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

• Paper / Proposal Title:

“Harnessing the proliferation of social media in spatial design development — finding integrity and experience over trend and visual replication”

• Author(s) Name:

Jack Tooley

• University or Company Affiliation:

Curtin University, Western Australia

• Abstract (300 words):

The proliferation of social media platforms such as Pinterest, Instagram, Tumblr and Facebook has prompted a shift in how students in spatial disciplines source design stimulus — through an abundance of readily available ‘inspo’ ( inspirational images). This shift affects how students participate in design development; sometimes abandoning a rigorous design process informed by unifying principles and concepts in favour of reproductive visual shortcuts. This threatens the fundamental design skills, future adaptability and critical thinking graduates need to bring into existing design teams. To counteract this trend, spatial design courses often resist the use of social media (with little success).

I address this issue in my design studio Spatial Experience and Aesthetics at Curtin University, Western Australia. However, I do not resist the use of social media but rather, equip students with formal analytical tools to find depth and integrity in the inspo to better inform their design process and outcomes.

During Spatial Experience and Aesthetics studio sessions, students explore core design theories that attempt to explain how the aesthetic composition of space affects
experience; including formal aesthetic principles, gestalt, colour theory, phenomenology, and semiotics. Students are then given a real-life client who has collected a significant amount of inspo for the design of their residence. Some images are gaudy or obscure, some contradict one-another and others are provocative.

By conducting a formal analysis through theory, students identify correlations and patterns in the inspo — teasing-out what types of experiences the client might want from their space, and the aesthetic components that could be used to elicit them. Students therefore learn to engage social media as an informative design tool that can be used to create spaces beyond visual trend or replication, potentially taking this new skill into their future practice.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Jack Tooley is a Lecturer of Interior Architecture at Curtin University, Western Australia. Alongside his honours supervisory role, the several studios Jack runs in the Interior Architecture course encourage students to consider research and theory as an essential tool for design, one that leads to transformational thinking and design outcomes. Jack’s teaching responds to the contemporary education context through alternative modes of content delivery; replacing the traditional lecture and tutorial scenario with ‘vignette packages’ and interactive activity-based learning. While lecturing, Jack has undertaken his forthcoming doctoral thesis in architectural and spatial sociology, ‘How zero acquaintance judgments are affected by space — with particular reference to civic transitory spaces’ which investigates how the composition of space affects our initial social value judgments of strangers. Jack is the recipient of two Australian Postgraduate Awards, and a national teaching commendation from the Interior Design Educators Association for his innovation in conceptualising digital technologies into the spatial design process. As a practitioner of spatial design, Jack has been awarded several local and national commendations from the Design Institute of Australia and the Interior Design Excellence Awards.