

**Semper in Suburbia**  
**Boston Architectural Center**  
**Mitchell/Moses Studio: Segment 2, Core 1**  
**Fall 2001**  
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Has the eighteenth century Jeffersonian ideal been achieved in Framingham? While the 50s ranch house may be a version of Monticello, we are not gentleman farmers. Jefferson strived to set up a model for the North American landscape that would locate us all in bucolic settings of agrarian bliss; this critical position is perhaps the first example of an American architect's pitch. One might argue, however, that the miracle mile is the only authentic American contribution to urban planning. Our arbiters of taste decry the Island, the Valley and Houston. As architects, what is it that appalls us about these placeless spots? Are they really placeless? Is it the relentless uniformity of latter day global capitalism or the domination of the automobile?

Here in New England we are on a high horse. We have quaint towns that muster militias. The strip operates in conjunction with the village green. If we want antiques we hit the high street; if it's linen its off to Route 9. We delude ourselves by thinking that our culture is integral to our historic legacy manifest in our built relics. Yet our strip and village green culture is the same as the rest of America. Do we as architects have a role to play in nursing this space to become a more democratic, heterogeneous, and local landscape?

The economic priorities of individuals and groups operating in 'the middle-landscape' have more often than not produced bland, ephemeral expressions, which tend to look tattered even before they are occupied. If architects are, in a sense, midwives for the built environment, can we afford to continue to ignore this landscape? Additionally, in contrast to downtown Boston, might this not be a place where one could challenge literal interpretations of 'context'? What, in fact, is the context here? Is there a suburban equivalent to the Prudential Center?

Atop these larger socio-cultural issues concerning the origins and development of the contemporary American landscape, the studio will overlay Gottfried Semper's recombination of Laugier's primitive hut and the Vitruvian triad (firmness, commodity, and delight): earthwork, framework/roof, hearth, and screen. These 'four elements of architecture' are explicitly tectonic in nature, suggesting that Construction precedes and makes possible Architecture. Beyond that, they potentially lend themselves on the one hand to a modest exterior, formal expression and, on the other, a more exuberant, improvisational interior, spatial one. Our hope is that by anchoring studio projects in tectonic processes a potentially richer landscape might evolve. Early studio exercises (including a brief case study) will test and elaborate the four elements. It will be impossible, in this studio, to answer the question of 'why' without simultaneously

The opportunities therefore exist and will be encouraged to explore proposals at multiple scales, from the regional (global, perhaps) to the handheld. What rules might one develop to govern a range of decisions from how a project might be oriented to whether to use a casement window? As always, we are interested in guiding students in the development of projects, the scope and scale of which will be commensurate with individual appetites and skills.

Reading (including, but not limited to): Frampton, Jackson, Stilgoe, Semper, Sennett, Koolhaas

*For additional information please visit [www.geocities.com/mitchellmosesstudio](http://www.geocities.com/mitchellmosesstudio).*