REFRAMING SPACE: EXPLORING VIDEO INSTALLATION AS PEDAGOGY IN DESIGN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with the pedagogical potential of video installation as a medium for spatial inquiry in a foundation-level design education program. Within the post-pandemic environment, where the way we consume online content has altered our view of video and space, this research brings video installation as a new experiential way of learning. Through a site-specific Installation workshop with Design Foundation students, the study considers the integration of moving images as a medium to develop a form in a specific space using time to build the narrative and develop perception. The theories used are those of media art, expanded cinema, and spatial forms and aesthetics, based on qualitative observations, student reflections. The findings underline the video installation as an excellent arena for transdisciplinary learning, encouraging critical thinking, spatial consciousness, and creative risk-taking in young designers. This paper contributes to the discussion on new media pedagogy and proposes a model for introducing immersive, media-based approaches in initial design education.

Keywords: Video Installation, Spatial Media, Design Pedagogy, Design Foundation Studies, Immersive Learning, Media Art

1. INTRODUCTION

The move to immersive, multisense, and transdisciplinary pedagogies in current design-based education has become essential in creating awareness of spatial and perceptual issues amongst those in early stages of study Kolko, J. (2010). Abductive Thinking and Sensemaking: The Drivers of Design Synthesis. Design Issues, 26(1), 15–28., Oxman, R. (2006). Theory and Design in the First Digital Age. Design Studies, 27(3), 229–265.. The B.Des. Foundation Programme at the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad, INDIA, is designed to expose students to the basics of design through a course that balances conceptual questioning with practical experimentation. Within this structure, Media Appreciation theory-driven was re-envisioned to include and introduce various media-based electives like

photography, sound, moving images, comic books, traditional Narrative, music video, advertising and many others. Among these, one of the electives proposed by the Author is the video installation, recasting moving images not only as a means of narrative abstraction but as spatial media capable of enacting and changing spaces.

In April 2022, the elective workshop, "Investigating the Extension of Video in Space/Video Installation", sought to further students' investment in video by challenging them to investigate its material, temporal, and spatial dimensions. The legacy informed the workshop of Experimental Films, expanded cinema Youngblood, G. (1970), and video art practices Meigh-Andrews, C. (2006). A History of Video Art. Bloomsbury., attempting to redefine video viewing from static viewing on the screen to active engagement as a moving part of spatial composition that can influence perception, interaction, and emotional response Elwes, C. (2005). Video Art: A Guided Tour. I.B. Tauris.

In this context, this pedagogical intervention becomes urgent within a post-pandemic learning scenario where the omnipresence of screen-based content turns a student's relationship with space, media, and embodiment Hayles, N. K. (2012). How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis. University of Chicago Press.. The likes of Video, hitherto screened in the realm of film or on digital screens, is starting to be utilised as a tool of architectural and experiential value in art and design. According to Maher McQuire, S. (2008). The Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space. Sage. and Penelope Mondloch, K. (2010). Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art. University of Minnesota Press., when incorporated into physical space, moving images act as media-architectural hybrids that tap into the temporal and corporeal registers of experience.

Many first-year design students are very aware of video as consumers—YouTube, Netflix, Instagram reels—but are far less aware of video's spatial, immersive, or performative potential. The workshop thus turned into a space for students to play with video content in space and experiment with scale /light/reflection/projecting surfaces/spatial context for pulling site-specific video installation. This process was in line with emerging educational discourses that supported performative, material, and experience-based learning environments in art and design education Dewey, J. (1934), Koss, J. (2010). On the Limits of Video Installation: Spatiality and the Body. Art Bulletin, 92(3), 228–245.

This paper provides a reflective practice-led account of that workshop. It presents a video installation as a means for introducing spatial cognition and narrative construction in the predesign learning stage. It also provides a methodological base and a critical commentary on the outcomes of students, how moving images actualize not only as a means of visual storytelling but as media for spatial enquiry, emotional response, and design thinking.

In this paper, the idea is put forward to discuss the pedagogical application of video installation as a spatial medium in the foundation of design education. In a practice-based workshop of 18 second-semester design students, most of whom were experimenting with video as a creative medium for the first time, this study explores how the moving image, revised and reframed with the help of spatial intervention, can augment students' abilities in visualization, conceptualization, and spatial storytelling.

