UTOPIA’S OFFCUTS

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THINKING SLOW IN THE FACE OF TEMPORAL ACCELERATION

In this studio, you are enlisted as soldiers of long-term thought. You are deployed to the contested frontier of American urban expansion – a complex terrain of capital flows and global policy manifest physically in the small city of Bend, Oregon. Beyond the idyllic allure of a care-free recreational lifestyle lies a landscape in turmoil. Stressed by unsustainable sprawling development, short-sighted planning, rapid gentrification, and social segregation, it can be observed as the confluence of contemporary urban forces in action. As a small city, Bend is large enough to have complex urban problems, yet small enough that the trajectories set in motion can be redirected.

The preceding militaristic metaphors are intentional. Architects are inextricably linked to global economic patterns - we are embedded agents. Each of us must declare a stance which will guide the course of the work we do. We can choose to be complicit (to ‘go with the flow’), or we can choose to reject these ties, to operate on the fringes. In this studio, we posit a third scenario: architect as double agent, Trojan horse.

A TACTICAL ARCHITECTURE

You will be tasked with conceptualizing a set of strategic architectural operations, meant to influence future patterns of development in Central Oregon. Your concepts will have national and global implications, as the rapid pace of urbanization is homogenizing small cities worldwide.

The city of Bend is actively courting tech startups and entrepreneurs, targeting big thinkers who are priced-out of San Francisco and Seattle. Bets have been made, land has been grabbed. Bend is committed to the idea that a third industrial revolution is at hand, and has positioned itself as a hub for just-in-time digital manufacture and thought commerce.

Your architectural prompt is to design for this new wave of technological immigrants. You will be given a program, involving micro-housing, working spaces, shared facilities and more. This programmatic prompt will require you to think deeply about how we as a globalized yet hyper-local culture will collectively live, work, and play.

The site for your operations will be located along the urban edges of the Deschutes river. This edge condition is the source of significant controversy, meaning that your work will contribute to a growing dialog about the possible futures of the city.

RESUSCITATING HISTORICAL DEVIATIONS

Anyone who dares to rethink the way we live must first understand the thought prototypes which have preceded us.

As a studio, we will collectively mine a historical backlog of utopian (and dystopian) architectural projects, with the intention of understanding their successes and failures in contemporary terms. Each student will identify and absorb one of these precedents as a conceptual co-conspirator, using the theoretical underpinnings as a platform from which they can test their own ideas.
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THE AGENCY OF METHOD

The nature of the thought experiments described above will necessitate a new and advanced representational vocabulary.

This course will be comprised of several additive phases, each exploring in-depth the potentials for advanced representational techniques to serve as design drivers. We will understand architectural tools such as rendering, mapping, and modeling as active processes, and will exploit each for their analytic and generative potentials.

We will find value in the intentional mis-use and mis-reading of traditionally static processes. We will embrace the fact that the methods we use in design have embedded agencies of their own, which can either enslave or liberate the designer. We seek to liberate process.

We will also embrace earnestly the constellation of advanced technologies available to us. A heavy emphasis will be placed on employing digital techniques in the manifestation of our thinking. This studio is an ideal environment for students who already have facility with digital tools, and who wish to advance their abilities. It is encouraged that students are familiar with Rhino, V-Ray, Photoshop, and Illustrator. There will also be supplemental software skills workshops built into the schedule.

Additionally, parametric software will be introduced and explored in this studio, through the use of Grasshopper and its plugins. Students who join this course should have an interest in learning about digital generative techniques.

For those students who have had less exposure to digital tools but who wish to learn, please spend time with the tools before the term begins. There are many tutorials available online. I particularly recommend the tutorials for Rhino 3D Modeling as well as Grasshopper available at www.plethora-project.com/education/.

BEFORE WE BEGIN . . .

This studio will require serious amounts of thinking and doing.

To succeed, you should be self-motivated, and highly interested in the philosophical and political ramifications embedded in every act of building. Additionally, you should be aware of and interested in involving yourself with contemporary digital toolsets, including parametric design, visualization, and fabrication concepts.

Finally, the nature of this studio will reward students who are already thinking about their trajectory for terminals studios and beyond.

Also, a note about schedule: Studio will take place generally on Mondays and Wednesdays from 1:00p to 6:50p, with the notable exception of week 1, when there is a field trip planned to visit the site in Bend on Friday Oct. 3.

THE INSTRUCTOR

John L. Brockway is an architect and educator based in Bend, Oregon. He holds degrees in architecture from Columbia University and the University of Oregon. His professional experience with award-winning firms in L.A. and NYC includes the offices of Michael Maltzan and Angelil / Graham, among others. As a design instructor, he has taught numerous courses in graduate and undergraduate architecture programs in California and Oregon. John recently co-founded Lightfoot Architecture & Design, a young practice producing design and identity projects across scales.