

The Public Studio

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To be is to-be-in-the world. -Heidegger

POSITION + CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS

At some point within an architectural education, the academic experience must engage a larger milieu than the studio. Students should be encouraged to step outside of their personal design process and take a critical public position. Based on wide exposure, broad experiences, and variety of disciplines it is our belief that students who are taught and practice this model of “public-studio” studies, have a stronger understanding of the ever changing economic, political, and cultural situations which are increasingly influential in the processes of architecture and urban design. Situated within the 21st century, where the complexity of issues facing urban society is such that politicians, clients, and community boards are increasingly under prepared in defining priorities for making cities and their architecture, it is essential that young architects and urban designers are able to develop intellectual dexterity and objectivity.

This paper will exhibit the processes and products of two graduate studios that held in common a commitment to the significance of public exchange and the impact of outside forces. The paper will move between two examples, one, the *NOsite | INsite Studio* which collaborated with the Dutch architect, Winy Maas, and the other, the *Burke Lakefront Studio* in collaboration with members of a city planning department and an airport authority. When teaching the studios presented in this paper, we asked ourselves, “At what point will it make sense to break down the enclosed, insular architecture academy and re-knit it foundationally into the public realm in which it is meant to serve?” In response to this inquiry, both studios embraced the notion and attitude of

a new mediation between the academy and the public realm. The aim of this paper was to raise questions rather than give answers, and nurture thought for the development and evolution of tomorrow’s academic model. Based on wide exposure, wide experiences, and variety of disciplines it is our belief that students who are taught and practice this model have a stronger understanding of the ever-changing economic, political, and cultural situations within which they work as well as their role as active social agents.

THE ACADEMY

The CUDC, our Hub, and Catalyst

The *Cleveland Urban Design Center* (CUDC) served as an interface for many of the relevant experiences necessary for the Public Studio. It became quickly evident that such a center becomes the catalyst for a rich diversity of experiences. The Graduate Design studios discussed in this paper looked at various ways to utilize the urban location and resources as beneficial aspects of a graduate curriculum.

Kent State University maintains The Urban Design Center in the heart of downtown Cleveland. This center undertakes a wide range of projects spanning from city master-plans to grant funded research. The Urban Design Center is home to approximately half of the Graduate students from the College of Architecture and Environmental Design at Kent State. These students are exposed to a range of social and urban issues that they would have little reference to had they remained in the “college town” of Kent some 30 miles south of the city. As there is no official university housing for UDC students, many become participatory residents of the urban neighborhoods in and around

downtown Cleveland. This urban academic exposure offered at the CUDC includes the participation in neighborhood and community design charettes and studios that typically focus on local urban issues as opposed to hypothetical conditions in some distant location.

THE CURRICULUM

NOsite | INsite

Students continually hear instructors charging them to explore, experiment, react, respond, and collaborate; this at times can be a daunting task without the awareness of peripheral forces such as culture, society, and community. The work discussed here displays the growth and maturity that takes place when the bar is raised within the studio environment. This is accomplished within the Public Studio curriculum by establishing a foundational importance upon the architectural project's relationship to the public. The public provides a conceptual resistance and friction in the work of the studio that allows individual students to react in ways that go beyond architecture and the built environment. The following examples are from two consecutive studios that acknowledge this importance.

In the example of the graduate studio *NOsite | INsite* that collaborated with Winy Maas of MVRDV, the students were given the opportunity early on to engage in design conversations with Mr. Maas regarding MVRDV's recent commission for the addition to the Cleveland Institute of Art. Student's interaction with this type of architectural alignment allowed a sense of contribution and enthusiasm that extended beyond typical expectations. As a result, questions arose concerning relevancy and 'real' issues concerning the building and its design.

Burke Lakefront

In the *Burke Lakefront Studio*, students were to engage a project that was currently underway in the city of Cleveland as a way of producing alternate scenarios and possibilities that may have been overlooked or not considered by the city and its consultants. The projects were reviewed on several occasions by members of the city planning department and members of the airport authority

in charge of the planning process. The student's projects were completed in groups as a method of engaging a team of thinkers in a collaborative way. The reality of this type of collaboration on large-scale projects, which encompass a range of disciplines and professions, is very familiar to practitioners within the field of Urban Design. Exposure to this method of working was seen as seminal to the success of the studio.

