or death. This lack of choice is foreshadowing in film and represents the choices being narrowed down to the finite givens in figure-ground drawing.

Myra soon realizes that Roy is not going to take his scams to the next level despite her attempts to bribe Roy with sex and play with his sexual emotion. Myra then must enact her only other design choice developed and that is to ruin Lily, take her money, and assume her identity. This presents one of the challenges of the figure-ground drawing and that is its
binary relationship – decisions are shown clearly to work or not to work but do not show alternatives in very clear light. In other words, film noir, and the figure-ground drawing, each have a serious liability in that they are confined to only two routes. These two routes are further blurred by the fact that two women have assumed nearly identical physical traits. To oversimplify it, one route versus another is very confining and the postmodern world of the 80s offers many points of departure. *The Grifters* takes advantage of this by blurring the lines of character identities. In prior film noir movies the character never bails out completely to choose another life – the character has invested too much in the binary scheme and therefore can only continue along the trajectory established previously. In neo film noir the two women become one in the same and their simultaneous trajectory has explosive consequences.

Lily is aware that she cannot be complicated by her relationship with her son. Whether it is lust for her son or the need to control her son that inspires her to keep reuniting with Roy, she is very aware that it is a liability and dangerous to do so. When Myra reveals Lily’s scam to Bobo, Lily makes a clean and rapid break. This break is not back to the way things used to be, but to a nomadic life hidden in the shadows, which is similar to the demise and empty life of Al Roberts in *Detour*. Myra shows some savvy and her identical traits by predicting this move and following Lily but Myra’s naiveté is shown when she tries to overthrow Lily in the motel and gets killed herself.

Roy’s failure is succumbing to his desires for both maternal and sexual attention from his mother. Like most men his decisions are tainted by the control women can exert sexually and the control mothers can exert through guilt – for Roy this stems from the same woman. Therefore, Roy’s life decisions are not made in a void, they are made in connection with the
mother figure/sexual figure of Lily. Lily is both a strong figural relationship and a strong ground relationship. By assuming Myra’s characteristics there is no longer any confusion about her mother relationship or her sexual relationship with her son – she is both. If we return to the triad, we can be reminded of the Oedipal relationship of Lily and her son – but we can also be reminded that the figure-ground is a binary relationship with no room for a third party in a relationship. By using the figure-ground drawing, outside erroneous information can be easily identified. Lily tries to maintain this relationship by removing Myra and assuming her identity – ironically this does not remove the Oedipal triangle because Lily is still the mother.

The director, Stephen Frears, plays with the visual link of figure-ground when decisions are made. He sets up many series where the character is shot in high-contrast doorways. This threshold is one that must be passed when proceeding through a series of rooms or hallways – the metaphor being that of decisions. The choices characters make are exhibited through this manner, but high-contrast scenarios are also developed by the outline of the character within the field of the door. The characters are constantly defining one another as a series of figure-ground relationships. The clowns are a figure on the field of black, while the paintings themselves are a figure on the field of the orange wall while the room is a figure on the field of the hotel and so on. In the final resolution of the film we see Lily returning to the room rented by her son. Many critical decisions are made at this point to impact the outcome. We are hovering around the entry door, the closet door, the hallway entrance and finally the kitchen doorway. Roy dies at the threshold between the living room and the kitchen. By framing characters in doorways, Frears puts characters in a series of thresholds. This represents the final decision-making period of both film and drawing.
Architecturally, Myra represents the “hot tomato” idea that never works – however sexy she may be or the promises of riches she presents, in the end her presence is to bring out final resolution to the bigger idea. She gives momentary points of contrast to the story line. The design path is a metaphor to the story line and oddly enough Myra and her design equivalent must be present in order for the product to be successful but it can only be successful if she is discarded. New “hot” ideas brought to the table allow for the core subject to receive a freshness or perspective unconsidered before.

