Taking the rapidly expanding city of Bend as a proxy site for national and global urbanization pressures, this studio investigates the capacity for ‘urban architectural acupuncture’ to move beyond the well-worn and self-congratulatory tropes, and into a powerful new role as the driver for large-scale transformations in the built environment.

You will be tasked with conceptualizing a set of architectural operations on an existing but underutilized industrial location, meant to offer viable new models for future development in Central Oregon. Your concepts will have far-reaching implications as the rapid pace of urbanization homogenizes small cities worldwide, and yet the work will remain intensely local in that we attempt to mine the existing cultural and material resources in the elusive search for authenticity.

“Like poetry, architecture can challenge any well-established social and political order, including that which reigns in a suburban cul-de-sac. The American Dream acquires its meaning largely through the mystique of the ideal home, which is both artistic and technological in character. . . . Hence, change the dream and you change the city.” From The Buell Hypothesis (2011)

Ours is an inherently optimistic and inclusive field, though in recent decades its leading practitioners have largely compartmentalized, yielding an oppositional landscape of practice comprised of either/or ethics: activist or formalist, functional or beautiful, visionary or specific, subversive or complicit.

We seek in this studio to reactivate and broaden an architectural dialog of both/and, by focusing our efforts on the confluence of urban and financial policies, emerging technologies, radical re-use, and the post-recession housing boom. The fictions you create in this studio must therefore be useful and beautiful; futuristic and plausible; tactical and systematic; broadly considered and highly detailed.

Embedded within Bend’s current development patterns is a vast disconnect between the ‘ideal’ (atomic) familial configuration as conceptualized by developers and financiers, and the much more nuanced and indeterminate reality of 21st century household organization. The result is institutionalized mediocrity and a ‘one size fits all’ design sensibility, which begs for drastic reform and flexible solutions. Alongside the need for new types of rich, diverse spaces and living situations is the opportunity to consider alternatives to the dominant fee-simple ownership model as potential drivers for as-yet undiscovered but entirely realistic living scenarios.

As a studio, we will collectively mine a historical backlog of ‘other’ conditions for living and ownership, with the intention of understanding their successes and failures in contemporary terms. From Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City to NYC’s limited equity cooperative housing initiatives, each student will identify and absorb these precedents as conceptual co-conspirators using the theoretical underpinnings as a platform from which they can test their new hybrids against the existing municipal and investment infrastructures.
Your architectural prompt is to develop proposals for new forms of housing in response to rampant suburbanization, focusing not only on physical form but also infrastructural and financial supporting mechanisms. You will be given a skeletal program, involving housing, working spaces, shared facilities and more. Each student will be asked to react critically to the given program, and to take full authorship of its specifics in support of the larger concept. This programmatic prompt will require you to consider how we will collectively live, work, and play in the near future.

The site for your operations will be a large existing industrial plot in Bend’s downtown periphery. A formidable pair of steel and concrete mill buildings occupy this prominent site - each student will be tasked with developing a strategy for the radical re-use or redeployment of these structures as the backbone of their project. The site is in an archetypal ‘leftover’ urban space - while surrounded by disused railroad tracks, a raised freeway, and a number of unremarkable commercial buildings, it occupies an advantageous position to be the highly-visible nexus of smart urban growth for the city. The existing buildings are among the largest and most robust structures in Bend, and are the last remaining vestiges of Bend’s sawmill heritage, yet are oddly anonymous. We seek to highlight and co-opt these two elephants-in-the-room as the hosts for our inventive proposals.

BEFORE WE BEGIN . . . NOTES ON THE AGENCY OF METHOD

To succeed in this studio, you should be self-motivated and equally interested in the artistic, political, and cultural ramifications embedded into every act of architecture. Additionally, you should be aware of and interested in involving yourself with advanced representational toolsets, as the questions we are asking in this studio are highly resistant to traditional modes of representation.

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 - in understanding that content, method, and representation are indivisible from one another, you are asked to develop a mastery of these tools in order to bend them to your will.

The nature of this studio will reward students who are already thinking about their trajectory for terminal 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. 2.

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. In 2014, John co-founded Lightfoot A+D, a young practice producing design, objects, and identity across scales.