One of the core goals of the workshop was to give students, regardless of how digitally-native they are from Generation Z—basically a chance to interact with the familiar vehicle of smartphone video critically and creatively, thereby exploring the medium beyond the screen dissolved into site-responsive, installation-based experiences. Interaction with video as a medium and technique allowed workshop

participants to experiment with the limits of cinematic language, learn the basics of editing, and reflect on the standard relationship between moving image and space.

The paper also draws historical comparisons between the roots of cinema (which include the Lumière brothers' portable projections and the development by Edison of the theatre as a dedicated viewing space) and present-day issues brought by the pandemic and calm of OTT platforms, which have recontextualized the way people receive time-based media. Within this changing landscape, the workshop acted as a reflective medium for students to consider how video could occupy and change physical worlds.

Apart from the practice itself, this research aims to explore systematically the design and development of the workshop as an educational intervention, especially as far as curriculum structuring, tactics of teaching-learning, and material building are concerned. One of the primary aims of this study is to add to the dialogue surrounding the conceptualization, use, and assessment of creative forms of pedagogy in educational design research. The paper explores the goal of furthering our understanding of characteristics of such interventions and processes that enable the design of such interventions to train experiential, spatial, and media literacy in early-stage design students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The inspiration for this investigation was based on the lineage of expanded cinema Youngblood, G. (1970), video art Meigh-Andrews, C. (2006). A History of Video Art. Bloomsbury. and media architecture McQuire, S. (2008). The Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space. Sage.. Nam June Paik's early video installations introduced the underpinning of time-based media within space, challenging the established planeness of the screen. Followers like Bill Viola, Pipilotti Rist, and Doug Aitken have used multi-sensory installation strategies that force the viewer to participate in narrative settings. Elwes, C. (2005). Video Art: A Guided Tour. I.B. Tauris. speaks of the embodied experience of video installation in terms of image, sound, and physical embodiment of the spectator.

In an educational context, video is typically used for documentation or storytelling. Nevertheless, its spatial potentials are becoming more notable in such areas as: interaction design Dixon, S. (2007). Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation. MIT Press., performative architecture Kolarevic, B. (2008). Performative Architecture: Beyond Instrumentality. Routledge. and installation art pedagogy Ibrahim, G., & Evans, M. (2020). These intersections are seldom discussed in a design foundation. This paper closes that gap by offering a scaffolded experiment for combining video installation with early spatial learning.

Youngblood, G. (1970) discussion in Expanded Cinema outlines the transition of paradigm in visual experience wherein the cinematic apparatus moves outside the screen in order to become an interactive spatial sphere. Youngblood was imposing the swarming devolution of the screen into experiential architectures that enabled hybrid forms that included video installation, media architecture, or interactive environments.

This trajectory finds its roots in the initial experiments of Nam June Paik, who not only ushered in video art but also rebalanced the television screen from a mere display to an art canvas. TV Buddha (1974) or Electronic Superhighway (1995) are examples of how time-based media occupy and react to space and dissolve the viewer, object, and screen difference Rush (2003), Lovejoy (2004).

Artists like Bill Viola, Doug Aitken, and Pipilotti Rist take this exploration further by using multi-sensory installation approaches, whereby the video incorporates the sound, light, architecture, and movement of the viewer to create narrative environments. The use of temporal suspension by Viola and Rist's psychedelic domesticity illustrates how space, time, and affect come together Mondloch, K. (2010). Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art. University of Minnesota Press..

Elwes, C. (2005). Video Art: A Guided Tour. I.B. Tauris. calls attention to the embodied character of video installation, which she posits as a dialogic spatial form, inviting the moving spectator. The feminist analysis of Elwes shows the change in space, body, and technologies that make up the viewing experience that transforms passive consumption into performative activity.

McQuire, S. (2008). The Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space. Sage. in The Media City offers criticism to traditional urban theory through the introduction of the concept of media architecture, where the digital images, screen, and interactive technologies redefine the urban public space. McQuire is considering buildings becoming media surfaces, meaning that they integrate digital temporality into material architecture. This corresponds to Lev Manovich's (2001) idea of "augmented space" and Bruno, G. (2002) "cinematic architecture," which refers to motion-based image systems that redistribute spatial sensibilities.

