Diploma Unit 2_2014-15

THE NEW DOMESTIC LANDSCAPE
Currently in its fourth cycle, Diploma 2 will continue to investigate the idea of physical and incorporeal autonomy in architecture through the use of fiction as an analytical framework. The basis for our preoccupations stems from observing already existing conditions or phenomena where self-containment is ‘creeping’ into social and organizational structures.

Instances like Googleplex in California (the whole complex consisting of a five acre park, open spaces with water features, shallow pools, fountains, pathways and plazas, a gym, free laundry rooms, two small swimming pools, multiple sand volleyball courts and eighteen cafeterias with diverse menus among the office spaces for use by the company’s employees) among many others, suggest that in our increasingly globalized times where communications, transportation, trading and technology are characterized by an ever expanding global outreach, there is a parallel tendency of the physical settings of corporations and cultural and educational institutions among others to become increasingly and physically self-contained and insular. As a result, the character and nature of the domestic space as a private domain separated off from the public has given way to a novel reconfiguring of this traditional separation. No longer are the two concepts segregated but through careful corporate strategies are merged into a spatial and temporal continuum, transforming the short-time movement born back in the Industrial Revolution into a consolidated 24-hour live-work-play shuffle.

In addition, although isolated to a large extent from their wider physical context corporations like Google are at the same time highly connected to a much wider global context on a disembodied level. Another example, the Square Mile, England’s “smallest ceremonial county”, although physically located at the centre of London has its own boundaries, governance, territorial police force, tax system and even a dedicated airport, characterized hence as a state within a state. It is through this partial disconnection that the City of London can become operational as an entity, highlighting even further the thematic that will be our research subject for the year.

We will start term 1 by defining what constitutes independence, autonomy and domesticity through extensive analysis and research into case studies selected by the students individually. Isolated desert communities, high rise mixed-use developments, corporate campuses, ancient city-states, virtually connected social groups and any other forms of social, spatial or political structures that deliberately or not manage to elude formal control. Through a range of examples -such as Freetown Christiania in
Copenhagen, the self-declared republic of Užupis in Vilnius, Ladonia in southern Sweden, Kowloon in Hong Kong or as was the case with some of the student projects from last year, the urban villages in Shenzhen, the Permanent Control Zone imposed around the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, the International Space Station and China Miéville’s novel “The City & the City” among others- the aim will be to rigorously and systematically analyse the hidden processes and potential loopholes that allow for autonomy to develop and become established. In addition, as a further focus the goal will be to research on the effects that the insular condition of autonomy has on the notion of domesticity. In the aforementioned examples, by virtue of its location the International Space Station housed researchers and scientists that adapted their domestic habits to conditions of zero gravity and the extremities of a sunrise and sunset taking place approximately every 90 minutes throughout the course of a conventional 24-hour day. A few years after the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl that took place back in 1986, some of the elderly inhabitants of the surrounding area decided to settle back into the exclusion zone surrounding the plant, longing to continue their life in their ancestral homes. This absurdity of elderly people going about their daily activities within a fenced off landscape, its air, water and soil contaminated by radioactive and toxic waste materials, highlighted in this case even further the significance of the domestic settings to one’s everyday existence.

In parallel to these two concepts that we are going to be analysing, there will be a selection of a relating fiction or writing that will link to the precedent study and which will also be examined in terms of its structure, addressing of key issues, and development of subject matter. The synthesis of the above will allow for the design of an artefact piece based on the previous analysis that utilizes some of the extracted themes in a creative manner. The main objective of these initial two projects taking place in term 1 will be to identify a problematic and define a specific theme that will subsequently form the basis of the building project for the rest of the year.

[ UNIT TRIP ]

01-08.12.2014

This year’s unit trip will be to Cuba, a country that is on the verge of undergoing radical political, financial and demographic transformations. Although decades old prohibitions on traveling abroad and migration have started to become more relaxed in recent years, the country is at same time still severely restricted from conducting any trading or any form of financial transactions, as well as having any commercial transportation links with the US. Within this climate of insularity, however, the two countries share common land borders, as well as very large ethnic groups that have migrated to the opposing territory. The nature of Cuba’s historical autonomy, has therefore become much more interdependent and complex, while it is expected to acquire an altogether different character its economy slowly opens up to the world.

In terms of its internal affairs, and because of its relatively unique state-controlled economic status, the country has achieved the tenth highest literacy rate in the world and third life expectancy rate in the Americas, while also maintaining one of the lowest ecological footprints globally. It is within this framework of complex external relations and heightened urban and social conditions that we will seek to address ideas of autonomy and domesticity. The aim will be to uncover hidden tendencies or areas of opportunity and nest our partially or fully self-governed proposals within their already autonomous context.
What will be questioned is the nature of the fading self-governance of this island nation, as well as its role, characteristics and significance in allowing for the preservation of the existing living patterns and part of the political and social structures that have led to the formation of these patterns. Will the logical course of things drive our proposals towards a process of an augmented internalization of context and people or will they become insular fortresses of a capitalist service economy? What does this unique architectural and philosophical condition of self-governance mean in a contemporary setting?

[TECHNICAL STUDIES]

The unit allows for an open brief approach in terms of the 5th year technical studies. Some of the award winning technical studies projects from Diploma 2 in the past years have ranged from research on drones and data storage, transfer and encryption, to responsive climatic and light quality control mechanisms and from timber gridshell structures to energy harvesting systems for offshore corporate IT platforms. The technical studies brief set-out therefore, vary greatly and are individually customised to allow for each thesis to be intrinsically linked to the design proposal. The studies start off concurrently with the launch of the building project towards the end of term 1 and are intensively tutored through precedent theses presentations, seminars, consultations with engineers and internal technical studies pin-ups and reviews.

