ATLANTA MUNICIPAL BRANCH LIBRARY

“Darwin was a first rate storyteller”
Zed and Two Noughts

“Humans think in stories rather than in facts, numbers, or equations, and the simpler the story, the better.”
Yuval Noah Harari

“Whether he be original or plagiarist, man is the novelist of himself.”
Ortega y Gasset

The program for this design studio is a library—a building type most related to history. The challenge will be to propose a civic institution using new technology, applied to heavy timber, that demonstrates prudent energy exchange. The site is an existing building, a major contingency for each design proposal. Total demolition, a tablula rasa proposal, so common in the U.S., and especially Atlanta, is probably not recommended.

The historian Yuval Noah Harari, has made provocative claims regarding the impact of technology on today’s culture and what it portends for the future. Like the philosophers Ortega y Gasset and Martin Heidegger before him, he argues for the role of the humanities and letters in an ever increasingly technological society. The issue fore-grounded in this studio sequence is narrative in relation to technology more broadly, and media in relation to building more literally.

Media and Building. The impact of media, and notions related to media, exist at several scales within any design project. First, media issues exist in relation to the conception and development of any architectural project at the semi-autonomous level of process. Secondly, at the other extreme, one might think of media in relation to a large cultural argument, as say a manifesto. Beatrice Colomina argues that both Loos and Le Corbusier, though radically different in their relation to modern tools of advertising and photography, were both modern to the extent that they recognized and utilized them. Both architects designed physical things, and both architects also designed a larger notion of what the good and ethical life might be, and how that vision might be promulgated.

The work of Loos and Le Corbusier would include then—in addition to the things and buildings they would respectively design—theoretical articles, analogical diagrams, text in the form of articles and manifestos, photography, etc. And finally, media issues exist in an obvious way in the physical properties of construction.

How do libraries function? Libraries warehouse mediated information (in ever growing forms) for retrieval and use by people. This prosaic function has been the impetus for some of the great building in the world. Libraries persist today, even though the number of physical books continues to decrease. The library program has offered a rich mix of issues—conceptual, expressive, technical, structural, and social/political—and this continues to be true. The task for each designer will be to address such issues anew, in synthesis.

Louis Kahn’s concluding comments on the occasion of the opening of his Exeter Library: “I always wanted to be an illustrator of fairy tales. And possibly, if I could muster the talent, to be the illustrator of history.” We might imagine a three-fold scalar implication within this poet’s statement: first, a recognition that architecture in the aggregate exists as an illustration of history (the cross section of a city provides insight to narratives); second, an allusion to the importance of historical understanding within his own highly innovative modernist output and finally; a nod to the major function of a library as an historical mechanism—an ever morphing repository of human generated information and speculation. Louis Kahn, as so many architects before and after him, made one of his finest buildings when given an opportunity to design a library. This studio proposal offers an opportunity for student and faculty to test timely pressing issues in relation to this historically provocative program.
ALT/ATL ACTIVATING AN ALT-NEIGHBORHOOD in SOUTH DWNTN
Re-source: Architectural Experiments in Radical Reuse and Regenerative Buildings

This studio calls on us to be proactive, optimistic, and systemic designers in the face of a growing concern stated in the syllabus: “how will architects reformulate their practice in order to mitigate – rather than simply adapt to – our unfolding environmental crisis?” Our shared goal is to generate novel proposals to “reconstitute the building lifecycle” towards “a truly resourceful architecture.” Our section will specifically speculate on how an alternative, multi-generational neighborhood (considering everyone from kids to seniors) can be activated in our current decomposition and recomposition of the site – as well as how our practice can make long-term, positive impacts that can inspire future cycles of redevelopment. The program considers how the arts community, installations, performances, and pop-up events have stimulated recent interest in the area - particularly on South Broad - and we will strategize how to develop and sustain a neighborhood for on-going creative revitalization in South Downtown.

The concept of an alternative neighborhood speaks to an interest in spaces for co-housing and co-working that recalibrate our standard notions of home and office alike. The ALT/ATL schemes of our section aim to be multi-use catalysts for the area, desiring to bring activity and a 24/7 potential for event and occupation to resuscitate the neighborhood. Our initial intervention will be at the ground floor, where an engaging façade and related reconfigurable gallery for public exhibitions, discussions, and performances will take advantage of the opportunities of our double-cornered, three-faced site at the edge of the block. The question of how to invent inviting, flexible thresholds at the storefront to interface with the street frontage and sidewalk will be key to this initial exercise. The remaining program is dedicated to co-housing space consisting of 20 micro-apartments with their own semi-private community amenities on the upper levels (shared kitchen, dining, living room, meeting space, workspaces, library, garden, etc.). The co-housing residents will be responsible for the management, curation, and programming of their semi-private community spaces as well as the public community space at the ground floor.