In addition to these primary projects, each studio had smaller scale art focused projects assigned. These projects established a counterpoint to the larger primary projects and employed the forum of the art gallery or art installation location as a means for disseminating the thoughts and discoveries of the students. These projects additionally required the students to collaborate or interact with a number of groups and individuals within the art world including the Colinwood Arts Council and Artist / Professor Frances Whitehead from Chicago.

With the combination of these projects the students experienced exposure to a wide range of personalities, disciplines, organizations, cultures, and methods of production. It is our position that this high level of integration within projects of particular relevance will produce more creative and well-informed students than more dogmatic traditional forms of architectural education. It could be said that the more engaged the students and their projects are within the influences affecting them, the more relevant, and successful they become. This is not suggesting that projects must become overly pragmatic, but instead that they critically engage issues and conditions in a way that seems relevant to the real project. It must however be noted that subversion or even extortion can easily be seen as relevant attitudes toward a real project.

THE METHODS [TOOLS THAT CONNECT]

Clients + Influential Architect

Within the graduate studio *NOsite | INsite*, the influence of Winy Maas, a world-renowned Dutch architect proved to be a positive experience. Winy's work straddles the boundaries of academia, practice, and intellectual pursuits, and this served to be a dynamic and critical element of the studio. Winy Maas is a co-founder of MVRDV, the Office

of Architecture and Urbanism in Rotterdam, and teaches and lectures at various institutions. His work is widely published and many of the graduate students had MVRDV books within their personal libraries.

The addition to the Cleveland Art Institute became the springboard for much of the programming phase. Winy's relationship to the studio and professor as well as the overlap with the professional project in Cleveland allowed for critical conversations about the ramification of an art school and its conceptual presence. Winy took a personal interest in each student's position for many reasons. The most obvious is that these investigations were aligned simultaneously with the work he is doing in Cleveland at the Cleveland Art Institute, an educational institution.

The quality of the projects ranged conceptually, formally and intellectually but all addressed the larger studio question: What and how should an art school function in today's cultural and economic landscape? The overall quality of the studio did not resonate in the singular but rather the collective ideals. The Jury that included the Board Chair of the CIA, Winy Maas MVRDV, and others was given the opportunity to compare the conceptual directions as well as group or cluster similar ideals.

Real Scenarios + Clients

The final project for *the Burke Lakefront Studio* attempted to speak to an ongoing issue facing downtown Cleveland. The Burke Lakefront airport was undergoing a master planning process to explore possibilities ranging from decommis-

