

*Farewell to egos, welcome back idealism:
Emerging Paradigms in Design Education (EPDE)
Conference—Sydney, July 1997*
JENI MIHOVA AND SHELLEY EGOZ,

SUSTAINABILITY, COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY were the themes that brought together international and Australian educators and professionals from various environmental and industrial design disciplines, ranging from architecture, landscape architecture, interior architecture and urban design to public art, visual communication and other related disciplines. The Emerging Paradigms in Design Education conference was in itself a demonstration of a collaborative effort between five Australian institutions: The Faculty of the Built Environment of The University of New South Wales; University of Sydney; The University of Technology, Sydney; The University of Western Sydney; and The Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

In an attempt to explore how design education should address current social and environmental needs at the local and global level, the conference plenary sessions and workshops involved a wide range of issues which invoked stimulating discussions. Common to most sessions was a positive and idealistic consensus that current paradigms of sustainability cannot be congruent with design driven by individual designers' needs for self expression, competitiveness and consumerism. Thus, the idea of Collaboration expanded beyond cooperation between the various design disciplines, and an emphasis on a democratic approach and community involvement in design underlay many of the sessions.

Professor Helen Armstrong (QUT), for example, presented her analysis of the 'Creative Village' programme. The Australian collaborative programme was a response to a need to sustain rural and peripheral urban communities' viability. This process was based on cooperation between communities, universities, the Arts Council, professional designers and students within the design disciplines. Professor Armstrong argued that in many aspects the programme was a prominent success, yet at the same time highlighted the inherent problems that go along with collaborative endeavours.

Another facade of a community-designer relationship was presented by Sydney-based architect Paul Pholeros. Pholeros shared a fascinating and unique design experience, describing his journeys with students to the 'Great Unmade Places of Australia' to learn from the 'unwritten library of Aboriginal knowledge'. Inspired by Aboriginal communities, Pholeros views architecture as pattern rather than object and suggests that there is much to be learned about health and the environment from indigenous communities.

The issues of education paradigms and involvement with indigenous communities were also addressed by Tony Ward from the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Ward has been working with the Māori population in Community Design Studios for the last 10 years. A conceptual grounding in

Jeni Mihova is a lecturer in design and Shelley Egoz is a studio tutor in the Department of Landscape Architecture, PO Box 84, Lincoln University, New Zealand

REPORTS

critical education theory, idealism and a quest for social justice underlie Tony Ward's credo. It was an uplifting experience to listen to his account of his pedagogic work. Ward is a sincere humanist who has committed himself to the goal of teaching 'personal, social, political and economic transformation and emancipation'.

An urgent need for the design disciplines to engage in a social commitment was voiced by Professor Leslie Weisman from the School of Architects, New Jersey Institute of Technology, USA. Although Professor Weisman could not attend the conference in person, her video presentation conveyed a powerful message to those involved in design education: the complex ecological problems which we are currently facing cannot be separated from social responsibility. She calls for a multidisciplinary approach to architectural education and practice which 'celebrates the interdependence among people, the natural world and the products of human design'.

A commitment to community, and the socially deprived in particular, underlay Andrew Crummy's workshop. Crummy, an international muralist who runs a public art course in London comes from a deprived housing estate in Edinburgh, Scotland. His commitment to the idea of 'Communiversity', a technology distance learning course, stems from his family background. Crummy's mother was the founder of the Craigmillar Festival Society, which used the arts as a catalyst for social action. *A comprehensive plan for action*, published by the Festival Society has since become a blueprint for community development throughout the world. In his workshop, Crummy presented an impressive piece of collaborative art—a 4-metre diameter circle cloth painting that was created by communities around the world. Crummy raised an interesting discussion about how we evaluate such art and the task of education and qualification in social empowerment.

The question of the role of public and individual art was addressed by David Harding, an artist, teacher and writer, and the Head of Department of Environmental Art at Glasgow School of Art. In a richly illustrated presentation, Harding pointed out the particular meaning of art in our complex and constantly changing culture. Harding argues that art is everywhere, and the boundaries between science and art, professional artists and non-professional artists are blurred. We should all recognise the importance and value of the spiritual contribution of art to our physical and conceptual realm.

Art and science are closely related. An example of a creative use of scientific theory in design education was presented in a workshop called 'A Systems View of Design: Educational Implications'. Dr John Broadbent, a microbiology scientist and graduate of Environmental Studies who teaches at Sydney College of the Arts, explored the possibilities of applying some of the contemporary scientific paradigms to design and design education. Dr Broadbent suggested that a fruitful potential lies in the relationship between science and design. This relationship varies from the use of computers as tools to manage complex problems, to relating scientific ideas such as chaos and complexity theories, information and communication theory and other such theories to design education.

The broad interpretation of the underlying concepts of Sustainability, Collaboration and Community, as they relate to the design disciplines, reflects the richness and intellectual stimulation found in this conference. Some further

sessions attended explored themes such as creativity, alternative methods in design, involving young school children in urban design and aesthetic perspectives of ecological and cultural concerns in design education.

Coinciding with the conference was an exhibition of students' studio projects relating to the conference theme. The show complimented the event by illustrating 'some examples of best practice and future thinking' (Student project/Refereed Studio information kit, EPDE conference). The concluding discussion of the conference emphasised the need to create a living network of acting professionals, educators and community members for future fruitful discussion.

In conclusion, although the speakers were actually 'preaching to the converted', the enthusiasm, optimism and positive energy that emerged during the conference discussions reinforced the common belief that, as educators and designers, it is our role to promote creativity and originality as a vehicle for social and environmental idealism rather than a worship of individual self expression.