In addition to this program, our section will critically reflect on the following to prompt individual imagination and related design proposals:

1. How do you create a neighborhood in and around a building?
2. What qualities must exist in a building or its parts to make us value it as a resource rather than dismiss its anonymity?
3. What alternative spatial models for living and working can we generate in our proposals to support a lifestyle congruent to our aim to reinvent the building lifecycle?

Following our studio-wide forensic analysis of the site and existing building, our section will work primarily in physical models and experimental, generative media to foster a culture of creative representations and iterative critical discovery in the studio. We will emphasize section models to study the logic of our initial interventions and their broader potential in detail.
Regeneration as Process + Place: A Branch Library for South Downtown Atlanta
Charles Rudolph, Associate Professor

The 2020 Portman Prize Studio explores **regenerative building**, an approach to the conception, design development, and technical specification of architecture that seeks to radically reduce its consumption of raw material and non-renewable energy resources throughout the building lifecycle and reshape design practice to ameliorate the current degradation of global environmental health.

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The setting for this ambitious exploration is south downtown Atlanta, at the intersection of Peachtree St. and Martin Luther King Boulevard. The H.L Green Building, a deco-moderner masonry-clad structure built in 1933, anchors the northern end of a block of low-rise commercial structures. The 1980's era Fulton County Government Center complex is across the street to the east, and the white marble Modern-style Martin Luther King Federal Building (built by the US Postal Service) is two blocks to the west, backing up to the railroad tracks at the gulch.

The Green Building operated until 2001 as a Five and Dime store, part of a chain of more than 200 stores developed by Harold Leavenworth Green (1892-1951) in the southeastern US. It has been recently purchased by the German real estate company Newport US RE, for $3.5 million. Current speculation centers on the key role that the Green Building (indeed considered historic by Atlanta standards) will play in the revival of the south downtown business district. Broad Street's shopping corridor forms an axis with the Five Points and Garnett MARTA stations at either end. A once-thriving social space, it was cut off from “upper” downtown and the Fairlie Poplar district alongside the Peachtree St. corridor by the construction of the Five Points station in the late 1970’s.

Questions for the Studio:

- How do we approach the challenge of designing a public library -a social and symbolic institution that is experiencing radical change from within, on a site that is critical to the future of urban space and life in south downtown?

- How can we think about the process of designing/ building a library that demands that we literally are using the materials from a Five and Dime store? What does this process mean conceptually -and might it be productive to consider such a “process” in terms of both art and architecture?

- What might a **regenerative architecture** have to do with ideas of PROCESS and PLACE?
Community Recreation

The focus of this section will be community recreation. We will seek to make new things out of buildings of the past. We will seek to reconstruct community with our desires for the future. The program will consist of the following 4 modes of collective re-creation:

- A large place for gathering and performance (a dance hall, a music club, a performance space)
- A medium place for sustenance and nourishment (a food hall, a grocery store, a cafeteria)
- A very small place for relief and contemplation (a chapel, a counselling center, a garden)
- Many places for rest and recovery (a micro-hotel, a hostel, a rooming house)

The following two emphases will encourage students to develop distinctive individual proposals:

- The “material identity” of the building. In a rigorous and spirited manner, we will be exploring the inventive potentials of material re-use and reconfiguration, in particular through systems of structure and enclosure. Students will use physical modelling as a primary mode of investigation and representation. Re-creation will be viewed less as a simple transaction of material reuse, than as a point of departure for inventive discovery and thorough proposals.

- The “community asset” of the program. In all areas and uses, we will be emphasizing the ability for persons to “recreate themselves” in the social context of the “common good”. We will be asking ourselves: “To what degree can an urban building allow for the greatest possible good for the largest shared community?”

Finally, our section welcomes all students who are interested in a high-production and collaborative semester of challenge and growth. We will learn a lot and make some excellent stuff.

Photo: July 24, 1992, The mosh pit at the Marquee, New York City, NY. ©David Corio