

Studio Brief

**SPRING 2018 NAHYUN HWANG STUDIO**

# KNOWLEDGE CITY

## Knowledge and the City

In 1966, through an unsolicited proposal of “Potteries Thinkbelt,” Cedric Price envisioned a transformation of a town-region of North Staffordshire in England, in which its functional territory was no longer defined by medieval town centers, an ideal grid, or other familiar administrative edifices. Instead, his plan appropriated the existing infrastructural network to produce a new framework for the city - education. Although unrealized, the project remains an important moment when knowledge production and its spatial mechanisms were proposed as the main drivers for the definition and transformation of the city. The new relationship between the ideals of the city (education) and the operations of the city (infrastructure, mobility, industry, technology, housing etc.), between the aspirations of the city and its environment, were articulated through the city-scale framework of “anticipatory architecture”<sup>1</sup> and the participation of the newly defined student body, the new citizens. Education was a “generator of urban location and form.”<sup>2</sup>

Working with the program of the public school shared year-wide this semester and acknowledging both precarity<sup>3</sup> and possibilities in knowledge in the context of a knowledge economy, the studio, a part of the on-going research and studio series “Knowledge City,” participates in the continuing discourse on the relationship between the architecture of education and the city. Exploring the possibility of a novel typology of “public campus,”<sup>4</sup> the investigation aims to challenge the familiar formats of knowledge production and their spaces in the context of contemporary cities while utilizing the potentials in the typology of schools, to generate new configurations for the collective of the city.

As a genre of architecture, educational environments have been one of the most instrumental experimental platforms to instigate new organizations and forms of collectivity as well as new values and ideologies. The Groundscraper of Berlin Free University prompted the architecture of “Opera Aperta” attempted by Team 10 and others, and Ant Farm’s inflatable “Clean Air Pod” that declared “air failure” at the 1970 U.C. Berkeley campus pushed forward the typology of tactical inflatables, soft yet subverting. Challenging institutional and typological conventions in different ways, Herman Hertzberger’s Montessori buildings explored configurations of ideal collectivity within the framework of “School as City,” while Aldo Van Eyck’s playgrounds across post World War II Amsterdam spatialized the notion of learning dissociated from conventional institutional enclosures, through the non-hierarchical, distributed design that asserted the idea of the city and education open to and re-imaginable by anyone. The Open Air School movement at the beginning of the 20th century, Neutra’s indoor-outdoor campuses, and the contemporary Edible Schoolyard Movement challenge the assumed boundary of the type and suggest its provocative permutations while articulating renewed ideals of the individual’s place in both socio-political and natural milieu. Through the

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<sup>1</sup> Isabel Allen, ‘Anticipatory architecture: Cedric Price’, *Architects’ Journal*, vol.204 no.8 September 5, 1996, pp.20-21,24-25, 27-41

<sup>2</sup> Cedric Price and Paul Barker, ‘The Potteries Thinkbelt’, *New Society*, 2 June 1966, pp.14-17.

<sup>3</sup> See the notion of precarity in the context of contemporary “Edufactory” and neoliberal knowledge economy in Aureli, Pier Vittorio. 2011. ‘Labor and Architecture: Revisiting Cedric Price’s Potteries Thinkbelt’. Log, No. 23. Anyone Corporation: 97–118.

<sup>4</sup> The contemporary term “campus” originates from Latin *campus* “a field,” as well as English *camp* which is closer to the actual spatial and operational structures of contemporary institutional campuses. See also Easterling and Agamben’s reading of camp and campus.

Studio Brief

**SPRING 2018 NAHYUN HWANG STUDIO**

# KNOWLEDGE CITY

examination of the historical and current models, manifestos, and criticisms on educational institutions and their architecture and the experimentation for original positions and strategies, the work of the studio pursues the architecture of knowledge that articulates and prompts the ideal future urbanisms of the city.

## **(Counter-) Environment, (Counter-) Education**

In a series of symposiums and discussions at MoMA in 1972 titled "The Universitas Project," Emilio Ambasz and the multidisciplinary participants including Manuel Castells, Umberto Eco, Jean Baudrillard, and Henri Lefebvre explored the possibility of "Institutions for a Post-Technological Society," "a new type of university concerned with the evaluation and design of our man-made milieu."<sup>5</sup> Despite the fact that the effort did not actualize and that it still invoked the familiar institutional structure of a university as a solution, the project was an attempt to "inquire into the nature of the man-made environment" and the role of design and agency of education in the context. The project sought to, through new modes of education, find the conceptual link to produce and communicate a more comprehensive thus more resistant definition of the environment, that connects and blurs the binary distinctions between the artificial and the natural, author and products, and most importantly the technical and the social.

