FORCES THAT SHAPE STUDIO CULTURE
FORCES THAT SHAPE
STUDIO CULTURE

In order to reinforce the consistency of the presentation, I will reiterate the goals of the study - to unveil patterns of everyday life, adaptive behavior, values that underlie environmental choices, and models for negotiating the use of space. The interpretation aims at understanding the major influences that produce the specifics of studio culture and the behaviors reconstructed in the previous section, the meaning of the studio in students' everyday lives, and, most importantly, the nature of the relationships between these social actors (and building users) and their physical environments.

The interpretation unveiled two major forces that shape the everyday lives of studio occupants: personality traits and environmental conditions. The personality traits include the motivation and attitudes that students share.
The environmental conditions are defined in a very broad sense, and include the social, the professional, and the physical. They encompass the social status of the profession, the influence of the professional community as a reference group, and the opportunities offered by the ambiance and the management of a studio room. All of these forces interact to produce the specifics of the everyday life and culture of a studio.

**Personality traits**

*The underlying motivation: In search of excellence*

The study indicates several major characteristics of serious architecture students: They are committed, devoted, and completely absorbed by architecture, and are workaholics who refrain from going out or engaging in entertainment and leisure activities. Professional success is probably their greatest satisfaction and happiness. The joy of learning and achieving is probably the most natural emotion in their lives. Competition is their habitual hobby. The urge for success is so compelling that competing with oneself displaces competition with fellow students. The quest for ultimate achievement leads to a continuous search for self-improvement. The intrinsic drive for mastery and the quest for a celebrated career are strong motivational forces. In this regard, the architecture student emerges as a super-
achiever. In other departments, overachievers sometimes become targets of mockery and contempt. The studio setting seems to be a safe haven for such people. The motivation to achieve is disguised by the demands of the institution, and these individuals do not have to hide this controversial impetus. The asceticism and sacrifice of leisure in the name of future success are concealed under the pretense of conforming with the high demands of the program.

One indicator of professional devotion is the time and resources architecture students invest in preparing their studio workplaces. In a previous section describing the studio setting, there is a detailed account of the large number of things students bring to the studio, the enormous efforts they make to move all of them into their "second home" in school, and the hundreds of dollars they invest for appliances, furniture, and drafting equipment. Most of these items are used during the semester, unlike textbooks that are returned by non-architectural majors to the university bookstore for refunds. There is no large-scale system for recycling architectural textbooks; there is not enough volume to support such an enterprise. Architecture students need their textbooks from their school days, through their licensing exam, and throughout their professional careers.
Devotion as an ego-defense:  
*The psychology of insecure superachievers*

On the whole, architecture undergraduates are superachievers, extremely devoted and competitive. This strong motivation, however, and desire for self-actualization makes them feel unsafe and always under the threat of failure. The overt self-confidence and competitiveness they display are a means to conceal this fear of failure. The insecurity that superachievers experience makes them adopt a veneer to protect the integrity of their personalities. They attempt to attribute eventual failure to environmental sources. Students want to convince themselves that everything necessary has been done to successfully present their projects. The easiest ego defense is to say, “I work around the clock. I did everything possible within my power. Failure is not my fault.” A logical consequence of the strategy to preserve one’s self-esteem is all-nighting. Some people say that the “all-nighter” phenomenon is an initiation; others say it is a promulgation of the design office culture at school, as well as a way of attracting attention and expressing individuality.

Another psychological defense is to capitalize on the huge workload. In case of failure, the cause will be due to the tremendous amount of work. The dual images of work piles and hardworking would-be architects are promoted by the constant complaint, “I am running out of time.” Everybody speaks about the workload and complains about time
shortage, but it must be noted that most students work as well. The truth is that they work more than students do in many of the other majors. The conspicuous busy schedule and the extensive work provide an excellent shield to protect the fragile egos of the students. Consistent with this self-suggestion and ego defense is the utmost concentration of architecture students and the tendency to minimize overt socializing and leisure. This also can be viewed as postponement of gratification. Usually, an instrument to achieve short-term goals and postponement of gratification can be viewed as a way of life, or rather, a major theme in the lives of architecture students. This fercious abstention in the name of professional development resembles the stubbornness of medieval craftsmen and the asceticism of Puritans.

However, this is only one way of looking at the situation. There is enough evidence to believe that the problem of the shortage of time is not only a way to protect one's ego against possible failures, but also to project a desired image. It is also due to poor time management, inefficient work, or constant revisions of the solutions of ill-defined problems (as is the nature of architectural problems). No matter what will be the detailed explanation, the roots of studio cu*lture can again be traced to the combination of achievement motivation and the feeling of insecurity.
Reducing anxiety: The instinct of flocking together

Another complementary force that contributes to the patterns of round-the-clock presence in the studio room stems from the high level of anxiety that juniors and seniors display in studio classes. At this point in their education, they have more questions than they would like. Every time they draw a line they face the dilemma of which way to go next. They also have no idea of the exact criteria for grading their projects, the level of achievement of their peers, and how the principle of bell curve grading will be applied to this small group of people. Even when the instructor puts forward a consistent and clear set of criteria, many students still experience the anxiety peculiar to every novice. The combination of achievement motivation, narrow knowledge base, and an unclear prospect for the semester creates tremendous pressure.

