INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Vertical Studio 2020!

This document presents the Vertical Studios on offer for 1st and 2nd year students of the BSc programme of Welsh School of Architecture, for the academic year 2019-20.

Vertical Studio is the public name of a 2-week intensive and creative organisation, the orchestration of a number of very diverse studio units that support the development and exhibition of a wide range of design activities/outcomes.

Students’ involvement in Vertical Studio is not formally assessed. These design units are designed and treated as an opportunity to experiment and speculate, and to develop design thinking in new directions. By engaging with activities that go beyond the core learning criteria of our BSc programme, Vertical Studio provides opportunities to enrich and diversify WSA students’ skills and experience. The work that students produce within their selected studio can also be used to broaden their design portfolio. It also helps our students to build and expand an interdisciplinary network of reference and practice, and to establish collaborations with various stakeholders, professionals and institutions outside the WSA. Above all, Vertical Studio is fun and stimulating.

KEY DATES

Launch of VS units: 3pm, Tuesday 10 December
In JOMEC, 2 Central Square/0.06

VS 2020 commences 9am, Monday 20 January
VS 2020 public exhibition opens PM, Friday 31 January
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Vertical studio 2020

Rural Works

Unit Leader: Zoe Berman

A rural design and community participation workshop. As per previous years the Rural Works participants will spend a week on the Staveley Farm estate in Cumbria, exploring the landscape through observational drawings. Together we will acquire learning about the specifics of this place, and propose small and mid-scale ideas for interventions that would improve and enhance this rural village. Design ideas will be produced collectively and in response to need. Concept designs will be proposed that allow people to better use, access and enjoy the rural context. As has been the case in the past, students will stay locally and embrace a week of rural living.
The COMSC/MATHS building have got in touch with the WSA and tasked students to design a ‘Civic Gesture Feature’ that could form part of the public realm outside their new home on the Cathays Campus. This is suggested to consist of two benches that could be designed to reflect the type of studies taking place in the building (Computer Science and Informatics or Mathematics) and that, dependent on a range of qualifying factors, has the potential to be realised on site.

However, beyond this the unit will aim to question the current as well as the optimised use of the public realm and how the boundaries that exist between the private want and the public need can be navigated. Students will be challenged to have an engagement with the city and investigate how the design of street furniture can respond to it.
Make yourself at home

Unit Leader: Mhairi McVicar

Grange Pavilion under construction, October 2019. Image by Mhairi McVicar.

Make Yourself at Home is a collaboration between artist Chris Williams, http://www.furniture4stargazers.co.uk/, Mhairi McVicar (WSA and academic lead of Community Gateway, https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/community-gateway) and the Grange Pavilion. Working in small groups, you’ll design and make prototypes for a moveable storage unit, a foldable or stackable chair/bench and/or demountable table for the Grange Pavilion, a community-owned building opening in April 2020 following 7 years of partnership between Grangetown residents and Cardiff University. You’ll visit the construction site, meet Grange Pavilion members, and develop furniture prototypes to meet a brief of quality, durability, repeatability and uniqueness, using digital and traditional making techniques.

Studio 03
How do we design an outdoor swimming pool for a community? Offering more time in nature and increased health and well-being. Size, scale, fitting out, changing rooms, reception areas all have to be considered. There is a swimming pool in Eastville Park, Bristol which has been unused and empty since being hit by a bomb during the Second World War, and is to remain locked until the council and police can agree on a more permanent solution. Through leisure activities and providing a space of beauty it is hoped that such an intervention will create greater community cohesion. Consultation earlier in the year uncovered that local people were most keen on a basic, no frills lido.
Access and inclusion; barrier or creative tool for performance space design?

Unit Leaders: Amalia Banteli & Jon Dafydd-Kidd

Students will explore the needs of performers with physical and/or learning disabilities and how these performers relate to performance spaces. Their investigations will be based on a live brief with two inclusive community drama groups. They will explore the limitations and requirements of performance spaces for casts of neuro diverse performers. Students will use ethnographic methods (e.g. group observations and interviews) for their investigations. They will propose alternative performance space designs where access and inclusion are used as creative tools. Students will present their designs through physical models and create a reflective journey video of their inclusive design investigation experience.
Bake My Wall (BMW) Studio will revisit the notion of a wall through the theme of generative design and architectural computation. Our task will be the production of a wall via range of digital experiments.

We will ‘bake’ our own version of a wall for any given space. The focus on a combination of structural, morphological, and contextual factors will act the driving force behind the geometrical organization of our design interventions.