Modern investigations by Usman Haque, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, and collective groups such as Random International rely on sensorial computation, motion capture, and live data feeds to generate reactive environments that can blur the envelope between installation, data visualization, and performative space.

In design education, video tends to be limited to the realm of narrative film, product documentation, or UI demonstrations. However, such emerging pedagogies encourage their application in spatial learning, specifically foundations of interaction design Dixon, S. (2007). Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation. MIT Press., computational architecture Kolarevic, B. (2008). Performative Architecture: Beyond Instrumentality. Routledge., and installation art pedagogy Ibrahim, G., & Evans, M. (2020).

Ibrahim, G., & Evans, M. (2020) argue that by incorporating the practices of installation art into early design curriculum, students develop embodied cognition, sensorial thinking, and constructivist learning, indispensable to fostering 21st-century design literacy. In the same way, Sweeny (2014) states that immersive media environments teach students to design through temporal-spatial problem solving and therefore, prepare them for future-facing domains such as AR / VR, speculative design, and the storytelling of the environment.

Further, Tavin, K. (2005). Hauntological Shifts: Video Installation and Art Education. Studies in Art Education, 47(2), 135–149. (Note: Volume & page Info Inferred)

Youngblood, G. (1970). Expanded Cinema. E.P. Dutton. and Irwin, R., & O'Donoghue, D. (2012). Encountering Pedagogy Through Art. Studies in Art Education, 53(4), 287–297. connect video installation with art-based research (ABR), indicating it offers crucial routes in developing a sense of subjectivity, place making, and nonlinear cognition, particularly in interdisciplinary education.

Video installations provide spectators with an active role where kinaesthetic and proprioceptive engagement are accentuated. Marks, L. U. (2000). The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses. Duke University Press.

introduces a notion of haptic visuality – the idea that the viewer experiences images through his/her body through preferential, affective navigation rather than detached observation. This shifts spatial pedagogy from Cartesian perception to somatic learning (a critical change for design learners of today).

Bishop, C. (2005). Installation Art: A Critical History. Tate.

Bruno, G. (2002). Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film. Verso.

Dewey, J. (1934). Art as Experience. Minton, Balch & Co. criticizes relational aesthetics but recognizes that immersive installations have a tendency to initiate relational encounters (between the participants and objects, and between the objects and the environments), thereby bringing in the sociality as a design dimension. These concepts become increasingly relevant to the practices of teaching design as a participative, multi-modal practice.

Low-cost projection technologies, sensor-response interfaces, open platforms (Processing, TouchDesigner), and the availability of XR technologies have democratized spatial video practice. MIT Media Lab's "Opera of the Future", Ars Electronica, and similar platforms have supported multi-screen, algorithmic cinema, inviting a transdisciplinary pedagogical opportunity.

Furthermore, Henriette Steiner and Kristin Veel (2015) denote that digital installations produce "temporally mediated architecture" with time as a compositional element. This is of particular relevance to design pedagogy to instill durational thinking into space-making.

2.1. SYNTHESIS AND GAP

Heavier text emerges from themes in media theory, installation practice, and architecture, yet many studies do not overlook the three fields for the sliver of design foundations pedagogy. The spatial potential of video is unexploited in early design education, where students tend to be segregated into Material, object – or Visual image–based learning. This paper contributes to this void by addressing the issue of integrating video installation through spatial inquiry, as experiential mapping, narrative construction, and allowing students to conceive of space as dynamic, affective, and participatory.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a practice-based exploratory approach, placing itself within the design pedagogy and experiential learning paradigm. The goal was to explore the use of a video installation as a pedagogic tool in developing spatial awareness and embodied interactions of the first-year design students. And this study is based on continuous five-year teaching from batch 2021 to 2025.