Students follow their natural instincts and flock together. On the one hand, strength is in numbers. On the other hand, students can find information about their peers’ progress and the difficulties experienced by other classmates; they can discuss project problems with friends, find answers to their questions, and discard other questions as unnecessary. Students become more relaxed when they see that everybody experiences similar problems, and that others cannot meet certain criteria, cannot come to satisfactory solutions, or cannot meet project deadlines. In this way, superachievers begin to view their problems not as
personal failures, but as objective states experienced by everyone. They are saved from frustration and humiliation.

In regard to the constantly emerging questions, working at the studio has several benefits. First, a student can get advice from the fellow at the next drafting table. Second, students gather and discuss the more difficult issues together. Third, they can see how other people solved the problem and construct a similar solution. Fourth, being at school they always have the chance of seeing the instructor or the teaching assistant for advice. Fifth, there is more available information. Students can monitor how their colleagues perform, how fast they move forward, and how their own progress compares with theirs. Students can also borrow ideas from each other. They often tour the drafting tables of their colleagues and sometimes smuggle out an idea. At least they can see how their colleagues solve similar problems and learn from the experience. Sixth, the timely advice has one very important advantage - it saves time! Students do not risk delving into the wrong direction; they do not have to deliberate or go through thick books. Most importantly, they will not stop their work until the answer is found. This translates into a much more efficient use of time and more productive work - a phenomenon that graduate students experienced years ago, although now they know the secret of managing time and getting the job done quickly.
Environmental factors

The time-saving strategy: Functional synergism

An important feature that has a big influence on shaping architecture students' everyday life, both in and out of school, is time pressure. Large workloads lead to reduced spare time and, consequently, to the necessity of abstaining from extended leisure activities. Socializing is a basic personality need and cannot be suppressed indefinitely. People devise different strategies to satisfy it. Architecture students have found a way to manage their scarce time for socializing by limiting their social interactions to the studio. This strategy may not offer diverse choices, but it saves time. Students don't waste time traveling long distances to meet their friends. They have everything they need at school: friends and partners, socialization sites, and opportunities for easy organization. They can socialize during every small break between classes or when they are resting and relaxing.

Functional synergism:
What makes students flock to the studio

There are several reasons for residing in the studio around the clock. First, the official department policy encourages students to work at school. The mandatory studio class takes 12 hours a week. Additional presence is fostered. Such a policy helps students decide where to locate their permanent workplaces - at home, or at school. If substan-
tial work on the project has to be performed at school, it makes sense to set the major workplace in the studio. The more time students spend in their studios, the more support equipment they will need to bring and install there; then it becomes even more convenient to work permanently at that location.

Second, it is very uncomfortable to carry to and fro huge drawings, drafting supplies, 48-inch-long drafting rulers, and other things of that nature. Also, every time drawings are dismantled and moved from one drafting table to another, there is a risk of deformations, which could compromise the quality of work.

Third, a drafting station takes up a lot of space: two big tables, a bookcase, a rotating chair, books, and drafting supplies including tracing paper, cardboard, wood and veneer for model making, paints, and glues. Model making often produces lots of waste, dust, and toxic fumes. The whole room becomes a mess. Students would rather have separate rooms for drafting and model making. Alex, Jeff, and Teo said that they rented small rooms near campus. Students cannot afford to rent an expensive $500-a-month, one-bedroom apartment with space enough for all study activities.

Fourth, in the studio, everybody can readily seek advice and consultation from other colleagues. My investigations show that junior and senior students do not have enough knowledge and skills and are liable to get stuck at
any moment. If they are at home, they become intellectually immobile and cannot proceed. At school, they can get help from colleagues and go on with the design process.

Fifth, all students report more distractions at home than in the studio. Several things are mentioned as the most common sources of distraction: the family (Mary), the TV (all students), the ringing telephone (all students), and the "softness of the pillow" (all students). It is not clear whether these are real reasons or, to some extent, a rationalization of an impulse or necessity to "flock" to the studio. My observations and conversational interviews with faculty and older students show that the socializing process in school is much more time consuming. This leads to the sixth point.

Sixth, the opportunities for social interaction and socialization at school are better than at home. The students did not admit this; rather, it came from other sources and the analysis of the interviews. Socializing in the studio is an important function in regards to both professional goals and personality needs. Students feel and understand this and adopt strategies of extended use in the studio.

