

# STUDIO MAKE

## TECTONIC ENGAGEMENTS AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF COMMUNITY

Nelson Mandela University Department of Architecture: Architectural Design 2 (AAV200)

The 2<sup>nd</sup> year design studio is structured by the core theme of *MAKING*, and engages with the *tectonics* of architecture as an *expressive and technical* undertaking. Thematically the course bridges the formative lessons learnt in the first year and the more complex pragmatic/professional and public/urban content of the third year design studio.

As an *expressive* endeavour, the studio aims to develop students' architectural dexterity through explorations of spatial and formal *abstractions* in architecture. Semper's ontological archetypal modes of tectonic and stereotomic set the basis for formal abstractions, while spatial abstractions look beyond traditional compartmentalization to explore modernist space and field conditions. The theory course (ATV200) supports these engagements by offering the required understanding of key concepts and a chronological interrogation of theoretical architectural preoccupations and expressions from the modern era to the present.

As a *technical* endeavour, the studio aims to develop students' ability to understand the translation from concept to technology and from architectural representation to constructed artefact. The construction course (ADCV200) is integrated into the design studio and dedicated time is allocated for the detail documentation of projects to facilitate the development of students' technical skill. Emphasis is placed on the architectural model in the design process to better reconcile representation and construction. The model offers a tactile and 3 dimensional medium that gains spatial, tectonic and material authenticity through escalating scales. When possible, the course also integrates design/build projects into the curriculum, creating the opportunity for hands-on experience and allowing students to engage with the full scope of the architectural project.

The course begins with "drill" exercises that allow students to practice the formal and spatial vocabularies outlined above. These skills are further developed in the leading projects that follow, which more specifically interrogate potential expressions and technologies in the underserved and destitute environments of Port Elizabeth. In these settings the studio engages with non-profit organizations for the production of small/medium scale community buildings; situating projects in real-world project contexts. The project scope includes the development of design documentation to assist funding applications for new projects; design proposals aimed to instigate development for facilities that have been overlooked by local authorities; and the execution of design/build projects. Design/build projects create the opportunity for hands-on experience and allow students to engage with the full scope of the architectural project. Projects are dependent on opportunities that arise from real-settings and therefore vary annually; although the thematic learning content and complexity remains intact.

These projects work closely with the relevant community and are executed in phases in an "office" style studio environment. The first phase is the development of individual student design proposals that establishes a "bank" of potential strategies. These strategies are further developed and hybridised in teams, including studio staff and students, to produce a single or limited number of distilled final project proposals. The individual phase promotes self-expression and the team phase fosters collaboration within the learning experience. These projects conclude in a public gallery exhibition or a physically constructed artefact.

The design studio aims to be a holistic platform that integrates teaching/learning, engagement and - as a social agency - the production of "useful" and relevant product that generates formal creative research, and affords additional architectural facility to communities of economic scarcity. With these intentions the course adopts an *experiential* and *critical* pedagogical approach; in the aim of making learning environments that are situated, critical and inclusive. In its full complexity the course is an opportunity for students to engage collaboratively, under professional guidance, with real construction and materials, and an authentic project context - underpinned by a socially sympathetic cause and real-world ethical responsibility.

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