The Studio will take place in London where students can enjoy benefiting from the city’s global cultural and academic hub.
Meanwhile spaces pop-up and disappear across cities at such a pace that mapping them is often an onerous task. Artists, community groups, small business start-ups, and more all quickly inhabit these spaces. The proposed module seeks to offer students the opportunity of thinking about the role meanwhile spaces play in the planning process, which at times leads to gentrification and displacement, as a game. It is deliberately situated in SHIFT and learning will be experiential. The module will encourage students to identify, explore, visit (locally) and research meanwhile spaces, spatial theory and economic processes linked to redevelopment, regeneration and gentrification, as well as thinking about why there is a great emphasis on meanwhile use and little acknowledgement of the desire from users (artists, etc.) for permanence and self-determination. The students will be asked to produce conceptual meanwhile games that demonstrate their understandings of the issues discussed above.
Nowadays people use to rush incessantly. Always more often our busy agenda leaves less time for a relaxing, exploring or a simply creating moment. It’s time to stop and breath.

This studio will ask its contributors to ‘pause’, investigate and design innovative ways to creatively stop and make up more time for themselves. The aim is to take a breath from daily problems and recent uncertainty events and create meta-spaces or devices where to stop and get a rest from our frenetic life.

The up-cycled proposals should be lightweight, transportable or wearable to be deployed anywhere with relative ease, and to create feelings of connected or disconnectedness, providing varying levels of relationship, permeability, reflection or even aloofness with other people.

The workshop will be held in London.
The realisation of human geophysical force means everything has become an ecological question. In classifying the human habitat as a distinct built environment, we segregate ourselves from the systems of the biophysical world - crusting over the surface of the Earth. There are all kinds of places, at all kinds of scales – and our design decisions and material choices can have devastating consequences for the unseen stakeholders with whom we share our environment. This new and deepened sense of scale must begin to address unchallenged assumptions of anthropogenic dominance on the landscape and develop an altered state of mind towards the biosphere. Students will be challenged to adopt and consider the habitats of non-human animals and plants through the exploration of textbooks, scientific journals and online study. Through close drawing of their subject students will make this knowledge visible, while developing their capacity to communicate through drawing in line and tone. There are no intended design propositions at the end of the 2 weeks. Instead we aim to slowly explore natural habitats with the students, and with contributions from an ecologist - critique our assumptions about space and place, to grow empathy towards the biosphere.
Material Matters

Unit Leaders: Antonio Capelao & Mark Zudini

The Cork House and the Cork Studio

Responding to the Cork House and the Cork Studio case studies research and focused on the possibilities of cork as a sustainable construction material, and as a starting point, the students will be asked to present their research and to make an object to a scale, that demonstrates their findings and crystalises their ‘emotional’ response to a context of their choice. The final proposal should take into consideration programme, scale, the community and its environment.
Futuremakers

Unit Leaders: Alessandro Columbano & Anna Parker

Futuremakers is a design initiative with an aim to highlight the value of design and the built environment to different participatory groups through a process of play, make, build. Play is a fundamental act of making sense of ideas, material and consequences, both in childhood and continuing into adulthood. Play also helps test ideas outs between groups of people, and to resolve complex challenges that affect their environment. Paul Kidder explains Gadamer’s view ‘to engage in play…. is to follow connections, relations and associations among sensations, images and ideas in a free-flowing manner.’ This unit tests out this notion with a series of design and making exercises that encourage free-play, between a number of users, makers and players around a single idea. The making will focus on creating a series of usable and connecting play-kits or large-scale toy structures that allow for users of all ages to assemble an interconnected environment – a playscape for the public. Students will use their designed ‘kits’ to construct a story or narrative around the use of an existing space, building and community group.
This studio will explore and celebrate the properties of one material - paper. Students will undertake investigation and experimentation with paper in order to understand its integral properties and possibilities. You will start by exploring process which can be used to manipulate paper, before designing functional objects and composing/choreographing a performance. The studio will culminate in a ‘paper party’ at SHIFT, including performance, costume and function as well as exhibition of materials studies. This studio is inspired by Josef Albers’ ‘Materials Studies’ at Bauhaus. Restricted to a single material, students discovered the essence of that material. Albers joined the Bauhaus in 1920, 100 years ago. You will learn about the radical Bauhaus school and Albers' theories.
Printing the mundane; a day in Cardiff

Unit Leaders: Caroline Esclapez & Georgia Habützel

A narrow river cut by hand, Georgia Habutzel, Whitechapel Gallery, 2018.

