

BUILDING DIGITAL PEDAGOGIES

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The tensions between architectural practice and academia have historically played out in different ways, lamenting on the one hand, that schools do not prepare student for the ‘realities’ of practice, and on the other, that practice never rises to the intellectual occasion of academia-- both of them building false adversaries in each other to conceal their respective myopia. The work, research and design speculation of Office dA has attempted to overcome this dichotomy as a vehicle of theorizing practice, while also injecting the politics of practice into the academic studio. This cross-fertilization has enabled us to define certain irreducible qualities of the architectural medium that permeate problems of form—from its inception to eventual fabrication. In a time when the definition of architecture is expanding in accordance with the impact of culture, media, and technologies, buildings have often come to characterize the margins of the architectural discipline. In turn, buildings have lost their primacy and do not always enjoy a commensurate attention to research, speculation, play and transformation. For precisely this reason, much of Office dA’s ongoing work in the past two decades has been dedicated to material research in its engagement with geometry, and modes of aggregation; this triad informs each other in productive and resonant ways, examining and challenging architecture at its core, precisely because of the shift that has occurred due to digital manufacturing and fabricational techniques. While this research may seem obvious, it is also not to be taken for granted; in a practice where the means and methods of fabrication are legally delegated to the realm of the construction industry, the architectural discipline has technically lost its dominion over the very built environment that it seeks to specify. Thus, the act of challenging the construction industry is a potentially subversive act: regaining access to building practices for the architect on the one hand, and dethroning the builder as the determinant of pricing, scoping, and detailing of the work of

architecture. Maybe most importantly, the argument holds that buildings themselves contain embodied knowledge, polemical stances and theoretical postures, engaging debates through material, spatial and formal properties.

Meanwhile, as disciplinary specialization has taken hold in the professional world, the role of the architect has, in recent decades, been tailored to reduced scopes of concern: packaging fragments of architectural parts and processes: facades, master-planning, decorating, interventions; this fragmentation has made it increasingly difficult for architects to command the broader spectrum of integrated thinking. Pedagogies have accommodated, and even promoted this specialization, advancing architects in discrete areas while leading them to a broader form of impotence. In the face of this predicament, some pedagogies still yearn for a classic sense of certainty, offering principles, techniques and mission statements that seek to compensate for an otherwise pluralistic and fragmented cultural reality. Other pedagogies have targeted this emerging reality with theoretical acumen, while leaving ambiguous and open-ended the status of “building”-- which by its very nature requires specification, certainty, and closure. The work of Office dA has attempted to take on the uncertainty of research, exploration and invention in a condition that requires action, implementation and physical commitments. In turn, the speculative work of digital installations has served as the very means by which the building industry may be interrogated, while the world of professional commissions has become the testing ground for intellectual platforms, formal preoccupations, and fabrication protocols. Navigating these two trajectories, the work strives for a difficult synthesis, bringing the certainty of materials to the uncertainty of ideas, experiments and explorations.