



IMPORTS: *Holland in Holland*

2G1/3G4 Threshold Studio, Fall 2010, Malcolm McCullough

Imports? This studio invites you to explore how an architecture that you have visited overseas might play out in America. It could also help make you a more observant traveler whenever you get the chance. You may focus on any country you have visited, but to provide a common ground for this studio, many of us will study one particular leader in design culture: the Netherlands. Dutch design excels in graphics, ecology, and urbanism. We will study and share many instances. But what does it mean to import from a culture where most buildings are designed by capable architects to a culture where most are not?

I love my country, but think we should still be seeing other people: America still pays the price of importing European modern architecture whole in the mid twentieth century. The discipline of architecture may still identify with that tragedy. Yet more recently, America and the West more often export an architecture, this time more corporate, but likewise totalizing, to a rapidly urbanizing world. So no wonder opponents assert how, as with music and food, better architecture is local. This tension inevitably exists; this studio accepts globalization, and shall not dwell on it. For on the other hand, a complete disregard for outside influence rarely helps. By spending the last decade with a xenophobic outlook, America has hastened its cultural decline. Among the many fields in which the US is now at least twenty years behind is green building, especially of the sort that changes not just technology, but also values and practices. Instead of imposing a totality, the latter patches and stitches at smaller scale: bicycle culture, live/work housing, street-level amenities, urban gardens, assembly spaces, play.

Basic buildings, in foreground and background: A small civic assembly space always makes a good studio project, for it combines open program, atmosphere of one big space, emphasis on structure, and urban context. Yet the best exercise for everyday patching and stitching tends to be a city block of walk-up multifamily housing. So this studio will engage both of these topics, as complimentary foreground and background elements. After some shared typological exercises, you will have choice of which topic to develop in more detail, and indeed to greater resolution than any of your previous projects.

Walkable small cities: Demand for walkability has renewed interest in smaller cities that have a good mix of amenities. One such place is Holland, Michigan. What is more, at least a few people in Holland think there may be more to Dutch design identity than stepped gables and wooden shoes. The city also happens to have a civic assembly hall coming down.

Holland in Holland: It's not about Tulips; nor Rem Koolhaas either; this studio asks where to learn to do a patch of everyday architecture.