

Abstract Submission
Conference on the Beginning Design Student

Igniting the Imagination: Speed, Slowness, Simultaneity as a Path to Discovery

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Abstract:

Perhaps the most formidable challenge to teaching first-semester, first year design students is creating space for their imagination to flourish. What if the pressure of artificially constructed deadlines was minimized and time—big chunks of time—were provided for failure, iteration, and reflection? What if work in the design studio was focused less on a sequential series of final outcomes and more on a flow of work that overlapped, intertwined, and had indeterminate endings? What if the tempo of teaching was more attuned to the actual pace of learning? And what if the primary purpose of the studio was to unlock the beginner's latent imagination?

What would studio like this look like?

Our purpose in this paper is to describe the tactics employed to realize our goal of activating vivid imaginative capacities in beginning designers. Principal tactics included:

- fostering a gradual build-up of creative capacities,
- allocating sufficient time for discovery,
- and maximizing self-directed learning.

Timing and duration were critical aspects for realizing each of our tactics. The rhythm of the studio alternated between fast and slow. Digital tools, for example, were introduced and put into action quickly, while the projects themselves had long durations allowing time for time for exploration, observation, and iteration.

Gradually, new projects were introduced coincident with existing projects allowing practice and improvement with an array of digital tools (rhino, photoshop, lightroom) as well as analog tools in the wood shop (band saw, chop saw, wire-cutter). The overlap between projects enabled not only an increased mastery of tools, but the opportunity for students to integrate new discoveries into prior work. By working on several projects simultaneously, students were encouraged to continually return to the beginning—constantly improving previous work, building confidence, and developing a more sophisticated creative process.

The porous boundary between projects and their long duration allowed students to establish a high-level design competence with minimum of stress. As a result, students could work from inner necessity rather than external pressure, relieving them of the anxiety that so often interferes with the activation of a vivid imagination.



Figure One: Vessel for and Organic Object

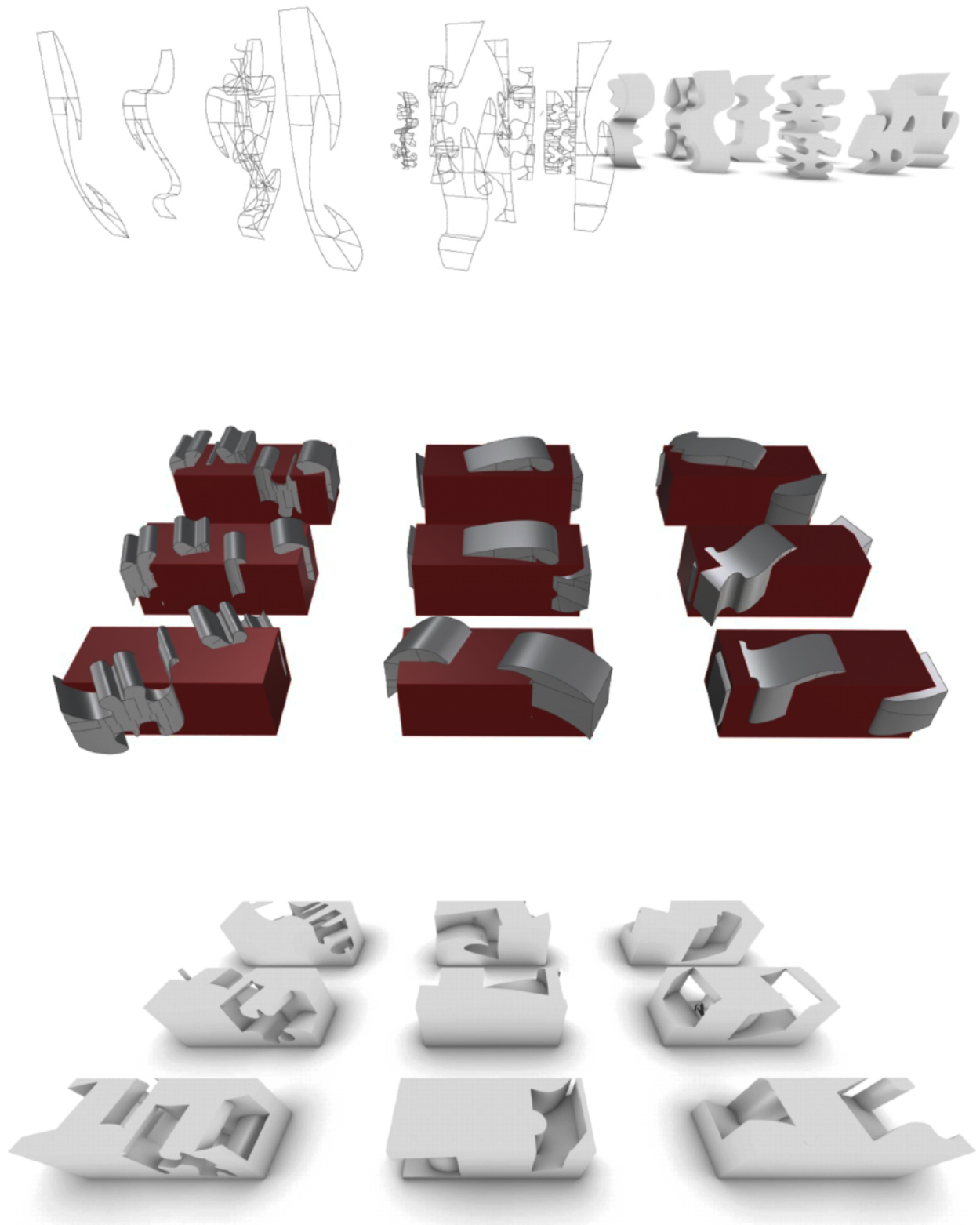


Figure Two: Carved Space



Figure Three: Fantastic Section in Process