Practice Sessions

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Mondays 9:00AM - 12:00PM

The Setup
If contemporary architecture is formally and stylistically inventive, it also lacks a clear extra-disciplinary agenda. The converse is likewise true: architecture that makes a proposal (or is in the self-styled business of “politics” or “addressing the big issues”) is aesthetically allergic and holds little interest for the discipline. These decoupled parts—form and the agency of proposition—may have once been united in the explicitly social agendas of the modernists or in the culturally stable forms of the classicists, but it is no longer the case. In the age of Big Data and climate crises, science overshadows culture and architects—as makers of culture—suffer an inferiority complex or convert to technocracy. If architecture is to regain a position of influence it must argue for the value of form in addition to agency.

The Gist
This seminar will examine the aforementioned division between form and agency through a focus on architectural practices that have made, or are currently making, a transition from speculative to building work. The architecture community often bemoans the “watering down” or “selling out” that occurs when our beloved experimental practices start to build and must negotiate the complex terrain of clients, budgets, ordinances, and user groups. The seminar will approach this lamentation with skepticism, optimistically believing that there is room to join together the ambitions of an “idea” with the exigencies of “Reality.” The course will entail lectures, reading discussions, and an in-depth examination of seminal practices that have made this transition in order to intimately understand what was gained and lost as they crossed the line.

The Fine Points
This seminar is offered in conjunction with the broader “Practice Sessions” program. This program is part of the University of Michigan’s “Third Century Initiative,” which funds experimental pedagogies in a bid to change how teaching and learning happen within the bounds of the institution. Over a five-year period, ten architectural practices will be invited to Taubman College to run a practice session. Each session centers on an immersive four-day design charrette that culminates in a juried review and exhibition.

Students enrolled in this seminar will be given priority enrollment for the inaugural Practice Session with MOS (Michael Meredith and Hilary Sample) scheduled for November 13-16, 2015.

“Practice Sessions,” a Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning program, is led by Assistant Professors Ellie Abrons and Adam Fure and funded by the University of Michigan’s “Third Century Initiative.”

www.taubmancollege.umich.edu/practicesessions
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