

Environments, Ecologies & Sustainability Research Cluster

2006/07

Organised by Werner Gaiser and Steve Hardy

The AA and the Environments, Ecology and Sustainability Research Cluster together with supporting organisations sponsored an open one-stage international competition in search of innovative ideas, design projects, new techniques and research initiatives that highlight insights into contemporary directions of architecture and design relative to environments, ecology and sustainability.

Within a period where environmental and sustainable issues seemed to address most projects, the competition aimed to locate projects that explored potentials and redefined common parameters within design. The organizers' goal was therefore to exhibit and publish relevant and important new projects as well as to help visualise and comprehend current strands of investigation within this realm critically reassess and redefine a series of issues related to it.

See [EES competitions](#)

AA|FAB AWARDS 2009 Designing Fabrication

2007/09

Curated by Alan Dempsey, Theo Sarantoglou Lalis and Yusuke Obuchi

The AA|FAB Cluster was a two-year research programme intended to act as an agency to foster interdisciplinary exchange and collaboration between members of the school community and outside participants who shared a common interest in the emerging application of digital design and fabrication technologies

In July 2008, AA|FAB launched a competition open to all full time AA students and staff members. The Cluster curators were interested in receiving proposals that explored the relationship between current manufacturing technology and computational or systematic design techniques as a means of producing design innovation and questioning the traditional role of the architect in design and procurement processes. The selected projects explored design strategies that took advantage of contemporary fabrication technologies and demonstrate coherence between formal expression and their logics of materialisation and assembly. The competition organised around three generic sites - Room, Building, and City – addressed themes including different scales: from new furnishing typologies, to issue related to the external envelope of a building to the design of infrastructural systems within a city.

In 2009 an exhibition, curated by Alan Dempsey and Kristine Mun, presented the research work supported by the cluster over the last two years. Eight award-winning projects are presented through drawings, images, models and full scale prototypes. A further 24 built projects from around the world submitted to the Awards programme places this work in a wider context of contemporary architectural innovation.

See <http://67.15.245.8/~aafab/>

<http://villageunderground.co.uk/events/aa-fab>

The Architecture of Innovation

2007

Curated by Lawrence Barth, Dominic Papa

The cluster hosted a number of discussions aimed at building the school's participation in the wider network of research and policy development in London. In order to do that a number of speakers were invited from universities like the London school of economics and the university of Manchester, together with key professionals from foundations, governmental units and architectural practices.

The aim was to frame an arena for discussion and research that would have encouraged both students and tutors to engage with the strategic transformations taking place in the city. An engagement meant give rise to fresh developments in the field of architecture itself.

'The fields of urban studies, economics, business and sociology describe the rich interplay of economic and technological forces that are driving the proliferation of new businesses and networks emerging in 'knowledge cities'. Remarkably, however, their ability to see, describe, and analyse cities is minimal, and their ability to generate meaningful propositions regarding urban development strategies is virtually non-existent.

The cluster will begin by supporting and developing lines of investigation. One of these we could call the urbanisation of regional infrastructure. The city-regions of the knowledge economy are highly dependent upon systems of integration, transportation and communication. our own city faces massive challenges in updating its transportation network and effectively integrating the region. We could also look at particular challenges at the interface of urbanism and infrastructure.

A second sub-theme will focus on what is increasingly being called social innovation – that search for fresh approaches to the challenges of health, education and social inclusion. one of the central problems of the innovation economy is the way in which it continually threatens to marginalise vulnerable or displaced communities.

A third example of architecture's role in the innovation economy can be seen in the transformation of workspace.

How do we provide space for growing industries at the same time as we pursue the intensification of urban environments as the milieu for business innovation?'

See <http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/Downloads/AArchitecture/AArchitecture05.pdf>.

New Media and Info System Research

2005/07

Curated by Joel Newman, Theo Spyropoulos and Vasilis Stroumpakos

The aim of the new media and information systems cluster was to open the school to larger audience. Through a series of talks, perfz and student led exhibitions the cluster tried to bring an external community of artists, programmers and institutions in touch with the AA students and faculty.

