

matters _ media _ milieux

LISA LANDRUM, <http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/architecture/facstaff/facstaff/landrum1.html>

This year-long studio will encourage students to pursue radically exploratory and comprehensive design projects through a series of architectural investigations involving *matters*, *media* and *milieux*. Students will investigate the theme of “media” in at least three interdependent senses that spur generative questioning:

***Media as...* the palpable stuff of architectural making:** What are the various mediums through which architects work and by which architecture becomes manifest? Paper, graphite and ink? Computer programs, luminous screens, data and pixels? Wood, metal, concrete and plastics? Speech, persuasion and suggestive gestures? Earth, air, fire and water? Public gatherings, artistic happenings, popular uprisings, practices of participatory democracy and domestic routines? Light, shadow, color, sound, texture and other subtle qualities of place? This studio will invite students to ambitiously investigate—in a *hands-on* way—a full range of “media”: graphic, digital, physical, performative, elemental, social, phenomenal and epi-phenomenal!

***Media as...* mass media, which (through their overwhelming ubiquity) tend to obscure how and why the medium of architecture matters:** In 1831 a leading character of Victor Hugo’s famous novel *Notre Dame de Paris* feared that the medium of printed books would steal the life and intelligence away from great architecture (by taking over its culturally orienting, narrative and commemorative roles). Now, nearly 200 years latter, our media-driven culture seems less concerned with the vitality of architecture and more preoccupied with the capacity of the Internet (and other devices of instant communication) to kill-off printed books and absorb all other kinds of tangibly embodied and situated modes of social exchange. In what ways does architecture still *matter* to this topic? Recent commissions of acclaimed architects to design web and news media headquarters (like Frank Gehry’s Facebook campus in California, KPMB’s Globe and Mail building in Toronto, and Renzo Piano’s New York Times Tower in NYC) suggest that architecture potentially matters a great deal. The reclamation of media-saturated Times Square as a vehicle-free public park provides another case in point. Architecture and verbal/social modes of communication have been fatefully intertwined from the beginning (think of the Tower of Babel). In what ways are these mediums of exchange co-dependent? If one of the functions of language, news, newspapers, literature and social media in general is to help people to interpret their own lives and to relate local situations to larger civic and global societies, then architecture indeed has an enduring role to play. This studio invites architectural responses to such critical questions and topics.

***Media as...* performative modes and milieux of inhabitation:** The reach of “media” extends well beyond the mixed mediums of physical making and communication to embrace the cultural substance and agency embedded in civic, global and ecological milieux. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls the analysis of such nested situations “*thick descriptions*”. As architects we will strive to understand and create *richly layered* designs—that is, architectural propositions that meaningfully provide for particular lived experiences while also participating in broad cultural horizons.

Field Trip: This studio will travel to New York City and Boston in mid to late October to study sites of media and mediation where architecture *matters*: including, Renzo Piano’s New York Times building, Steven Holl’s Storefront for Art and Architecture, and civic spaces associated with Occupy Wall Street movement. In Boston we will also visit Boston Commons and the only North American buildings of Le Corbusier and Alvar Aalto.