Seventh, the intensive utilization of the studio for everyday activities is fostered by the need for one's own territory. Architecture students have keys for their studios, they can control the access to their territory, possessions, and information. People develop a sense for place and ownership.
And lastly, after students commit so much effort to studio assignments and spend most of their working time in the studio room, they experience a snowball effect: It is more convenient to keep all books and notes in the studio, so that everything is ready and at hand for their classes. This means that their study week may pass completely at school.

*Catering to everyday activities:*

**The effects of studio confinement**

The nature of architectural work, the psychology of the achiever, and particularly the motivation for achievement lead to an activity strategy that presupposes extensive use of the studio environment. Once students work exclusively in a studio, this decision produces a number of implications. For example, the inconvenience of carrying tons of stuff to school is eliminated. There is no need to rent a larger apartment anymore; a person may prefer a smaller, cheaper room, near school. This saves both time and money. There is no need for a car, parking spaces, parking tickets, and maintenance. Of course, there are trade-offs – the size and quality of your living quarters is traded for proximity to school and lower rent.

*A sense of place: The home base*

When students spend a long day at the studio, they engage in most of the activities that usually are done at
home. This fact makes the studio a special place, a facility that offers opportunities for both work and home activities. The necessity of performing home activities in an institutional environment brings about the exotic appearance of the architectural studio. It also produces a number of problems, both for students and the school administration. Students have to create their own comfort with cheap materials, making use of worn-out and free stuff. The result is an unusual "shanty town" atmosphere. In some ways this astonishing picture becomes a symbol of the architectural studio culture. It reinforces the identity of the studio inhabitants, and the eccentric landscape boosts their egos.

The homelike experience is further reinforced by the shelter function of the studio during the night, and the base support it provides during the day. The studio is the refuge where students study, leave their backpacks, sip cups of coffee before going to lecture classes, or just rest between classes. This is the place where students leave their belongings while running small errands around campus. It is not unusual to see somebody coming from the library with two bags of books, leaving them in the studio, taking off a winter coat, and running to another class. The sense of territory, the base support, the shelter function, and the presence of a group of close-knit friendly people are factors that bring about the emergent sense of the studio as one's own place.
The turf: A socialization ground

A second consequence of around-the-clock studio attendance is the intensive social life in the studio. The reduction of out-of-school social contacts has to be compensated by more intensive networking and interacting in the studio. From a territorial perspective, this is inevitable. One can't escape contacts with people he/she spends all day with bound in a common space. From a time management perspective, it is beneficial to have friends sitting nearby. The studio becomes turf where everybody is hanging around in anticipation of meeting somebody else, gathering the gang, and socializing. It is much easier to organize a social life when all your buddies are around. For example, when students get tired of drafting, they easily and quickly organize a group right in the middle of the night and go for a drink at a nearby bar. Often such spontaneous entertainment helps relax and alleviate the enormous tensions of endless work.

Brothers in arms: The camaraderie

The long hours of work in the studio also presuppose that people have to satisfy their need for belonging and their need for preserving self-esteem. This spurs another phenomenon that otherwise may not have seemed so obvious: the camaraderie. The territorial bond strongly affects the socialization process, the social interaction, and the social structure of the studio. When the informal man-
agement of the studio is successful enough to prevent conflicts, the strong friendships that originate may easily interpenetrate to form a community spirit that makes people feel like an extended family. The differences and distinctions remain; the latent competition and rivalry may not diminish, but the overall atmosphere is relaxing and stimulating: happy faces, low-volume music, and frequent interaction in the “living room” quarters of the studio.

However, a group of fifteen people is too large not to break into several smaller ones. In the long run, the studio society cracks slightly along the line of personal likes and dislikes, and possibly personal interests, to form about three to four primary groups. Many of the students become very close friends by the middle of the semester and their friendship might continue up to graduation and even beyond. Their lives in the studio will become more intensive, and the time they spend in the room will be longer. They obviously satisfy their needs for social support and belonging in this way. So, the territorial bond amplifies the personality predisposition and catalyzes the formation of social bonds.

The interpretative process was based on the belief that the social world was constructed by goal-directed actors possessing a complex psychological frame of mind, the ability to set strategies and purposefully organize their actions, and the diligence to pursue their objectives. The motivation perspective provided understanding about the
forces that shape the studio strategy and behavior patterns, together with the underlying values and subsequent choices. The activity perspective used in this study implied that human activity was the medium that related social actors among themselves and produced the everyday phenomena, and that it also related the everyday life of these actors with the physical environment. The belief that the social phenomena could best be understand and reconstructed from an activity perspective resulted in the formulation of the interpretative concept “work around-the-clock in the studio.” The metaphors of “workshop,” “studio-as-a-home,” and “socializing ground” provided an interpretative background for reconstructing the social dimensions of the studio habitat.