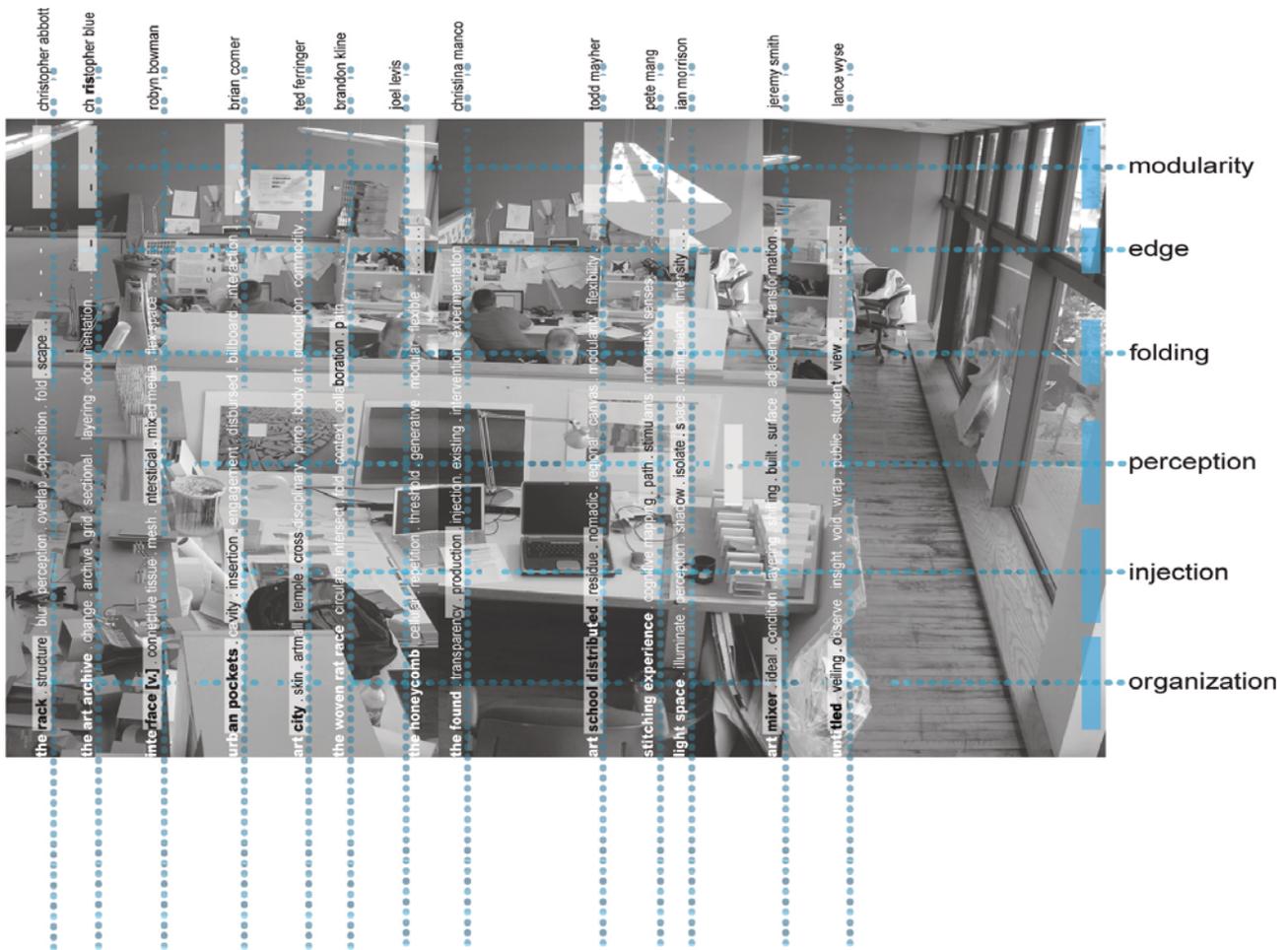


Figure 1: Program Diagram generated by students based on Winy Maas's suggestions

lack of a given site forced the students to consider the program more thoroughly, which was one of Winy's stipulations, much aligned with the Dutch academic model.

The studio presented 13 'ideal' positions and allowed each student the freedom to design a program appropriate to the critical positions put in place. Described within the conceptual diagram, students claimed that the ideals fall into similar categories, such as edge conditions, folding and wrapping, modularity, depth and perception, skin

and veil, and urban injection. Each student was asked to title the project, giving each ideal a unique persona. In Christina Manco's project titled 'The Found', the project fell within the category of urban injection. Her design proposal explored locating the art school within a 'found' structure. The project proposed that the program is a de-institutionalized environment where students are free to be experimental and messy. The program was injected into an existing structure in a way that the spaces would ambiguously flow into one another to support a school in which the various