*If one begins with the affirmation that "man constructs his milieu," and if one refuses to reduce this "man" to a technical agent imbued with a universal and ahistorical rationality, then the problem becomes one of a social relation. The environment is no longer a physical "given," exterior to human action, but a particular form of matter (human and nonhuman), an expression, a relation among elements. But what elements? And the expression of what? <sup>6</sup>*

After 45 years, the key concerns of "Universtas" - the environment as a complex and intertwined bio-techni-socio-political milieu; and the instrumentality of knowledge as a medium for its articulation and a framework for necessary transformation - are still, if not more, relevant. The studio will investigate multifarious and constantly evolving notions of the environment and education and their manifestations, aiming to elucidate the often elusive performance of (hidden) environments<sup>7</sup> and the possibility of (counter-) education<sup>8</sup>, or radical pedagogies, through strategically framed design proposals.

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<sup>5</sup> Emilio Ambasz, "Introduction." In *The Universitas Project: Solutions for a Post-Technological Society*, edited by Emilio Ambasz. The Museum of Modern Art, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Manuel Castells. "Urban Symbolism and Social Movements: On a New Institution for the Study of the Urban Environment." In *The Universitas Project: Solutions for a Post-Technological Society*, edited by Emilio Ambasz. The Museum of Modern Art, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> See the notion of hidden environment in McLuhan, Marshall. "The Invisible Environment: The Future of an Erosion". *Perspecta*, Vol. 11 (1967), pp. 163–167., also McLuhan, Marshall. *Counterblast*. New York: Harcourt, 1970.

<sup>8</sup> See the historical account of of radical reform of educational institutions and the ideas of Counter Education, in Stein, Maurice, Marshall Henrichs, Paul Cronin, Adam Michaels, Jeffrey Schnapp, and Larry Miller. *Blueprint for Counter Education*. Box Pck Pa edition. New York: Inventory Press, 2016.

Studio Brief

**SPRING 2018 NAHYUN HWANG STUDIO**

# KNOWLEDGE CITY

## Uncertainty as Catalyst

Taking advantage of infinite programmatic and demographic complexity, the studio utilizes the New York metropolitan area and its extended water territories as a testing ground. The hardbound island of Manhattan has been the most potent and prolific paradigmatic site for the architectural and urban explorations for the past centuries.<sup>9</sup> The 2018 Knowledge City studio proposes to proactively expand this familiar zone of disciplinary and political instrumentality beyond the constructed edges of Manhattan island, acknowledging the expanded operational territories of the contemporary metropolis tightly interconnected with various networks as well as shared ecologies. The projects engage various site/zones of heightened precarity and uncertainty to explore the notion of fragility and anti-fragility through the architecture of education. Exploring the program of a novel “public campus,” the studio aims to engage diverse momentum, agendas, and agencies around the territories of risks as the vehicles and frameworks to project the possibilities of new collective domains in the city. The work will take the space of seeming instability, vulnerability and crisis as the sites of inventive spatial practices that articulate a renewed notion of the city, to reprogram the city.

## Approaches

In the essay "Utopie Experimentale: Pour un Nouvel Urbanisme," Henri Lefebvre defines “Experimental Utopia” as “the exploration of human possibilities, with the help of the image and the imagination, accompanied by a ceaseless criticism and a ceaseless reference to the given problematic in the 'real.'” In the context of the current reality - continuing socio-political and environmental crisis and ever deepening inequalities - the studio’s work aims to utilize the program of education and learning as a platform for daring yet effective experimentation that speculates on the ideal relationships between the goals of individuals, institutions, and the city, and the agency and opportunities of architecture in the milieu.

The studio will start with a research and analysis effort through a review of relevant discourse and an overview of both historic and contemporary cases through readings and surveys. Following the initial overview, fact based investigations on selected topics or examples with focused research and analytic documentations will instigate the individuated agendas of the design projects to be set forth in the next phase. Initiating the design phase, the students will be asked to define a set number of project trajectories and outline basic framework, potential strategies, and the site(s) of interest pertinent to each project. The design work, revised through an iterative process in response to the ongoing investigations and dialogue within the studio, will be developed articulating the rationales and intentions at multiple scales and time frames regardless of the projects’ physical bounds -from global and regional scales of intersecting networks and operations; and the urban scales of the newly defined “campus” and connected collectives; to the architectural scale of buildings, systems, configurations, and their

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<sup>9</sup> See the discussion of Manhattan and Venice as paradigm islands, in Stoppani, Teresa, *Paradigm Islands: Manhattan and Venice. Discourses on Architecture and the City*, Abingon, Oxford: Routledge, 2010

Studio Brief

**SPRING 2018 NAHYUN HWANG STUDIO**

# KNOWLEDGE CITY

interfaces. The emphasis of the studio is on the production of rigorously articulated architectural propositions that each engages the critical inquiry of the studio topic with a distinctive thesis.

\* *Group work for some portion of the semester will be encouraged but students will have options to work individually if necessary.*

\* *Studio excursions to selected sites will be scheduled for February.*

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Studio Brief

**SPRING 2018 NAHYUN HWANG STUDIO**

# KNOWLEDGE CITY

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