

Drawing air workshop: drawing attention to air in architectural education

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Air is continuous and recognises no borders. The air we share is multi-scalar and extends from the human scale of our breath and lungs to the atmosphere that hovers above the earth. Air is invisible in its default state and this 'invisibility has led us to take air for granted' (Abram, 2014) and misuse it as a dumping ground, despite being named as a global concern by the United Nations. Air is a shared fragility, that is central to climate change, to the experience of place, to health and well-being, and to the experience of being indoors where we spend over 90% of our time. While it does feature in architectural education, it is often siloed within environmental science, taught by experts from outside the discipline (Moe, 2014, p. 42), and neglected in design studios.

Invisible air resists visual representation. What happens when you try to draw air? This presentation documents a short workshop called 'Drawing Air', delivered to final year architecture students, who were invited to make a speculative hand drawing of the air in their own design projects. Hand drawing aids cognition. An air-borne approach to design situates a project in its immediate physical, environmental, historical, cultural and climatic context, and can reveal fresh insights that inform design decisions from concept to detail. Air is XL and XS.

The workshop forms part of a PhD study that explores how foregrounding air within architectural education can raise awareness of air and prompt exploration, critical interrogation and creative engagement with its role and potential in design of the built environment in the context of the climate crisis. The study forms part of the 'Building Change' project, through which the six schools of architecture in Ireland revised their architectural curricula in response to the climate emergency.