There is some confusion about who represents the main idea of the figure-ground drawing and whom the movie is truly about. Because Roy is the central character he is introduced with fundamental criteria, filtered through the process of figure-ground drawings and finally thrown out at the end because the idea has undergone its evolution. His death at the end shows that being the central figure doesn’t necessarily make him the main idea or at least the right idea – a good lesson for architecture. Lily rides off into the darkness at the end showing her staying power but not necessarily her success. Due to her contradiction of surviving without content, Lily is harder to establish even though she is dominant. She is neither the idea of the day, nor the ongoing issue being addressed. She is wicked and destructive at times, she nurturing and consoling at other times. She is, in the end, the difficult to establish device of design. One the designer cannot control, yet one that cannot be discarded. Left to its uncontrolled path it will destroy its own child – a situation all designers face when going through the process.

True to the nature of film noir, the closure is disconcerting. Lily has driven off to presumably blend into the doldrums of life. The metaphor here is that good materials (actors/intelligent people) and quality construction (script/plot) will not necessarily result in a
quality design or the perfect figure-ground drawing. Sometimes it takes a high-quality exercise to realize that something doesn’t work and furthermore to vastly change the original circumstances. This is precisely what makes The Grifters compelling – its recognition of circumstances that result in banality. Specific reactions to the figure and to the ground parallel design decisions, and the product is never as compelling as the process.

Cast

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Myra Langtry</td>
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<td>Roy Dillon</td>
<td>John Cusack</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roy’s mother, Lily</td>
<td>Anjelica Huston</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bobo Justus</td>
<td>Pat Hingle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simms</td>
<td>Henry Jones</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cole</td>
<td>J.T. Walsh</td>
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<td>Hebbing</td>
<td>Charles Napier</td>
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Architecture 436 – Advanced Architectural Design Media

http://www.arch.iastate.edu/436

Course Description

Architecture 436 is an introduction into architecture media and digital visualization. The strategy of this class is to practice and implement methods through which architecture will be represented, investigated, presented and designed using the computer.

(0-9) Cr. 3 each time taken to a maximum of 6 credits. F.SS. Prereq: 230, 232. Special topics in design media applications.

Objectives

This course challenges students to integrate their work in the design studio with their investigation of digital tools and techniques. The objective is to investigate how design takes place when digital tools are researched – and that other methods exist for design process and research. Presenting work is only a facet of media, and with the technology that exists today there are many opportunities to go beyond merely representing work with the digital tools.
Methods through which you will learn

The semester is broken down into a series of assignments that will prepare you for the various methods of digital visualization you will explore. Each assignment focuses on a crucial aspect of this design process. Three major benchmarks of this process include your mid-term movie, your 1-2 minute movie and your final web site.

You will work with your current project in studio. The point is to examine your design process and determine an avenue through which you can re-think your architecture in terms of this additional design and visualization tool.

This other design method integrates contemporary culture and media (i.e. music, T.V., movies, advertisements, etc.) with your architectural work. You need to be open to influences beyond typical design practices and be willing to let these influences show through your work. A short film is the backbone through which the investigation will take shape. You will use these tools to communicate a design concept in a short period of time and use multiple images and text...it must also include motion and music to manipulate the senses.

A warning... working on a current design project can be frustrating at the beginning stages because you need to work with some Form Z three-dimensional software in order to understand it. I suggest working with generative material and/or site material at first. I do
encourage current studio work because it allows you to consider your studio design process
while you are involved in it.

The means through which you will create this
Spatial Interpretation
Form•Z Model
QTVR and Renderings
Story Board
30 Second Movie
1-2 Minute Movie
Web Site and web graphics
DVD Authoring
The benchmarks for achieving the goals mentioned above

<table>
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<th>Exercise</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<td>Exercise 1</td>
<td>Video Collage</td>
<td>Collage using motion material</td>
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<td>3%</td>
<td>Exercise 2</td>
<td>Still Rendering</td>
<td>3 renderings with materials and lights</td>
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<td>5%</td>
<td>Exercise 3</td>
<td>Rendered Motion</td>
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<td>Exercise 4</td>
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