Education, Design and Practice – Understanding skills in a Complex World

• Paper / Proposal Title:

“Designing for the Many: Fabricating Urban Installations with Collaborative Community Partners”

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• University or Company Affiliation:

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• Abstract (300 words):

How we build, how things are made and for whom, reflects the social, economic, and political values of a community. Academic institutions have the responsibility to help shape those values in our own neighborhoods. Here, on the street, New York’s key urban questions can be explored and tested. This is where in the words of Michael Sorkin, cities are “distribution engines”, separating bodies and power into distinct tranches, which require a constant vigilance to break down these spatial inequalities in an endless struggle to maintain free, open space that is accessible to all. In many instances, public benefit has been surrendered in deference to a private gain. However, with tactical precision, design and build workshops conducted in academic settings can apply the tools at our disposal to subvert the systemic decisions that have led us to this point, to provide an alternate path forward. Diverse groups of students in collaboration with community partners can prove that things, ideas, installations can exist in public space only for delight, outside of market forces.
The design and fabrication skills at our disposal are relevant not as form-making exercises, but rather as potentialities for increased relevance. Through the re-appropriation and re-imagining of existing urban conditions, students can harness their entrepreneurial spirit to design and fabricate working prototypes that embrace the messy reality of urban life.

Through case studies undertaken while teaching at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, there are new avenues for architectural education that present themselves. These directions strive for collaborative input from outside community partners and marginalized groups, exposing the participants to ideas and viewpoints outside the typical academic pedagogy. The opportunity arises for architecture students to regain lost relevance by creating a dialogue that asserts their position in the public consciousness as stewards of urban well-being.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

John Locke is an architect and Sr. Principal Research Scientist with The Living, part of Autodesk Research. He has extensive experience developing significant architectural works which display a deep understanding between a project’s form, material and urban context. Most recently, he has managed the office’s competition winning entry at the PS1 MoMA in Queens, New York and has recently completed the Princeton University Laboratory for Embodied Computation as well as Living Light, an interactive, public installation to be installed in New York’s East River.

John holds a graduate architecture degree from Columbia University in New York, where he was the recipient of the William Ware Prize for Excellence in Design and the Lucille Smyser Lowenfish Memorial Prize. His work has been covered and exhibited internationally. At Columbia, he is currently an Adjunct Professor where his research focuses on the political and social implications of public design.