

Moses Mitchell Studio
Boston Architectural College
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*I'm all lost in the supermarket
I can no longer shop happily
I came in here for that special offer
A guaranteed personality*
-The Clash



Back to the Green: Celebration's End

The idea that a *laissez-faire* market is the last, best vehicle for shaping our landscape may have disappeared as the swollen waters of Lake Pontchartrain receded into the Gulf of Mexico. Have we Americans come to realize that the free market is not capable of solving every ill that faces our society? Given the limits of private development, in the face of natural and economic disaster, to create authentic, sustainable community, we wonder if there are alternative models for imagining our future? Likewise, are there models that do not embody the 'control of nature' practiced by the Army Corps of Engineers, which are, at best, temporary in their capacity? Is there a mode available to us not unlike the way in which the dance halls of Central Texas were created: a community getting together, deciding to build a dance hall, and building it?

It is possible to imagine a time in the not too distant future when our patterns of settlement and life might be altered by necessity in significant ways. The effects of war, mass migration, and global warming may conspire to change fundamentally the ways we live. One reaction is to view these potentials as imminent disasters and hunker down in gated communities. An alternative is to seize both the latent and manifest opportunities such challenges present and channel our resources to develop new ways of living together. This might lead us to live more of life in view of others. Where many of us now move from home to car to work in a series of more or less private moments, we may enter an era in which we more explicitly acknowledge our dependence upon neighbors. How might the design of the public realm respond to such a possibility? Can we imagine one that is not first and foremost an opportunity for engaging in commerce? Where the goal of social engagement is not consumption?

Since the late Jane Jacobs's withering critique of modern urban planning and development practices, observers of the urban scene have expressed anxiety about the depletion of public space in the city. As economic abundance has grown, an inverse movement has occurred relative to the creation and maintenance of public space. As public space has waned and the privatization of historically public places has accelerated, the private sphere has swelled. The essence of Jane Jacobs's critique was to point out the failure of public housing policy, which tended to 'warehouse' people of low income in towers. This model removed people from *terra firma*, and denied parents the ability to supervise easily their children at play outside. In Jacob's view, the old New York walk-up apartments in Greenwich Village allowed mothers to sit in their living rooms, engaged in private activities, and watch their children as they played out in the street, the public realm. What might reasserting the priority of public space mean for our understanding and experience of the private?

It is important to acknowledge that the discipline and profession of architecture have precious little to say about this condition, and that most remedies exist within the purview of public policy and its practitioners. The backlash against the supposed alienations of modernist orthodoxy may have delivered a *coup de grace* to any social agenda held by the profession. The retreat to a hermetic, aestheticized architecture, on the one hand, or a torpid populism, on the other, has dramatically circumscribed the arena in which spatial practice participates. Is it time for a more explicitly activist architecture?

With careful observation as the core method, case studies, mapping exercises, reconnaissance, writing, and reading will lead to the culmination of the semester: the design of an interior public space. As always, the scale and scope of this project will be calibrated to the preoccupations, ambition, and experience of each participant.

Recommended reading: *The Uses of Disorder*, Richard Sennett

Please find additional information about our studio at www.geocities.com/mitchellmosesstudio.