Bio
MICHAEL SPEAKS, Ph.D., is Dean of the College of Design and Professor of Architecture at the University of Kentucky. Former Director of the Graduate Program at the Southern California Institute of Architecture in Los Angeles, Speaks has also taught in the graphic design department at the Yale School of Art, and in the architecture schools at Harvard University, Columbia University, The University of Michigan, UCLA, Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, CA, and the Berlage Institute and TU Delft, in the Netherlands. Speaks has published and lectured internationally on contemporary art, architecture, urban design, and scenario planning. His essays and exhibitions in the 1990s were among the first to introduce a new generation of Dutch architects and planners to a broader audience in the U.S. Speaks has also played an important role in recent debates about city branding and alternative models of city planning, authoring a number of essays and advisory studies as well as overseeing scenario studies commissioned by city and regional governments in the Netherlands. More recently, Speaks has been at the center of debates about the role innovation and prototyping plays in design and has written a series of influential essays that argue for the importance of what he calls “design intelligence,” or the various forms of design knowledge generated during design but which are often overlooked in favor of “the design.” Such intelligence, Speaks argues, offers an important area for design research, especially in an increasingly knowledge-based economy. Speaks was founding editor of the cultural journal Polygraph, and former Senior editor at Any in New York, where he also edited the book series, “Writing Architecture,” published by MIT Press. In addition, he served for many years on the editorial advisory board of a+u and as a contributing editor for Architectural Record.

Lecture Synopsis
One of the unexpected consequences of the 2008 economic downturn has been that the debate over the value of architecture and design is now focused less on style and the exquisite, designed object, and more on the economic and societal value added by design. And that is because almost everyone now acknowledges that we need new design values as much as—perhaps more than—we need new designs. The most promising development, in this regard, and one that affects architecture and design practice as well as design education, is the growing recognition that design is not only a product—a table, building, plan or landscape—but is also a creative process and a powerful engine of innovation. This new understanding of design helps us begin to see what new values of new design practice and education might look like. Cheap, fast and adaptable, so that hundreds of iterations can be designed, sorted, and discarded. Big, bold, and dumb, so that clients, stakeholders, even other designers, can engage in transparent, productive discussion that might lead to better problems and better solutions. And finally, apposite not perfect, so that if the design needs to adapt to changing conditions, it can do so with minimal effort and cost. If architecture, in particular, is to thrive during and after the current economic downturn, it will have to adapt to these and other values of the “good enough” revolution, where the quick and dirty have eclipsed the slow and polished and the cheap and simple have eclipsed the expensive and complicated. But if architecture, and more importantly, if architecture schools, are unwilling or unable to innovate, communicate, and adapt, they will soon be left behind, comforted only by the memories of those expensive, incomprehensible, perfectly designed things that not too long ago fascinated us all.