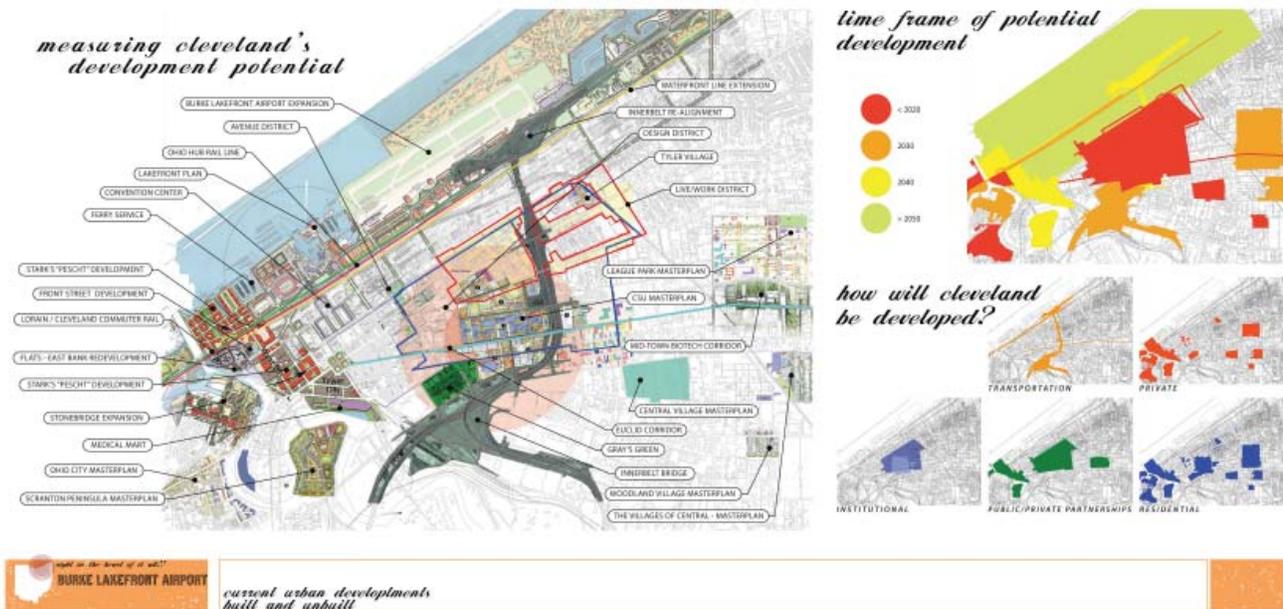


Fig. 3: Transit Hub and Neighborhood Development Plan

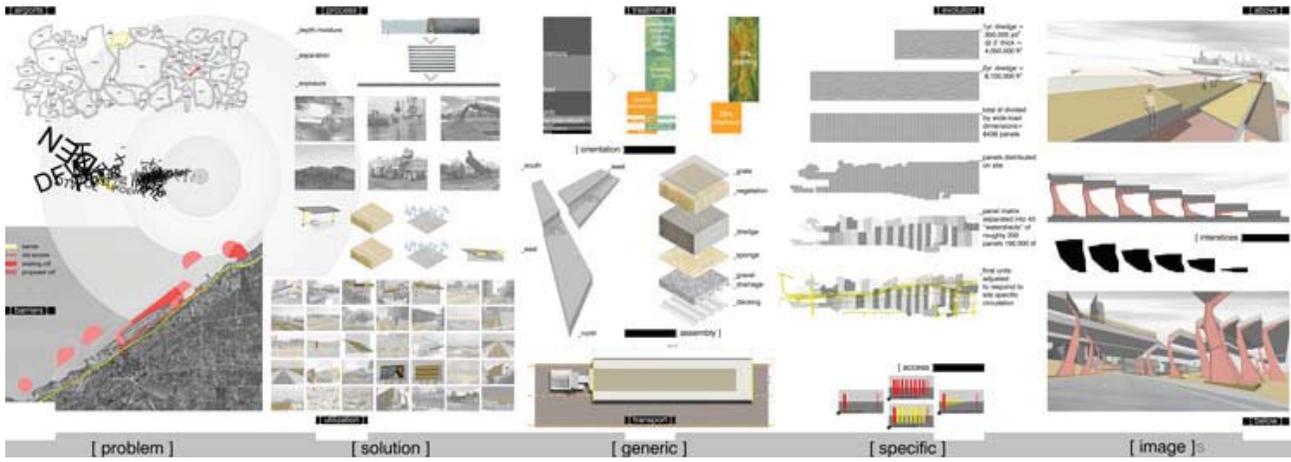


Fig. 4: DredgePan (commodity) Landscape

disciplines strongly interact. A system of vehicular ramping was injected into the found structure in order to service the economy of art production.

Another example of a different strategy is found in a project designed by Ted Ferringer, titled, 'Art CITY'. This project embraced a non-traditional approach to the art school and the art disciplines housed within. For example, this particular school would offer degrees of art in tattoo design, graffiti, auto body design, as well as the traditional degrees such as painting, sculpture, etc. The project mediated situations involving skin, program, and contextual relationships. These relationships are supported throughout the architectural design by the combination of the 'plinth + the Referencing American capitalism as a way to display products and goods the storefront studios and the plinth became a display space for products surrounding students work. The ART CITY acted as an intelligent socially engaged strategy for the ideal art school in the 21st century.

The opportunity to utilize Winy Maas and his expertise not only benefited the school and the community but also contributed to the students heightened experience by addressing issues through the eyes of a prolific architect. Suggestions and critique from Winy Maas directly shaped the students projects.

