

To face the climate and social emergency, the construction sector must change radically, as does architectural practice. This studio examines the profession's economic model, and how the traditional 'office' can be challenged by alternative forms of architectural practice.

Fix the Office

Spring 2024 Design Studio
More on IS-Academia

Fix the Office
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Mondays and Tuesdays

Monday: 10:00-12:00, 13:00-18:00
Tuesday: 10:00 - 12:00, 15:00-18:00

Credits: 12

Location: SG 2211 - Studio Space, AAC XXX - Lecture, Reading Discussion Space

Office Hours as requested

Instructors: Charlotte Malterre-Barthes charlotte.malterrebarthes@epfl.ch, Kathlyn Kao kathlyn.kao@epfl.ch

Course Description

Nota Bene: This studio is part of the 'Moratorium on New Construction' cycle, one of RIOT's meta agenda, following a series of topics seeking to center systemic change in architecture and the building industry. This means the class will prioritize radical designs that engage with repair, remediation, care, tactical interventions, system design and policy making, and interrogate architecture as the sole 'art of building buildings.' Architecture is here at the forefront, considered as a powerful tool for change, if and when it is used as such. In this case, architecture is asked to scrutinize its own functioning toward larger power shifts.

"Fix the Office" examines the way architects produce economic value and how to change the exploitative business model of "the office" toward addressing the social and climate emergency. It explores how architects can design emancipated forms of practice for themselves that then translate into spatial solutions for the ongoing social, ecological, and political crises. Researching power dynamics in design offices, financial and legal frameworks of the profession, honoraria and billing schemes, liberal constricts, and labor conditions, this studio is curious to uncover the causality between operative ways and built work. How does the functioning of an office, its business model, its economic status, and institutional framework impact the architecture it generates, and how to edit these structures to achieve a non-extractive architecture? Another underlying agenda is to educate ourselves on the economic system that underpins the production of space, aiming to illuminate the division of labor and class created between intellectual design workers in the office and the manual and executive labor force on site, as well as unpacking questions of land and material value against labor organization.

Candidly addressing 'who can afford to be radical,' the studio seeks what are the possible ways outside of accumulative economies, learning from past and present resistant labor movements and what such structures entail for building and architectural design? As a design task, once understanding alternative ways of 'not being an office' is better outlined, we will think about emergent forms of world-making that diverge from the status quo. While this topic

This is a necessary work to challenge why our discipline is at the heart of the profit-generating machine of construction despite its mandate of sheltering humanity and serving the common good.

