Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Re-evaluating the agency of matter in architectural space production through the case of model making.

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• Abstract (300 words):
Matter has only recently begun to be appreciated and understood as a powerful agency in the architectural realm. This turn to materiality in architecture, which acknowledges the presence of materials in architectural production, is not limited to architectural practices and space production but extends to architectural education. While a lot has already been written on the digital turn in architectural education, there has been no consideration of what the digital development has left behind in terms of active material engagement.

This paper aims to question and reposition what traditional model making practices in architectural education have enabled. It starts by borrowing a Material Engagement Theory (MET) from archaeology and introduces its application to architectural theory. MET argues that the historical engagement with artifacts has influenced our cognitive evolution. Through this lens, I argue that physical model making in architecture offers not simply a different spatial understanding to an architecture student, but involves an entire
cognitive change in the student’s spatial perception. The paper then moves on to describe this cognitive evolution through examples from the architectural studio. It presents work samples of two cohorts running in parallel and led by the same tutor at the same university: the first one is asked to design solely through manual methods of model making and the second one exclusively through a digital model. Student interviews are supplemented by observations made by the instructor and images of studio work.

The paper concludes that the physical handling of matter informs the development of ideas in architectural and design education in a different way than the engagement with a digital tool because of the embodied experience that an object’s materiality offers.

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

Athena Moustaka is a Lecturer in Architectural Design at the University of Salford, where she has been a full time faculty member since 2015. She is currently the Programme Director for BSc Architectural Engineering and a member of Salford’s Centre for Urban Processes, Resilient Infrastructures & Sustainable Built Environments (UPRISE research group).

Before studying architecture, Athena was educated as an engineer. In 2016 she completed a PhD at the Manchester Architecture Research Centre of the University of Manchester. She has published on the agency of materials in architecture, assemblage theory, brutalism and theories of concrete. Her most recent publication is on the material drivers behind the transformation of the brutalist idea of “Streets in the Sky”, published in the International Journal of Architectural Theory: Cloud Cuckoo Land.