[FICTION]

Fiction

n.

1. (Literary & Literary Critical Terms) literary works invented by the imagination, such as novels or short stories.
2. an invented story or explanation; lie.
3. the act of inventing a story or explanation.
4. (Law) Law something assumed to be true for the sake of convenience, though probably false.
[from Latin fictiō a fashioning, hence something imaginary, from fingere to shape]

fictional adj
fictionally adv
fictioneer, fictionist n

Having been an attractive subject matter, autonomy has historically been used in fiction and writing as a means of speculating on ideal states, private utopias, political and social systems that eschew formal control, or even dystopic environments where human instincts and psychological aspects are stretched to their limitations. JG Ballard’s ‘High Rise’ where programme and typology latently promote an extreme insularity of the tower and its inhabitants, progressively ends up in a dystopia of mayhem, where people unconsciously revert to an extreme primal behaviourism that is complimented by its containing degenerated high-tech architecture. Neal Stephenson’s ‘Snow Crash’ is another example of the sovereign state model gone wrong, where the ensuing city states are turned into franchises, selling lifestyles as a commodity. Hakim Bey in his book ‘T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism’ uses historical and philosophical examples in order to analyse and “describe the socio-political tactic of creating temporary spaces that elude formal structures of control”.

Drawing from the Diploma 2 work of previous years, the use of fiction will be targeted at a specific point in the year when our building proposals are already underway. Forming a sort of singularity in the development of the individual projects, fiction at that instance will be a tipping point where the formulated designs acquire a speculative and subversive dimension becoming therefore animated and moving
away from mere representation. How will our designs change over time, will they cause confrontations, temporary internal chaos, attract unnecessary attention or unwanted inhabitation?

In time, the potential subversive unravelling of our proposals will result in fictional scenarios that form the basis of an architecture that goes beyond mere representation and that ultimately makes dynamic what is otherwise conventionally static.

[ YEAR SCHEDULE ]

TERM 01- Key Dates

Weeks 1-6 (29th September- 4th November)
*Research and analysis of the concepts of autonomy and domesticity through existing, historical or fictional case studies.*

• **Friday 3rd** October- Undergraduate Complementary Studies Introduction & Presentation of Selected Case Studies from Last Year & Presentation of Past Dip 2 Portfolios (TBC)
• **Tuesday 7th** October- Group Tutorial of Individual Case Studies (Research & Initial Drawings)
  • **Friday 10th** October- Individual Tutorials
  • **Tuesday 14th** October- Pin-up/Review
  • **Friday 17th** October- Individual Tutorials
• **Tuesday 4th** November- Final Case Study Presentation/Artefact Brief Launch

Weeks 6-9 (5th November- 25th November)
*Design of an artefact piece used to critically explore the ideas observed and analysed in the case study.*

• **Friday 7th** November- UNDERGRADUATE OPEN JURY/UNDERGRADUATE OPEN DAY- Individual Tutorials
  • **Tuesday 11th** November- Midterm Review
  • **Wednesday 12th** November- 5th Year TS meeting (TBC)
• **Thursday 13th** November- Technical Studies 4th Year Introductions/Registration
  • **Friday 14th** November- Individual Tutorials
  • **Tuesday 18th** November- Individual Tutorials
  • **Friday 21st** November- Individual Tutorials
• **Tuesday 25th** November- Final Artefact Presentation/Building Brief Launch

Weeks 9-12 (26th November- 19th December)
*Building projects commence*

• **Monday 1st** December- Monday 8th December- Unit Trip to Cuba (TBC)
• **Friday 12th** December- Term 1 Undergraduate Submission Hand-In & 5th Year TS meeting (TBC)
• **Tuesday 16th** December- End of Term Jury (Individual Building Briefs, Building Sites, Concept Designs)

TERM 02- Key Dates

Weeks 1-11 (12th January- 27th March)
*Building projects continue*

Individual Tutorials to be held on Tuesdays and Fridays

• **Monday 12th** January- Friday 16th January- Complementary Studies commence
- Tuesday 13th January- Pin-up
- Tuesday 27th January- Pin-up
- Friday 23rd January- UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOL OPEN DAY (PM)
- Friday 30th January- Precedent Technical Studies Projects Presentation (TBC)
- Tuesday 10th February- Midterm Review
- Tuesday 17th February- Technical Studies Pin-up (printed work-in-progress TS reports)
- Tuesday 24th February- Pin-up
- Friday 13th March- 5th Year TS Interim Jury (TBC)
- Monday 16th- Tuesday 17th March- 4th Year Previews
- Wednesday 18th March- 5th Year TS Meeting
- Monday 23rd March- Term 2 Undergraduate Submission Hand-In: 4th Year
- Wednesday 25th- Thursday 26th March- 5th Year Diploma Previews

EASTER BREAK- Weekly individual tutorials

TERM 03- Key Dates

Weeks 1-9 (27th April- 26th June)

Building projects completed

- Monday 27th April- TS5 Final Submission
- Tuesday 5th May- Review (Building Projects Completed- Final Drawings, Physical Models, Fiction/ Narrative of Building Evolution Scenarios)
- Thursday 7th May- TS5 High Pass Panel
- Tuesday 12th May- Diploma 2 End of Year Review
- Tuesday 9th- Wednesday 10th June- 4th Year End of Year Reviews
- Wednesday 17th June- Thursday 18th June- Diploma Committee
- Friday 19th June- Diploma Honours Presentations
- Wednesday 24th June- External Examiners (ARB/RIBA Part 2)
- Friday 26th June- End of Year Exhibition

[ INDICATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY ]

Adbusters: Journal of the Mental Environment.