The invited guests ranged from Stelarc to Dextro and included institutions such as Ars Electronica's Future Lab, United Visual Artists with Matt Clark (art director) and Ash Nehru (software director), and Lina Dzuverovic of Electra Productions with artist Emma Hedditch.

Her Noise was an exhibition that took place at South London Gallery in 2005 with satellite events at Tate Modern and the Goethe-Institut, London. Her Noise gathered international artists who use sound to investigate social relations, inspire action or uncover hidden soundscapes. The exhibition included new works by Kim Gordon and Jutter Koether, Hayley Newman, Kaffe Matthews, Christina Kubisch, Emma Hedditch and Marina Rosenfeld.

A parallel ambition of the project was to investigate music and sound histories in relation to gender, and the curators set out to create a lasting resource in this area through establishing an archive.

See <http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/newmedia/>

Alternative Practices and Research initiative Cluster

Curated by Andreas Lang and Susanna Gonzalez

Alternative Practices & Research Initiatives touches upon modes of studying, teaching and working in architecture.

Exploring a series of possibilities of looking at alternative models linking education to practice over the course of the 5-year period.

This research cluster tried to expose such alternative routes for an architectural education and practice and synergies between them by providing a platform to engage staff, students, graduates and external colleagues in a dialogue to examine possibilities and identify alternatives. In order to look outwards at existing models being explored in other institutions, practices, or in other areas, and building on internal interests and potentials, the cluster promoted a series of events (such as Residencies, Live projects / school-based project and consultancy work, Multi-disciplinary networks and collectives, academic and practice-based research, year-out alternatives and web-based 'showcase') meant to provide the groundwork to develop a set of initiatives to be put back to the school and to share experiences of alternative practices and research initiatives by members of the AA community.

See <http://issuu.com/aaschool/docs/aarchitecture01>

AUSP Research Cluster: Architectural Urbanism, Social and Political Space

2005/06

Curated by Katharina Borsi, Shumon Basar

Roving Editors: Eleni Axioti, Tal Bar, Marc Britz, Ana Rute Fascia, Christina Papadimitriou, Christian Parregno, Telemachos Telemachou, Kirk Wooller

The AUSP cluster has taken upon itself to highlight the topic of how engagement with the city operates at certain scales, and vice versa. It drew a simple line that started with what is happening inside the School to what is happening outside in the so-called 'real world'. Hoping that by profiling, in a discursive and descriptive way, the connections and differences shared by staff, students and external sources, the horizon of criticality on the future of city-studies could develop more productively.

Two open sessions explored a salient point of discussion triggered by the AA Open Jury: what are the relationships between Scale and Engagement in dealing with the contemporary city?

This Research Cluster proposed to open and scrutinise the discussion across urban scales. By juxtaposing positions and approaches that exist at the AA, the aim was not so much to emphasise distinct, territorial positions, but to collectively compare the myriad ways in which the school thinks through the problem of the city.

The Sessions involve short presentations from tutors and students followed by a convivial discussion/debate, chaired by the Cluster Curators Shumon Basar and Katharina Borsi, and guests. Both sessions and their resulting conversations were documented in a book, together with additional essays by the cluster's roving editors.

A first two discussion forums, held in the spring of 2006, on the theme of Scales and/of Engagement brought together units and programmes from the Intermediate School, the Diploma School and the Graduate School of the AA to provoke urban questions that aim to go beyond the particularities and specialities of individual pedagogies. The event resulted in a first publication titled *A Document of Scales and/of Engagement*.

In 2006 *Cities from Zero*: a one-day symposium took place, which highlighted the strategies, politics, iconographies and fantasies behind the phenomena of instant city building taking place in the Middle and Far East. The content of this symposium was transformed into the second Cluster publication, published in 2007.
See www.aaschool.ac.uk/Downloads/Architecture/Architecture02.pdf