Education, Design and Practice – Understanding skills in a Complex World

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Refocusing the Interior Lens: Other Methods of Critical and Creative Inquiry in the Architecture Studio

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• Abstract (291 words):
This paper explores different ways of engaging with spatial investigations in the architecture studio. The study grew from the researcher observing a repeating pattern in student responses to a variety of design briefs, addressing various contexts, programmes, typologies and issues of concern. The gap that was identified echoes the premise posed by Spatial Agency: other ways of doing architecture (Awan et al. 2011) – the need for a shift from static expression of architecture, to refocus on the dynamic and social conditions of living.

A series of creative, yet critical activities were introduced: descriptive/keyword responses, spontaneous vignette drawings and the making of critical artefacts. As instrumental case study, issues are emphasized with critical reflection (self and peer) interspersed into the process. Qualitative content analysis revealed that the ‘think-make-share’ model (Reynders 2012) as a tool of inquiry, underscored Belenky et al’s (1996) ‘ways of knowing’ and Perry’s (1970/1999) scheme of development in tertiary students. Findings illustrated that the series of sequential tasks empowered students to
‘enter into’ a different understanding, that of the user, as citizen expert. This emic perspective, adopted from the social sciences, allowed for an enriched and expanded understanding of complex design issues to be absorbed as a new praxis for future practitioners.

When the student (designer) can comprehend, or assume the role of the user, a people-centered approach is introduced. Then “spatial judgement, mutual knowledge and critical awareness” (Awan et al. 2011, 33) take an ‘interior’ focus. This speculative investigation probes many ‘how’ questions – ‘how’ to investigate, ‘how’ to understand, ‘how’ to shift attitudes, ‘how’ to make meaning and ‘how’ to get closer to that which is finer, more subtle and intangible. It explores that which lies under the lens – the micro, albeit within the realm of the urban.

• **Author Biography (158 words):**

Anika van Aswegen is a lecturer in the Department of Architecture, specializing in Interior, at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. She graduated in 2005 with a MInt (Research), with honors, from the same institution. Her research interest combines design pedagogy in the design studio, with explorations of the temporal and dynamic conditions of inhabitation - within architectural and urban interiors. Emphasis on the user, ‘interiority’ and the intangible form the core of her research. She presented a paper on relational encounters and emotional attachment at the [in]arch international conference in Indonesia (2018). She is an emerging academic and is currently busy with her PhD. She coordinates and facilitates a postgraduate design studio and teaches design theory. Other ways of creative inquiry in the educational milieu inform her teaching methodology, especially approaches from the creative arts and social sciences. The same inquisitive spirit is infused in her own creative work - designing and making glass art and installations.