Site

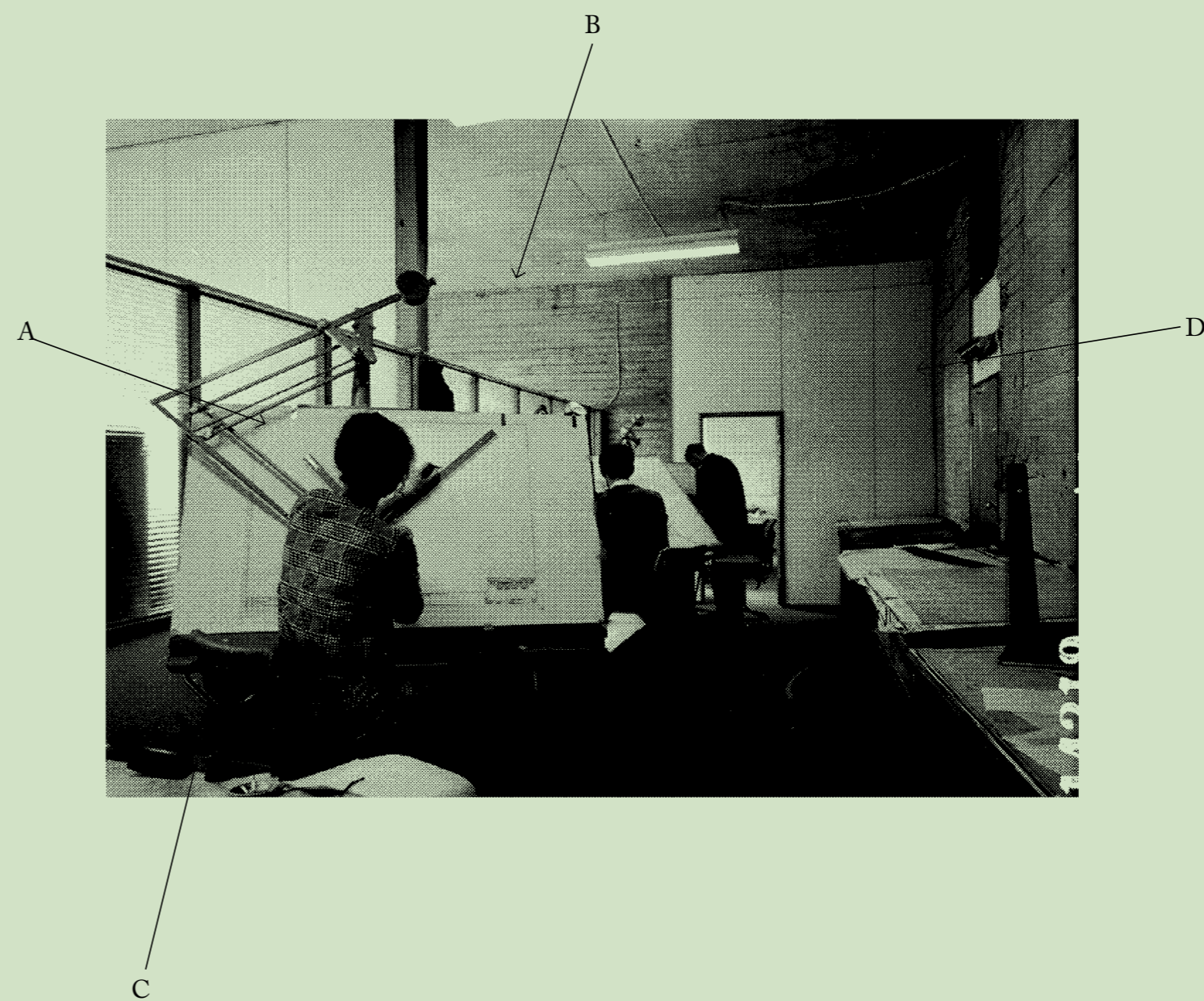
"Fix the Office" is not a literal investigation of office spaces—instead it aims to think about our offices as spaces of labor, but also as entities located within what we call "the commodity chain of space production"—namely as entities that participate in how architectural products (i.e., the built environment) are supplied as a commodity by an array of actors that by processing land, materials, and labor are located both in local and world economies. We treat the office as our primary site, one that needs reforms—primarily within the Swiss context.

Scales

This studio is based on a conception of urban design as a multidimensional trans-scalar discipline. Not only political, economic, social, cultural, and geo-tectonic forces affect and shape the built environment at the planetary and global scale, at the territorial and landscape scale, at the neighborhood and urban scale, down to the architectural and material scale—and to the body of the human and more-than-human, but space and its arrangements have a reciprocating effect on these forces, humans, and non-humans acting upon them. We will design within these gradations, positing that each constituent scale is distinct and can be considered on its own, yet the piece as a whole is only complete with each scale, resulting in the sum of all the small scales producing a large-scale total.

We will also think around temporal scales to challenge "impatient capital" as it dictates architectural, urban, and landscape projects for immediacy, exploring seemingly contradictory notions of ephemeral and impermanent, durable, and longevity as frameworks for operation.

[1] Pedro Fiori Arantes, *The Rest of Form: Architecture and Labor in the Digital Age*, ed. Adriana Kauffmann et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 152.



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RIOT

Research and Innovation on Territory:
Charlotte Malterre-Barthes, Kathlyn Kao
Nagy Makhoulouf, Summer Islam, Tamara Pelège
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