3.1. CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

The study was undertaken in the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad (an institution of National Importance in India), with undergraduate students taking a foundational spatial design course each year. Students represented various linguistic as well as regional backgrounds with different perceptual frameworks. The participants were split up into smaller working groups of 4-5 so they could have manageable collaboration and diverse input during the intervention.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The pedagogical experiment was implemented like a four-phase workshop over two weeks, with each phase scaffolding a component of a spatial exploration with the video as the medium. The phases are detailed below:

3.2.1. PHASE 1: OBSERVATION SITE SPECIFIC INSTALLATION AND SPATIAL MAPPING

Students were allocated specific spatial sites within the campus: courtyards, staircases, corridors, and thresholds. Students were tasked with making interactive video installations using simple materials, including: Reflective surfaces (mirrors, foil), Semi-translucent fabrics (sheers, muslin), Objects and screens (phones, projectors, tablets), and recycled material.

Installations were still placed within or next to the original sites, thus ensuring that the installations did not lose context. Spatial composition, viewer position, sensory layering, and minimal ecological impact (reuse, low-energy devices) were important.

Each of the groups carried out a contextual analysis mapping the site's scale, the texturing, ambient light, movement by the human, the acoustic qualities, and material attributes. Both objective mapping (e.g., flow diagrams, material grids) as well as subjective observations (e.g., mood, memory, emotion) were used as subjects of the emphasis. This stage introduced students to phenomenological spatial analysis, which they learned to use in seeing how people occupy and emotionally react to built environments.

Image 1



Image 1 Initial Setup of Installation Using Podiums.

Image 2



Image 2 Mapping Process for Screens.

3.2.2. PHASE 2: VIDEO CAPTURE AND EDITING

Students used their smartphones and common video editing programs (InShot, Kinemaster, CapCut,) to produce short, looping videos (10 –30 seconds long) in response to their site's sensory or metaphorical qualities. The videos explored:

Movement (e.g., footsteps, the wind, the reflection of water), Touching interaction such as (rustling leaves, shade in the walls), Rhythms in time (a morning versus an evening light – for example, at night or during the day), Metaphoric readings (for example thresholds are portals, staircases are time). This segment focused on embodied filmmaking and site-specific cinematic thinking, which promoted a way of seeing spaces as a dynamic and time-bound medium.

Image 3



Image 3 Preparation of Screen

Image 4



Image 4 Preparation of Screen on Adobe After Effects

3.2.3. PHASE 3: PROJECTING SPACE INTO EXPERIENCE

This phase focused on projection mapping and incorporated installation art methodologies, allowing students to explore spatial storytelling, multisensory immersion, and real-time interaction. Based on their final installations and compiled, edited videos, students projected their work onto physical site installations using software such as Adobe After Effects.

Projection mapping is a meticulous process that demands precision and careful setup. A significant amount of time is spent stabilizing the projector on a fixed, vibration-free surface—any minor displacement can disrupt the alignment and compromise the final projection. Controlling ambient light is also critical, as darkness is essential to enhance the visual clarity and immersive impact of the projection. Thoughtful spatial composition, careful consideration of viewer positioning, and controlled lighting all contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the final installation.

Below are a few images documenting the outcomes.

Image 5



Image 5 Screenshot from Window Sequence

Image 6

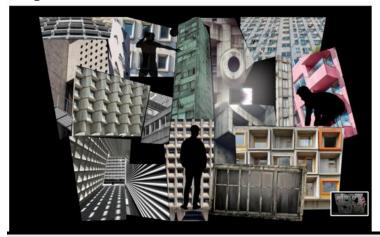


Image 6 Screenshot from Building Facade

Image 7



Image 7 Screenshot of Shadow-Casting Sequence

3.2.4. PHASE 4: REFLECTION AND CRITIQUE

In the final phase of the workshop, a series of guided critique sessions were held with the assistance of faculty and peers, providing students with a space to articulate and critique their creative processes and outcomes. Each group presented an overall view of their journey, including process documentation such as sketches, concept notes, video drafts, and their final installation. In addition, students also submitted individual reflections, which were presented through written narratives or behind-the-scenes 2 recordings from their side, talking about their experience. The critiques were focused on the discussion of aesthetic decisions, spatial interpretations, technical problem-solving, and the larger emotional impact of the installations. This phase acted as an essential metacognitive exercise through which students could internalize their learning and see their abstract concepts translated to concrete output and understand how collaborative practice and embodied experimentation shaped their spatial knowledge.