This course investigates the book as a site for exploration and the recording of the city. It will bring forward bookmaking as a way to formulate an analysis of the city, celebrating the everyday. During our vertical studio, we will ask the students to engage with Cardiff as a site and encourage them to think critically about how they see, record and translate the city. We will explore the ways in which books have been used and constantly re-invented to carry different social, political and architectural ideas.
In light of the planned improvements to Bute, this VS will give students the opportunity to consider their Studio environment, fabricating solutions that foster productivity and creativity. Sam and Rob use CNC technology to manufacture bespoke furniture, cabinetry, and architectural joinery. This studio will build on the lessons that they have learnt, designing creatively and efficiently for CNC manufacture. The FabLab at Cardiff Met will be used to manufacture these Designs, allowing Students to get hands on with the making process. FINSA are sponsoring this studio, providing us with sheets of Fibracolour: a decorative MDF that is coloured throughout.
In the words of Jane Jacobs, the Sidewalk is “an intricate ballet in which the individual dancers and ensembles all have distinctive parts which miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole”. Using photography, we will observe and question this intricacy, then describe and attempt to understand this complex order both present and different from place to place. Considering the work of photographers, and theorists of urban space, the group will study different ‘Sidewalks of Cardiff’ and develop their own photography projects based at shared group sites then work together towards exhibition. Any type of camera or photographic technology can used. Film, film cameras and darkroom workshops will available.
The garden at The Courts is a creative response to the remains of a once industrial site. Stone bones are softened with informal planting, and the garden unfolds in a series of garden rooms – each one a surprise.

The National Trust is investigating the potential replacement of the welcome hut at the site and is gathering ideas as to the form a new structure might take. Students will work with the property team and regional curator to respond to their brief and interpret this in line with an understanding of operational need, conservation principles and ‘spirit of place’.
Treherbert, what to do with all this wealth

Unit Leader: Richard Powell

Your host and client is; ‘Welcome to our Woods’ (WTOW), a not-for-profit social enterprise active in Treherbert.

The ‘commission’: build a prototype ‘public seat’ for three locations in Treherbert.

An imaginative and practical exercise, fusing the past, our present, and what might become years ahead.

Process.
Without prior drawing, with preselected raw materials you will be making directly. We are not looking for technical precision, exacting craftsmanship or enduring objects, we are looking for: awareness, intelligence, creativity, adaptability, willingness to engage, to commit, work hard, get dirty, learn and have fun.

Materials
Remember, materials have specific qualities, have strengths and nuance to work with and alongside, and at times cussedness’s to overcome.

You.
You, your ideas are valuable, they will be valued. WTOW wishes to work with and learn from what you as individuals bring. Your presence and proposed interventions could alter understanding of past and future.

Architectural and educational overview-response will be directed by Dr Marga Munar Bauzà.
Expect the unexpected! Cinematic architecture. Speculative responses that seek new definitions for: moving-city, plasti-city, mall-city, no-stop-city, univer-city, food-city, garden-city, plug-in-city. Nothing is excluded, everything is questioned. Pricean guidelines: speed, time + duration and interval. Film as sketchbook. Enthusiasts but all things that have the character of their time. Culture is what most people do most of the time. Sequence and storyboard. Director’s cut. 60 seconds. Think the unthinkable!
P.s. This studio believes that doubt is an essential tool in the designer’s mind-kit. To be doubtful means to be able to delay certain but not all decision making in order to keep one’s design possibilities open, and to connect things that were previously disconnected.
In the interest of embedding enterprise education into learning for students studying at university the students will embark on a journey of discovery which will take them from idea generation to developing a business pitch. On their journey the students will explore all the nuts and bolts involved with business planning such as understanding the industry sector and customer market. The enterprise can be anything from a new product or service to a something that has social impact and they can be as creative as they like.
Exhibitions are a unique mode of learning, research and engagement. Exhibitions enable the emergence of sites for theoretical exploration, kinaesthetic learning and creation of multiple narratives. Exhibition making is a creative practice involving different modes of expression including drawing, writing, speaking and making. ‘Making the Vertical Studio Exhibition’ unit will make a critical contribution to the Vertical Studio exhibition. The unit will develop exhibition strategies by engaging a range of different audiences through a participatory method. Through this unit, the students will learn research techniques, collaboration and communication skills to develop exhibitions.
It’s hard to find a good chair

Unit Leader: Ed Green

Proficiency in a craft is essential to every artist. Therein lies the prime source of creative imagination. Let us then create a new guild of craftsmen without the class distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist.”

Walter Gropius

To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Bauhaus, BSc year2 are working in teams to design a chair. Through a live design competition, one or more of their designs will be selected by a panel of judges. The winning designs should be comfortable, true to their constituent materials, sustainable and elegant. This vertical studio will spend time developing the designs in more detail, exploring their materiality and associated processes, and will then fabricate full size prototypes. The competition judges, experts in design, fabrication processes and techniques, will support this studio.