Burke Lakefront

The *Burke Lakefront Project* operated at the scale determined most beneficial for the individual stu-

dent group. The "urban" project is not one of boundaries, but one of potentials. As students began to tap into these various urban potentials, their projects began to flow far beyond the Burke site and engage the latent possibilities in other areas of the city.

In the first example, the project group tackled the daunting task of reconciling the transit

infrastructure converging on the site by including the design of a large multi-modal transit station adjacent to the airport site. As the airport site and its associated waterfront are significantly cut off from the rest of the city by this very transit infrastructure, this project could efficiently deal with both increasing the transit options in this potential new development site while providing new connections between the city and its waterfront. The project itself was informed by the group's many discussions with the Cleveland City Planning Dept, and paid close attention to the large number of proposed projects included in Cleveland's current Lakefront Plan. The final product was creative in many ways while remaining a project of well-informed decision making.

The next example was of a different nature. Much of the airport site is surrounded by confined disposal facilities used to hold dredge material removed from the river shipping channel. These facilities fill up quickly and new ones must be created to accommodate new material. This project looked to create a system of recycling to produce a unit



Fig. 5: Art Installations. Left: Spaces Art Gallery, Right: Collinwood Arts Festival

of commodity from this large volume of dredge material. The material would be removed from the barge and placed into large pans that would cover the entire lakefront. These pans would allow the dredge to drain itself of water and utilize phytoremediation to clean the soil within them. These panels could then be re-used throughout the city and the region in a wide range of applications from green roofs to bank stabilizers.

Although this project could be seen as ridiculous if evaluated pragmatically, it remained true to the studio by engaging a real issue taking place on the site and working with it in a creative way without the use of the hollow metaphors and clichés typical of many graduate studio projects.

Art Installations

Installations by architects and architecture students have been a critical and intellectual force within current academic and professional practices. The Waterloo Art Festival, located in Collinwood community accepted a proposal for art installations from the Graduate students and the studio worked in teams of 4. It seemed appropriate to insert an art installation as a pedagogical experiment to further investigate the relationships amongst art and architecture. The installation titled 'Leaving your footprint on Collinwood' was one example that examined social interaction and reaction by architecturally constructing thoughts and devices that demanded observations by the inhabitant seen within the installation. The site of the installation was a tight path slipped between two buildings acting as a threshold between private and public. The piece actively marked the foot steps of a person by using chalk and tarpaper. The tarpaper markings were intended to be displayed within the adjacent gallery as 'moments in time' after the installation was concluded. In many ways these installations could classify themselves as temporary public art as they reached out and embraced the street and engaged storefronts and alleys. These public art installations will be included in a publication in collaboration with Winy Maas, of MVRDV.

The art gallery is also a site for public discourse and display of the student work. As a way of addressing a current issue within the city, the students worked with Frances Whitehead as an advisor to produce a series of projects for the towpath

trail extension currently underway. The products of the project included the documentation of illegal site visits, a full scale production of site markers indicating the discrepancy between the historic trail location and that of the new trail, and large hypothetical diagrams expressing the development possibilities along the trail.

Selected works produced for this project were shown in Cleveland's Spaces Gallery in conjunction with the Shrinking Cities exposition from Germany and a piece titled *Superorg*, by Frances Whitehead. This project allowed students to show their work at a highly publicized event that spoke to a series of important urban issues within the region. The nature of the subject matter was enough to alter the observing public demographic from simply art enthusiasts to a range of citizens from many fields and age groups. This was seen as advantageous for both the students and the gallery as the exposure for both increased significantly.

Tools That Evaluate | Teaching Methodology

Burke Lakefront

The ability to evaluate the success the *Burke Lakefront Studio* is significantly different than a typical design studio in that the positive affects desired take a long period of time to become apparent. For example, many of the ideas presented by the students were taken seriously by policy makers and will likely be considered as the project moves forward. The work however may not be acknowledged for the production of the ideas, but this loss of ownership is a valuable aspect of the project as it is the only way a true integration can occur. Projects are not singular voices but become the collective enunciations of many participants.

Another example of evaluation surrounding the studio resulted in one of the participating students being asked to work for the city, to aid in the development of a new plan for the lakefront around the airport, thus indicating their interest and value in the student's work.

NOsite | INsite

The quality and amount of work produced within a short time between mid-term and pre-final review is a testament to the value of an established ar-

chitect's involvement. Students were challenged to quickly react and develop a project, presenting the progress in a cohesive and thoughtful way.

