CRITICAL CONSERVATION: PARADIGMS AND PRACTICES

The course situates conservation both within and outside the disciplinary bounds of architecture as an ever-evolving social, cultural, political and economic phenomenon. Discussion will engage comparative cultural and critical practices to build an understanding of conservation as a highly temporal, layered, contradictory and constructed mode of socio-spatial organization. Filtered through the contemporary and historiographical operational lenses of nostalgia, collective memory, nationalism, authenticity, artificiality, connoisseurship, aesthetics, identity, ecology and heritage, conservation will be explored as an ongoing material and virtual process that invokes future possibilities for the built environment. Beyond environmental stewardship, and the management of a projected, collective longevity, this course will navigate the ideological paradigms embedded in our drive for preserving the past and attempt to unmask the ends towards which a range of historical preservation discourses have been instrumentalized.

This hybrid project-based seminar will combine lectures and research with intensive fieldwork in Detroit in order to arrive at a projective understanding of conservation practice as an integral component of contemporary design. The scholarly inquiry will cover as much the histories as the geographies of conservation, enabling comparative studies between historical positions as well as between regional approaches. Through exposure and a critical analysis of the discourse, students will position themselves in a world that is simultaneously sanctified or thoroughly disposable.