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Projective Futures

Projective Futures is a heavy-laden topic, considering the burden of the unforeseeable future and the resultant architectural design. The jury I sat in on included projects from Diploma Units 6, 9, and 17, as well as the Landscape Urbanism MA program all exploring this central theme. Projects differed in scope and scale, but all were reflective of projective futures – unknown cities within the context of imaginary worlds, some more “real” than others, all dealing with speculation, projection and prospective relationships between the local city and the global world. The projects exhibited were constructed by use of a narrative, as a general thread in which to tie the realities of the present to the fantasy of the unknown/future. Exploring various themes such as authenticity and value in terms of original versus copy, the role of history, in terms of a framework for design through existing forms and processes as well as the creation of an architectural canon, and the general theme of process versus agenda were all discussed in relation to the topic of projective futures – both real and imaginary. However, while some units focused more explicitly on the idea of narrative than others, all projects were arguably developed by use of one.

For Diploma Unit 17, journalism was the starting point for the projects. Beginning the design process with raw data and facts, such as charting or graphing growth patterns/morphologies in African villages or different types of icebergs in the Arctic, the students were able to manipulate their findings into various formations that produced the resultant design of their projects. Focusing on a larger global scale, these projects delved into larger issue such as agrarian urbanism and global warming, using the local as a point of departure.

While, Diploma 17 focused more on concrete realities from which to obtain their designs of their so-called futures, Diploma Unit 6 blurred the boundaries between fantasy and fiction. This theme was carried throughout the presentations by use of strong imagery of the Australian landscape, as well as captivating presentations involving a strong literary element; these projects explore the friction between the real and unreal world from the local to the more global scale. It was here that student’s were able to begin to explore the relationship between the natural and the artificial (technological) landscape in terms of natural and cultural production.

The Landscape Urbanism program used a similar technique of charting and mapping existing ecological structures and relationships in Zhenhai Ningbo, China. Exploring the possibility of ecology generating a new understanding of the territory, the students used indexes and diagrams to understand the current site in order to go forward and make informed interventions in the landscape that will subsequently help plot and predict a possible future for the city of Zhenhai Ningbo. For them, the process of drawing and mapping the current site demonstrated the

increasingly global and networked world we belong to and the ever-changing role of architecture within this context.

Diploma Unit 9 dealt with a more literal type of narrative – the narrative of constructing the architectural canon as well as the narration of storytelling (by means of creating their own manifestos by which to produce work). Starting with twentieth century iconic works of architecture, such as Mies van der Rohe's IIT campus, Chicago, and The Eames House, Los Angeles, the unit constructed realities from fictional narrative based on the historicity of the project. Producing their own manifesto to accompany the project, the narrative took on a life of its own, emerging from the real events but verging on the unreal in terms of narration and individual agenda. For example, Mies' IIT campus played with the notion of real/copy in terms of the original and replica buildings, while the Eames House functioned as a cultural object – a container for living/living archive of representation. Through the process of narrative, by extracting historical facts and intertwining them with unreal or imaginary ones, the students are able to direct a new discourse within the context of the traditional architectural canon.

As with a projection – a construction itself in some sense of the term – the narrative was explored in relation to the real and unreal conditions as well as the projective futures of the site and cities. In creating a narrative, a story in which to explore ideas, one must question the role of the author (in this case, the architect/student) in shaping the larger architectural discourse. In terms of desired outcomes, the author must position him/herself in accordance to the work already produced (history/canon) and the trajectory of the architectural project. In doing so, the question of audience comes into play, and this is crucial to understanding the desired outcomes for subsequent projects. While these projects are all “architectural” in one sense of the term or another, they are not typical projects therefore they shouldn't use traditional architectural representation, such as plans, sections, and elevations, to convey their ideas to the public, but be understood in terms of spatial praxis and the interaction between person, place, and environment – all questions relevant in the search for an architecture of the future.