Collaborative Outreach:
The Luxembourg Honors International Studio in Architecture and Urbanism and the *Pedagogy of Engagement*

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I. INTENT, OBJECTIVES AND THEORETICAL FRAME

The *Luxembourg Honors International Studio in Architecture and Urbanism* conducts architectural inquiry in an international setting leading towards new forms of knowledge and design artifacts that enhance student learning and the communities they serve. A *Pedagogy of Engagement* links design investigation, architectural making at multiple scales, and outreach activities to the values of the affected communities. Constructing design practices that critically intersect a specific design situation enables students to interpret and give form to the forces that impact their respective design settings while resisting those that contribute to architecture's global commodification and homogeneity.

Studio design practices are collaborative. They emphasize an engagement characterized by students entering into contest with the situation's forces and values, ideation and materials with the design task in an effort to "bind", or "bring under obligation" each design component within the mix. This type of engagement blurs the traditionally distinct terrains occupied by studio and client, instructor and student, student and student, collaborating partners and community. As the practices of engagement bind each to another and the situation, design acts assume the properties of the situation like an amalgam, leading towards the production of artifacts whose annealed form reveals the maker's hand, as an "organ of knowledge",[1] that shapes and expresses the forces bound within.

Foucault's proposition that architecture "can and does produce positive effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with an authentic practice of people in the exercise of their freedom"[2] affirms the studio's assumption of architecture's role as a social practice and a political act that "operates at the intersection of power, relations of production, culture and representation and is instrumental to the construction of our identities and our differences, to shaping how we know the world."[3] Architecture as envisioned by the studio echoes Hannes Meyer's claim that architecture should give form and pattern to the social life of the community, and that the social context should inform architecture's formal and tectonic character.[4]

II. DESIGN CONTENT AND PROCESS

Since 1993, the *Luxembourg Honors International Studio* has engaged in community outreach in diverse cultural and social contexts. Luxembourg is undergoing dramatic demographic change (Luxembourg's population will double by 2020) and the studio explores the changing landscape of human migration collaboratively with Le Centre de Documentation sur les Migrations Humaines (CDMH) in Luxembourg. Students live and work in Luxembourg with immigrant families or members of the social network that supports the curatorial and social objectives of the documentation center, including artists, journalists, political activists, teachers, social workers, design professionals, and crafts-persons. This working group assists students in their understanding and critique of the design situation while co-developing agendas for design action and community engagement.

Design activity for the CDMH initially included an adaptive conversion of a factory train station into a cultural center with interior and exhibition (Fig. 1) environments. The *Memory Wall* (Fig. 2) and *Reception Area Desk* (Fig. 3) projects resulted from a reciprocal engagement between design forces, ideation, craft practices and the makers. Working with wood and steel at full scale (Fig. 4), the design group (residents, CDMH staff, students, faculty, cabinet maker and machinist) encountered many challenges that had to be mediated materially to express the design situation. Thinking alone, as suggested by Jose Ortega y Gasset,[5] was too easy. The intellectual construction of

each project met resistance in the material. Lightness and transparency, as important democratic design instruments to achieve environmental and social interaction, would at times resist each project's material attributes as they established an opposition to the structural qualities and tectonic articulation of the former train station. Central to CDMH exhibition activities, the *Memory Wall* has introduced ten local and major international exhibitions including *La <<Petite Italie>> au Luxembourg, un patrimoine de rang européen* with photographs exploring migration issues and the vanishing industrial landscapes of southern Luxembourg by Christian Kandzia, Behnisch + Partner Stuttgart. Other Exhibitions *Le "Quartier": Une Patrimoine Social Luxembourgeois, Une Lieu de Memoire pour les Migrations,* stimulated symposia and publication activity exploring transnational identity in collaboration with AEMI (Association of European and Migration Institutions) and the Network of the Museums of Conscience.

Simultaneously, narrative-based advocacy or "agit prop" art installations and small architectural projects were developed as part of a *Museum Without Walls.* Derived from the forces that shaped the situation (e.g. de-industrialization, demographic change, cultural friction, political and social alienation) and occurring on multiple sites within the immigrant quarter "Little Italy", these design interventions assist marginalized populations in finding their voice and raise awareness of buildings and spaces endangered by current speculative development practices. Situated within a domestic urban housing block, the *Passage Project)* includes a changing electroluminescent exhibition panel system (Fig. 5), luminous security panels (Fig. 6), an urban greenhouse, clothes drying and child-tending spaces that support an urban horticulture program initiated by elderly residents and the immigrant school. A hybrid design form linking exhibition issues with architecture, the *École d'Italie Market Space* (Fig. 7) is a market, exhibit and forum for community rituals that occur on the immigrant school playfield.

III. ASSESSING STUDIO OUTCOMES

In an era of globalization, where design practices and methods are characterized by cynbernetics, virtual reality and an experiential distancing between the maker, artifact and design situation, this studio offers students the opportunity to immerse themselves in an international design setting and work intimately with their ideas and hands in collaboration with others whose interests are central to the community and nation. Among the most significant teaching outcomes are the set of design practices students construct when posing the questions: How should we live? How should we build? as they offer alternatives and resistance to the forces that contribute to architecture's global commodification. Within Luxembourg, the studio's advocacy, exhibition, symposium and design activity

received national recognition including the royal patronage of HRH Maria Teresa (Grand Duchess of Luxembourg and Cuban Immigrant) and will be included as part of a National Heritage Circuit by the Service Sites et Monuments Nationaux. Featured in The 1995 European Union Cultural Year Exhibit in Luxembourg, the *Museum Without Walls* project will play a significant role in the future 2007 EU Cultural Year Exhibit. Recognized as a "Place of Memory" or "Lieu de Memoire" by the Cultural Heritage Section of the Council of Europe, the immigrant quarter "Little Italy" and the studio activity focused there will continue to focus the debate on transnational migration patterns and the adaptive reuse of industrial landscapes and neighborhoods, while challenging students to immerse themselves in, and give form to, the forces shaping their world.

NOTES

[1] Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art* (New York: Zone Books, 1989) p. 160. On the hands: "They are the instruments of creation, but even before that they are an organ of knowledge."

[2] Michel Foucault, Cited in Tony Schuman, "Forms of Resistance," in Dutton ed. *Voices in Architectural Education* (New York: Bergin and Garvey) p. 23.

[3] Thomas A. Dutton and Lian Hurst Mann, "Modernism, Postmodernism and Architecture's Social Project," *Reconstructing Architecture: Critical Discourse and Social Practices* Dutton and Hurst Mann eds. (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1996) p.1.

[4] Anthony Ward, "The Suppression of the Social in Design," *Reconstructing Architecture: Critical Discourse and Social Practices* Dutton and Hurst Mann eds. (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1996) p. 33.

[5] Jose Ortega y Gasset, "Man and the Technician," *History as a System* (New York: W.W. Norton, New York 1941) p. 160. On engagement with objects: "Thinking is too easy. The mind in its flight rarely meets with resistance. Hence the vital importance for the intellectual of touching concrete objects and of learning discipline in his intercourse with them."

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