The final video installation created by students during the two-week Media Appreciation module marked an ambitious and exploratory engagement with the medium of projection mapping. As an experimental practice, this project allowed students to step beyond traditional narrative structures and engage in a more fluid, subjective form of storytelling through moving images and sound.

Working with projection mapping as a medium challenged students to think spatially and conceptually. Their final installations demonstrated a developing understanding of how space, motion, and sound can come together to form an immersive and multisensory experience. The videos, which incorporated a range of effects and editing styles, reflected each group's and individual creative interpretation—often abstract, often raw—and presented layered perspectives on their chosen themes.

3.3. JUSTIFICATION FOR METHODOLOGY

This practice-led, studio-based inquiry aligns with the spirit of design education, where doing and learning are key pedagogical approaches Schön 1983, Candy (2006). It also positions the project in research through design paradigms in which the act of making is a legitimate way of producing new knowledge Frayling, (1993), Niedderer and Roworth-Stokes (2007). The methodical utilization of video installation as a research tool enabled the students to interact with the issues of space, time, narrative, and interaction, thereby internalizing the actual principles they learn when studying spatial design theory.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The video installation workshop revealed a multidimensional learning environment that engaged students cognitively, technically, emotionally, and collaboratively. The process of translating abstract concepts into spatial installations enabled students to explore metaphorical and symbolic dimensions of storytelling. Many began to perceive familiar environments through a new conceptual lens, reframing everyday spatial sites into canvases of temporal and sensory experimentation. The act of conceptualizing space as a narrative medium required them to grapple with ambiguity, engage in layered thinking, and form new associations—skills that are foundational in cultivating design literacy.

One of the most significant outcomes was the enhancement of spatial cognition. Students transitioned from viewing space as a passive backdrop to understanding it as an active, responsive element. Their engagements with light, shadow, projection distortion, and reflective materials encouraged a somatic and embodied understanding of space. This shift aligns with existing literature on haptic visuality and embodied design, where learners interact with environments not just visually but also through movement, rhythm, and material tactility. In this way, the installations became a site of experiential learning, where perception was shaped by movement, proximity, time of day, and the viewer's sensory orientation.

The workshop also demonstrated students' growing proficiency with contemporary digital tools such as Adobe After Effects and mobile-based editing software. Many were using these platforms for the first time in a design context, yet their output reflected a quick adaptation and a willingness to take creative risks. The inclusion of video editing and projection mapping introduced them to time-based design thinking, a critical aspect often missing from foundation-level pedagogy. In aligning the video with the site, students encountered challenges such as ambient light interference, projector calibration, and material suitability—each of which

necessitated trial, adaptation, and improvisation. These technical struggles became fertile ground for learning, echoing the iterative and reflexive processes integral to design methodology.

This process provided multiple entry points for learning: conceptual thinking, where students interpreted abstract themes and translated them into spatial narratives, encouraged metaphorical thinking, and symbolic interpretation. Working in teams fostered mutual respect, negotiation of ideas, and the weaving together of multiple creative inputs into a cohesive vision. Mastery of new-age digital tools gave students hands-on experience with software environments that are increasingly relevant in the fields of design, media, and communication. Students began to perceive space not just as a backdrop but as a responsive surface to interact with light, time, and perception. The temporal nature of video allowed for layered, nonlinear storytelling within physical sites. The project also encouraged interdisciplinary engagement—students experimented with shadow, projection distortion, and reflective materials to manipulate both image and space.

The learning outcomes demonstrated increased student engagement, curiosity, and openness to risk, essential traits for creative learning. Importantly, students gained early exposure to systems thinking, user experience, and embodied design, aligning with contemporary demands of the design profession. One of the most valuable outcomes of this process was the emphasis on collaboration. Students had to learn how to work as a collective—respecting diverse viewpoints, negotiating concepts, and weaving individual ideas into a coherent visual and spatial narrative. This not only enhanced their interpersonal skills but also introduced them to the real-world dynamics of collaborative media practices.