During the mid-term and final review the emphasis of critique and commentary from Winy Maas engaged the future publication of the studio results. The suggestions were framed within the notion that each project would be bound together, offering a full range of design solutions. Specific direction included naming the project, creating programmatic diagrams, historical precedents, and a research component describing 'places and spaces that are conducive to making art.' The studio as a whole found this type of constructive feedback from Winy Maas to be extremely helpful and ultimately gave them the confidence to move forward confidently and passionately. The product examining and presenting this evidence is a publication that the students, studio professor, and Winy Maas will contribute to. This connection with a public audience can easily be lost or overlooked within the academy.

Students respond to the historical research by writing this:

"Throughout the years, design schools have been founded based on evolving pedagogies and critical stances on techniques. One of the pioneers in design schools was the Glasgow School of Art in Glasgow, Scotland. Still a functioning art school today, the Glasgow School of Art was founded as the United Kingdom's government school for design. Renowned for the 1909 building by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the school trains students in the advancement of fine arts, design, and architecture. Following the Glasgow School of Art is Walter Gropius's Bauhaus, founded in 1919. The Bauhaus pioneered a functional, severely simple architectural style, featuring the elimination of surface decoration and the extensive use of glass. After the disbandment of the Bauhaus, the Hochschule Fur Gestaltung was founded twenty years later in Ulm, Germany. Created by Max Bill, a Swiss artist and designer, the Hochschule was intended to focus on the redirection of society and the influence of theory in design."¹

In addition to Winy's comments other jurors such as Pete VanDyke, CIA Board Chair, Faculty from the University of Toronto and Faculty and Dean

from Kent State University were invited to write an essay to be included in the publication. The publication is scheduled for the fall of 2008 and will function as a record of the studio as well as a means of evaluating these types of relevant academic models.

"I like to think of landscape not as a fixed place, but as a path that is unwinding before my eyes, under my feet. To see and know a place is a contemplative act. It means emptying our minds and letting what is there, in all its multiplicity and endless variety, come in."²

"When typecast in its customary tragicomic roles, the discipline [of architecture] often reinforces the boundaries of its own world – its own autonomy as an art form within which to write monologues that preserve its integrity."³

CONCLUSION

In the end, the examples presented within the Burke Lakefront Studio and the NOsite | INsite Studio responds directly to an outside force, this force being a relevant voice of a community official or that of a world renowned architect. What we found is that when a student is faced with the reality of these outside forces the work produced within the studio not only has an outpouring of thought provoking design solutions that are rooted in the spirit of relevance and thoughtfulness, but also offers the student an unexpected reputation for contributing to something real. We propose the "The Public Studio."

SYNOPSIS

Guideline and strategy generated post-studio to support other Faculty and Academic Institutions interested in this teaching model:

Convictions that may generate an attitude toward the "Public Studio"

Towards a new mediation between the academy and practice

- Create dialogue, mediate between the philosophical and the actual, between people and architecture

-Manage the disappearance and reappearance of our academic pedagogical models, use precedents, and broad examples

-Manage the physical changes in relationships to students, faculty, and public groups

Towards an integration of the physical, intellectual and global studio

-Create situations for exchange; mediate relationships amongst prolific architects and designers.

-Manage the physical and economic changes of your city and facilitate dialogue amongst students and city officials.

-Manage studio critiques within the project to involve clients who have invested interest in the feasibility and accessibility of the project

For a human and cultural approach to "Public Studio"

- Integrate, preserve, and respect the various cultures that make up the global landscape.

-Stimulate communities by exhibiting work and public displays at local galleries and art festivals

For an ecosystem approach to the academic environment

-Cultivate and harmonize urban and rural landscape by collaborating with practitioners on 'real' projects. Give particular attention to the CITY.

For a realistic and relevant future for future architects and urban designers

-Integration of relevant forces that create a direct response from the academy to the public

-Design globally, expose cultural and economic diversity, rather than subdue

-Diversity of participants

ENDNOTES

1. Kent State Masters Student, Text for inclusion for Publication, 2007

2. Gretel Ehrlich, "Landscape," introduction to Legacy of Light, as quoted from Prairyerth by William Least Heat Moon.

3. Keller Easterling, Enduring Innocence: Global Architecture and its political Masquerades. MIT Press, Cambridge. 2005

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