Fill In Architectures/Fit Out Ecologies

Scenario
Portland continues to grow, with people attracted to the Metro Region in part because of the high level of urban environmental quality it offers. How is it possible to accommodate expanding populations and economies without expanding the urban growth boundary and without compromising functioning ecologies? Might it be possible to add density while simultaneously adding to the environmental health and complexity of the city? "Fill In Architectures/Fit Out Ecologies" refers to a process by which designers “fill in” gaps in the city at the same time that they “fit out” sites with functioning ecological infrastructure, such as green corridors, water retention basins and other elements. The studio will test strategies for synergistic links between human and nonhuman habitat, and anticipates a real project that Portland Metropolitan Services, a regional planning and regulatory agency, will sponsor and that is intended to demonstrate “best practices” for integrating “nature in neighborhoods.”

Project
This mixed-use project will be of medium density (+/-3 stories) and on the order of 50,000 SF in new building construction. It will include a significant residential component, a retail/commercial component, a childcare facility, a bike cooperative, and other community functions. In addition, there will be significant open space features including both recreational uses and habitat.

Site Attributes
While the exact location is TBD, the site will fall within the Portland Metro area, will have convenient access to public transportation, is designated for “opportunity siting,” represents a “missing piece” in a nodal development, and will be adjacent to significant habitat areas that would benefit greatly from improved connectivity.

Process
The fall seminar “Architecture and the Ecological Imagination” enables each member of the studio to articulate a position with respect to how ecology can positively inform architecture. This will mean different things to different people. For some, ecological design may refer to material flows and construction assemblies; for others, it may refer to water as both “commodity and delight;” for others, community cohesion and social equity; for still others, establishing habitat as part of project development (etc.). The articulated position should lead to 2-3 key questions that will be tested through architectural design. As a comprehensive studio, you are expected to address the numerous issues that characterize complex architectural endeavors, but the key questions you generate should help you to establish a framework by which to manage such complexity.

This is an architecture studio first and foremost; a planning component will be short (2 weeks), as a goal is to focus on the site scale and comprehensive project development.

With respect to media, process (as in for example the process by which materials are brought to the site and assembled), “flow” and the temporal (seasonal, diurnal) will receive considerable attention, as we are interested in tracing the impacts of our activities on the environments in which we work and live. (It is inherent that our actions as makers and shapers create disturbances relative to existing conditions; a question we can speculate about through our work is: how can we make our disturbance regimes ‘beneficial’?)

This studio endorses the architect Ed Mazria’s 2010 imperative “that all projects be designed to engage the environment in a way that dramatically reduces or eliminates the need for fossil fuels.”