Further, the integration of sound design added another critical layer of multisensory engagement. By collaborating with peers or sound specialists, students began to understand how auditory elements could reinforce or disrupt spatial cues, add emotional undertones, and shape narrative rhythm. This awareness marks a significant step toward thinking in terms of spatial-temporal composition, where sound, image, and space cohere into a unified design language. These insights are particularly valuable given the rising importance of immersive environments in fields such as interaction design, media architecture, and virtual experience design.

While some outcomes remained inconsistent in terms of execution—such as alignment issues, resolution constraints, or control over projection light—these shortcomings were not viewed as failures but as part of the experimental ethos of the module. The very nature of the medium invites imperfection, and in embracing this, students learned to problem-solve in real time, adapt their ideas to physical and technological limitations, and reflect critically on their process. The installations, though diverse in polish, reflected an authentic grappling with space, narrative, and technology.

This module ultimately functioned as a catalyst for experiential design learning by positioning video installation as both a method and a medium. It foregrounded the importance of working across disciplines, engaging multiple senses, and allowing meaning to emerge from the interaction between body, space, and image. It also reinforced the pedagogical power of learning through making, wherein the process itself is as valuable as the final output. As such, the findings affirm that when students are allowed to play, fail, collaborate, and reflect within a structured yet open-ended framework, they begin to embody the kinds of thinking and making that are essential for a future-facing, media-literate design practice.

Collectively, these observations suggest a convergence of six key learning domains that were activated through this intervention. At the cognitive level, students developed metaphorical thinking, abstraction, and narrative innovation. Technically, they demonstrated mastery over video editing, projection mapping, and environmental control such as light and surface alignment. Spatially, they began to design with responsiveness and sensitivity to multi-sensory context. Collaboratively, they exhibited real-world skills of co-authorship, negotiation, and empathy. In terms of material and media, students engaged in hybrid experimentation across physical and digital substrates. Finally, the sensory and embodied dimension brought awareness to the integration of haptic, auditory, and spatial feedback mechanisms, essential for immersive design practices. These interwoven insights underscore the transformative potential of video installation as a pedagogic strategy for foundational design education.

5. DISCUSSION

This experiment contributes to a growing body of work on experiential and media-integrated learning in design education. Unlike conventional studio exercises that focus on form or function in isolation, video installations create a multisensory matrix that situates the learner at the intersection of space, time, motion, and narrative. The approach also bridges gaps between disciplines—combining media theory, spatial thinking, and performative practice.

Challenges included access to projection equipment, technical skill gaps, and time constraints. However, these were mitigated through collaborative learning, peer exchange, and resourcefulness. The study supports the case for introducing media-lab practices at the foundation level, enabling students to view technology not as an add-on but as a conceptual partner in design thinking.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper positions video installation as an effective medium for rethinking spatial pedagogy in design education. As design practices become increasingly immersive, interdisciplinary, and technologically embedded, early exposure to such media-rich experiments can cultivate future-ready designers. The findings advocate for the integration of experiential, performative tools in the curriculum and emphasize the need for critical frameworks that treat moving images as spatial, temporal, and interactive. Future studies may explore long-term impact, cross-departmental collaboration, or extend this model to urban and public engagement projects.

The exploration of projection mapping within the two-week Media Appreciation module reveals the potential of experimental media practices in fostering both technical skill and collaborative creativity among students. Through the integration of video installation, sound design, and spatial storytelling, learners were encouraged to move beyond conventional narrative forms and engage with more subjective, multisensory modes of expression.

This project-based approach not only enabled students to experiment with digital tools such as Adobe After Effects but also provided a platform for interdisciplinary learning—merging visual, spatial, and auditory elements into cohesive experiential artworks. Importantly, the collaborative nature of the work cultivated respect for diverse perspectives, emphasizing the value of co-creation in media art.

While the experimental nature of the medium presented technical challenges, such as projection alignment and light control, these hurdles became valuable learning moments within the iterative creative process. The installations, though varied in polish, demonstrated a growing sensitivity to space, audience engagement, and the interplay of form and content.

Ultimately, this study affirms the educational value of incorporating experimental media practices like projection mapping into design curricula. It highlights how such immersive, collaborative exercises not only build technical competence but also deepen students' capacity for conceptual thinking, empathy, and storytelling in contemporary digital contexts.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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